

THE MANDATORY OPEN DOOR

The United States and the League of Nations Mandates

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Abstract

The Mandatory Open Door is a global history of US engagement with the League of Nations mandates. Although the United States never joined the League of Nations, nor took on any mandates, American officials played a sustained and influential role in shaping how the mandates functioned in the Pacific, Africa, and the Middle East. This thesis explores how US officials, particularly within the State Department, used the mandates to promote American interests, strategic, ideological, and commercial. In so doing, it identifies the Open Door as the dominant policy instrument through which the United States pursued access to mandated territories. It notes that although the Open Door had been a longstanding policy approach developed in earlier US engagement with China and the Caribbean, its application to the mandates significantly altered and expanded the meanings of the policy.

This thesis examines the mandates system as a framework for managing empire through international oversight, and considers how American actors, operating from a position of formal detachment, shaped its development. It highlights how US officials capitalized on the system's institutional pliability and the United States' ability to selectively engage with the mandates to exert influence while avoiding deeper political entanglements. The mandates appear less as a fixed structure than as a contested arena in which sovereignty, access, and imperial authority were continuously negotiated. In tracing these dynamics, the study reveals how the United States participated in reconfiguring both colonial governance and the global order in the first half of the twentieth century.

Extended Abstract

The Mandatory Open Door is a global history of US engagement with the League of Nations mandates from their inception at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 through the late 1930s. Although the United States never became a League member nor assumed a mandate of its own, it remained deeply involved in the mandates system. This dissertation explores how American officials, particularly those within the State Department, shaped the mandates in pursuit of US interests across the Pacific, Africa, and the Middle East. It argues that despite the absence of formal League membership, the United States played a central role in defining, contesting, and operationalising the rules that governed the mandates. At the heart of this engagement was the Mandatory Open Door, a set of flexible policy approaches baked into the legal architecture of the mandates by President Woodrow Wilson and his delegation to the Paris Peace Conference. This proved to be an invaluable tool for the State Department to pursue a range of goals in mandated territories.

The Mandatory Open Door marked a significant expansion of previous American Open Door policies both in geographical scope and in overall meaning, while retaining the flexibility and selectiveness that had characterised the policy prior to the First World War. This allowed US officials to ensure access for American enterprises and influence, while preserving flexibility to disregard those principles when they did not align with American interests. By extending the Open Door into the mandates the US Government gained the ability to project power into spaces administered by other empires, and to set binding precedents into an international system from which it was formally aloof.

The mandates system emerged from the geopolitical and legal settlement imposed by the victors of the First World War. It was developed to administer former German and Ottoman territories deemed unprepared for sovereignty. Rather than being annexed outright by the Allied

powers, these territories were placed under the stewardship of ‘mandatory’ authorities, operating under League of Nations oversight. Although framed as a progressive alternative to traditional empire intended to guide subject populations toward eventual independence, the mandates largely functioned as instruments of imperial control, facilitating access to resources, consolidating markets, and extending great-power influence under international sanction. This thesis argues, however, that the influence of the United States served to constrain the authority of the mandatory powers in ways that distinguished the mandates from other forms of colonial rule. Through tools like the Mandatory Open Door, US officials limited the ability of mandatory powers to monopolize trade or exclude foreign actors, forcing them to govern in ways that were at once imperial and increasingly subject to external legal and economic scrutiny.

While the historiography of the mandates system has often focused on the League’s institutional mechanisms, particularly the Permanent Mandates Commission, this thesis shifts the analytical lens outward. Rather than focusing solely on Geneva or on the mandatory powers themselves, it centres the United States, a non-mandatory, non-League actor, to reveal the mandates as a flexible system of legal and economic governance subject to outside influence. Drawing on a wide body of American and European archival materials, particularly US sources underutilised by international historians of the mandates, it reconstructs how US officials negotiated access, exerted pressure, and used the mandates to secure influence over imperial policies abroad. It shows how the United States used treaties, diplomatic correspondence, and informal channels to insert itself into the governance structures of European empires and to reshape international standards of colonial rule in line with American priorities.

At the centre of this intervention is the Mandatory Open Door, a term used here to describe the suite of policies and legal mechanisms through which the US Government sought to guarantee its rights and advance its interests in mandated territories. The Mandatory Open Door was an

adaptation of the Open Door policy first articulated in the context of US involvement in China, and extended to Latin America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While originally framed around the principle of equal commercial access, the Open Door evolved into a broader strategy for inserting the United States into regions where it lacked direct colonial authority. In the mandates context, this policy was expanded in scope and application. It included not only commercial equality, ensuring that American corporations would enjoy the same privileges as those from mandatory powers, but also protections for missionaries, scholars, and scientific expeditions. Additionally, the mandates imposed limitations on monopolies and preferential trade arrangements in mandated territories, and provided rights of legal recourse for American nationals, allowing the State Department to effectively insist upon adherence to its Open Door policies.

The mandates system proved especially amenable to such influence due to its novel and multilayered legal structure. The agreements undergirding the mandates system secured for the US the same rights and privileges enjoyed by League members, including the right to equal commercial access and to receive the annual reports submitted by the mandatory powers to the League. In this way, the US secured influence without responsibility, and oversight without entanglement. The mandates became platforms for the United States to push against the more exclusionary aspects of European imperial preference systems while maintaining its ideological commitment to anti-colonialism and its strategic preference for informal empire.

This argument builds on and diverges from the existing mandates literature, particularly the landmark work of Susan Pedersen. In *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire*, Pedersen centres the role of the Permanent Mandates Commission as the key actor in transforming colonial rule into an internationally accountable regime. While her work successfully repositions the mandates as a moment of internationalist intervention into imperial practice, it largely omits the role of the United States, treating it as peripheral after its

withdrawal from League correspondence. This dissertation challenges that view, in part through its use of American sources, showing that even after withdrawing from League institutions, the US Government remained an active and often decisive actor in mandate affairs through treaty-making, economic leverage, and legal pressure. It also highlights how the mandates offered US officials a practical arena to advance their interests through legal and economic channels, reflecting an emerging preference for influence through access and regulation rather than direct control. While not a decisive break from empire, the mandates allowed American policymakers to experiment with modes of engagement that later informed US approaches to the UN Trusteeships following the Second World War.

The thesis is organised along both chronological and geographic lines, mirroring the structure of the League of Nations mandates system and tracing the evolution of American engagement with it across different imperial contexts. The first chapter addresses the foundational moment of the Paris Peace Conference, with subsequent chapters following the mandates system as it unfolded in practice across the Pacific, Africa, and the Middle East. This structure roughly parallels the League's classification of the mandates according to differing levels of perceived political and civilisational development. The ordering also aligns with the shifting intensity of American strategic and economic interest in these regions over time, beginning with concerns over militarization in the Pacific, moving through commercial and humanitarian ambitions in Africa, and culminating in the pursuit of multifarious influence in the Middle East. By following this dual logic of both the mandates' internal typology and the external trajectory of US foreign policy, this thesis highlights how the United States maintained significant influence over the mandates system through legal instruments, diplomatic pressure, and economic engagement.

Chapter one focuses on the development of the League of Nations mandates through the actions and priorities of the United States delegation to the Paris Peace Conference. It

emphasizes the high-level decisions made by President Woodrow Wilson, Presidential Advisor Colonel Edward M. House, Secretary of State Robert Lansing, and other senior officials. Tracing the evolution of American engagement from the early work of The Inquiry in 1918 to the near finalisation of the mandates framework by the end of 1919. The chapter argues that the US played a decisive role in shaping a new form of colonial governance that imposed formal restrictions on imperial control while advancing American strategic and economic interests. Although mandates negotiations unfolded unevenly amidst competing priorities such as war reparations from Germany, US officials succeeded in embedding key principles including limitations on commercial monopolies and constraints on territorial annexation into the system's architecture. Through complex, and often contentious, negotiations with British, French, and Dominion officials, the American delegation ensured that the mandates' structure reflected its priorities. This allowed for some compromise with annexationists, both in the three-tiered classification of mandated territories and in the contested application of the mandates concept to former Ottoman provinces. By following the American delegation's interventions across these parallel tracks of negotiation, the chapter demonstrates that the mandates system, though often seen as a European project, was fundamentally shaped by US ambitions, laying the groundwork for enduring American engagement with the system even in the absence of League membership.

Chapter Two explores how the United States engaged with the Pacific mandates to advance its strategic, economic, and diplomatic interests. The US Government viewed the former German Pacific territories, now classified as 'C' mandates, primarily through the lens of strategic security, particularly in response to Japan's expanded presence in the North Pacific, as well as through the potential for commercial and missionary activity. Although the mandates in this region lacked explicit Open Door provisions, American officials succeeded in using the legal framework of the system to restrict and monitor militarization, safeguard civilian access,

and push back against monopolistic practices. Case studies include the Yap cable dispute in the Japanese mandate, treaty enforcement in New Zealand-administered Samoa, and resource access in Australian-controlled New Guinea. The chapter concludes with the mandate for Nauru, which was nominally administered by the British Empire collectively, but was in practice an Australian mandate. It treats this as a negative case illustrating how the absence of American interest correlated with weak enforcement of mandate principles and the persistence of extractive colonial practices.

Chapter Three examines the African mandates as the ideological centre of the mandates system, where longstanding debates over colonial reform, humanitarian obligations, and international oversight were most fully articulated. Although Germany's former African colonies held limited economic or strategic value for the United States, the region played a central role in shaping the moral and legal vocabulary of the mandates, particularly through precedents such as the Congo Basin agreements and the Treaty of Algeciras concerning Morocco. The chapter argues that Africa served as a symbolic and practical arena in which the US sought to embed principles resonant with American public opinion, such as anti-slavery measures, restrictions on liquor trafficking, and a nominal commitment to indigenous self-determination, into international law. It contextualizes the mandates within colonial Africa's legal history, examines the US role in shaping specific provisions of the African mandates, and analyses American interactions with various territories where mandate status offered leverage, often in service of broader diplomatic goals. The chapter concludes with a negative case study of Liberia, where a mandate was considered but rejected, using it to illustrate how American officials used the mandates system to constrain European exploitation while preserving their own economic advantages in non-mandated territories.

Chapter Four focuses on the Middle Eastern mandates, the final and most strategically significant component of the mandates system for the United States. Central to American

interest was Iraqi oil, which played a pivotal role in shaping US engagement with the mandates from their inception, even as ongoing conflict delayed formal resolution. This chapter explores how American policymakers used the mandates framework, especially the Open Door principle, to secure commercial equality and access to key resources such as oil and archaeological sites, and to use as leverage in larger discussions with Britain over Imperial Preference in the 1930s. Despite resistance from British and French mandatory powers, the US used the system to gain entry to these markets and counteract preferential tariffs that threatened American interests.

Throughout the dissertation, a recurring theme is the strategic ambiguity and utility of the Mandatory Open Door. Unlike other legal instruments of international relations, the Open Door was never precisely defined. This vagueness allowed US officials to shape its meaning according to need. In some cases, it was used to secure oil concessions; in others, to press for religious freedom or scientific access. This flexibility was a feature, not a flaw. As Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes noted in a 1922 communication, the point was not to uphold abstract legal doctrines, but to open ‘opportunities for American companies’ and preserve room for diplomatic negotiation. The Mandatory Open Door thus functioned as both a tool of legal positioning and a means of informal imperial expansion.

Ultimately, *The Mandatory Open Door* reframes the mandates system as not only a League of Nations experiment in imperial oversight, but also a crucible in which new forms of American global power were tested and refined. It reveals that the United States, far from being an absent or marginal actor in the interwar period, was a shaping force in the evolution of colonial governance, international law, and economic access. Many of the legal and ideological principles pioneered through the mandates—such as equal access, non-annexation, and development toward self-government—were carried forward into the United Nations Trusteeship system established after World War II, revealing a clear continuity shaped by US

influence. Although the United States never formally administered a mandate, it played a crucial role in defining post-imperial governance, ensuring that American norms, interests, and commercial strategies continued to shape the global order well into the twentieth century. By tracing the interplay of law, diplomacy, and strategic interest, this thesis illuminates how the mandates system functioned as a laboratory for indirect empire and as a harbinger of the global order that would emerge after 1945. It offers a new perspective on both the mandates themselves and on the deeper structures of US foreign policy, showing how the open-ended language of access and fairness could be used to reconfigure empire in an age of internationalism.

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List of Abbreviations

BFSP – British and Foreign State Papers

DBFP – Documents on British Foreign Policy

FRUS – Foreign Relations of the United States

IPC – Iraq Petroleum Company

LOC – Library of Congress

LON – League of Nations

NAA – National Archives of Australia

NARA – National Archives and Records Administration

PMC – Permanent Mandates Commission

SONJ – Standard Oil of New Jersey

TNA – The National Archives

TPC – Turkish Petroleum Company

Introduction

This dissertation examines the relationship between the United States and the League of Nations mandates system from its creation during the Paris Peace Conference through the late 1930s. Established in the aftermath of the First World War, the League of Nations mandates system was a form of governance designed to administer territories captured from the German and Ottoman empires that the Allies deemed unprepared for self-government. It did so by placing them under the supervision of individual powers acting as ‘mandatory’ authorities. While the United States did not become a member of the League, it nonetheless figured prominently across the mandates through its diplomatic channels, commercial interests, as well as scientific and missionary endeavours.

This is a global history of the United States’ relationship to the mandates. It places the mandates in international law and governance as a system of restrictions and stipulations designed to regulate the conduct of colonial powers governing these territories, and explores its implications for regional and imperial dynamics in Africa, the Pacific, and the Middle East. It approaches the mandate system from the perspective of American diplomatic actors, chiefly State Department officials and other governmental representatives of the United States. By taking this approach my thesis recovers and reframes historians’ conception of the relationship between the United States and the League of Nations mandates system, and investigates an understudied element of American foreign policy in the era of the two world wars. Relying on a large and diverse body of primary records, this dissertation situates American involvement within broader contemporary debates about sovereignty, self-determination, international oversight, and economic development. It argues that the American engagement with the mandates system reveals expansions of American approaches to regions of the Global South

within European empires based on models developed in its own imperial holdings and in independent areas of the Western Hemisphere and China. It shows that American engagement with the mandates, including the foundational role of the United States' delegation in creating the system in 1919, helped to mould international norms surrounding colonialism to better suit American interests.

This thesis looks most closely at the extension of Open Door concepts to mandated territories, exploring the significance of the application of a once-obscure policy to large swathes of the colonial world through the framework of international law. The Open Door originated in late nineteenth century US foreign policy in China and had a rather vague meaning that mainly encompassed the right of American nationals to conduct commercial activities on an equal footing with their European counterparts. This thesis asks how this concept was expanded into the mandates, and how this extension transformed the meanings and utility of the policy. I term this the Mandatory Open Door, which included a broadened conception of openness to Americans in territories placed under mandate than did the original conception of the Open Door in China. The creation of the Mandatory Open Door is examined as a mechanism through which State Department officials sought to ensure that American enterprises would have access to markets and resources in mandated territories, while also being used as a lever for these officials to influence larger trade and commercial policies in mandatory empires. By tracing how American officials pursued these goals through legal and diplomatic channels, this dissertation highlights how the Mandatory Open Door was embedded within international law, establishing precedents that were later carried over into the United Nations Trusteeship system after the Second World War. It raises questions about how these efforts intersected with or challenged the economic logics of European imperialism, and what this legacy suggests about the longer trajectory of American global economic strategy.

Definitions

Throughout this thesis readers will encounter the word ‘mandate’ and practically every conceivable declension of the term countless times. The meaning of the term ‘mandate’ as well as its variations are briefly explained here, as well as some technical details of the system, so that readers can be sure to understand the meanings expressed here clearly. It is not my goal to detail the origin of the term, or of its precise interpretations over time or in the historiography. Rather I seek to clarify to readers the manner in which the terms are used here, which is generally consistent across the historiography and sources, with only minor divergence in the very early documents on mandates in 1919 and 1920. First and foremost, one must understand what was meant by a mandate. These were a collection of 14 territories (though more were proposed) severed from the German and Ottoman Empires by the peace treaties at the end of the First World War. All of these territories were in ‘colonial’ regions of the world, in the Middle East, Africa, and the Pacific.

Each of these territories can be termed a ‘mandate’ or more precisely as a ‘mandated territory,’ and the power administering the territory as a ‘mandatory power’ or more simply a ‘mandatory.’ The nature of mandatory administration was that each territory had been ceded to the Principal Allied and Associated Powers under the peace treaties at the end of the war, and these powers delegated responsibility for the supervision of the territory’s administration to the League of Nations. Before they handed over authority, the Allied and Associated Powers had agreed on which powers would administer which territories, and roughly under what terms. Article 22 of the League of Nations Covenant set out three categories (or classes) of mandate (‘A’, ‘B’, and ‘C’) as well as some of the conditions under which they were to be governed. When taking on a mandate each mandatory was required to accept a binding agreement with the Council of the League of Nations establishing their title and its conditions. These differed

substantially from one another, however most mandate agreements within a class were very similar. Confusingly, the agreement itself was formally called a 'mandate,' but for the purposes of this thesis it will be called a 'mandate agreement.' In sum, each mandated territory was administered by a mandatory power under the terms of a mandate agreement in line with the stipulations of the League of Nations Covenant.

This administration was subject to a number of conditions regarding how the indigenous population was to be treated, as well as the rights of League members other than the mandatory. These were stipulated in the mandate agreement and Article 22, and overseen by a League organ called the Permanent Mandates Commission (PMC) which reported to the Council of the League of Nations. Mandatory powers had to submit annual reports to the PMC, and by treaty also to the US Government, and the PMC had the right to oversee all aspects of mandatory administration as well as to receive petitions on behalf of the indigenous populations of these territories. This entire structure is the 'mandates system' to which I constantly refer. Formally, the United States' relationship to this system was quite limited. It was one of the Principal Allied and Associated Powers to which these territories had been ceded by the German and Ottoman empires. Because of this the US demanded, and received, the same rights as League members in mandated territories, though this was agreed upon by individual bilateral treaties with each mandatory power rather than being automatically granted through the League because the United States was not a member state.

It is hoped that readers will understand from this the different meanings and variations of the term 'mandate' employed in this thesis. Once assembled by around 1920, the system was fairly linear: the League Covenant gave life to the system and established its meanings, the Allied and Associated Powers delegated authority to the League to oversee the system, each territory was administered under special rules established by an agreement signed by the mandatory power which established a mandatory administration over a mandated territory. As

ever there were variations, Nauru, for example, did not have a single mandatory power, but rather the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand shared this power by holding the title collectively as ‘The British Empire.’ Iraq’s mandate agreement was never ratified, and its function was instead fulfilled by a treaty between the United Kingdom and the Government of Iraq signed in 1922. Exceptions and variations aside, this was the general manner in which the mandates operated through the 1920s and 1930s, and, more importantly, it is in this way that the American officials whose actions are recounted here understood the system to operate.

Sources

In studying the relationship between the United States and the League of Nations mandates this thesis relies on a wide range of primary sources from the United States, the League of Nations, as well as several of the mandatory powers, who helped shape the system alongside the United States. The most important sources relating to the United States are the published Foreign Relations of the United States collections (hereafter referred to as FRUS), as well as archival materials from the National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter NARA), both at their location in Washington D.C. (Archives 1), and their location in College Park, MD (Archives 2). The main record groups consulted at NARA were RG 46, records of the US Senate, and RG 59, the Department of State Central Decimal Files. Also consulted were RG 256, the Records of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace, and RG 40, the General Records of the Department of Commerce. These files were supplemented with collections from the Library of Congress (hereafter LOC), particularly additional records from the American Commission to Negotiate Peace stored there. A variety of other records, mostly collections relating to important individuals such as George Louis Beer, Robert Lansing, and Huntington Gilchrist were also consulted at the Library of Congress. Completing these files are archival records originating in the United States accessed through the University of Oxford’s Bodleian

Libraries, such as the microfilm records of Colonel Edward House, and a wide range of published primary materials originally printed in the United States. American sources on the mandates are atomised in State Department records because there was no central approach by the department to these territories, and because the US never joined the League, the US administration never had a need to consider or order them cohesively.

Beyond US sources, this thesis uses many records from The National Archives at Kew, London, England (hereafter TNA). The records consulted there come from a range of collections, including Cabinet Office (CAB), Foreign Office (FO), Dominions Office (DO), Colonial Office (CO), and Crown Agents for Overseas Governments and Administrations (CAOG), though only files from the Cabinet Office and Colonial Office proved to be of practical use. Complementing these archival records are published collections including British and Foreign State Papers (BFSP) and Documents on British Foreign Policy (DBFP). As with the American collections, these records are supplemented with published materials and personal collections from involved individuals. Australian records made available online by the National Archives of Australia (NAA) have also been used in sections where Australian involvement, or where Australian correspondence with Britain, was significant or informative.

The final set of archival records consulted here are those from the League of Nations, made available online by the United Nations Library and Archives in Geneva, and abbreviated hereafter as LON. Because this project primarily concerns American relationships with mandated territories, rather than with the League institutions tasked with overseeing the mandates, these files are used sparingly, and mostly cover the early periods considered in chapter 1. They are supplemented with the League of Nations *Official Journal*, which was published monthly for the entire existence of the League.

These primary sources, alongside dozens of books, pamphlets, and articles written by involved individuals and organisations during the existence of the mandates system, offer an

extremely close view into the global interactions between the United States and the mandates system. I have relied much more heavily on American sources than have other historians of the mandates, most of whom have tended to view the system from the perspective of either the League of Nations or of the mandatory powers. My approach has revealed that the US played a much more active role in shaping the mandates system across its existence than has been previously recognised. By using and privileging US archives, this thesis shows that although the mandates formally existed as part of the architecture of the League of Nations, they were also a part of the restructuring of global order after the First World War, in which the United States played a prominent, though underappreciated, role.

Historiography

This project addresses multiple intersecting bodies of literature, most prominently those of the mandates and United States history, but also histories of imperialism and decolonisation as well as regional and national historiographies of each mandated territory. It also speaks to literature on global governance, capitalism, and the history of the League. Because of this wide range of literatures, this introductory historiographical treatment is representative rather than comprehensive, dealing with only selected works to highlight the most important historiographical contributions of the project. Smaller historiographical sections can be found in each of the chapters, as well as more targeted treatments throughout the thesis.

Mandates

The larger mandates historiography has mostly ignored the role of the United States. The following chapters remedy this shortcoming, demonstrating that American influence on the mandates system produced significant changes to how it operated. The wider picture this reveals is that US engagement with mandatory governance transformed the mandates system

into a key instrument of American legal and commercial power, which Washington used to constrain mandatory policies and to shape what mandatory status meant in practice. This thesis shows that American officials used the system in different ways to pursue what they perceived to be American interests, in some cases against the wishes of officials from the mandatory powers. In practice, US officials leveraged bilateral treaties to selectively engage with mandated territories whenever US interests were at stake. They effectively replicated the rights of League members, particularly commercial equality clauses, anti-monopolisation provisions, and non-militarisation rules. The mandatory powers, most prominently Britain and France, though also including Belgium, Japan, and some British Dominions, governed territories under the oversight of the League of Nations' Permanent Mandates Commission. This thesis also reveals that, in many cases, it was the State Department's effective supervision of the mandates, rather than the PMC's formal oversight, that constrained the policies of the mandatory powers. By closely monitoring adherence to mandatory terms and intervening selectively, American officials lent significant meaning to mandatory status.

The most influential modern treatment of the mandates is Susan Pedersen's 2015 book, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire*.¹ In this book she revived mandates scholarship by reconstructing the world of the Permanent Mandates Commission and presenting the mandates as an experiment in moralised imperial oversight. She argues that the Permanent Mandates Commission transformed imperial rule into a public performance of accountability sustained by scrutiny and petition, with conquest and sovereignty held in abeyance. While foundational to much of the current scholarship, this Geneva-centred perspective underplays the mandates' legal and economic architecture and their life outside the League. Her argument is primarily about governance, the rights of nation-states, and civil

¹ Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

society; it largely ignores the economic and financial dimensions of mandates and, except for passing mentions, their geostrategic and market significance. This thesis relocates the analysis to the State Department and to the bilateral agreements through which the United States replicated League privileges without membership and secured a position of significant influence over the meaning of the mandates system. It reveals an architecture of legal and commercial influence that operated parallel to the League's moral oversight, by which the United States Government was able to expand its influence into new territories under the control of empires and the watchful eyes of the international community.

The most important difference between my work and Pedersen's is that she is focused on the PMC, of which the US was not a member. In contrast, I look at how the US Government approached the mandates as a category of territory governed by exportable rules, most prominently equal commercial access, anti-monopolization, and non-annexation, that Washington embedded into the mandates. While the mandates have often been viewed through the lens of the League, within which the PMC was the primary body with responsibility for mandates, I argue that the mandates represent a broader system of rules and regulations embedded both into the architecture of the League and into global economic and legal structures. My work naturally uses many more American primary sources than does Pedersen, and in so doing it also uncovers many of the economic aspects of the mandates system that are lost when it is viewed primarily through the League. This is a particularly important omission from Pedersen's work, in that she shows limited interest in the economic functions of mandatory status despite the importance of some of these territories as producers of strategic commodities, such as petroleum.

As she points out in her introduction, *The Guardians* is the first major work in over fifty years to treat the mandates system comprehensively. This work therefore owes her a large debt for reigniting debate on the system as a whole, and for laying the groundwork that allows for

an effective exploration of the American role in the creation and functioning of the mandates system. Her work, however, is focused on those issues around the mandates system that made international headlines and stoked debates at the League of Nations. This project highlights that her work failed to fully appreciate the role of the United States in shaping the mandates system as well as the broader international environment in which this system existed. As the United States was not a member of the League, Pedersen's approach necessarily relegated one of the most important international actors to the periphery of her study. She does recognise that Americans played important roles in designing the system, and like many other authors points to an Anglo-Americanism in the design of the mandates system at their inception in 1919-20.² She also acknowledges American intentions to generalise these norms in the international sphere, a point that my research largely confirms. However, she posits that the mandates ceased to be as much of an Anglo-American project following the sudden death in 1920 of a man who will feature prominently in this project, American colonial expert George Louis Beer, who had been slated to head the Mandates Section of the League. She also connects the decline of American influence on the mandates to the election of a Republican President and the resolution of the United States to begin concluding separate treaties with each of the mandatory powers. She notes in particular that the US Government began to leave letters from the League of Nations unanswered around 1922-23. This thesis shows that, although these developments certainly altered the relationship between the United States and the mandates, the US Government remained deeply involved in mandatory affairs throughout the system's existence.

My project differs in both its source materials and its view of how the United States influenced the mandates and the mandates system following their decision not to join the League and to seek separate treaties with the mandatory powers. By looking more closely at

² Ibid., 11, 19.

American documents, as well as those of the European powers with whom the Americans were negotiating, I identify a continuation of American influence in the mandates system after its departure from the League. This was both direct, through treaty making, trade, and strategic concerns in mandated territories; as well as indirect through the frequent references in European documents to how the US Government would respond to their actions in mandated territories. Despite the similarity of our conclusions regarding the convergence of Anglo-Americanism in the formative stages of the mandates system, my work details the role of the United States in the formation and evolution of the mandates more comprehensively. It then carries this analysis into phases when Pedersen argues that American influence in the system diminished. I argue that while US influence through the League waned, the US Government continued to use the mandates system as a tool for its own foreign policy in the 1920s and 1930s.

Since Pedersen's seminal book was published in 2015 there have been a few other studies on the mandates of note, though none specifically about the United States. Some recent studies relate to how non-mandatory states operated within the mandates system, such as Sean Andrew Wempe's 2019 *Revenants of the German Empire*, in which he assesses the role of Germans in the mandates system as a whole, particularly German settlers in Africa, pointing to the importance of Germany in understanding the language and discourses of the mandates system.³ This is an excellent contribution, but tells us little about the Americans, and Wempe noted later in 2019 that 'We need studies that explore how powers like Spain, Poland, Norway, and even the United States directly or indirectly benefited from the quasi-open-door style of colonialism that the [mandates] system created.'⁴ This project attempts to fulfil part of that call

³ Sean Andrew Wempe, *Revenants of the German Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 20.

⁴ Sean Andrew Wempe, "A League to Preserve Empires: Understanding the Mandates System and Avenues for Further Scholarly Inquiry," *The American Historical Review* 124, no. 5 (2019): 1723-31, 1730.

by examining how the United States used the mandates system to insert itself into European empires and alter international standards of colonial governance and international law.

Besides Wempe, most other recent works have tended to look at the mandates on smaller scales than this study, frequently at the level of individual mandates or regional groupings. These are too numerous and varied to detail in broadbrush approach necessary here, though many are discussed in greater detail in the relevant sections of the chapters that follow. On a more systemic level, some studies have approached the mandates through particular facets of their status, exemplary in this respect is the 2020 edited collection *Experts et Expertise dans les mandats de la Société des Nations*, edited by Philippe Bourmaud and Norig Neveu, in which the collected authors study the mandates through the deployment of experts. Like Pedersen, the volume remains League-centred.⁵ I complement it by showing how in the case of American experts, whether archaeologists, oil men, or missionaries, the State Department came to rely on these actors for information and to use its considerable diplomatic leverage to secure access for them and the institutions they represented to mandated territories using bilateral treaties.

A few examples of authors writing on individual mandates or smaller groups include Tze M. Loo's 2019 article on the Japanese Mandate, Sarah K. Griswold's 2018 dissertation on Archaeology in the Syrian Mandate, or the many authors concerned with that most famous of mandates, Palestine.⁶ These recent works are all wonderful contributions to the field, both individually and collectively they advance our understanding of the operation of the mandates

⁵ Philippe Bourmaud, Norig Neveu, and Chantal Verdeil, eds., *Experts et expertise dans les mandats de la Société des Nations: figures, champs, outils* (Paris: Presses de l'Inalco, 2020).

⁶ A particularly good example of recent work on the Palestine mandate is Jacob Norris' 2013 book entitled *Land of Progress*, in which he focuses on the deployment of developmental language and ideas towards Palestine, and how this influenced intercommunal relations there. Like many such studies, it is a wonderful contribution to the literature on the Palestine mandate and offers insights that might be applicable to other mandate settings, but does not approach the mandates as a category of territory. See Jacob Norris, *Land of Progress: Palestine in the Age of Colonial Development, 1905–1948* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). See also Tze M. Loo, "Islands for an Anxious Empire: Japan's Pacific Island Mandate," *The American Historical Review* 124, no. 5 (2019): 1699-1703; Sarah K. Griswold, "In Search of Civilization: Archaeology and the French Mandate for Syria and Lebanon" (PhD diss., New York University, 2018).

as a distinct form of territorial status within larger empires, and as a subsystem of the League of Nations. What is absent, however, is any consideration at all of the presence of non-mandatory and non-League actors, notably the United States.⁷ This absence matters because the twentieth century saw rapid shifts in global power tectonics, above all the rise of the United States. As its political, economic, and naval power expanded, Washington acquired the material capacity and diplomatic leverage to shape the mandates' economic and strategic landscape without formal League membership. There have been recent studies that consider US actors, including Jonathan Conlin's 2024 article about oil diplomacy and the Lausanne Conference, in which he includes some of the most important Americans.⁸ Conlin's study is focused largely on non-state actors, whereas my study mainly considers how the State Department used the language of the mandates, the very vocabulary those non-state entities were invoking, in negotiations with mandatory powers to advance US interests. These works make valuable contributions to the historiography of the mandates; however, none has offered the larger-scale analysis of how the United States engaged with the mandates as a global category of territoriality. This thesis not only fills that gap, but transforms the field, by showing that there was a discernible pattern to US foreign policy with regard to the mandates. This is only visible when one steps back to look from local and regional perspectives to examine the US and the mandates worldwide.

Another branch of the mandates historiography considers the influence of the American delegation to the Paris Peace Conference. Most prominent in these studies is President Wilson, whose formulation of mandates language had a decisive impact on the evolution of colonialism in the aftermath of the First World War. One of the most important works in this body of

⁷ One exception here is that Wempe considers the role of Germany and Germans in mandates also in the periods before Germany joined the League in 1926, and after it left in 1933.

⁸ Jonathan Conlin, "'Fouled by Oil'? Oil Diplomacy and the Lausanne Conference, 1914–1928," *The International History Review*, published August 20, 2024, 1–19. DOI: 10.1080/07075332.2024.2393642.

literature is Erez Manela's 2007 book *The Wilsonian Moment*, in which he undertakes a study of how Wilsonian language was received in colonised regions around the world.⁹ My project approaches the changes wrought by Wilson and his successors to colonialism from the other side, rather than considering the reception of Wilsonian language by colonised populations, I look at how this language was received and operationalised by State Department officials, as well as other Americans with interests in mandated territories. The State Department had played a fairly limited role in designing the mandates, this being the purview of Wilson and his hand-picked group of negotiators and experts, and the substantive language being largely a product of Wilson's personal discussions with the leaders of Britain, France, Japan, and Italy. This study looks very little at how colonised populations, whether in mandated or non-mandated territories, understood or responded to the stipulations of mandatory status. The topic has already received significant scholarly attention, for instance in the form of Susan Pedersen's 2012 article about Samoan petitions to the League of Nations, or Natasha Wheatley's study of legal hermeneutics in petitions from Mandate Palestine.¹⁰ I examine a group that was much less impacted by the characteristics of mandatory administrations, but wielded much greater influence in shaping the meaning of the mandates: American diplomats.

The direction of the mandates historiography since the mid-2000s has been to look more closely at the populations of mandated territories in search of the system's meanings and its functions. As suggested above, it has been coupled with a new League-centred view of the mandates. Together these approaches place the systems of petitioning and reporting at the

⁹ More recently, Scott Malcomson has published an article that traces the disappearance of the term 'Self-Determination' from the League of Nations Covenant, even though, as Manela notes, the term did not lose currency among many colonised peoples around the world. See Scott L. Malcomson, "The Disappearance of Self-Determination from the League of Nations Covenant, January–February 1919," *The Historical Journal*, 2025, 1–24. DOI: 10.1017/S0018246X24000682.

¹⁰ Susan Pedersen, "Samoa on the World Stage: Petitions and Peoples before the Mandates Commission of the League of Nations," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 40, no. 2 (June 1, 2012): 231–61; Natasha Wheatley, "Mandatory Interpretation: Legal Hermeneutics and the New International Order in Arab and Jewish Petitions to the League of Nations," *Past & Present*, no. 227 (2015): 205–48.

centre of current understandings of the system. While there are certainly many merits to these approaches, these actors were rarely empowered to shape the system's meanings. Rather it was governments, chiefly those of the powerful mandatory states, and from what was then a rising superpower, the United States, that determined what mandatory status meant. I focus instead on how U.S. actors operated outside League structures, where they engaged only minimally with mandated populations. Mandated populations seldom shaped US policy, with officials instead deploying the mandates' language to advance American diplomatic and commercial aims. This thesis therefore significantly challenges the current mandates scholarship by revealing how the Geneva mandates regime was operationalised by powerful global actors and shaped to serve their interests. It thus compliments and adds to what we know and reframes the mandates primarily as a form of territorial status carrying specific rules and norms that were actively moulded from within and without the League throughout the system's existence. This reshapes how we understand the mandates' place in the history of colonial and international governance, and helps to recast global understandings of international law and governance by shifting the focus onto those who benefitted from the rules and structures created, and away from those populations and territories that were mainly subjected to these strictures with little more than a façade of consultation.

While not as recent, there were a handful of authors who wrote in connection to the mandates system's relationship with the United States during the twentieth century, notably Quincy Wright and Walter Russell Batsell, who began writing on the subject during the 1920s.¹¹ Then came Rayford W. Logan, who wrote at the time of the Second World War, when the subject gained renewed interest as a result of the need to reckon once again with colonial

¹¹ Quincy Wright, "The United States and the Mandates," *Michigan Law Review* 23, no. 7 (May 1, 1925): 717–747; Quincy Wright, "Status of the Inhabitants of Mandated Territory," *The American Journal of International Law* 18, no. 2 (1924): 306–15, accessed January 8, 2021; Walter Russell Batsell, *The United States and the System of Mandates*, International Conciliation, no. 213. (Worcester, MA; New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Division of Intercourse and Education, 1925).

territories captured during wartime.¹² Later in the twentieth and into the twenty-first century William Roger Louis published numerous articles and books starting in the 1960s and continuing into recent years. His writings cover related topics such as the role of George Louis Beer in creating the mandates system, as well as how Britain and the Dominions approached the former German colonies at the end of the First World War, the relationship between colonialism and international institutions, and other aspects of imperial history in the first half of the twentieth century. Louis' work has proven an invaluable resource in researching for this project. In particular his stress on the continued importance of the United States in international relations and imperial politics after the Wilson administration have informed my work.¹³ My own archival research has largely confirmed his findings, and builds on them by highlighting the importance of American Open Door policies in shaping the contours of the mandates system as a whole. Louis is one of the few authors who has written at any length on the relationship between the United States and the mandates system. My research has confirmed Louis' findings that the US was instrumental in creating the mandates and builds on it by showing that throughout the existence of the mandates system, US officials played key roles in shaping how its provisions were interpreted and enforced. This marks a significant point in the mandates' historiography, highlighting that in order to understand the mandates both individually and systematically, one must look beyond the League architecture and towards wider global networks, particularly economic structures, and their strategic and financial ties to powers like the United States.

¹² Rayford Whittingham Logan, *The Senate and the Versailles Mandate System* (Washington, DC: Minorities Publishers, 1945).

¹³ Wm. Roger Louis, "The United Kingdom and the Beginning of the Mandates System, 1919–1922," *International Organization* 23, no. 1 (1969): 73–96, pp. 86, 90.

International Institutions

Much of the current mandates' scholarship addresses the mandates regime as part of the broader changes to international order and the creation of international institutions, particularly the League of Nations. My work contributes to this scholarship by highlighting how powerful actors outside of these structures, chiefly the United States, nevertheless shaped their operation through multiple channels. In this case, the thesis reveals how they leveraged their economic and diplomatic power to ensure that they retained access to the mandates on equal terms to members of the League. Within the published literature there are frequent references to the mandates' precedent-setting nature and to the confusion created as to the interpretation of the mandates in terms of their sovereignty, the nationality of their inhabitants, and the rights of mandatory powers within mandated territories.¹⁴ Scholars of international law have often noted the novelty of the mandates system in legal terms, and it is commonplace for them to point to Woodrow Wilson, and by extension the United States, as the originators of this novelty.¹⁵ Some authors, such as Nele Matz, have argued that this novel introduction into international law constituted the 'first manifestation of the ultimate goal to abrogate the colonial system that was still being pursued by many European states.'¹⁶ Matz is arguing that this was essentially an American introduction into international law that colonialism would eventually be brought to an end.¹⁷ She points out that the idea of mandates was that territories were administered functionally as colonies, but with the ultimate goal not of economic or imperial aggrandisement. Instead the intention was to foster development of the mandated

¹⁴ Patrick Cottrell, *The League of Nations: Enduring Legacies of the First Experiment at World Organization* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018), 93-94; Malcolm Shaw, "The League of Nations Mandate System and the Palestine Mandate: What Did and Does It Say about International Law and What Did and Does It Say about Palestine?" *Israel Law Review* 49, no. 3 (2016): 287-308, 293-294.

¹⁵ Leonard V. Smith, "The Wilsonian Challenge to International Law." *Journal of the History of International Law/ Revue D'histoire Du Droit International* 13, no. 1 (2011): 179-208, 198.

¹⁶ Nele Matz, "Civilization and the Mandate System Under the League of Nations as Origin of Trusteeship," *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law* 9 (2005): 47-95, p. 55.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

territory by an ‘advanced nation.’ The approach has precedents in American political discourse surrounding the Philippines, most notably in how the US justified colonial rule in the territory.¹⁸ While this project does not address the legal precedents for the mandates system in detail, my findings show that American policy precedents in the form of the Open Door were inculcated into the mandates system. My work builds on Matz’s by showing that there were multiple avenues of American influence taking place within the mandates system at structural levels. In the chapters that follow, readers will see that this was not merely a one-time import into the system at its inception, but rather an ongoing process driven by US officials.

Given its novel legal character, it is no surprise that histories of international law sometimes contain lengthy treatments of the mandates system, a notable example of this can be found in Antony Anghie’s 2004 book *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law*.¹⁹ In this book, Anghie devotes an entire chapter to the legal structure of the system and connects it to broader changes to international law and to the decolonisation movement of the second half of the twentieth century.²⁰ As with similar works, Anghie points out the novel characteristics of the mandates system and the difficulties it created in terms of understanding sovereignty and the place of the League of Nations in international law.²¹ While my study does not go as far in connecting the mandates system to decolonisation, the precedent it set that colonial territories ought to be governed with a view towards their eventual independence was an important development of the mandates, and it lends a great deal of significance to the study of the system. Anghie and other legal scholars often point to the influence of American negotiators at the Paris Peace Conference, chiefly President Wilson, in creating the mandates system and imbuing it with many of the novel characteristics that have

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law*, Cambridge Studies in International and Comparative Law (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

²⁰ Ibid., 116-117.

²¹ Ibid., 133.

given it an enduring legal legacy. My work builds on this approach by looking at economic, political, and diplomatic aspects of the relationship between the United States and the mandates, highlighting the ramifications of American interactions with the mandates outside the League structure.

While legal historians have often noted the importance of the mandates, and sometimes even the position of the United States in inserting these new precedents into international law, historians of global capitalism have not paid much heed to the system. This is not altogether surprising given that the mandates never accounted for more than a small fraction of global trade, even if some places contained strategic resources. Ntina Tzouvala argues in her book, *Capitalism as Civilisation*, that the mandates system existed to shore up the existing capitalist system on a global scale while accommodating new challenges to colonialism.²² Her basic contention that inclusion of non-western nations into the fold of civilisation ‘depends on the adoption of particular reforms by such communities that would ensure their conformity with the necessities of capitalist modernity’ is accepted here.²³ She notes the importance of the United States in creating the system, but, as is common to many authors, cautions against overstating this influence even in the latter stages of the Paris Peace Conference.²⁴ Her arguments regarding the role of capitalism in the mandates can be distilled down to positing capitalism mainly as a feature of the civilising mission in mandates. In doing so she ignores the more practical role that capitalism played in setting out the lines of influence and administration across mandated territories. My thesis contends that although capitalist modernity was part of the mandatory civilising mission, it also existed separately alongside these goals. My focus is therefore more on the ideas and practices of capitalist expansion in the

²² Ntina Tzouvala, *Capitalism as Civilisation: A History of International Law*, Cambridge Studies in International and Comparative Law (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 89-91.

²³ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 93.

mandates as distinct from the civilising mission, since the United States Government had, at most, a passing interest in the progress of the civilising mission in most mandated territories. But, as we will see, American officials expended enormous energies in promoting capitalist developments in specific mandates in pursuit of the interests of US nationals. However much the mandates system may have been justified by the civilising mission, Tzouvala, and many other authors considering the system, have failed to notice that it was economic imperatives, particularly American ones, that dictated much of what differentiated the mandates from other colonial forms of governance.

United States Foreign Relations

This project speaks to multiple aspects of United States history, including US imperialism and foreign policy, as well as highlighting some important continuities between the Wilson administration and its mostly Republican successors. The literature on these topics is immense and heterogenous, but several strands are especially relevant to the mandates. Taken together, these strands show why this study matters. It shows that the United States was not a marginal bystander in the mandates; it acted as a neutral outsider, formally detached from the Geneva-based system while pressing for the legal and commercial rights of League members.

First, a body of work has shown how international law functioned as a technology of American power. Benjamin Coates argues in his 2016 book, *Legalist Empire: International Law and American Foreign Relations in the Early Twentieth Century* that US lawyers and legal institutions forged and deployed international legal doctrines to underpin American predominance.²⁵ Coates explicitly ties the emergence of international law to American ‘hegemonic projects’ in Latin America between 1904 and 1917, and makes the argument that

²⁵ Benjamin Allen Coates, *Legalist Empire: International Law and American Foreign Relations in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), Oxford Scholarship Online.

the United States employed international law to project power into states and regions in the Global South.²⁶ In this interpretation, the United States used its power to imbue international law with certain norms, such as the protection of foreign capital and investments as well as submission to some kinds of oversight, as mechanisms to legitimise empire and to protect its interests in states that were notionally equal to itself.²⁷ This model maps closely onto the mandates, an area that Coates does not treat directly, where US officials translated ideals into enforceable rules and then replicated the privileges of League members through bilateral treaties despite American non-membership. Although it did not participate formally in mandatory structures, the United States insisted upon adherence to key strictures of mandatory status, including commercial equality, anti-monopolisation, and non-annexation, in order to facilitate the expansion of American influence into mandated territories. This project therefore builds on the work of historians of international law as a tool of American foreign policy like Coates by showing how the structures of the mandates system were employed in a manner reminiscent of those mentioned by Coates in the Latin American context to advance US interests in mandated territories. In this way it also complicates Coates' arguments, though above all it is complementary, highlighting that these same tools of international law could be used to exert influence not only into relatively weak states in Latin America, but also into territories governed by major European powers, showing that the United States was not merely expanding a hegemonic project within spheres traditionally covered by the Monroe Doctrine, but was also using them opportunistically to pursue interests in territories within the spheres of other imperial powers.

Another notable work on American foreign policy in this period is Robert E. Hannigan's 2017 book *The Great War and American Foreign Policy, 1914-24*. He argues that there was

²⁶ Ibid., 107, 110.

²⁷ Ibid., 110-111.

not a fundamental break between Wilson's foreign policy and that of his predecessors, but rather that Wilson was essentially continuing in line with the general trends of American foreign relations from the prewar period.²⁸ He explicitly draws upon earlier American practice for precedents to the mandates system, pointing to American 'trusteeships' in Latin America and the Caribbean as Wilson's inspiration for the system.²⁹ Hannigan's analysis supports my contention that Wilson's foreign policy was in keeping with American precedents, and my project takes his analysis further by extending the period past 1924, when the postwar system had largely stabilised. By extending Hannigan's continuity further into the 1920s and 1930s, this thesis traces how State Department officials used mandate rules to bargain over oil concessions, communications infrastructure, and market access across the Pacific, Africa, and the Middle East. It shows that Wilsonian language, as embodied in the legally-binding texts agreed upon in Paris, survived as a set of important tools for later administrations to pursue US interests in mandated territories. One of the key points here is that although there were many changes to US foreign policy at the end of the Wilson administration, the fundamental techniques and tools that had proved useful to earlier generations in regions such as China and Latin America, most notably the Open Door, remained powerful assets in the State Department's arsenal. Although Wilsonian language and internationalism were somewhat of an aberration in the longer track of American diplomacy in the early twentieth century, later officials and administrations showed no reluctance in utilising the agreements and legal language innovated by Wilson and his compatriots, as this thesis shows in the case of the mandates. My work therefore builds on Hannigan's arguments about continuity, while highlighting that the Wilson administration employed a novel vocabulary in crafting

²⁸ Robert E. Hannigan, *The Great War and American Foreign Policy, 1914–24* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 202-203.

agreements in Paris relating to the colonial world, that allowed the State Department to pursue policies analogous to prewar models in new territories, and armed with new tools with which to pursue those ends.

A second strand of US historiography concerns business-state relations and the political economy of interwar diplomacy, as exemplified by Joan Hoff's works *American Business and Foreign Policy: 1920-1933*, and *A Faustian Foreign Policy from Woodrow Wilson to George W. Bush: Dreams of Perfectibility*.³⁰ In *American Business and Foreign Policy* Hoff shows that business preferences were fragmented, and that there was no monolithic isolationist sentiment with regard to concerns such as tariffs, debts, and disarmament. Read through the mandates, this helps to explain the State Department's preference for flexible Open Door language and for allowing private enterprises and institutions to take the lead in determining where access was required. The Open Door language embedded into the mandates proved capacious enough to accommodate the heterogeneous domestic interests and constituencies without sacrificing any leverage abroad or committing the United States to direct involvement with international institutions that lacked unanimous support among the American public. In *A Faustian Foreign Policy* Hoff highlights the recurrent pairing of idealist rhetoric with power politics, a tension that is readily visible in American interactions with the mandates system recounted here. US officials routinely invoked equality of access, non-annexation, and international oversight in the mandates while refusing to join the institution responsible for enforcing these stipulations. All the while American officials worked closely with private interests to negotiate with other powers to gain concrete access for Americans to these territories, employing idealistic and universalist language but negotiating exclusively on behalf of US concerns in mandated

³⁰ Joan Hoff Wilson, *American Business & Foreign Policy: 1920-1933* (Lexington, KY, 1971), Ebook Central; Joan Hoff, *A Faustian Foreign Policy from Woodrow Wilson to George W. Bush: Dreams of Perfectibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

territories. These findings therefore contribute directly to Hoff's concept of "independent internationalism" in which the United States supported internationalist projects as and when they served US interests, which I argue was certainly the case with the mandates.

Interestingly, although Hoff mentions the mandates in passing in this latter book, she does not discuss them as examples of this form of selective American internationalism.³¹ This thesis therefore not only serves to offer another example in support of her arguments, it also strengthens the argument that this trend can be dated at least as far back as the Wilson administration. The shift towards what she describes as a 'Faustian' foreign policy can be in part understood through the mandates as being a return to normalcy on the part of the State Department. Wilson and his delegation introduced ideological elements into international law and US foreign policy that went well beyond what many Americans and State Department officials considered to be within American interests. These new features of the international landscape reflected an ideological element that was not always in keeping with State Department priorities, but were useful tools to extract concessions from mandatory powers, which helps explain their use by American officials in the selective manner recounted here, and described by Hoff as 'Faustian.' This thesis helps to show that what Hoff is pointing to, at least in the early period of the 1920s and 1930s, was essentially a return to normal for the State Department. It incorporated the language of Wilsonian foreign policy into what was really a conventional approach to supporting the expansion of US interests abroad using whatever diplomatic and legal tools were available.

³¹ Interestingly, Hoff does remark on the mandates adjacent to comments about Open Door policies in the context of American officials refusing to openly tie German reparations to Allied war debts, however she does not draw any connection between the two and does not seem to notice that the mandates were imbued with Open Door elements. See *Ibid.*, 71-72.

Brooke Blower's 2014 article 'From Isolationism to Neutrality' helps to clarify what this return to normalcy looked like in practice.³² Rather than seeing the Interwar Period as one of tension in the United States between isolationism and internationalism, she shows that Americans argued primarily about how to redefine neutrality so that the United States could remain aloof from international conflicts while still engaging with other powers across the world diplomatically, culturally, and economically. Defending neutral rights had long allowed the United States to be 'out in the world without getting run over by Europe's imperial wars,' but after 1918 the rise of total war, air power, and economic sanctions made that position increasingly unstable.³³ Debates over Article X of the League Covenant thus appear less as a choice between withdrawal and engagement than as part of a wider struggle to adapt neutrality to a more tightly interconnected world.³⁴ Building on Blower's reframing, this thesis treats the mandates as a key arena in which such neutrality politics were worked out in practice. Here, the United States appears not as an absentee from the League nor as a reluctant internationalist within it, but as a neutral outsider that remained formally detached from Geneva while insisting on the rights and privileges that flowed to League members from the mandates system. By acting as 'neutral' outsider, this thesis shows, the United States was able to demand commercial and civilian access, as well as supervisory rights and other privileges in mandated territories without having to accept any of the broader collective agreements applicable to League member states, turning non-membership and selective, neutral, engagement into a tool for advancing US interests. In foregrounding these arrangements, the chapters that follow trace how officials repeatedly exploited this non-member status to convert 'neutral' positioning into concrete leverage over access, supervision, and infrastructure in mandated territories.

³² Brooke L. Blower, "From Isolationism to Neutrality: A New Framework for Understanding American Political Culture, 1919–1941," *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 2 (2014): 345–76. DOI: 10.1093/dh/dht091.

³³ *Ibid.*, 366.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 366-367.

A third strand, aligned with ‘America in the World’ approaches, concerns how power travelled through infrastructures and legal forms rather than through formal sovereignty and diplomatic interactions. A. G. Hopkins’ comparative account de-exceptionalises the United States by situating it within global cycles of imperial construction and reconfiguration, emphasising mixed regimes of influence that fused market-making, regulatory approaches, and limited jurisdiction.³⁵ Although the mandates do receive some discussion in this work, particularly the Iraq mandate, my project helps to place the mandates within this comparative framing. By doing so, this thesis helps us to understand the mandates not as ‘colonies in camouflage’ as Hopkins would have it, or as League set-pieces as some historians of the mandates might argue.³⁶ Instead it shows them as juridical and logistical nodes through which American officials helped to project US influence by means of insisting upon ideologically-justified but practically-motivated rules. These were used to facilitate the construction of significant economic and cultural infrastructures ingrainng American companies and institutions into mandated territories without requiring any formal governmental sponsorship. This thesis builds on Hopkins’ work by specifying the instruments through which mixed regimes like the mandates were operationalised in practice, and by showing that these regimes remained effective despite formal non-membership in the institutions created to oversee them. In a sense, however, it re-exceptionalises the United States by showing that in the particular case of the mandates, the US Government occupied a unique and privileged position where it could insist upon all the same rights as other states while facing no responsibilities or demands itself.

³⁵ A. G. Hopkins, *American Empire: A Global History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018). DOI: 10.1515/9781400888351.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 451.

Also in this vein was Paul A. Kramer's 2011 *American Historical Review* article in which he argues that US power is best written as a history of connection, that is to say a history of networks, infrastructures, and asymmetries, rather than as a sequence of formal acts of sovereignty.³⁷ This thesis adopts that lens but applies it directly to statecraft and state actors. It follows connections forged by State Department officials with oil consortiums, missionary groups, and archaeological institutions, all of whom relied on the same set of rules and ideas ingrained into the mandates, to show how a repertoire of legal and diplomatic techniques created durable corridors of access. In so doing, this analysis both extends Kramer's approach by reconstructing the connective practices of US diplomatic actors in League-adjacent settings; and qualifies his model by demonstrating that legal form and treaty replication could, in some contexts, substitute for formal sovereignty or control rather than merely supplementing it.

A complementary strand of recent work comes from Katherine Epstein's chapter 'The Sinews of Globalization' in the third volume of the *Cambridge History of America and the World*.³⁸ Epstein argues that historians have overstated the United States' rise by concentrating on industrialisation and neglecting what she calls the 'sinews' of globalisation: merchant shipping, trans-oceanic communications, financial services, and blue-water naval power.³⁹ On these measures, she shows, the United States remained heavily dependent on Britain before the First World War, with domestic sectional and partisan conflicts repeatedly frustrating efforts to build independent American infrastructures.⁴⁰ In this setting, the Open Door before 1914 appears less as a confident expression of surplus-driven industrial might than as a plea for opportunities by a financially, commercially, and militarily constrained power operating within

³⁷ Paul A. Kramer, "Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World," *American Historical Review* 116, no. 5 (2011): 1348–91.

³⁸ Katherine C. Epstein, "The Sinews of Globalization," in *The Cambridge History of America and the World, Volume 3: America and the World, 1900–1945*, ed. Brooke L. Blower and Andrew Preston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 37–61.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 37–38.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 37, 40–41, 44–45.

a system outside its control.⁴¹ Although Epstein does not discuss the mandates, this thesis both draws on and qualifies her account.

Epstein's focus on the infrastructures that move goods, money, and information helps to explain why some of the mandates' seemingly technical provisions on communications infrastructures, military basing, and supervision mattered so much to American officials. As noted in the section on mandates historiography, this is a dimension that much of the mandates literature has tended to overlook. At the same time, the mandates reveal a different dimension of American strength that Epstein's emphasis on dependence tends to understate. Long before the First World War, US policymakers had begun to construct legal and political 'sinews' of their own in the form of Open Door notes, treaty clauses, and exclusionary policies like the Monroe Doctrine, that served to create spaces safe for American commercial imperialism. By insisting that Open Door principles be written into the mandates, and then reproduced in bilateral agreements with mandatory powers, American officials inserted the United States into the League's accelerating systems of globalisation as a rights-bearing outsider. What I term the Mandatory Open Door thus shows how American officials used an existing repertoire of legal and diplomatic strategies not merely to cope with a globalising world mainly under British control, but to craft a parallel set of tendons that bound Britain and other powerful states to the United States through legal obligations. In so doing, American officials were able to gain substantial leverage over other Empires, especially Britain, in negotiations over trade, markets, and access to strategic infrastructures in mandated territories that made ownership of the sinews of globalisation less relevant given the obligations and rights that Britain had ceded to the United States as part of the postwar settlement.

⁴¹ Ibid., 42.

This thesis therefore engages with the ideas of the America in the World literature by shifting attention from the formal structures of the mandates to the connection through which power moved across this novel form of territorial status. In so doing, it brings greater analytical precision to what ‘the world’ in *America in the World* actually denotes: not a neutral stage on which US interests were projected, but a set of networks, legal structures, and bargaining spaces through which power circulated. It shows how mandate rules and their bilateral replication in treaties with the United States created effective corridors through which American influence could flow, converting the legal architecture of the mandates that existed within the League into a tool of American influence over territories with which it had little formal relationship. The contribution is both empirical, tracing the specific instruments that facilitated this access, and conceptual, in reframing the mandates as mixed regimes operationalised through rules and diplomatic practice rather than through territorial control or the creation of physical outposts.

A fourth strand of US history, the historiography of American Open Door policies and concepts, is also important to this study given that one of my central contributions is the concept of the ‘Mandatory Open Door.’ Cold War-era revisionist scholarship, most notably William Appleman Williams’ *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, first published in 1959, advanced the argument that the Open Door should be understood less as a discrete policy than as a guiding strategy of informal empire, whereby the United States sought to secure commercial and investment access in lieu of formal colonial rule, including in territories governed by other powers.⁴² For Williams, the Senate battle over the League of Nations constituted a ‘great debate over the tactics of empire,’ in which both supporters and opponents of the Covenant accepted the basic Open Door project but disagreed over whether it should be pursued through binding multilateral commitments in the League or by preserving American freedom of action outside

⁴² William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, rev. and enl. ed. (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1962).

it.⁴³ Williams offers only a brief treatment of the relationship between the Open and the mandates system, surmising that Wilson sought a compromise between ‘traditional colonialism and revolutionary nationalism’ through the Open Door in mandated areas that ‘would be used to reform the political and economic life of the [mandated] areas according to American interests.’⁴⁴ What follows offers a much more detailed analysis of how exactly the Open Door was deployed to reform the life of mandated regions to suit American interests. Williams’ treatment of the mandates is quite brief, however his insight as to the importance of the Open Door in their design is an important note which is unfortunately not emphasised within his larger treatment of the importance of the Open Door in American foreign policy. This thesis broadly works within Williams’ insight that the Open Door articulated a form of informal American empire, but my study of the mandates suggests some modifications to his model. The mandates show how Open Door objectives could be embedded into international legal architectures and then pursued by the United States from a position of formal non-membership. My study also shows how this framework was extended beyond quests for markets or raw materials to encompass broader objectives including communications infrastructure, as well as cultural, religious, and scientific access, all of which also served to provide informal means of oversight in these territories. In that sense, the Mandatory Open Door both confirms Williams’ claim about the centrality of the Open Door as a feature of US foreign policy and refines it by specifying the legal-infrastructureal techniques and institutional settings through which this strategy operated in practice.

More recent scholarship has revisited the Open Door in ways that both update and broaden this revisionist framework. Perhaps the best recent study of the Open Door as an article of American foreign policy is Michael Patrick Cullinane and Alex Goodall’s 2017 book *The*

⁴³ Ibid., 104.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 113.

Open Door Era: United States Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century. This book highlights that the Open Door, both as an idea and a set of policies, were central features of the history of American foreign policy throughout the twentieth century. Perhaps their most important finding is that the ‘flexibility of meaning is a key theme for understanding the Open Door idea’s appeal to successive generations of policymakers.’⁴⁵ For Cullinane and Goodall this applies across the twentieth century, but they comment that for President Wilson the Open Door was central to his plans for the postwar world. It is curious that they say relatively little about the mandates system, though they do mention it, since, as the following chapters show, the Open Door was in many ways its central feature, one that would not have been included or sustained without American insistence. My findings therefore both extend Williams’ formulation and add to Cullinane and Goodall’s recent synthesis by showing that in the mandates the Open Door took on a specific form as a key feature of American foreign policy, and that this is very much in keeping with larger trends of US foreign policy in across the twentieth century. My research also highlights that the Open Door’s inclusion in the mandates broadened its geographic scope and widened its applicability. In this account, the Mandatory Open Door operated as a mode of governance that consolidated global norms and systematised emerging features of imperial cooperation into a global order. US Open Door policies were globalised in this emergent order without losing the flexibility that made them such a valuable tool in American foreign policy.

⁴⁵ Michael Patrick Cullinane and Alex Goodall, *The Open Door Era: United States Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 25.

The Mandatory Open Door

As this thesis shows, the Mandatory Open Door came to be a flexible instrument of American policy in the era of the two world wars, whose meanings depended upon the interests being pursued by the State Department in different mandatory contexts. As suggested here, the Mandatory Open Door was, in the main, a set of economic policies derived from American practices in China and the Caribbean. The first facet of these provisions was often termed commercial equality, in which US officials worked to ensure that American nationals and corporations received equal treatment to that received by those of the mandatory power. In this context it can be understood as a colonial equivalent to Most Favoured Nation clauses found in many trade agreements, whereby Americans were guaranteed the same rights as Europeans in a colonial region without having to grant any reciprocal benefits. This set of provisions applied to the 'A' mandates in the Middle East, and the 'B' mandates in Africa (except Southwest Africa, which was class 'C'), but did not apply in the Pacific 'C' mandates. The other important economic stipulation of the mandates forming an integral part of the Mandatory Open Door were anti-monopolisation provisions. These limited the ability of mandatory powers to establish or facilitate monopolies in mandated territories, which mostly meant preventing the establishment of resource-monopolies for lucrative exports such as petroleum products. As we will see in the second chapter, the State Department was willing to ignore these provisions when they felt that American interests were not damaged by non-adherence to anti-monopolisation provisions, which was most prominently visible in the phosphate monopoly established in Nauru.

There were non-economic aspects of the United States's Mandatory Open Door, though they were in most cases subsidiary to the economic meanings of the policy. Most prominent were the set of provisions enabling access to mandates for civilians from League member states

and the US, including missionaries, scientists, and archaeologists. By using the stipulation, the State Department was able to receive reliable reports from a variety of mandated territories regarding adherence to other provisions, including those prohibiting militarisation. It was also able to gain access to important areas of knowledge production such as archaeological excavations in the Middle East and anthropological investigations in New Guinea. The latter provisions of the Mandatory Open Door were generally less important to the State Department than were the economic provisions. Nonetheless, they formed part of a coherent American policy of using the legal strictures of the mandates system to gain access to colonial regions under the control of European empires far beyond what could be demanded in other colonies. The Mandatory Open Door was a systemic feature of the United States' approach to mandates in its widest terms: it was part of the architecture of the mandates both through their legal structures in the League and in the bilateral relationships between the United States and each mandatory power. This means that the Mandatory Open Door was both structural feature of the mandates and an American policy approach to those territories placed under mandate.

These restrictions were incorporated into the individual mandate agreements conferred by the League of Nations onto each mandatory state. They were then reconfirmed by treaties between the mandatory powers and the United States. This arrangement provided the State Department with legal guarantees protecting American rights in mandated territories even without League membership. By incorporating the restrictions into binding agreements both in the emergent body of international public law and through direct bilateral agreements the US Government was able to protect its rights without joining the League of Nations. It did so while ensuring that the precedent being set by the mandate system would be binding within League structures.

The most important feature of what I term the Mandatory Open Door was that it offered a very flexible set of policies for American officials. The precise meanings of the Open Door as it

pertained to the mandates were never defined by State Department officials or their counterparts in other countries. Rather, it was a very malleable phrase that allowed the State Department to press for American participation in a variety of enterprises in mandated territories without being bound to uphold notions of equality beyond what suited American interests in each circumstance. The importance of this flexibility was perhaps put most clearly by Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes in a message to the President of Standard Oil of New Jersey in 1922 when discussing the Iraq mandate. He said that it was: ‘not this Government’s desire to set up impractical and theoretical principles or to place obstacles in the way of the participation of American companies in foreign enterprise but rather to open to American companies the opportunity for such participation if they desire it.’⁴⁶ This was not Wilson’s vision of the mandates system, which the first chapter will show was a much more principled construction, though he also intended to protect and advance US interests in mandated territories. Instead, after Wilson, the Mandatory Open Door became a tool in the State Department’s arsenal that allowed it to interact in unique ways with mandated territories. It also used the special rights conveyed by the Open Door in mandates to press American interests further afield by leveraging willingness to ignore violations of the Mandatory Open Door in the interest of more important agreements in other areas.

Across the chapters that follow a recurring cast of State Department officials and advisors based primarily in Washington and other American sites emerges as central to how the mandates system operated in practice. Operating within a regime that was, on paper, polyvocal and Geneva-centred, they nonetheless helped to shape its design and operation by treating Open Door clauses as key instruments of diplomatic leverage, as channels for American enterprise, and for advancing wider US strategic aims. This relatively small group of actors was not,

⁴⁶ FRUS, 1922, vol. 2, doc. 257, “The Secretary of State to the President of the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey (W. C. Teagle)” Washington, August 22, 1922.

however, executing a single coherent vision of the mandates or the Mandatory Open Door as elements of US foreign policy, rather they were drawing on shared assumptions and vernaculars about what these provisions meant and how they could be used in pursuit of the wider aims of the United States Government.

Structure

This project is divided into four chapters, organised both chronologically and geographically. The first chapter looks at the development of the architecture of the mandates system during the Paris Peace Conference. It concludes that the American delegation, through the offices of the Paris Peace Conference, succeeded in implementing the mandates system onto formerly German and Ottoman colonial areas, and shaping the system to include provisions that established a basis for American involvement in mandated territories after 1919.

The following three chapters trace the American influence across the mandates system by region, which, with one exception, matches how the mandates were structured into classes A, B, and C. The structure is organised in a roughly chronological manner, reflecting the sequence in which American officials were most engaged with the mandates in different regions. This is an imperfect chronology, but it shows how the regions were interconnected in American policy approaches through their shared mandatory status. I begin with the Pacific mandates, where the United States Government used the mandates system in the Pacific to create barriers to the militarisation and fortification of mandated territories in the region that could have posed a threat to American territories. It further highlights that despite the absence of Open Door provisions in the Pacific mandates, the US Government was able to use the system to strengthen its economic position in mandated territories globally through diplomatic engagement with the system in the Pacific.

The next chapter concerns the African mandates. It argues that the United States Government used new legal mechanisms to ensure that Americans would have unencumbered economic access to mandates in Africa. They also helped to enshrine stipulations, such as the suppression of the slave and liquor trades, that were of interest to many Americans, particularly missionaries, in these territories. While the United States had less strategic interest in Africa than in the Pacific, they used the same legal mechanisms to prohibit the building of fortifications and the recruitment of indigenous Africans for military service in the hopes of reducing the scope of any future European wars. The US view was that there was not much hope in the short term for the African mandates to produce any resources of particular value to the United States. But Americans hoped that in the long run some might be discovered, and that, because of the resultant domestic development, large markets might grow demanding American products. This was also part of a broader strategy to improve the American position on tropical and strategic resources that were largely controlled by European empires, such as rubber and cacao, by ensuring that the former German colonies were not subject to monopolies or price-fixing schemes.

The final chapter concerns the Middle Eastern mandates, where the United States had the greatest interest due primarily to the large oil resources then beginning to be developed, as well as religious and archaeological sites of interest to segments of the American population. This chapter argues that the United States Government facilitated access for American companies to Middle Eastern resources using the 'Open Door' principle as they did in Africa. Although the US Government did not ultimately insist that the 'Open Door' be observed in practice, they used this provision of the mandate to ensure that American companies gained a large share of Mesopotamian oil resources and revenues. The United States also succeeded in securing access to important religious and archaeological sites in the Middle East. Further, the Palestine mandate proved useful in pressing British officials in debates over the legality and

applicability of Imperial Preference in the 1930s, especially when tied to the African mandates by US officials trying to undercut British policies.

Chapter 1: The United States and the Origins of the

Mandates System

On December 4, 1917, President Wilson delivered his Annual Message to Congress. Much of the speech was naturally focused on the Great War. But despite having only entered the European theatre in April that year, Wilson constantly looked toward the eventual peace, proclaiming that ‘The cause being just and holy, the settlement must be of like motive and quality.’⁴⁷ Wilson was already thinking of the monumental peace that would have to be constructed, and of the place of the United States – and indeed himself – in it. It is doubtful that in December 1917 Wilson had thought much about the fate of Germany’s colonies in Africa and the Pacific, or the Ottoman territories of the Middle East. However, approximately a year later, Wilson met with specialists from ‘The Inquiry’ aboard the ship to Paris, where the League of Nations was to be the key feature of the new peace. After this meeting George Louis Beer recorded in his diary that one of the points emphasised by the President was that ‘Common property will hold League together: e.g. German colonies. ... Their administration under mandate of League should be entrusted to some small state or several...’⁴⁸

This chapter examines the development of the mandates system from the perspective of those American officials involved in its creation, chiefly the members of the United States delegation to the Paris Peace Conference. The focus is mainly on the upper echelons of the delegations, Wilson, Presidential Advisor Colonel Edward M. House, Secretary of State Robert Lansing, and a few others, as it was at this level that the most consequential decisions were

⁴⁷ FRUS, 1917, “Address of the President,” December 4, 1917.

⁴⁸ LOC, *Diary of George Louis Beer*, entry dated December 10, 1918, p. 2.

made. It follows these officials' interactions with the mandates system from its origins in the work of The Inquiry in 1918 through the negotiations during the Paris Peace Conference, and towards the codification of the system into something approximating its final form by the end of 1919. This process produced a novel form of colonial title: the mandate. The new title placed restrictions on how these territories could be governed, and severe limitations on the benefits that mandatory powers could reap from the colonies and territories severed from the German and Ottoman empires. Through long and complex negotiations, Wilson and his delegation in Paris succeeded in reshaping the practice of colonialism in formerly German and Ottoman colonial areas in ways that suited US. economic and strategic interests, allowing for American commercial expansionism by diplomatic means. Subsequent chapters show how the system shaped by the American delegation in Paris became an invaluable tool in the arsenal of the State Department. It was used to pursue diverse American interests in mandated territories even after the Senate refused to ratify the peace treaties or join the League of Nations.

Although the mandates were one of the first topics raised at the Paris Peace Conference in January 1919, the negotiations were not straightforward. Instead, they proceeded in fits and starts as more pressing issues such as German reparations dominated discussions. This chapter follows the mandates chronologically through the conference. Beginning with a brief look at the planning and proposals relating to colonial areas during the First World War. Here, I show that although the mandates idea was not purely American in origin, by the time Wilson arrived in Paris in December 1918, the concept had moved to centre-stage in the geopolitical plans of the US delegation. The next section looks at the initial mandates discussions in January 1919, highlighting that the outline of the mandates system produced through these discussions represented a compromise between the United States and the British Dominions. The agreement reached at the end of January allowed the American delegation to incorporate most of its desired conditions into the mandates system. By this time the mandates had become an

American priority, which was forced onto reluctant British and French representatives and openly hostile representatives from some of the Dominions. From here the mandates negotiations split into two mostly separate lines of discussion, one on the African and Pacific territories captured from the German Empire, and the other on the Middle Eastern territories of the Ottoman Empire.

The next section follows the deliberations on the African and Pacific mandates from February through to August 1919 and incorporates discussion of the claims of a wider group of states including Belgium, Portugal, and Japan. The African and Pacific mandates discussions fleshed out the January agreement to a three-tiered system and highlighted that although the American delegation had compromised with the Dominions, all the United States' core interests were protected by the agreements reached regarding these territories. Discussions relating to the Middle Eastern mandates ran from February 1919 until the Summer of 1920, though American participation mostly lapsed by the end of 1919. These conversations were more nebulous than their African and Pacific counterparts, the territories in question were less territorially distinct and the interests of most powers in them much deeper. The final section does not attempt to cover every aspect of these discussions but rather follows American officials through the Near Eastern problem. In particular, it explores how American representatives insisted upon the applicability of the mandates concept to this region despite French attempts to have the region without restrictions on their sovereignty.

Each of these regions are revisited individually in subsequent chapters looking at what mandatory status meant for their relationships with the United States in the 1920s and 1930s. Subsequent sections also expand on range of US interests involved in each region and how the mandate was used in pursuit of these interests. This chapter, by contrast, examines a narrow timeframe in which the concept of mandatory administration was developed, discussed, and

incorporated into international law, highlighting that this novel institution was created as a direct result of American influence.

I am certainly not the first historian to consider the history of the mandates at the Paris Peace Conference. This topic is probably the most well-trodden ground of the entire mandates historiography. It is also notable that unlike other aspects of the mandates, the influence of the United States on the development of the system during the Paris Peace Conference is widely acknowledged by scholars. Susan Pedersen, for example, wrote on the very first page of the introduction to her landmark study of the Permanent Mandates Commission that on mandates ‘Only reluctantly did [the allied powers] bend to American pressure and the wave of internationalist and anti-imperialist sentiment sweeping the globe.’⁴⁹ This study is focused on very different aspects of the mandates system than Pedersen’s, but in our assessments of their genesis at the Paris Peace Conference, there is no real disagreement.

Other scholarship focused on the United States at the Paris Peace Conference has also touched on many of these themes. A recent article by Scott Malcomson argues that: ‘Wilson, despite or, one might say, alongside his florid personal racism, did indeed believe in and fight for self-determination and early democratic independence of African and Asian colonies.’⁵⁰ While self-determination is not the focus of this thesis, the point that Wilson was an earnest supporter of some of the ideological goals of the mandates system during the crucial early stages of the Paris Peace Conference finds much support in these pages. Unlike Malcomson, my focus is on the practical benefits that the mandates system could bring to the United States through the economic and cultural Open Door, anti-militarisation provisions, and the increased leverage that the system offered to American diplomats.

⁴⁹ Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire*, 1.

⁵⁰ Scott L. Malcomson, “The Disappearance of Self-Determination from the League of Nations Covenant, January–February 1919,” *The Historical Journal* (2025): 1–24, 3.

This chapter invites readers to look at the formation of the mandates at the Peace Conference through American eyes, to see what the United States delegation sought from the mandates. It further shows how they succeeded in securing the adoption of the mandates in a form aligned with American aims, despite opposition from their negotiating partners. It is the outcomes of this steadfastness that inform the subsequent three chapters where subsequent generations of American officials used the mandates as a diplomatic tool time and time again in pursuit of diverse US interests in distant corners of the globe. Ultimately, the US Government used the mandates system as a mechanism to pursue peace and stability that would create an environment conducive to American success in regions captured from the German and Ottoman Empires.

The War Years

On April 2, 1917, President Wilson delivered an address to a joint session of Congress asking for a declaration of war against Germany, citing German autocracy and submarine warfare as justifications for war.⁵¹ American entry into the First World War had little, if anything, to do with the German territories in Africa and the Pacific. Yet these territories were not insignificant to the war effort, though most had already been captured by Allied forces by the time of Wilson's speech.⁵² The advent of submarines, and to a lesser extent airplanes, added new value to these far flung territories. And the establishment of colonial fronts, fought with colonial troops, in an otherwise European war made these colonies more than just bargaining chips for the eventual peace. The US Government had watched cautiously as one island after another was captured in the Pacific in 1914-15. This included some that were perilously close

⁵¹ FRUS, The World War, 1917, Sup. 1, doc. 231, "Address of the President of the United States Delivered at a Joint Session of the Two Houses of Congress," April 2, 1917.

⁵² Limited fighting against small German armed groups continued at the time in German East Africa and New Guinea at the time.

to American possessions, and where Japanese flags were planted astride important sea-lanes and above cable stations that served as the lifelines of the American administration in the Philippines and American business interests in East Asia.⁵³ Germany's African colonies were less of a strategic threat to the United States, but the potential for colonial rivalries to drive European conflicts was well-known and widely remembered in light of incidents like the one at Fashoda as well as successive Moroccan Crises before the war. Fears of renewed rivalries in Africa were further aggravated by officials in both Britain and Germany mentioning territorial aggrandisement there. This made it clear that finding an African settlement that could mitigate colonial rivalries would have to be part of the eventual peace negotiations.⁵⁴

As it turned out, the United States' European allies had already put a lot of thought into the future disposition of German and Ottoman colonial territories before the US joined the war. The German colonies were not, however, the major area in which the Allies had been staking claims, instead it was the territory of the Ottoman Empire in which British, French, Russian, and Italian claims were all in contention. The existing agreements among the Allies came to American attention during a discussion between Wilson's close advisor, Colonel Edward House and British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour in Washington on April 28, 1917. Here, House and Balfour discussed the future of the Ottoman Empire and the existing inter-Allied agreements extensively, on which House records that 'It is all bad and I told Balfour so. They are making it a breeding place for future war.'⁵⁵

⁵³ The conduct of the Pacific war is recounted in much greater detail in the next chapter.

⁵⁴ More details about the war in different colonial theatres can be found in subsequent chapters, for German references to renegotiation of colonial claims in Africa see FRUS, *The World War, 1917*, Sup. 2, vol. 1, doc. 296, "The Chargé in Switzerland (Wilson) to the Secretary of State No. 1528," Berne, October 4, 1917. For British claims see for example FRUS, *The World War, 1918*, Sup. 1, vol. 1, doc. 352, "The Special Representative (House) to the Secretary of State," Paris, October 30, 1918, 5 p.m.

⁵⁵ Edward M. House, *Diary*, vol. 5, *Edward Mandell House Papers (MS 466)*, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, pp. 124-125.

Balfour apparently expressed regret about the state of the agreements and agreed to have copies of them transmitted to Wilson. House pointed out that whatever had been agreed amongst the Allies, the United States would stand above it, saying: ‘if we are to justify our being in the war, we should free ourselves entirely from petty, selfish thoughts and look at the thing broadly from a world viewpoint.’⁵⁶ It had not yet been a full month since American entry into the war, and already Wilson’s closest advisor was pushing an idealistic concept akin to what would later be called ‘A free, open-minded and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims’ on British officials.⁵⁷

In November 1917 House, continuing his meetings with European officials, recalled in his diary that he:

‘pinned [Lloyd] George down to British war aims. What Great Britain desires are the African Colonies, both East and West, an independent Arabia, under the suzerainty of Great Britain. Palestine to be given to the Zionists under British, or, if desired by us, to be under American control. An independent Armenia and the internationalisation of the Straits.’⁵⁸

This conversation seems to have omitted French claims, but in substance what Lloyd George said to House in November of 1917 looked almost identical to the claims that would be articulated when the Peace Conference opened in January 1919.

Markedly absent from these conversations was any indication that territories to which Britain laid claim would be limited by international oversight. But claims for colonial spoils clearly ran against the spirit of the times. In early January 1918, both Lloyd George and Wilson gave speeches articulating peace aims in the German colonies and the non-Turkish portions of the Ottoman Empire that, in Lloyd George’s words: ‘The general principle of national self-determination is, therefore, as applicable in their cases as in those of occupied European

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Quote from Wilson’s famous Fourteen Points speech, January 8, 1918, quoted from Erik Goldstein, *The First World War Peace Settlements, 1919-1925*, (London: Longman, 2002), 104.

⁵⁸ Edward M. House, *Diary*, vol. 5, p. 36.

territories.’⁵⁹ Three days later, when Wilson gave his famous Fourteen Points Speech, his fifth point called for: ‘A free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable government whose title is to be determined.’⁶⁰ House recorded in his diary the next day that when he and Wilson had gone over the drafts of this speech this point had given them little trouble, and they hoped that it would be acceptable to Britain.⁶¹ It seems that Wilson and House had not yet heard Lloyd George’s words, since the leaders of both countries articulated a similar set of ideas about how colonial questions would be answered in the eventual peace. However, neither leader explicitly outlined any mechanisms to enforce this novel form of colonial settlement or specified who would possess sovereignty over these territories.

Sovereignty, as it turned out, was perhaps the thorniest question of all regarding the mandates, and it is one that legal scholars have still not entirely resolved.⁶² But in early 1918 there were many questions regarding what exactly these vague statements about an ‘open-minded’ and ‘impartial’ adjustment of colonial claims might mean, and intellectuals began to step up to offer suggestions. Despite a long history of scholarship on the intellectual genealogy of the mandates, it is not entirely clear when the idea became tied to the peace settlement. At the time, the term was being freely used by a variety of officials and statesmen, including

⁵⁹ ‘Lloyd George’s Caxton Hall Speech, 5 January 1918’, quoted from Erik Goldstein, *The First World War Peace Settlements, 1919-1925*, 100.

⁶⁰ ‘Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points’, quoted from Erik Goldstein, *The First World War Peace Settlements, 1919-1925*, 104.

⁶¹ Edward M. House, *Diary*, vol. 6, p. 6.

⁶² Martti Koskenniemi explores some elements of this debate in Martti Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law, 1870-1960*, 1st pbk. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 170-176. Patrick Terry also explores this subject in much greater detail, offering a plethora of further references in Patrick Terry, ‘Britain in Palestine (1917-1948): Occupation, the Palestine Mandate, and International Law.’ *University of Bologna Law Review* 2, no. 2 (January 1, 2018): 187-251, pp. 215-224.

Woodrow Wilson and South Africa's chief representative in Britain Jan Smuts, by December 1918.

The academic legal expert Pitman B. Potter opened his 1922 account of the mandate idea with Jan Smuts' December 1918 book *The League of Nations: A Practical Suggestion*.⁶³ But he did not leave it with Smuts or his American negotiating partners, although he rightly pointed out that it was Smuts' book that brought the concept in a familiar, though not final, form to the Peace Conference. For the origins of the ideas behind the mandates system he turns to a group of British thinkers operating under the banner of 'the Round Table Group' between 1915-1918, especially, though not exclusively, through their anonymous publications in the quarterly *The Round Table*. The Round Table group, among whose membership could be counted Leo Amery, Lionel Curtis, Alfred Milner, and American correspondent George Louis Beer, was a powerhouse of intellectuals and experienced statesmen. It did not, however, originate the concept of mandates from thin air. Potter argues that most of the core ideas behind the mandate were embodied in a plan for Morocco formulated by US President Theodore Roosevelt and Secretary of State Elihu Root under the 1906 Algeciras Act.⁶⁴ He argues that these ideas were then passed through the Round Table group to Smuts, and then influenced by Wilson's principles before being formulated into Smuts' 'suggestions' in December 1918, and then taken up by Wilson at the peace conference.⁶⁵ While earlier precedents can be identified, Potter's analysis shows that these ideas had at least partially crystallised by 1906, shaped by the influence of American statesmen who shared many of the interests later pursued by their successors 13 years later.

⁶³ Pitman B. Potter, "Origin of the System of Mandates Under the League of Nations." *The American political science review* 16, no. 4 (1922): 563–583, pp. 564-566.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 583.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Intellectual genealogy aside, it is not clear when Wilson first heard the suggestion for mandates, even if he was aware of the core ideas associated with it in other contexts. He probably first became cognisant of the term in the meaning it was to acquire from reading Smuts' book, likely sometime around the beginning of December 1918.⁶⁶ Certainly by the time Wilson and the American delegation had arrived in Paris the term was in wide usage. The meaning of a 'mandate' was, in Smuts' words: 'nominating a particular State to act for and on behalf of [the League] ... so that, subject to the supervision and ultimate control of the League, the appointment of the necessary officials and the carrying on of the necessary administration should be done by this mandatory State.'⁶⁷ The book was first published a few days after Wilson's arrival, and doubtless made for interesting reading for the many delegates as they assembled over the Christmas holidays in advance of the conference opening in January.

Winter in Paris

Although planning for the postwar settlement had begun before the November 1918 armistice, the mandates system was not addressed in earnest until late January 1919, when the plenipotentiaries took it up and President Wilson asserted himself as its chief proponent. This section is of necessity very strictly chronological, and gives quite a bit of detail on the events of four days at the end of January 1919. This is because these deliberations were so immensely consequential for all future discussions of the mandates that it is imperative that they be

⁶⁶ It is not entirely clear when this was, Potter notes that 'The plan was also circulated privately in mimeograph form among the leading representatives at Paris'. See Pitman B. Potter, "Origin of the System of Mandates Under the League of Nations.", p. 565. The term mandate was also used in this context by Lt. Col. Stephen L'Hommedieu Slocum, American military attaché in London in a message to Col. Peyton March, the War Department Chief of Staff on November 27, 1918. See FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 1, doc. 349, "The Military Attaché at London (Slocum) to the Chief of Staff, War Department (March), London, November 27, 1918." The precise chronology is hazy; however many British and American officials had begun to use the term mandate in reference to German colonies and Ottoman territories in the final months of 1918, about the time that Smuts' book was being readied for publication.

⁶⁷ Jan Christian Smuts, *The League of Nations; a Practical Suggestion* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918), 19.

understood in minute detail. The colonial question was the first major issue to be addressed by the conference, and by the time the plenipotentiaries had all sat down it was clear that this discussion would be about mandates. It was evident to all by the end of January that the real advocate for the mandates system as a genuine modification of the existing practices of colonialism was the American delegation, especially President Wilson.

It was in January that the three-tiered structure of the mandates was agreed upon, as well as the Open Door and anti-militarisation stipulations that so concerned the United States. These discussions and agreements were referred to again and again during the Peace Conference as well as in its aftermath, when the actual texts of the mandates were formalised and implemented. The key takeaway here is that by February 1919, an Americanised conception of the mandates had been accepted by the conference, one that protected the United States' main priorities in mandated territories. These were: the application of the system to all former German colonies and non-Turkish Ottoman territories, as well as Open-Door economic stipulations in 'A' and 'B' mandates, and anti-militarisation clauses across the system, alongside other, less-contentious, conditions. This does not mean that the United States got everything its delegates argued for. The Open Door did not apply to 'C' mandates, and it was large colonial empires and not small states, as Wilson had originally wanted, that held mandates. There were also some exceptions to non-recruitment provisions in France's African mandates. Despite such sacrifices, this section shows that the mandates went from an idea originating in British intellectual circles in December 1918 to an agreed upon system championed by the United States by February 1919.

While it is impossible to know exactly what Wilson thought of the mandates on his arrival in Paris on December 13, sometime between this date and January 7, when he sent a communication to Lansing, his ideas had evolved. Around this time Wilson drafted 'Supplementary Agreements' concerning the future of colonial territories, which, Potter

contends, were inspired by Smuts' suggestions, and included the basic substance of the mandates system, including non-annexation, non-militarisation, the Open Door, and League supervision.⁶⁸ The ideas contained here, whatever their inspiration, were already a significant departure from Smuts' suggestions because they included all: 'the peoples and territories' which formerly belonged to Austria-Hungary, and to Turkey, and in respect of the colonies formerly under the dominion of the German Empire.'⁶⁹ Smuts had explicitly excluded Germany's former colonies in Africa and the Pacific on the grounds that they were 'inhabited by barbarians.'⁷⁰ Yet, in Wilson's second draft of the Covenant from January 10, the extension of the mandates system to the German colonies was included marking a departure not only from the Smuts plan, but also from the mandates plan being consonant with the annexationist desires of European and Dominion officials.⁷¹ This departure also meant a much wider application of the Open Door than Smuts had envisioned, one that expanded American practices of Open-Door imperialism from China and the Caribbean into territories under direct European control. This expansion put Wilson's proposals for the mandates system on a collision course with the interests of practically every major power represented in Paris.⁷²

⁶⁸ Pitman B. Potter, "Origin of the System of Mandates Under the League of Nations," 566-569.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 567.

⁷⁰ Jan Christian Smuts, *The League of Nations; a Practical Suggestion*, 15.

⁷¹ See Benjamin Gerig, *The Open Door and the Mandates System: A Study of Economic Equality before and since the Establishment of the Mandates System* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1930), 85-87.

⁷² The reasons that most other delegations were opposed to the mandates idea are varied and complex but mainly centre on the desire of large sections of the public in each country for compensation from Germany for the cost of the war. The subject is extremely well-studied, in particular by William Roger Louis, see for instance William Roger Louis, *Great Britain and Germany's Lost Colonies, 1914-1919* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 77-116; Wm Roger Louis, "Australia and the German Colonies in the Pacific, 1914-1919." *The Journal of Modern History* 38, no. 4 (1966): 407-21; Ernst B. Haas, "The Reconciliation of Conflicting Colonial Policy Aims: Acceptance of the League of Nations Mandate System," *International organization* 6, no. 4 (1952): 521-36; Michael Dennis Callahan, "Mandates and Empire in Africa: Britain, France, and the League of Nations Mandates System, 1914-1931" (PhD Diss., Michigan State University, 1995), <https://doi.org/doi:10.25335/wljy-pj14>, 14-52; C. M. Andrew, and A. S Kanya-Forstner, "The French Colonial Party and French Colonial War Aims, 1914-1918." *The Historical journal* 17, no. 1 (1974): 79-106; Gavan Duffy, *The British Empire's Southern Dominions and the Emergence of the League of Nations "C" Mandates, 1914-1926: Origins, Administration and International Oversight* (PhD Diss., NUI Galway, 2020), 23-88.

The collision came after Wilson submitted his third draft of the Covenant on January 20, which added to the previous version a clear line forbidding the annexation of any of the former German colonies or Ottoman territories.⁷³ This ran counter to the annexationist desires of the Southern Dominions in Southwest Africa, New Guinea, and Samoa, as well as the governments of France, Italy, and Japan. For most of the delegates, holding the territories without sovereignty on the promise of their eventual independence was not an attractive proposition on its own, even if that independence was envisioned to be in the distant future. The idea of these territories being held under a contingent status while the conduct of the non-sovereign administering power was supervised by the international community added a further layer of undesirability to mandatory status. But the truly objectionable feature of Wilson's plan for mandatory status was the administering powers would be hamstrung by Open Door economic provisions that would make it difficult to return a profit from the colonies.

Discussions on the mandates took place mainly across four days after this, January 24, 27, 28, and 30. These conversations were held at meetings of the Five Powers and the main participants were the heads of delegation.⁷⁴ In addition to the heads of government, foreign and colonial ministers were prominent participants, as were the prime ministers of the Dominions who occupied ambiguous positions as both the heads of their own delegations and members of the British delegation. Representatives and experts from other countries occasionally made appearances but had little impact on this phase of the mandates discussion. This was centrally a series of conversations between American, British, French, and Dominion leaders, with some participation from Italy and Japan.

⁷³ Benjamin Gerig, *The Open Door and the Mandates System*, 86.

⁷⁴ The powers in question were the United States, Great Britain, France, Italy, and Japan. All but Japan were represented at the conference by their heads of government, the Japanese delegation was *de facto* led by former foreign minister Baron Makino Nobuaki who had been appointed for the purpose.

On January 24, the Five Powers held their first real discussion of the future of the former German colonies. The assembled delegates quickly agreed that the colonies would not be returned to Germany. This was justified in large measure by Germany's alleged poor treatment of indigenous populations and the raising of indigenous troops that Lloyd George alleged had been taught to 'behave in a manner that would even disgrace the Bolsheviks.'⁷⁵ Lloyd George did, of course, acknowledge that Britain and France had also raised such troops, but contended that 'they had controlled them better.'⁷⁶ Lloyd George then went over the options he thought available to the conference to dispose of these territories, he explained the 'mandatory system' in some detail, enumerating most of its substantive provisions, including oversight, equal economic opportunity for all nations (the Open Door), and non-recruitment of indigenous populations for military service. He was careful to note 'that the definition he had just attempted to give did not differ materially from the method in which the British Empire dealt with its Colonies.' And that 'As far as Great Britain was concerned, therefore, he saw no objection to the mandatory system.'⁷⁷

But Lloyd George's early remark in favour of the system masked the deep hostility of the Dominions to the idea of mandates. Canada was uninterested and agreed with the British position, but the 'Southern Dominions' of South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand were the most vocal opponents of the system. On the January 24, the Prime Ministers of Australia and New Zealand (William Hughes and William Massey, respectively), and General Jan Smuts for South Africa all gave their initial statements against the mandates system. The substance of these arguments differed with each territory but were largely on the basis of the sacrifices that the Dominions had made during the war, and in the cases of both New Guinea and Southwest

⁷⁵ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 3, doc. 47, "Secretary's Notes of a Conversation Held in M. Pichon's Room at the Quai d'Orsay on Friday, January 24, 1919, at 3 p.m."

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Africa, on the contiguity of the captured territory with that of the Dominion. On the latter point Hughes argued that such a division of administration between the parts of New Guinea would lead to ‘confusion of authority.’⁷⁸ Whereas Smuts argued that Southwest Africa needed to have the same fiscal system as South Africa since it would be impossible to police the frontier, clearly indicating that he was concerned about the impact the Open Door would have.⁷⁹ Massey’s claims for Samoa were centred on strategic necessity rather than contiguity, but also on the basis that previous attempts at international administration, such as in the New Hebrides and Samoa itself (before it was annexed by Germany in 1900), had been failures, and that he ‘was very sceptical in regard to the success of any joint arrangement in regard to the German Colonies.’⁸⁰ These arguments did not meaningfully change over the course of the next week, and were repeated numerous times by each of the representatives, with Hughes and Massey being more antagonistic towards Wilson than were Smuts and Botha of South Africa.

On Monday January 27, discussions over the territories captured by Japan led British Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour, to introduce a distinction between the German concessions in China and the Pacific islands, with only the latter to be included in the mandates system.⁸¹ At the afternoon meeting, Chinese and Dominion representatives joined, and the conversation became a very general one about what the mandates system, until then a rather nebulous concept, would actually mean. It was President Wilson who, after hearing Japanese claims, moved the conversation to a general consideration of what was meant by the mandates system, and articulated it before the assembled representatives of the Five Powers, the Dominions, and China.⁸² Wilson enunciated the principles of the system mostly by means of an example, for

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ FRUS, *The Paris Peace Conference*, vol. 3, doc. 48, “Secretary’s Notes of a Conversation Held in M. Pichon’s Room at the Quai d’Orsay, Paris, on Monday, January 27, 1919, at 10 hrs. 30.”

⁸² Jan Smuts was not present for this meeting, South Africa was instead represented by its Prime Minister Louis Botha.

which he chose Southwest Africa. It was abundantly clear from the tenor of his statements that he assumed South Africa would be the mandatory for this territory. Wilson told the plenipotentiaries that: ‘The purpose [of mandatory administration] was to serve the people in undeveloped parts, to safeguard them against abuses such as had occurred under German administration and such as might be found under other administrations.’⁸³ This lofty goal was uncontroversial, as was the idea that the mandatory was responsible: ‘to assure their development so that, when the time came, their own interests, as they saw them might qualify them to express a wish as to their ultimate relations.’⁸⁴ Wilson even hinted that this pattern might even ‘lead them to desire their union with the mandatory power.’⁸⁵ A statement clearly intended to assuage the annexationist Dominions.

Development leading to self-determination and protection against abuses were the core of Wilson’s description of the mandates system’s purpose. However in his articulation of the second condition of mandatory rule, Wilson broke from the existing script by introducing the Open Door, or commercial equality. He explained: ‘that there should be no discrimination against the members of the League of Nations, so as to restrict economic access to the resources of the district... all countries would pay the same duties, all would have the same right of access.’⁸⁶ Although it had been part of Smuts’ plan when the mandates did not include German colonies, it was now, to paraphrase the notes of the meeting, the sole administrative difference between Wilson’s scheme and annexation.⁸⁷ In the first half of this speech Wilson had

⁸³ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 3, doc. 49, “Secretary’s Notes of a Conversation Held in M. Pichon’s Room at the Quai d’Orsay, Paris, on Monday Afternoon, January 27, 1919, at 3 O’clock.”

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ The exact phrasing of this statement as recorded by the Secretary in response to a question about preference from Lloyd George was ‘President Wilson replied in the negative. Preference as far as South-West Africa was concerned, would be excluded under the circumstances, but, with the elimination of that exception, there would be no administrative difference between his scheme and annexation.’ See FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 3, doc. 49, “Secretary’s Notes of a Conversation Held in M. Pichon’s Room at the Quai d’Orsay, Paris, on Monday Afternoon, January 27, 1919, at 3 O’clock.”

articulated the Open Door as a key stipulation of the mandates system as it applied *everywhere*, and he now referred to it as ‘his plan.’

Wilson’s plan, especially the Open Door stipulations, had serious implications for the economic value of mandated territories. This prompted Lloyd George to ask for time to discuss the system with his experts, as, he said, ‘this was the first time they had heard an exposition of the system principle.’⁸⁸ He was concerned with the expenditures required to develop territories under mandate, and he brought up the cases of the Middle Eastern territories positing that huge sums would be required for development that would not yield profits for a long time. This was now Wilson’s mandates plan, both in his own statements and in Lloyd George’s.⁸⁹ Lloyd George emphasised that he did not object to the plan, merely that it was a ‘new principle,’ and one that he felt required more examination.⁹⁰

On January 28 mandates discussions resumed, this time with French representatives articulating their concerns with Wilson’s mandates plan. In the afternoon meeting, Louis Henry Simon, the French Minister of the Colonies, entered the meeting to present French claims in Germany’s West African colonies of Togoland and the Cameroons. He argued on the basis of inter-Allied treaties, the abrogation of all treaties with Germany, and supported the arguments relating to economic and geographical continuity made by Dominion representatives the previous day. He further expressed concern that the system’s implementation in West Africa would mean that territories ‘inhabited by the same population’ would have different systems of government, resulting in confusion. He argued further that mandatory rule would disincentivise investment and colonisation and therefore development. He also speculated

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Lloyd George said that he ‘thought each of those present at this meeting should consult their advisers purely on the practical application of the principles of the mandatory power, as laid down by President Wilson in his speech.’ Ibid.

⁹⁰ All quotations and the entire record of these conversations can be found in FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 3, doc. 49, “Secretary’s Notes of a Conversation Held in M. Pichon’s Room at the Quai d’Orsay, Paris, on Monday Afternoon, January 27, 1919, at 3 O’clock.”

about who would be mandatories, noting the drawbacks of small nations (which Wilson had preferred) without the resources and experience to do the job, or large nations that would provoke defensive expenditures in neighbouring colonies. Simon therefore came out in favour of ‘annexation, pure and simple...’⁹¹ But he knew his audience, and in a telling phrase laid out that the possible objections to annexation were that it: ‘might be said to lead to the exploitation of the country for the benefit of the individual; it might be said to lead to the ill-treatment of the natives; it might permit of the setting up of the economic policy of the “closed door”.’⁹² Not only did Simon try to pre-empt American opposition to the closed door, he promised that:

‘The French formally announced that day that their policy in regard to the formerly-German territories would entail the application of a liberal system, practically open to everybody, the “Open Door” system, without differential tariffs. Everybody would be able to enter and to trade in Togoland and the Cameroons without let or hindrance. France henceforth renounced all economic protective measures.’⁹³

This reflected French acceptance that Wilson’s mandates system was now firmly coupled to the Open Door. This was an important moment in the economic relationship between the United States and Europe, of which the mandates were only a small part. During the war, Britain and France had moved towards protectionist policies arousing concern among American experts in The Inquiry. American experts were concerned that these policies would lead to larger zones of influence for European powers in colonial regions, which, as noted by historians Patricia Clavin and Madeleine Dungy, inspired economist Allyn Abbott Young to suggest imposing an ‘open door’ on colonies without tariff autonomy.⁹⁴ Clavin and Dungy move quickly away from this subject towards more pressing negotiations over European, and especially German, economic questions, noting that it was essentially American pressure that

⁹¹ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 3, doc. 51, “Secretary’s Notes of a Conversation Held in M. Pichon’s Room at the Quai d’Orsay, Paris, on Tuesday, 28 January, 1919, at 4:00 p.m.”

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Patricia Clavin and Madeleine Dungy, “Trade, Law, and the Global Order of 1919,” *Diplomatic History* 44, no. 4 (2020): 554-79, p. 568.

reversed wartime protectionist policies. But they make an important point that American thinkers in 1919 were concerned by British and French moves towards protectionism and Imperial Preference and responded with suggestions for open-door policies in colonial settings.⁹⁵ This reinforces my argument that American thinkers saw this as a mechanism to undercut imperialist logics of empire and secure the place of the United States in global trade and security architectures.

Although the economic stipulations of the mandates seemed to be acceptable to France and Britain outside of the Dominion cases, Wilson observed that the discussion thus far had been ‘in essence, a negation in detail—one case at a time—of the whole principle of mandatories.’⁹⁶ British representatives, both Balfour and Lloyd George, spoke in favour of the system for the territories captured by British forces while still seeming to favour the Dominion exception. Lloyd George opined that in essence the French statement had been an acceptance in all but name of the mandates system for the territories in west Africa. Wilson disagreed, arguing that because the mandatory principle ‘assumed trusteeship on the part of the League of Nations’ whereas the French proposal ‘implied definite sovereignty’ he drew this out to say that ‘the League of Nations would be a laughing stock if it were not invested with this quality of trusteeship.’⁹⁷

With British acceptance of the mandates system and Wilson’s impassioned arguments, Clemenceau expressed a willingness to compromise, and seemed to accept the principle for Togoland and the Cameroons. The conversation then rapidly turned to questions over the meanings and mechanisms of oversight, and the Italian representative, Prime Minister Vittorio Orlando, expressed a willingness to go along with whatever was agreed so long as Italy ‘could

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 564.

⁹⁶ FRUS, *The Paris Peace Conference*, vol. 3, doc. 51, “Secretary’s Notes of a Conversation Held in M. Pichon’s Room at the Quai d’Orsay, Paris, on Tuesday, 28 January, 1919, at 4:00 p.m

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

participate in the work of civilisation.’ The meeting had nearly adjourned when Japanese representative Baron Makino Nobuaki asked if the principle of mandates had been accepted, to which Clemenceau replied that it had not.⁹⁸

That evening Wilson called House over to see him, they spoke for only about 20 minutes, but Wilson was apparently ‘much disturbed at the turn of things this afternoon’ and he proposed publicising the whole matter.⁹⁹ House dissuaded him from this course of action, and seems to have taken the reins himself. The next day Smuts visited House bearing a paper that he had drafted and which Lloyd George, but not Massey and Hughes, had seen and approved. The paper contained a compromise formula on the mandates which Smuts and Lloyd George had not wanted to show to the Australian and New Zealand representatives unless it was satisfactory to Wilson. House described it as a ‘great concessions from the position they took yesterday.’¹⁰⁰ House approved of the new formula and sent it over to Wilson, who seemed to think that it could be the basis for an agreement, though he was not ready to approve it entirely.¹⁰¹

The meetings on January 30 were described by Colonel House, who was not present, in his diary as ‘a first class row’ between Wilson on the one hand, and Lloyd George, Clemenceau, Hughes, and Massey on the other.¹⁰² However hostile the meetings were, an agreement was reached on the basic outlines of the mandates system, and it was these conversations that were most frequently referred to later in the conference. These discussions produced the three-tiered structure of mandates and laid out not only the most important stipulations of the system like non-militarisation, civilian access, and the Open Door, but also

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Edward M. House Diary, vol. 7, Edward Mandell House Papers (MS 466). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, p. 25.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 26.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

the exceptions to the system and some of its provisions. The document that House had reviewed with Smuts the previous day was the starting point for discussion, having been accepted as a compromise by the Dominions. Lloyd George presented the compromise in written form to the assembled meeting, which included the usual faces as well as Beer. The compromise was essentially that the mandatory principle would be accepted as applying to all the territory captured in the German and Ottoman Empires, but that there would be three different classes of mandatory power or Mandate. By the end of this thesis readers will be intimately familiar with the differences of these three classes, which were both theoretical and practical, but the basic outline as laid out in the Lloyd George compromise was that the class 'A' of mandates would apply to areas of the former Ottoman Empire, where a provisional recognition of independence could be acknowledged and the wishes of the populations taken into account in assigning mandatories. The class 'B' mandates, comprising most of the former German colonies in Africa, was where the protection of the indigenous population against abuses was paramount, and where 'the full principle of a mandatory would be applied, including the "open door".'¹⁰³ Finally the class 'C' mandates, that included Southwest Africa and the Pacific islands, would be treated as integral parts of the mandatory power – which would have to be the adjoining power – subject only to those safeguards that were for the protection of the indigenous populations.¹⁰⁴

The emergence of what came to be known as 'A,' 'B,' and 'C' mandates from this conversation is revealing. This was the fundamental compromise of the mandates system, the major difference for 'C' mandates was that the Open Door would not apply to them, that in those territories the customs and immigration laws of the mandatory could apply fully. Massey

¹⁰³ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 3, doc. 54, "Secretary's Notes of a Conversation Held at Mr. Pichon's Room at the Quai d'Orsay, Paris, on Thursday, January 30, 1919, at 11 a.m."

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

had been insistent that he hear from Wilson that this was a concession the United States was willing to make to get the Dominions to accept the mandates system. It is therefore quite clear that from the perspective of the mandates' opponents, the Open Door was the key feature of the system that they wanted to avoid, and it was the United States that was pressing them to accept it.

This was not Wilson's only compromise on the mandates, though it was the most significant. In the same meeting Clemenceau presented a French demand for the mandates, stating that 'France could not renounce the right of raising volunteers in the countries under her administration, whatever they might be.'¹⁰⁵ What he wanted was the right to recruit indigenous troops in French mandates for service outside the territory, though he later clarified that 'he was thinking of the tropical colonies,' meaning African rather than Middle Eastern territories, which was prohibited by the system as it stood. This did not meet with too much objection from any of the assembled delegates, granting France a special exemption from the non-recruitment portion of the non-militarisation clause of the mandates.¹⁰⁶ Later we will see that when this exemption resurfaced for debate in the Commission on Mandates in London, this conversation was understood as a binding commitment by the Allied and Associated Powers.

Questions about the designation of the mandates, the provisionality of their position at that time, and the future allocation of mandatories continued to plague the delegates even once the 'Big Four' were satisfied as to the shape of the overall system. Italy, Belgium, and Portugal all had claims to advance on territory outside of Europe that might fall under the system, with these claims being pushed off stating that more experts and maps would need to be consulted.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

There was also the nagging question of whether the United States would take on any mandates.

As Wilson noted:

‘Many of these mandates would constitute a burden—by no means a privilege—and a very serious burden, but while he should not be disinclined to see the United States get any advantage out of this war, he should be equally disinclined to see her shirk any burden or duty.’¹⁰⁸

He went on to say that if the US was asked to take on any mandates, the whole matter would have to be postponed until he could convince the American people to take one.¹⁰⁹ The system was therefore left as provisional, meaning that it was not yet operational and the mandatory powers not assigned territories. Though the conversations on that day made it clear that the assembled powers had a good idea of what the final assignments would be, with the only major question being what, if any, mandates the United States would take.

The date of January 30 brought a landmark agreement on the mandates. The initial hostility of the Dominion prime ministers and the resistance of Clemenceau had been met by a principled stand by President Wilson, and a tactful compromise presented by Lloyd George. In the four days of negotiations, the mandates had gone from a British suggestion to a policy priority of Wilson and his delegation opposed chiefly by the Dominion representatives. The process of negotiations had created a three-tiered structure, the lowest tier of which amounted to a concession to the Dominions to leave the Open Door out of their mandates. The very fact of this concession is indicative of what Wilson wanted from the mandates: they were part of his broader plans for the League and for world peace, but they were also a mechanism to extend the Open Door to the former territories of the German and Ottoman empires, which was the chief reason that they were opposed in some quarters. The agreement that this would be left out of some mandates therefore represented a sacrifice of some American interests in those

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

mandates in order to secure the Open Door in the more valuable 'A' and 'B' mandates. As we will see in subsequent chapters, the Open Door stipulations of the mandates were frequently used by later generations of American statesmen.

Africa and the Pacific

Just because the system had been agreed upon in outline at the end of January did not mean that it was all smooth sailing from there. The mandates issue applied to three separate areas under slightly different terms, and questions regarding the exact nature of the system crept up whenever the futures of these territories were discussed. In broad terms the African and Pacific mandates were considered together, and the Middle Eastern mandates taken separately owing to greater uncertainty in the region. As questions relating to Africa and the Pacific came up in the Spring of 1919 the system was clarified further. In this process the United States delegation showed that it was willing to make more concessions to keep the key American priority – the Open Door – incorporated into the 'B' class mandates and to maintain the uneasy agreement reached in January. The allocation of these mandates was agreed on May 7. The topic was then referred to a special Commission on Mandates that met in London to resolve issues and draft the mandate agreements, which went back to Paris for agreement on August 5. This section follows these discussions as the African and Pacific mandates wound their way through various committees and bodies into their final form in the hot Parisian summer.

Pacific questions resurfaced in late April, starting at a meeting between British, French, and American representatives, chiefly the heads of government. The crux of this discussion was the connection between the former German concessions in China and the colonies in the region. Lloyd George seems to have wanted the concessions to be dealt with in much the same way as colonies, whereas Wilson was less adamant on this point, arguing that 'the interest of

the world in China was the “open door”.¹¹⁰ Wilson reported that in conversation with Japanese delegates earlier that morning he had repeated a suggestion earlier made by Secretary of State Robert Lansing that ‘all claims in the Pacific should be ceded to the Allied and Associated Powers as trustees leaving them to make fair and just dispositions.’¹¹¹ This was an important development, as it clarified some of the procedure and legal title over these territories. Furthermore, Wilson communicated in the same conversation: ‘that it had been understood that Japan was to have a mandate for the islands in the north Pacific although he had made a reserve in the case of the island of Yap, which he himself considered should be international.’¹¹² The Yap issue resurfaced a number of times and is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. But Wilson’s comments show just how far things had come since January, whatever the pretences of provisionality were, assignments of mandated territories to specific powers were underway.

When more Japanese delegates joined, they wanted to ensure these concessions would be ceded to Japan in the treaty being prepared with Germany. British representatives feared this would cause the Dominions to demand the same for nearby colonies which could not be sorted out fully in advance of the treaty signing. The Japanese delegates then turned to the logic of the mandates system itself to differentiate between the Pacific islands and the concessions in China. Arguing that ‘The mandatory system rested on the basis that those islands were in a state of civilisation which necessitated their being taken care of by other people.’ But that this did not apply to the concessions in China.¹¹³ Lloyd George concurred, and once Japan agreed that the Open Door would apply in the concessions the cases separated.

¹¹⁰ NARA, Archives 2, RG256, M820 Roll 113, “Paris Peace Conference 180.03401/110, Notes of a Meeting held at President Wilson’s House at the Place des Etats-Unis, Paris, on Monday, April 21, 1919, at 4 p.m.”

¹¹¹ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 5, doc. 11, “Notes of a Meeting Held at President Wilson’s House at the Place des Etats-Unis, Paris, on Monday, April 21, 1919, at 4 p.m.”

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., doc. 13, “Notes of a Meeting Held at President Wilson’s House at the Place des Etats-Unis, Paris, on Tuesday, April 22, 1919, at 11:30 a.m.”

On May 1, in a conversation between Lloyd George and Wilson over the conditions of mandates, the latter recognised ‘that there was a tacit agreement as to the assignment of the Mandates.’¹¹⁴ The evidence reveals this was true of the Pacific mandates at least, the January agreement had made very clear the Dominion positions, and the wartime agreement between Britain and Japan that the equator would divide Pacific claims seems not to have been challenged. The mandates in the Pacific got through despite opposition from the Dominions because of a willingness to sacrifice the Open Door in the region. The concessions were sort of a mirror image of this, the Americans got an Open Door in the former German concessions but they were left outside the mandatory fold. This is most easily explained by understanding the Open Door as an originally China-focused policy aimed mainly at areas with lucrative resources or markets, which the Pacific islands captured from Germany mostly lacked. What the Americans were able to secure in the Pacific were anti-monopolisation provisions that, as the next chapter will show, were heavily used by State Department officials in trying to prevent Australian authorities from establishing monopolies over resources in New Guinea. In the Pacific, the Open Door and the mandates diverged, because the American priority was really securing anti-militarisation clauses in the islands and the Open Door in China. Africa was a different story, the Open Door was central to US plans to ensure that Americans would have access to any valuable resources discovered there, and past experiences had shown that European empires were not always open to sharing.

Between May 2-6, major issues relating to the African mandates, including rough details of their allocation, as well as some legal troubles with their structure, were the main focuses of discussion. The key issues addressed during these discussions were Belgian claims for a mandate in Africa, the phrasing of what body was responsible for allocating mandates,

¹¹⁴ Ibid., doc. 36, “Notes of a Meeting Held at President Wilson’s House at the Place des Etats-Unis, Paris, on Thursday, May 1, 1919, at 11 a.m.”

freedom of access for missionaries, allocation of Pacific mandates, and the boundaries of the Cameroons mandates. This period was the last time that many of these issues came to the highest levels of the Peace Conference, and many of these decisions had deep impacts on the legal structure of the system. The most important outcome was that the mandates would be formally ceded to the 'Principal Allied and Associated Powers.' The construction of this phrase, with its considerable legal weight, had been a matter of some debate, particularly as the Belgian Government sought to prevent the Great Powers from monopolising claims to former German colonies.¹¹⁵ Elements of these issues are discussed in greater detail in chapter 3, where the mandates system is considered in its African context.

Other issues addressed during this period were that Lloyd George had been strongly pressed to insert a condition for the mandates on the protecting religious equality and freedom for missionaries.¹¹⁶ No reply to this comment is recorded in the minutes, but it seems to have been accepted since later forms of the mandates included precisely this protection.¹¹⁷ This suited American interests quite well, as this form of access provided a mechanism to obtain information on the ground in mandated territories regarding adherence to their terms, some of which we will see in subsequent chapters. The final resolution of Pacific mandate allocations were also agreed, albeit informally between May 2-6. This included an agreement to pass the question of what country would act as mandatory over Nauru to the British Empire as a collective unit. Curiously, during this discussion Wilson gestured at Article 22 to say that the

¹¹⁵ See FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 5, doc. 39, "Notes of a Meeting Held at the Quai d'Orsay, Paris, Friday, May 2, 1919, at 4 p.m." and FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 4, doc. 41, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of Foreign Ministers Held in M. Pichon's Room at the Quai d'Orsay, Paris, on Saturday, May 3, 1919, at 4 p.m."

¹¹⁶ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 5, doc. 44, "Notes of a Meeting Held at President Wilson's House in the Place des Etats-Unis, Paris, on Saturday, May 3, 1919, at 4 p.m."

¹¹⁷ See for instance the draft mandates appended to a meeting from December 24, 1919 in NARA, RG 256, M820, Roll 123, "Paris Peace Conference 180.03501.116," "Notes of a Meeting of the Heads of Delegation of the Five Great Powers Held in M. Pichon's Room, Quai D'Orsay, Paris, on Wednesday, December 24, 1919, at 10:30 A.M.," Appendices D through I.

Open Door would have to apply in both Nauru and Samoa, and that if tariffs were applied it would lead to difficulties.¹¹⁸ It is odd that Wilson made mention of the Open Door for these ‘C’ class mandates, since it had been agreed in January that it would not apply in these territories. One can imagine that in Wilson’s mind the Open Door applied to any territories not directly adjoining the mandatory, meaning that at this stage Wilson may have envisioned that Samoa and Nauru would be ‘B’ mandates and the only territories excluded from the Open Door area would be New Guinea and Southwest Africa. Unfortunately, the subject was dropped when French colonial minister M. Simon entered the room to discuss the African mandates, leaving the record ambiguous on Pacific matters.¹¹⁹

When Henri Simon, the French Colonial Minister, entered and explained the issue, he opined that the mandatory principle should not apply to Togoland, which Wilson thought would be difficult. But the division of Cameroons along a mountain range and the adjoining of territories to neighbouring colonies seems to have been at a preliminary stage of agreement between himself and Alfred Milner, the British Secretary of State for Colonies, who was not present. This situation was agreeable to Simon, who then asked that the portions of the Cameroons that had been ceded to Germany in 1911 (sometimes called Neukamerun) should not be subjected to a mandate. Wilson suggested that this be included in the joint recommendation, and the meeting closed without conclusion.¹²⁰

May 7 was an important date for the Paris Peace Conference. The participants probably remembered it as the day that the conditions of peace were communicated to the Germans. But it was also the date that the former German colonies were properly assigned as mandates on more or less final terms. The agreements reached are embodied in appendices to the minutes,

¹¹⁸ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 5, doc. 47, “Notes of a Meeting Held in M. Pichon’s Room at Quai d’Orsay, Paris, on Tuesday, May 6, 1919, at 5:30 p.m.”

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

the gist of which is that Britain and France would make a joint recommendation to the League on the futures of Cameroons and Togoland, the phrasing of which seems to have sought to avoid mandates in Togoland. It was agreed that the Neukamerun area would be *returned* to France because one of the conditions of the peace was that all previous treaties with Germany would ‘disappear’ and therefore the territory would retrocede to France.¹²¹

Orlando objected during this meeting to Italy having been left out of the distribution of mandates in Africa, he gestured to Article 13 of the 1915 Treaty of London, which promised Italy equitable compensation ‘in those parts of Africa that specially concerned her in the event of France and Great Britain increasing their colonial territories in Africa.’¹²² Balfour retorted that: ‘the phrase in Article 13 of the Treaty of London referred to augmentation of British and French territory and not to mandates which, strictly speaking, were not an augmentation.’¹²³ This points to the versatility of the mandates concept, which, though largely promoted by the United States, was readily taken up by European delegations when it served their interests. The French delegation had managed to use retrocession to keep a large area outside of the mandate, and the British and French together were colluding to try to get Togoland out of the system. The British delegation now argued to Italy that the mandates did not amount to territorial aggrandisement and therefore did not invoke treaty obligations. Wilson and his delegation, by all appearances, were content to let this all happen, so long as the mandates system in general applied, the only thing Wilson stood on in these negotiations was that the mandates be applied and that the Open Door be included in as many of them as possible.

The turning point regarding the African and Pacific came when Wilson and his European counterparts were able to find a compromise, namely that the mandates would apply

¹²¹ Ibid., doc. 48, “Notes of a Meeting Held at President Wilson’s House in the Place des Etats-Unis, Paris, on Wednesday, May 7, 1919, at 11 a.m.,” Appendix I to IC-181E.

¹²² Ibid., doc. 50, “Notes of a Meeting Held in the Conference Room of the Supreme War Council at the Grand Hotel Trianon, Versailles, on Wednesday, May 7, 1919, at 4:15 p.m.”

¹²³ Ibid.

with a few exceptions throughout the German colonies, and that the Open Door would apply in most of the territories placed under mandate. With these compromises in hand, as well as a rough outline of how mandated territories would be allocated, colonial questions did not resurface at top levels until the end of June. On June 27 the leaders of the Five Principal Allied and Associated Powers again considered the African and Pacific mandates. This meeting considered proposals prepared by Milner on the forms of mandates and Belgian claims in East Africa. Wilson was particularly concerned that the proposals ‘hardly provided adequate protection for the native population; they did not provide sufficiently for the open door’ and the class ‘C’ Mandates did not make provision for missionary activities.’¹²⁴ Lloyd George responded that he disagreed with Wilson on the Open Door criticism, noting that in some ways Milner’s proposals ‘went beyond what was originally contemplated.’¹²⁵ Wilson wanted to avoid the Council having to draft the mandates themselves, and suggested appointing a special commission to sort out remaining mandate issues. Lloyd George agreed and suggested the commission meet in London as this would be more convenient for Milner. This meeting also considered some aspects of the Near Eastern problem, to which we will turn shortly.¹²⁶

When the Commission on Mandates held its first meeting in Paris (all subsequent meetings were in London) the next day, it signalled a new phase in negotiations over the African and Pacific mandates.¹²⁷ This was the point at which national leaders, led by Wilson, felt that their representatives and experts could resolve all remaining issues, and that their agreements

¹²⁴ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 6, doc. 80, “Notes of a Meeting Held at President Wilson’s House in the Place des Etats-Unis, Paris, on Friday, June 27, 1919, at 4 p.m.”

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ The representatives at this meeting were Milner for Britain, Simon and Henri Merlin for France, Di Martino for Italy, Viscount Chinda for Japan, and Beer, who was standing in for House, for the United States. Most of these individuals will be familiar to readers by now, it is not entirely clear who Di Martino was, but probably it was Giacomo Di Martino who acted as the Italian delegation’s secretary general. Henri Merlin was an experienced French colonial official who had served as the governor of several different French colonies in Africa.

by that point could be taken as binding. The commission set out in the first instance to decide on the forms of the 'B' and 'C' mandates, meaning drafting template versions of these types of mandate that would be modified to fit each territory. This amounted to the working out in detail of all the agreements made in January and modified along the way. The areas that would be under each class of mandate had already been agreed upon and were included within the terms of reference for both types of mandate at the first meeting.¹²⁸

When the meeting discussed 'C' mandates there were two points of concern, both raised by Japan. The first was that the prohibition on building fortifications in mandated territories did not apply equally to 'B' mandates, and the second was the absence of commercial equality (Open Door) provisions in the draft 'C' mandate. The first issue was deferred until it could be considered in the context of 'B' mandates, while the second issue of the Open Door's applicability to 'C' mandates provoked an important conversation on the meaning of the mandates.

The Japanese and French representatives opined that the Open Door was fundamental to the mandates as described by Article 22, and therefore could not be left out of any mandate. Beer responded that this exact issue had been discussed by the Council of Ten with respect to Southwest Africa, where it had been agreed that it would be impossible to have a different customs regime than in South Africa (this is clearly a reference to the discussions of late January). Milner agreed with Beer and stated that 'B' and 'C' mandates differed precisely in respect of commercial equality, marking a curious point of disagreement in which the British and American representatives were arguing against the extension of the Open Door to 'C' mandates while the French and Japanese representatives argued in favour. This makes sense

¹²⁸ LON, R1-1-2366-52, "Mandates Commission - Minutes of the first ten meetings of the Special Commission on Mandates held on various dates from 28 June to 5 August 1919," "Commission on Mandates Minutes No. 1, Notes of a Meeting of a Special Commission on Mandates, held at the Ministry of the Colonies, Paris, on Saturday June 28th, 1919, at 10:30 a.m."

when one refers back to previous discussions, as the compromise on commercial equality in ‘C’ mandates had been fundamental in securing Dominion acceptance of the mandates system as a whole, and without this compromise intact the whole structure would be in danger. The issue was not resolved that day, as a report back to the Council was expected that afternoon, and it was pushed to the next meeting of the commission.¹²⁹

The Commission on Mandates reconvened on July 8 at Sunderland House in London, with Colonel House now in attendance and Robert Cecil, who had been Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs until January, invited at House’s suggestion.¹³⁰ Viscount Chinda, one of Japan’s chief representatives at the Peace Conference, again raised the issue of commercial equality in ‘C’ mandates, to which Milner responded that the only reason the Dominions had accepted the mandates was that the Open Door did not apply to ‘C’ mandates. After much discussion, it became clear that the key obstacle was Australian discrimination against Japanese people on racial grounds. Chinda expressed concern that this discrimination would be extended to Australian mandates, where many Japanese people had settled and ‘a not inconsiderable amount of capital had already been invested.’¹³¹ After more discussion, Chinda effectively abandoned the point, but wanted his dissent recorded. He tried again on July 10 to have the Open Door included into the ‘C’ mandates but was rebuffed once again on the basis of earlier agreements reached in Paris.¹³²

On July 8, the ‘B’ mandates were first considered by the commission, which carried on into the next day. At issue were French attempts to undermine the mandates system, as Wilson had once said, by negation in detail. As had been the case in the Winter and Spring discussions,

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ The Italian representation changed as well, with Senator Guglielmo Marconi seeming to head the Italian contingent.

¹³¹ LON, R1-1-2366-52, “Commission on Mandates, Minutes No. 2, Notes of the Second Meeting of the Commission on Mandates, held at Sunderland House, on Tuesday, July 8th, at 3.30 p.m.” p. 3.

¹³² Ibid., “Commission on Mandates, Minutes No. 5, Notes of the 5th Meeting of the Commission on Mandates held at Sunderland House on Thursday, July 10th, 1919, at 11 a.m.”, pp. 2-3.

it fell to American representatives to ensure that the system came into being as something more than a new rhetorical device. House commented that:

‘public opinion in the United States was not convinced of the sincerity of the Mandatory System. ... and [it] would be more closely scrutinised than any other part of the peace settlement. The charge would be made, if the French proposal were accepted, that the ‘B’ Mandate was equivalent to pure annexation...’¹³³

Ultimately this discussion went nowhere, and the committee moved to consider other articles of the draft ‘B’ mandate.¹³⁴ Clearly it was still a matter of argument between French desire to have exemptions from stipulations of the mandates and the willingness of the United States to accept violations of the mandatory principle.

The details of commercial equality for ‘B’ mandates were debated on July 9. Beer’s initial proposal had contained a lot of details as to the application of the Open Door. French delegates opposed Beer’s suggestions because they wanted safeguards for large public works projects. Simon argued that the mandatory power should be able to undertake these projects solely, arguing that ‘it would be most unfair that all the benefits of occupation under the Mandate should go to foreigners and all the cost to the Mandatory Power.’¹³⁵ Cecil proposed that the mandatory power be free to organise essential public works, saying that: ‘unless such freedom was left to the Mandatory Power the latter might have no motive for developing the country.’¹³⁶ This marked real agreement on what the Open Door meant in ‘B’ mandates: that mandatory governments would have a limited ability to monopolise development on ‘essential public works’ but would otherwise be required to offer equality of treatment to the nationals of all League members. Beer’s detailed proposals were dropped for this vague formulation, and

¹³³ Ibid., “Commission on Mandates, Minutes No. 3, Notes of the 3rd Meeting of the Commission on Mandates, held at Sunderland House, on Wednesday, July 9th, 1919, at 11 a.m.” p. 2.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid., “Commission on Mandates, Minutes No. 4, Notes of the 4th Meeting of the Commission on Mandates, held at Sunderland House, on Wednesday, July 9th, 1919, at 5 p.m.” p. 4.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

as we will see in subsequent chapters, the open-ended formula for the commercial equality gave the State Department a lot of latitude in negotiations over the Mandatory Open Door.

The terms of the 'B' mandates were the easiest to pin down, and besides the Open Door, were very similar to the 'C' mandates. Despite the relative ease of agreeing on stipulations, the allocation of mandates in Africa was more difficult than the Pacific, with the former German East Africa at the centre of debates. East Africa was considered by most of the planners to be the most valuable of the German territories in Africa, and within British circles there were wide-ranging debates on its future, including some who hoped that the former German East Africa might be opened to Indian enterprise and immigration, in view of the policies of the White Dominions restricting immigration from India.¹³⁷ In October 1918 House and Lloyd George had discussed a possible American mandate over the territory, but House expressed his: 'feeling as to [Lloyd George's] suggestion regarding German East Africa is that the British would like us to accept something so they might more freely take what they desire.'¹³⁸ The idea seems to have never gone much past vague suggestions, and by the time of the London meetings the discussions had much more to do with Belgian and Portuguese claims on the territory.¹³⁹

Portuguese claims, first presented by President of the Portuguese Peace Delegation, Dr. Affonso Costa, on July 12 were twofold. First, Portugal wanted to receive an allocation of mandates equal to Belgium, and second that the small area at the southeastern tip of German

¹³⁷ Beer said in 1918 that 'Of all the German colonies, East Africa is recognized to be the most valuable' See LOC, U.S. American Commission to Negotiate Peace, box 12, George Louis Beer, "Central Africa The Economic Aspects of the Problem," 1918, 7. See also Imperial War Conference, 1917: Extracts from Minutes of Proceedings and Papers Laid before the Conference, (1918), 161-162.

¹³⁸ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 1, doc. 347, "The Special Representative (House) to President Wilson, Paris, October 30, 1918".

¹³⁹ LON, R1-1-2366-52, "Commission on Mandates, Minutes No. 7, Notes of the 7th Meeting of the Commission on Mandates, held at Sunderland House, on Saturday July 12th 1919 at 11 a.m." p. 3.

East Africa known as the Kionga Triangle should be restored to Portugal in full sovereignty.¹⁴⁰ The first claim was based on Portugal's track record of offering a 'civilising influence' in Africa, and did not convince the representatives on the commission.¹⁴¹ The second claim, however, presented quite different arguments and had a much more salient result. Costa argued that Kionga had been under Portuguese sovereignty until 1894, when German officials took possession of the territory, hoisted the German flag, and then refused mediation with Portugal. Costa argued that Portugal should receive a mandate over this small territory, but rather that it should be retroceded to Portugal in full sovereignty.¹⁴² These claims were heard in full on July 12, but no decisions were made.

Belgian claims to a mandate for a piece of German East Africa known as Ruanda-Urundi adjacent to the Belgian Congo were heard by the commission on July 17. This mostly amounted to laying out the agreement that had been reached with Britain on May 30 and highlighting that the area claimed was much smaller than that conquered by Belgian troops. Everyone present accepted that since there was an existing agreement they could not really dissent.¹⁴³ On August 5 African questions were finally resolved by the commission in London, they had heard back from both Wilson and Lloyd George who approved of the draft 'B' and 'C' mandates, although the French and Japanese reservations articulated in the first meetings still stood. On Belgian claims House expressed that although the only action open to the

¹⁴⁰ This small area came to be known by the shorthand 'Kionga' after the name of its main settlement. It was a small sliver of territory held by Germany south of the Ruvuma River, which otherwise formed the border between German and Portuguese territories in the region.

¹⁴¹ LON, R1-1-2366-52, "Commission on Mandates, Minutes No. 7," p. 5.

¹⁴² LON, R9-1-442-442, "Commission on Mandates: 1. Précis of the Statement made by Dr. Affonso Costa before the Commission July 12, 2. Memo on the Subject of Kionga Presented to the Peace Conference by the Portuguese Delegation, 3. Note of May 14 Presented to the Supreme Council of the A. A. P. by the Portuguese Delegation to the Peace Conference," pp. 3-6.

¹⁴³ LON, R1-1-2366-52, "Commission on Mandates, Minutes No. 8, Notes of a Meeting held on the 17th July 1919," pp. 2-4.

committee was to approve the Belgium-Britain agreement for East Africa, that ‘He personally would have preferred Great Britain to take a Mandate over the entire territory.’¹⁴⁴

In considering Portugal’s claims all seemed to agree about Kionga being returned, Milner expressed that Portugal had ‘tacitly accepted the fact of German sovereignty.’ But remarked that: ‘If Germany and Portugal had been equal powers, however, Germany never would have had it, so that it might be said to have been taken from Portugal by force majeure.’¹⁴⁵ Milner then proposed that Kionga be retroceded to Portugal on the grounds that it was formerly part of her territory and that ‘to establish a mandate over such a small area would be to reduce the principle to absurdity.’ As an afterthought he added that Portugal should receive no mandate. All of these proposals were accepted; however Chinda made an interesting reservation that:

‘the people of Japan had accepted the mandatory idea on the assumption that all the German colonies were to be subjected to it. If exceptions now were made by this Commission, the people of Japan would not be able to reconcile this fact with their first opinion of the mandatory idea.’¹⁴⁶

Milner replied restating his justifications for the Kionga exceptions, indicating that this was the area in question.¹⁴⁷ The Japanese objection to Kionga as a retrocession is an interesting one, since it alludes to a point that the United States representatives simply ignored: that the African settlement introduced exceptions to mandatory administration.

Kionga and Neukamerun were termed as retrocessions to avoid violating the principle that the mandates system applied to all former German colonies. This worked well because it was designed essentially as an excuse to allow some territories to escape the confines of mandatory administration. In this we see a clear willingness on the part of American negotiators

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., “Commission on Mandates, Minutes No. 10, Notes of the 10th Meeting of the Committee on Mandates held at Sunderland House, on Tuesday August 5th, 1919 at 5 p.m.,” p. 2.

¹⁴⁵ LON, R1-1-2366-52, “Commission on Mandates, Minutes No. 9, Notes of the 9th Meeting of the Committee on Mandates held at Sunderland House, on Tuesday August 5th, 1919 at 12 m.,” p. 2.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

to make compromises with their European counterparts to get the system adopted as a whole. By the summer, British and American representatives had aligned in their desire to push through the mandates system as it had been agreed upon in the winter and spring against opposition from France and Japan. US representatives refused to support Japanese demands of the Open Door in the Pacific, and were willing to compromise with France, Belgium, and Portugal in Africa to ensure that the mandates system, complete with an Open Door, was applicable in 'B' mandates. This was achieved through numerous loopholes, such as retrocessions of German territory in Africa to France and Portugal, as well as allowing for exemptions from certain mandates provisions like the recruitment of indigenous troops in French 'B' mandates. These were assented to by American representatives that enabled the system to be implemented on the whole and to remain binding upon the victorious powers. We will now turn to the Middle East where the compromises from Africa and the Pacific helped to ensure that the United States delegation had plenty of political capital to ensure that the areas of most interest had mandates imposed and the door was kept open.

The Near East

Like the previous section, we begin at the end of January 1919 and trace the creation of the Middle Eastern mandates through the Paris Peace Conference. Because events in the Middle East were still unfolding militarily a lasting peace was not established on a formal basis in the Middle East until the Treaty of Lausanne was signed in 1923. Despite this, the future of the Middle Eastern mandates was settled among the European powers, and received effective American approval, after the April 1920 San Remo Conference. These agreements were then formalised with the Ottoman Government in the August 1920 Treaty of Sèvres. Because the United States had never formally declared war on the Ottoman Empire it was not a party to this treaty, and by the time it was signed the Senate had already refused to ratify the Treaty of

Versailles and begun the American withdrawal from the architecture of the League of Nations. Middle Easterners were also more effective in receiving hearings from the Paris Peace Conference than were African or Pacific peoples, adding a further layer of complexity. The final reason for the added difficulties in the Middle East was that decisions about the Ottoman Empire carried implications not only for Western Asia, but also for Southern and Eastern Europe and Russia — regions that raised particularly thorny challenges for the Peace Conference. Because our focus is on American participation in the mandates, and because many of the later developments around the Middle Eastern mandates are recounted in the fourth chapter, this section concludes with the end of formal American participation in the peace-making efforts at the end of 1919.

Out of this tangle of interrelated issues over what was once the Ottoman Empire emerged an independent Turkish Republic and three Middle Eastern mandates. There were quite a few proposals for other mandates in Ottoman territory, including suggestions of American mandates in Armenia and the Turkish Straits area. For reasons of brevity the focus here is squarely on those territories that did become mandates: Syria, Iraq, and Palestine. The Middle Eastern mandates were much more important for American negotiators than were those in Africa, and because their significance was mainly economic the Open Door was central to the American approach. In fact, many of the compromises reached with the European powers such as the absence of the Open Door in ‘C’ mandates and the acquiescence to French recruitment in African mandates should be understood as having been made to secure the Open Door in the Middle Eastern mandates. This section argues that while the American delegation lacked a straightforward Near Eastern policy, the main priority was the Open Door. Many Americans, including President Wilson, had hoped to see an American mandate for Armenia, but this proved impossible due to opposition within Congress. In the end the American delegation achieved partial success with respect to the Middle East: large portions of the former

Ottoman Empire became mandates, and in those mandates the Open Door was the law of the land.

The question of mandates in the Middle East arose almost immediately after the rough shape of the mandates system had been agreed on 30 January, 1919. Over the course of February the delegations of the Five heard from Greek, Armenian, Arab, and Zionist delegations. Each of these groups presented their territorial claims and generally expressed preferences for independence but a willingness to submit to temporary mandatory administration with the promise of future independence.¹⁴⁸ Of course many of these claims were overlapping and mutually incompatible, and even the meaning of the term mandate remained an object of some confusion.¹⁴⁹ Although the powers were willing to hear from delegations representing Middle Eastern peoples, it was usually only foreign ministers who held these discussions. Besides hearing from Middle Easterners who had made their way to Paris, there was also a lot of discussion of sending commissions to the region to ascertain the wishes of local populations and gain a better understanding of the changing facts on the ground. But as early as March 13, Lansing commented that he was in principle opposed to sending large missions to the area ‘because he foresaw no benefits coming from them ...’¹⁵⁰ Lansing’s prescience did little because Wilson did not share this view. He thought an inter-Allied commission would be an effective way to help resolve Middle Eastern questions.

¹⁴⁸ See FRUS The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 3, doc. 61, “Secretary’s Notes of a Conversation Held in M. Pichon’s Room at the Quai d’Orsay, Paris, on Thursday, 6 February, 1919, at 3 p.m.”; Ibid., doc. 68, “Secretary’s Notes of a Conversation Held in M. Pichon’s Room at the Quai d’Orsay, Paris, on Thursday, 13 February, 1919, at 3 p.m.”; FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 4, doc. 8, “Secretary’s Notes of a Conversation Held in M. Pichon’s Room at the Quai d’Orsay, Paris, on Wednesday, 26 February, 1919, at 3 p.m.”; Ibid., doc. 9, “Secretary’s Notes of a Conversation Held in M. Pichon’s Room at the Quai d’Orsay, Paris, on Thursday, 27th February, 1919, at 3 p.m.”

¹⁴⁹ This was particularly the case for representatives from the Middle East, and the issue was notably raised on February 13th by Rusteem Haidar, representative of Hedjaz. See FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 3, doc. 5, “Preliminary Peace Conference, Protocol No. 3, Plenary Session of February 14, 1919’.

¹⁵⁰ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 11, doc. 32, ‘Minutes of the Daily Meetings of the Commissioners Plenipotentiary, Thursday, March 13th, 1919.’

At a meeting of the Four (US, Britain, France, and Italy) on March 20 the first major discussion among national leaders regarding the Middle East took place. Pichon opened the discussion by stating French claims to Syria on the basis of prior agreements, most prominently Sykes-Picot, with the French Government asking: ‘That the whole Syrian region should be treated as a unit: and that France should become the mandatory of the League of Nations of this region.’¹⁵¹ Pichon quoted other agreements and discussions, including from November 1918 and those that had taken place in January and February.¹⁵² In all of this, Pichon was mostly concerned about the borders of a future Syrian territory under French control, in particular the question of whether the Mosul Vilayet would be attached to Syria or to Mesopotamia.¹⁵³ Mosul was a central question because it was (correctly) supposed that there were large oil deposits in the area. The French position was that France had essentially agreed to Mosul being included in the British zone in return for recognition of French rights in Syria. This was all complicated by the existence of an independent government in Syria headed by Emir Faisal whose regime was facilitated by British troops in Syria, and with whose father Britain had concluded agreements for military support during the war.¹⁵⁴ The bickering between Pichon, Clemenceau, and Lloyd George continued over the validity and implications of various agreements and correspondences until Wilson ‘said that he would now seek to establish his [own] place in the Conference.’¹⁵⁵

As he was wont to do, Wilson gave a rather long statement to delegates, the crux of which was that: ‘the only idea from the America[n] point of view was as to whether France

¹⁵¹ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 5, doc. 1, “Notes of a Conference Held in the Prime Minister’s Flat at 23 Rue Nitot, Paris, on Thursday, March 20, 1919, at 3 p.m.”

¹⁵² The discussion in February took place on the 15th, and was mainly about redistribution of Allied troops in the Middle East.

¹⁵³ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 5, doc. 1, “Notes of a Conference Held in the Prime Minister’s Flat at 23 Rue Nitot, Paris, on Thursday, March 20, 1919, at 3 p.m.”

¹⁵⁴ The conference had also heard directly from Faisal in Paris in February.

¹⁵⁵ NARA, Archives 2, RG 256, M820, roll 112, doc. 180.03401/10.1, “Notes of a Conference held in the Prime Minister’s Flat at 23 Rue Nitot, Paris, on Thursday, March 20, 1919, at 3 p.m.,” p. 14.

would be agreeable to the Syrians. The same applied as to whether Great Britain would be agreeable to the inhabitants of Mesopotamia.¹⁵⁶ He further said that the United States did not want anything in Turkey, though he was being pressured to see if the American people would accept a mandate, but he noted that ‘there was great antipathy in the United States of America to the assumption of these responsibilities.’¹⁵⁷ This was not the last mention of an American mandate somewhere in the Middle East, but Wilson clearly understood that it would be very difficult to sell it to the American people.

At the centre of Wilson’s statement, however, was the idea of asking the inhabitants of the Middle East which power they might like as mandatory. Wilson suggested that an Inter-Allied Commission should be formed to go to Syria ‘extending their inquiries, if they led them, beyond the confines of Syria.’ He justified this idea by saying he hoped it would: ‘convince the world that the Conference had tried to do all it could to find the most scientific basis possible for a settlement.’¹⁵⁸ Clemenceau accepted Wilson’s ideas, but wanted the commission’s remit extended beyond just Syria to Palestine, Mesopotamia, and Armenia.¹⁵⁹ Both Wilson and Lloyd George approved of the idea of an expanded commission, and it was agreed that Wilson would draft terms of reference for the commission.¹⁶⁰

The concept of an Inter-Allied commission fit with American priorities rather well, since the United States Government was less interested in which powers should hold specific mandates, but rather with acceptance of the system and the access for commercial and cultural enterprises that it entailed globally. The story of this commission, which came to be known as the King-Crane Commission after its two most prominent members (both Americans) is long and well-told, so it will not be repeated here. Suffice it to say that, because the other

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 15.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 17.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 21.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 21-22.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 22-24.

governments did not want their delegates to participate in a commission that might produce suggestions counter to their desired Middle Eastern policies, it was left as an entirely American delegation.¹⁶¹ This commission set out for the Middle East in June 1919, meeting with representatives of many nationalities asking about their preferences for mandatory. It ascertained that the majority of the inhabitants would prefer independence, with many willing to accept limited forms of technical assistance from outside powers, but many were fearful that the imposition of mandates would be used as a cloak for colonialism.¹⁶² There was a notable caveat that, according to the commission's numbers, 60.5 per cent of the population of the areas it considered would prefer American assistance to British or French.¹⁶³ It may be that because the interviewers were American expressing these opinions to them could act as a means of putting pressure onto Britain and France to grant concessions to local desires for autonomy. The commission returned to Paris with its report in August 1919, however most of the important decisions relating to the Middle East had already been made by then, and the reports did not reflect favourably on British and French plans, so little heed was taken of their suggestions.¹⁶⁴

Historian Alan Sharp writes that 'The Syrian question continued to drift as the Four finalised the German settlement in May and June.'¹⁶⁵ He adds that due to difficulties over British refusals to evacuate troops from Syria and the collapse of the existing oil agreement

¹⁶¹ It was a slow process over the course of April and May whereby France, Britain, and Italy all pulled away from the commission. There were quite a few factors at play and excuses given, which have little bearing on the central issues considered here. The subject is dealt with in great detail in Andrew Patrick, *America's Forgotten Middle East Initiative: The King-Crane Commission of 1919* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2015). One can also look to the following sources for information about the commission itself: Ray Stannard Baker, *Woodrow Wilson and World Settlement* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1922), 76-77; FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 12, doc. 377, "President Wilson to the Secretary of State, [Paris] 15 April, 1919."

¹⁶² Ibid., doc. 379, "Mr. C. R. Crane and Mr. H. C. King to the Commission to Negotiate Peace, Beirut [July 10, 1919]."

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, *The First World War in the Middle East* (Oxford: C. Hurst and Company Limited, 2014), 189.

¹⁶⁵ Alan Sharp, *The Versailles Settlement: Peacemaking in Paris, 1919* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1991), 181.

that Clemenceau offered to duel Lloyd George over the question of Mosul.¹⁶⁶ If this event did occur, it was probably in the days before May 7, when the treaty was handed to Germany and the allocation of the African and Pacific mandates was agreed upon.¹⁶⁷

Towards the end of May, Wilson, Lloyd George, and Clemenceau had confirmed the rough allocation – though not the borders – of the mandates in the Middle East. Britain would have Palestine and Mesopotamia (including Mosul), France would have Syria, and the United States would have Constantinople, Armenia, and Cilicia, subject to Senate approval.¹⁶⁸ The allocation of the Middle Eastern mandates were not entirely separate at this stage from those in Africa, Lloyd George in particular felt that British willingness to give France larger shares in Togoland and Cameroons should be considered in border questions over Syria.¹⁶⁹ Wilson expressed that he did not like the tenor of the border negotiations between Britain and France in the Middle East, preferring to hear first from the commission what the inhabitants thought. But by the end of this meeting, it was clear that the American commissioners would go alone, with no representatives from Britain or France, and although it was probably not apparent to Wilson, that the commission would not have much effect.¹⁷⁰

At the same meeting on June 27 that the instructions for the London committee on mandates were drafted there was a brief consideration of the Turkish mandates. The conclusion reached by the Four in this case was, according to Lloyd George: ‘that the Turkish question must be postponed until it was known whether the United States of America could accept a

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.; I have traced this citation back to a report from Georges Suarez printed in 1932 entitled *Clemenceau: Soixante Années d'Histoire Française*, which may or may not be an accurate reflection of events, see Georges Suarez, *Clemenceau: Soixante Années d'histoire française*, vol. 2 (Paris: Éditions Jules Tallandier, 1932), 284.

¹⁶⁷ This dating is based partly on assumptions about the temper of those present, for which readers can refer to the earlier section of this chapter, and partly on the order of comments in Suarez's book.

¹⁶⁸ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 5, doc. 77, “Notes of a Meeting Held in President Wilson's House, Place des Etats-Unis, Paris, on Wednesday, May 21, at 11 a.m.”

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., doc. 81, “Notes of a Meeting Held at Mr. Lloyd George's Residence, 23 Rue Nitot, Paris, on Thursday, May 22, 1919, at 11 a.m.”

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

mandate.’¹⁷¹ Wilson was about to head back to the United States to campaign on behalf of the agreements he had reached in Paris, and he never would return to Europe thereafter. What stands out is that in all of these matters Wilson’s position had been markedly different from his European partners: he had much more earnestly wanted a commission to resolve Middle Eastern issues while Britain and France wanted to negotiate them entirely in Paris. Although the commission that ended up going to the Middle East had little impact, Wilson’s campaign for it and his ambitions for an American mandate in the former Ottoman Empire delayed a Franco-British agreement. It also helped to secure the area as part of the larger mandates system being devised. At the end of June when the remaining mandates questions were sent to London, US participation as a mandatory was still seen as a realistic possibility, and the terms of the mandates therefore had to consider the United States.

Even in August 1919, with all the other mandate issues mostly resolved and the Middle Eastern order roughly agreed upon, French representatives were still trying to keep the Middle East out of the mandates system. French opposition to the mandates system in Syria contributed significantly to the difficulties in resolving what would happen in the Middle East. This was part of the reason the London Commission on Mandates did not really consider the ‘A’ mandates. In their final meetings on August 5, the ‘A’ mandates were on the agenda, and House had presented a draft version of the ‘A’ mandate for consideration. However, at this meeting, where there were no French representatives present, the commission read three cablegrams from Simon to Milner that articulated French objections to the commission considering the ‘A’ mandates.¹⁷² Simon, who claimed that Clemenceau was in complete agreement with him, stated

¹⁷¹ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 6, doc. 80, “Notes of a Meeting Held at President Wilson’s House in the Place des Etats-Unis, Paris, on Friday, June 27, 1919, at 4 p.m.”

¹⁷² LON, R1-1-2366-52, “Commission on Mandates, Minutes No. 9, Notes of the 9th Meeting of the Committee on Mandates held at Sunderland House, on Tuesday August 5th, 1919 at 12 m.,” p. 2. The cablegrams are meant to be appended to these minutes but do not appear, a translation into English of these cablegrams can be found instead in LON, R1-1-563-52, “Mandates Commission: Lord Milner wishes Monsieur Simon, Minister of the

that the committee could not consider ‘A’ mandates because it had not been ‘determined whether there will be a mandate in European or Asiatic Turkey, and that is the business of the Supreme Council.’¹⁷³ On August 6 House drafted a cablegram to Wilson, in which he relayed the French objection and noted that: ‘Lord Robert Cecil insisted and I agreed with him that Article 22 of the Covenant established the mandatory principle for these territories...’¹⁷⁴ He said that the committee had been forced to refer the issue back to Paris because of the French objection, even though the British and American representatives were clearly in agreement about the applicability of Article 22 to the Middle East. House went on to request that the President send First Undersecretary of State Frank Polk, who was then at the head of the American delegation in Paris, instructions to ask that the commission draft an ‘A’ mandate: ‘otherwise the Ottoman Empire will be divided and distributed without any previous agreement as to the general principles under which it shall be administered and the whole mandatory conception will receive a severe blow which public opinion will hardly forgive.’¹⁷⁵ Although House reports that Cecil was on his side about the importance of having Middle Eastern mandates, he seems to have believed without explicit American intervention the Middle East would be divided by France and Britain without mandates. This development shows just how crucial American negotiators were in making the mandates happen in the Middle East, as French representatives were still trying to pull the region out of the system and its associated safeguards and provisions. The ‘A’ mandates had not yet received approved drafts, but it would have been impossible to make them any less generous than the ‘B’ mandates approved by the same committee in August, which included the Open Door.

Colonies, to be present at the meetings & that the Commission should deal with the colonial clauses of the Peace Treaty & the Report on German East Africa. Further Correspondence within,” p. 2.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ LOC, *Huntington Gilchrist papers*, box 20, file 1, “Draft of Cablegram, August 6, 1919, For the President from Colonel House,” pp. 1-2.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

After August the Paris Peace Conference began to wind down. However there remained some issues relating to how exactly the peace treaty with the Ottoman Empire would be constructed, in particular it was unclear what would happen to Armenia as the US Government had not clarified whether or not it would accept a mandate there. Lloyd George said on 15 September 1919 that the conference ‘was held up in the matter [of the treaty with Turkey] until President Wilson was able to declare the position of America in regard to Mandates.’¹⁷⁶ On the same date House recorded in his diary that he spoke with Milner and that they resolved ‘to let the formation of Mandate A go for the present and wait until the Turkish Treaty has been taken up and considered.’¹⁷⁷

The question of an American mandate in the Middle East had lingered throughout the Peace Conference, but by the fall of 1919 it seemed to be dead in the water. Wilson had a stroke on October 2, and the Senate rejected the Treaty of Versailles for the first time on November 19, leaving little hope for direct American participation in the mandates system. Reporting on a meeting with Lloyd George from November 24, Polk sent a message to Lansing conveying the British leadership’s anxiety to resolve the Turkish question once and for all. Polk said that Lloyd George ‘assumes that we will not take a mandate on any terms and expressed keen regret as he said that was the only real solution.’¹⁷⁸ Polk also reported on other Middle Eastern troubles: Lloyd George seems to have been facing more issues with France over the drafting of ‘A’ mandates and was worried about future conflicts around Mesopotamia. But what really concerned Lloyd George according to Polk was that the United States would not participate in the final resolution of the Turkish question, which Lloyd George apparently said would be a

¹⁷⁶ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 8, doc. 12, “Notes of a Meeting of the Heads of Delegations of the Five Great Powers Held in M. Clemenceau’s Room at the War Office, Paris, on Monday, 15 September, 1919, at 10:30 a.m.”

¹⁷⁷ Edward M. House Diary, vol 8, Edward Mandell House Papers (MS 466). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, p. 36.

¹⁷⁸ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 11, doc. 377, “The Commission to Negotiate Peace to the Secretary of State, Paris, November 29, 1919 – 3 a.m.”

‘calamity.’¹⁷⁹ Polk’s report was dated to November 29, 1919, and this was the last major communication to come out of the American delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, which was by then making its way home. The delegation left behind it an unfinished Middle Eastern peace that was up to the Europeans to resolve as they saw fit. However, they had succeeded, with considerable British support, at ensuring that the mandate principle was accepted by all as a required part of the final arrangements for the region.

This was no small victory for the American delegation. Most of the non-Turkish areas of the former Ottoman Empire, that had been in British and French hands since the war, did not end up being parcelled out to the victors as spoils of war. Rather the mandates system in its fullest form, including the Open Door for economic and cultural activities, protections for ethnic and religious minorities, and promises of eventual independence and League oversight were inculcated into the unfinished peace of 1919. This, as we have seen, would not have happened without the efforts of the United States delegation.

Conclusion

On March 19, 1920, the Senate issued its final rejection of the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations Covenant. A little over a month later, European and Japanese representatives gathered at San Remo and allocated the Middle Eastern mandates. On August 10, a peace treaty was signed with the Ottoman Government known as the Treaty of Sèvres, although events on the ground would force a renegotiation of the Middle Eastern peace in 1923. On November 2 Warren G. Harding was elected President of the United States, removing Wilson’s Democrats from power and signalling a major sea change in American foreign policy. And in December 1920, drafts of the ‘A’ mandates finally made it to the League of Nations

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

Council for approval, and the Japanese Government formally accepted that there would be no Open Door in the 'C' mandates.¹⁸⁰ That was a long two years from Wilson's arrival in Paris in December 1918, armed with Smuts' suggestions about the mandates, to the final forms of the mandate agreements making it into international law. As we have seen, most of the important decisions about the mandates were made between January and August of 1919 in Paris or in London. In those eight months the mandates idea transformed from a concept for the administration of areas in the former Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires to one applicable to German colonies and non-Turkish Ottoman territories.

This transformation in scope came alongside a transition from an idea originating in British intellectual circles to a set of policies advocated for by American officials against the leaders of the British Dominions and France. Through the negotiations from January to August of 1919, a novel form of colonial title was produced, replete with restrictions on how these territories could be governed, and with severe limitations on the benefits that mandatory powers could reap. The exact meaning of the restrictions created by the mandates system had to be worked out through negotiations over their application in the aftermath of the Peace Conference. But it is clear that Wilson and his delegation in Paris succeeded in reshaping the practice of colonialism in formerly German and Ottoman colonial areas in ways that suited American economic and strategic interests. As we turn to the regions subjected to the mandates system in turn, each of which will briefly recap how that specific region's mandatory status was negotiated in Paris, we will see just how valuable mandatory status was to American officials. The system that was created in Paris through the powerful advocacy of the American delegation became an invaluable tool in the arsenal of the State Department in pursuing diverse

¹⁸⁰ LON, R2-1-10533-161, "'A' Mandates - Secretary General - Memorandum on the draft mandates submitted by the French and British governments for Syria, Lebanon, Mesopotamia and Palestine. Annexed are the relevant documents," Council Document 103; LON, R2-1-9645-161, "Declaration by the Japanese Government relating to Mandate 'C'."

American interests in mandated territories across the world. Turning first to the Pacific, where military and trade considerations dominated the thinking of postwar American policymakers, we will see just how useful mandatory status was when it came to protecting US interests in Pacific islands.

Chapter 2: The United States and the Pacific Mandates

As they were preparing for the Paris Peace Conference, American planners began to consider the changed realities of the Pacific world. Formerly German islands were occupied by Japanese and Dominion forces, causing some to become nervous that American interests were becoming imperilled. While the Americans perceived little military threat from the British Dominions, the same cannot be said for the Japanese position in the North Pacific. The issue generated such concern among planners that some contemplated annexing portions of the former German territories, including areas beyond Japanese control, in order to secure communication routes to Guam and the Philippines. One such suggestion came in December 1918 from Breckenridge Long, then Third Assistant Secretary of State, who suggested in a memorandum for the American Commission to Negotiate Peace:

‘First, that the United States take the position that the Carolines, Marshalls, Marianas, Yap, and the Pelew Islands and the Samoan Group be returned to Germany by the Peace Conference. Second, that after the Peace Conference adjourns the United States immediately enter into negotiations with Germany to obtain possession of the Marianas, Carolines, Yap, and the Samoan Group, and such others as may be desirable or obtainable.’¹⁸¹

This convoluted plan for annexation ran against Wilson’s general strategy at the Paris Peace Conference and was not ultimately pursued as it would have risked the President’s entire plan for the colonial settlement. However, Long was not alone in stressing the strategic importance of the Japanese-occupied islands for American planning in the Pacific, with Beer saying:

‘As these former German islands will, in general, have to be disposed of on the same basis as has already been set forth with regard the other ex-German possessions, it is highly important that the Peace Conference determine first the

¹⁸¹ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 2, doc. 432, “The Third Assistant Secretary of State (Long) to the Assistant Secretary of the Commission to Negotiate Peace (Harrison). Washington, December 14, 1918.” As well as enclosure entitled “Memorandum by the Third Assistant Secretary of State (Long) on the Disposition of the Ex-German Islands of the Pacific Ocean Now in Possession of Great Britain and Japan. Washington, December 14, 1918.”

fate of those which Japan is occupying, because it is far more essential to establish safeguards in them than those which are now occupied by Australia and New Zealand.¹⁸²

The strategic concerns surrounding the Japanese mandate, chiefly that the islands now under Japanese control lay directly between Hawaii and the Philippines and nearly surrounding Guam in the North Pacific go a long way towards explaining American policy towards the Pacific mandates. These strategic concerns motivated not only American policy towards the Pacific but also the mandates system in general. Wilson's wartime statements made it difficult to justify differential treatment of mandatories on matters such as the legality of building fortifications.

The overriding concerns for the American Government in the Pacific were, as one would expect, American military and economic security, and the potential threat posed by Japan's now-expanded position in islands near American territories. Though the US Government was not entirely fixated on this threat, they also worked hard to ensure that American businesses, missionaries, and other civilian interests would not miss out on any major opportunities in the former German Pacific possessions. The US Government did not have any specific policy towards the Pacific mandates beyond ensuring the adoption of the system in the region and that its design helped to address their strategic concerns. However, the territorial status of the mandates proved useful to American officials as they pursued their interests in the region. Whether strategic, economic, or missionary, the American Government protected its positions while facilitating access for civilian businesses, missionaries, and researchers in the Pacific mandates in ways that were impossible in other territories in the region, but that follow the similar patterns to their interactions with mandates in Africa and the Middle East.

¹⁸² George Louis Beer, *African Questions at the Paris Peace Conference: With Papers on Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Colonial Settlement*, ed. Louis Herbert Gray (New York: Macmillan, 1923), 453.

This chapter argues that the United States Government used the mandates system in the Pacific to pursue their interests, chiefly by creating barriers to the militarisation and fortification of mandated territories that might have threatened American holdings in the region. They did so by establishing the right of the League of Nations to supervise the conduct of mandatory administration, the freedom of missionaries from all members of the League to travel to mandated territories unobstructed, and by erecting legal barriers to the construction of fortifications in all mandated territories. The US Government further utilised the mandates system in the Pacific to strengthen its economic position in mandated territories despite the absence of Open-Door provisions in the 'C' mandates. The interests pursued by the United States Government in the Pacific mandates can be broadly grouped into four categories. First, geostrategic interests, focused on safeguarding American positions in the region. Second, economic interests, focused largely on trade and resources including some speculative resources in New Guinea. Third, civilian access, primarily facilitating access for Christian missionaries though also some anthropologists and other civilians interested in the indigenous populations. Finally, diplomatic interests, concerned with ensuring that the mandates system was upheld in the Pacific to ensure that it could be enforced in other regions, and to use it to gain diplomatic leverage over the mandatory powers in pursuit of other goals.

The chapter begins with the creation of the 'C' mandates at the Paris Peace Conference, focusing on how these differed from the other categories of mandate. It then traces American interactions with the Pacific mandates geographically, following the rough chronology of developments that were of concern to the US. Beginning with the Japanese mandate for the North Pacific, where American interests were largely strategic, and which was centred on the Yap cable dispute and fortification clauses of the mandate. Next, it examines New Zealand's Samoa mandate, where the United States had significant interests owing to the proximity of American Samoa and where they had a commercial treaty from 1899 that they wanted to ensure

New Zealand would honour. Moving across the Pacific it then considers the Australian mandate for New Guinea, which was the largest of the Pacific mandates and was of the most interest to Americans because of its resources, chiefly oil and gold, and where they argued with Australian officials about monopolistic practices. Finally, the chapter turns to the mandate for Nauru, which was nominally held by Great Britain, but was functionally governed by Australia, and where the United States had limited interests as the only resource of note was phosphates, which the United States already had in abundance. The Nauru mandate serves as a negative case of American influence, showing that in the absence of American interests the mandate functioned much less effectively, and its administration adhered much more closely to models from non-mandated territories, most notably in the form of resource monopolies. Through these cases it is clear that American interests played a major role in the operation of the Pacific mandates, and that the mandatory powers were forced to adjust their policies in order to mollify the United States Government.

This argument finds a good deal of support in writings on the Interwar Pacific and on the Pacific mandates specifically, but is less well represented in the larger mandates historiography, which tends to focus on the interactions between Britain, the Dominions, and Japan in the Pacific.¹⁸³ The United States is more considered in the Pacific than it is elsewhere, though chiefly in strategic terms rather than on issues of economic and missionary access.¹⁸⁴ Recent authors writing about specific mandates, such as Tze M. Loo on the Japanese mandate,

¹⁸³ Examples of works that address the United States as a major player in the Pacific mandates: Ruth Henig and Alan Sharp, *League of Nations: The Makers of the Modern World* (London: Haus Publishing, 2010); Robert E. Hannigan, *The Great War and American Foreign Policy, 1914-24* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press). Examples works regarding the mandates that focus primarily on actors other than the United States: Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire*; Thomas W. Burkman, *Japan and the League of Nations: Empire and World Order, 1914-1938* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016).

¹⁸⁴ Martin Ceadel, "Enforced Pacific Settlement or Guaranteed Mutual Defence? British and US Approaches to Collective Security in the Eclectic Covenant of the League of Nations," *International History Review* 35, no. 5 (2013): 993-1008.

have often noted the willingness of mandatory powers to reach private agreements with the United States over matters of interest to the Americans.¹⁸⁵ However, authors like Susan Pedersen considering the system from the standpoint of the League of Nations have often overlooked these agreements.¹⁸⁶ Older works such as Herman Joseph Hiery's *The Neglected War*, devoted entirely to the German colonies in the Pacific during and after the First World War, show a good deal of consideration of America's role in the Pacific mandates, arguing for instance 'that Wilson's mandate concept had little to do with idealistic motives, but was based on the United States' concrete political interests.'¹⁸⁷ While this is certainly accurate, Hiery also comments that the final form of the mandates system as a whole was 'an almost unadulterated British interpretation.'¹⁸⁸ This chapter rather argues that in the Pacific, as in the other mandates, the United States pursued its concrete interests in ways that not only led to the creation of the system, but also deeply influenced its design and interpretation. Thomas W. Burkman's more recent *Japan and the League of Nations* comments on Japanese concerns regarding American economic power and its relationship with Open-Door policies in the Pacific, but also comments that in relation to the mandates Japan had argued in favour of the Open Door because it wanted economic access to the mandates south of the equator.¹⁸⁹

These and other works generally comment on the episodes to which this chapter is largely devoted: measures against Japanese fortifications in their mandate, the American-Japanese agreement over Yap, American-New Zealand debates over Samoan tariffs and governance, and American diplomatic challenges to monopolistic practices in New Guinea.

¹⁸⁵ Tze M. Loo, "Islands for an Anxious Empire: Japan's Pacific Island Mandate," *The American Historical Review* 124, no. 5 (2019): 1699-1703.

¹⁸⁶ Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians*; Susan Pedersen, "Samoa on the World Stage: Petitions and Peoples before the Mandates Commission of the League of Nations," *Journal of imperial and Commonwealth history* 40, no. 2 (2012): 231-61.

¹⁸⁷ Hermann Joseph Hiery, *The Neglected War: The German South Pacific and the Influence of World War I* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995), 223-224.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 211.

¹⁸⁹ Thomas W. Burkman, *Japan and the League of Nations*.

However, none of them have looked at the way the United States systematically used the mandates as a category of territorial status to enhance its interests in the Pacific, much less connected this to a larger pattern of American interaction with mandates elsewhere. Those works which look in-depth at the mandates as a category tend to view from it the perspective of British and Dominion relations with one another and with Japan. Some, like Hiery, have noted American influence on the whole and have even argued that the shape of the system in the Pacific is the result of the United States pursuing its political interests, but have not then connected this to broader patterns in other mandates in Africa and the Middle East. Those who look specifically at certain mandates often see American influence more clearly, but have tended not to see the broader structural importance of American influence across the mandates system as a whole.

This chapter thus demonstrates the American role in the Pacific mandates by showing a pattern of the US Government employing the language and legal status of mandates to press its strategic and economic interests in ways that it could not do in Pacific colonies held without mandate. By the time the US was preparing for the peace conference at least, they viewed the mandates system, as it would come to be called, as a mechanism to protect their communications, trade, and ultimately their authority in the Philippines and Guam from potential Japanese aggression. It was also designed to defend against challenges to their authority in American Samoa caused by New Zealand policies in Western Samoa, and to ensure that American private interests would gain a share of any mineral wealth to be found in New Guinea. The system in the Pacific was also designed with the goal of preserving peace in the region, and of fostering stronger economic development, both of which would be favourable conditions for the United States. While each of these goals was parochial, and the responses somewhat ad hoc, they all connected in the minds of American peacemakers, diplomats, and

other government officials in designing and utilising the mandates system as a mechanism to pursue and protect American interests in the Pacific.

The Pacific in Paris

The war in the Pacific went quickly. By 1915, all the German possessions in the region were captured. Japan held the German islands north of the equator and the former German concessions in China.¹⁹⁰ New Zealand had Samoa, and Australia captured New Guinea and the other islands south of the equator, where there remained a small force commanded by Captain Hermann Detzner evading capture in the New Guinea highlands, achieving much less fame than its East African counterpart under Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck.¹⁹¹ This gave war planners and military administrations plenty of time before the beginning of the Paris Peace Conference, which began nearly five years after most German possessions had been captured, to imagine and to some extent effect, what might become of these islands after the war ended. For most planners, particularly those from Australia and New Zealand, there was little question that the goal would be annexation and the extension of their existing practices.¹⁹² Some in Australia and New Zealand apparently analogised their desire to hold these territories, or for the British Empire to hold them in some way or other, with the Monroe Doctrine, a view that was noted by American planners for the Peace Conference.¹⁹³ What exactly they had meant by this analogy is unclear, but their adoption of this American terminology for their goals of Western Pacific regional hegemony is telling of the degree to which American views on foreign policy in the Global South had pervaded the zeitgeist throughout the English-speaking world.

¹⁹⁰ The Kiachow Bay Leased Territories, centered on Tsingtao, were located on the Shandong Peninsula. Today this area is known as Jiaozhou Bay. It went by various names in different languages at the time, but nearly all discussions around Shandong, Shantung, Kiachow, Tsingtao, and others refer to the same territory.

¹⁹¹ Hiery, *The Neglected War*, 25.

¹⁹² TNA, CAB 32/1, Imperial War Conference 1917 Minutes of Proceedings, pp.174-188.

¹⁹³ LOC, U.S. American Commission to Negotiate Peace, box 29, William Churchill, "Pacific Islands of Germany," 1918, p. 237; Hiery, *The Neglected War*, 17, 222.

After having captured German positions in China and the North Pacific, Japan worked hard to ensure that there would be no resistance from the British for them to retain these territories.¹⁹⁴ While the British agreed not to protest, it was noted by Sir Maurice De Bunsen (a former ambassador working with the Foreign Office at the time) at the Imperial War Council in 1917 that ‘Of course there is great apprehension in regard to the future, owing to Japanese ambitions, but it is hoped that they may be restrained by the lessons of this War.’¹⁹⁵ He also appreciated that Britain was not the only power that might be concerned with Japan’s territorial expansion, saying at the same meeting: ‘I think it is very much felt that there must be considerable friction, and conflict even, between Japan and the United States with regard to Pacific questions.’¹⁹⁶ This acknowledgement presaged many of the discussions and events of the Interwar Period, though the issue was less contentious at the Paris Peace Conference than British planners might have imagined. For the United States, as De Bunsen had sensed, the rapid capture of these territories, particularly those captured by Japan, induced a great deal of concern about the security of their possessions and commerce in the region, and planners began to think of ways to safeguard American interests without becoming militarily involved.

The concessions in China were probably the most sensitive issue in the Pacific for the American delegation. Though US interests were limited to general economic interest in China, and a desire to maintain good relations with the Chinese Government, who felt that these territories ought to be returned to them.¹⁹⁷ By the end of April 1919 the question of Shantung, the name of the largest concession that quickly became shorthand for the issue as a whole, had been separated from that of the German colonies and the mandates system more generally. Though it remained connected to larger issues in the Pacific, particularly for the Japanese and

¹⁹⁴ FRUS, Lansing Papers, vol. 2, doc. 261, “Memorandum by the Secretary of State of a Conference With the Japanese Ambassador on Special Mission (Ishii), September 6, 1917.”

¹⁹⁵ TNA, CAB 32/1, Imperial War Conference 1917 Minutes of Proceedings, 186.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ LOC, Papers of Robert Lansing, vol. 44, pp. 7586-7587.

American delegations.¹⁹⁸ There were a number of arguments about Japan receiving special treatment in Shantung, the crux of the distinction being the racial makeup of the territories, it having been agreed in January that the Pacific islands were to be assigned as ‘C’ mandates on the basis of their ‘civilisational development,’ which the Japanese argued could not be said for concessions in China.¹⁹⁹ A stark reminder of the racial hierarchies justifying the mandates system in general, and the institution of the Pacific mandates under the lowest-levels of oversight as justified by their ostensible lack of civilisation. In the course of discussions over Shantung on April 21, Wilson reminded the Japanese Delegation that there was an understanding that Japan would receive a mandate for islands in the North Pacific, but that he thought Yap Island ought to be internationalised.²⁰⁰ These discussions are recounted in greater detail in the preceding chapter, with Wilson showing a willingness to accept the overall distribution agreed between the British and Japanese during the war, having implicitly endorsed a Japanese mandate for the islands north of the equator, but held out on officially endorsing this assignment until some agreements were reached over Shantung, where he pointed out that ‘His interest was to keep open the door with China.’²⁰¹

Ultimately Japan was awarded the former German concessions in Shantung, despite loud protests from, among others, Robert Lansing and the Chinese delegation.²⁰² These protestors were not so much upset that the mandates system had not been applied here, but that the area had not been handed over to China. The American delegation was willing to let Japan

¹⁹⁸ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 4, doc. 39, “Secretary’s Notes of a Conversation of the Foreign Ministers, Held in M. Pichon’s Room at the Quai d’Orsay, Paris, on Saturday, April 26th, 1919, at 3 p.m. Paris, April 26, 1919, 3 p.m.”

¹⁹⁹ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 5, doc. 13, “Notes of a Meeting Held at President Wilson’s House in the Place des Etats-Unis, Paris, on Tuesday, April 22, 1919, at 11:30 a.m. Paris, April 22, 1919, 11:30 a.m.”

²⁰⁰ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 5, doc. 11, “Notes of a Meeting Held at President Wilson’s House at the Place des Etats-Unis, Paris, on Monday, April 21, 1919, at 4 p.m., Paris, April 21, 1919, 4 p.m.”

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² LOC, Papers of Robert Lansing, vol. 42, 7402-7405.; Robert Lansing, *The Peace Negotiations: A Personal Narrative*, (Luton, Bedfordshire, Ebook Central, 2012), 3.

keep the area after some promises of the Open Door, a running theme of their policies, and because they were afraid that Japan would walk out of the conference and jeopardise Wilson's whole plan for the League and the mandates system. So, Japan got its concessions, and Wilson got the League and the mandates system, though he also had to compromise on its provisions in the Pacific because of Dominion opposition.

Pacific questions at the Paris Peace Conference were fairly minor in the scheme of things, although they were capable of arousing significant emotions among the delegates of Australia and New Zealand.²⁰³ The most important features of the discussions surrounding the Pacific mandates at the Paris Peace Conference were that Australia and New Zealand had expressed at the beginning of the conference that they would have preferred to have the territories they had conquered (New Guinea and Nauru for Australia, Samoa for New Zealand) in full sovereignty rather than be subject to any form of international oversight.²⁰⁴ In the preceding chapter we have seen how the mandates system came into being at the Paris Peace Conference, the role played by the Americans in designing this system, and the compromises made by the Americans in facilitating the creation of the 'C' mandates largely in the Pacific. It will be recalled then that the outline of the mandates system was one of the first major decisions reached by the Paris Peace Conference at the end of January 1919. It will further be remembered that the final shape of the system was essentially a compromise between the American position and that of the Dominions authored by Lloyd George and agreed to by the major delegates on January 29.²⁰⁵

²⁰³ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 3, doc. 55, "Secretary's Notes of a Conversation Held in M. Pichon's Room at the Quai d'Orsay, Paris, on Thursday, January 30, 1919, at 15 Hours 30."

²⁰⁴ Ibid., doc. 47, "Secretary's Notes of a Conversation Held in M. Pichon's Room at the Quai d'Orsay on Friday, January 24, 1919, at 3 p.m."

²⁰⁵ Ibid., doc. 54, "Secretary's Notes of a Conversation Held at Mr. Pichon's Room at the Quai d'Orsay, Paris, on Thursday, January 30, 1919, at 11 a.m., Paris, January 30, 1919, 11 a.m.," see especially appendix PB-11, "Draft Resolutions in Reference to Mandatories."

The salient features of this agreement were that the mandates system when applied to the territories conquered by the Dominions, all but one of which were in the Pacific, would be ‘C’ mandates: ‘administered under the laws of the Mandatory as integral portions of its territory, subject to the safeguards above mentioned in the interests of the indigenous population.’²⁰⁶ The major difference between the mandates in the Pacific from those in Africa and the Middle East was that it was not clear that the Open-Door provisions so insisted upon by the Americans elsewhere would apply in the Pacific. The compromise in the Pacific was that, in essence, Wilson and the American delegation were content to allow the ‘C’ class mandates to proceed without the Open-Door provisions as long as the British Dominions would accept the mandates system in principle and a functional agreement to ensure that they would be assigned as the mandatories for the regions they had conquered. Wilson was also concerned about cable rights in Yap, and wanted to see it internationalised, though this issue was not resolved until after the conference. The Americans accepted the need to compromise with the Dominions in the Pacific to ensure that the system would be applied elsewhere where they had more economic interests for which the Open-Door would be important. Wilson assented to the distribution of the Pacific mandates on May 6, 1919 along the lines of conquest with the exception that Great Britain would have the mandate for Nauru.²⁰⁷ This conversation presaged a number of the issues that were to come up later with the Pacific mandates, including the complications over Nauru and the joint interest of the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand there, as well as the trouble that was likely to come up if a tariff were applied in Samoa.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 5, doc. 47, “Notes of Meeting Held in M. Pichon’s Room at Quai d’Orsay, Paris, on Tuesday, May 6, 1919, at 5:30 p.m.”

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

While the Pacific mandates had been functionally assigned by the Paris Peace Conference by May 1919, this was not the end of disputes over their status, nor over the position of the US Government in respect to them. Whether President Wilson had on this date assented to the assignment of mandatories by the Supreme Council with or without reservations about the assignment of the island of Yap to Japan, would remain a matter of dispute for several years to come.²⁰⁹ Ultimately this issue, like most between the United States and the mandatory powers, was resolved by a bilateral treaty that granted the United States all of the rights possessed by League members in the territory, and some extras that suited American interests, in this case, cable rights.²¹⁰ We will return shortly to the dispute over Yap, but the arguments over whether Wilson had agreed to various assignments and details at Paris were a source of continuous frustration throughout the Interwar Period. As was the status of the United States in the mandates it had helped to create once it became clear that it was not going to join the League. In the Pacific, unlike in Africa or the Middle East, the United States had territories, as well as major strategic concerns for its own security. The Americans also had vested economic interests in the Pacific region, although these were quite limited in the mandates themselves. Strategic concerns in the Pacific mandates were largely limited to the Japanese mandate in the North Pacific, which reached the Senate during deliberations over the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles.²¹¹ What stands out at the end of the Paris Peace Conference was the extent of American willingness to compromise over the Open-Door in the Pacific to secure its approval in the African and Middle Eastern mandates. The Americans did not, however, relinquish any interests in the region, as they still ensured that the Pacific mandates had clauses preventing

²⁰⁹ NARA, RG 46, Records of the U.S. Senate Committee Papers Including Hearings Com. on Foreign Relations, Sen 67A-F9, Box 115, p. 15; Huntington Gilchrist, "The Japanese Islands: Annexation or Trusteeship?" *Foreign Affairs* 22, no. 1 (1943): 635-37.

²¹⁰ FRUS, 1922, vol. 2, doc. 531, "Convention between the United States of America and Japan, Signed at Washington February 11, 1922."

²¹¹ Rayford Whittingham Logan, *The Senate and the Versailles Mandate System* (Washington, D.C.: Minorities Publishers, 1945), 77-78.

the building of fortifications and ensuring some degree of economic openness and access for League members, as well as placing the mandates under League supervision.

American interests in the Pacific mandates are nicely summed up in a cable from the American embassy in London to Lord Balfour on July 26, 1922, in which US interests in respect to ‘C’ mandates, except Yap, were enumerated as follows:

‘(A) That Article Five should be changed so as to embrace nationals of the United States and that it would be preferable to avoid ambiguity as to educational and charitable activities of missionaries to have in this Article the same provision as in Article Eight of the British “B” Mandate for German East Africa; (B) That it was desired that the Mandatories should guarantee to the United States most favoured nation treatment in all “C” Mandate territories reserving however the present special treaty rights of the United States with respect to German Samoa; (C) There should be a provision similar to that proposed in the other forms of Mandates prohibiting monopolistic concessions or the monopolising of natural resources by the Mandatory; (D) That as in other cases any modification of the Mandate should be subject to the assent of the United States.’²¹²

While some of these conditions were particular to the moment, and we will return this particular exchange again, the chief interests of the United States in the non-Japanese mandated territories in the Pacific are stated fairly clearly here. One can clearly detect that the US Government was concerned mainly about its economic position in the Pacific territories despite their small size, and the lack of Open-Door provisions in this category of mandate. The Americans were essentially trying to extend their existing capitalist model from China into the insular Pacific, and trying to leverage their diplomatic and economic strength to further empower American businesses, a type of State Department backed capitalism that is familiar from before the First World War. There is also a detectable anxiety about access to these territories for missionaries and other charitable and educational workers, a category that in

²¹² NAA: A981, League Man 6, “External Affairs Department, League of Nations. Mandated Territories, Economic and Other Rights – United States attitude,” p. 78.

some cases, mainly in New Guinea, extended to anthropologists.²¹³ These concerns drove American policy towards the mandates during and after the Paris Peace Conference, though at the conference there was the substantial consideration of how the mandates fit into broader perceptions of the American delegation, which worked hard to appear disinterested materially and to take a moral high-road towards colonised areas.

For the Japanese mandate the Americans were also concerned about its strategic position in the Pacific, both with respect to undersea cables on Yap, and the potential threat posed to Guam and the Philippines, concerns that did not extend to British and Dominion mandates. It should be remembered, however, that there was not one specific division within the American Government that coordinated Pacific policy, not even on the level of the American possessions in the region, with policymaking divided between Navy, War, Interior, and Treasury departments.²¹⁴ This meant that the State Department, in formulating policy towards the mandates, had little coordinated intelligence on American interests in the region to work from, and acted either entirely independently or on the basis of reports that happened to find their way into the hands of relevant officials.

The Japanese Mandate for the North Pacific

When the war began in August 1914 there had been few preparations for the defence of the German Pacific colonies, this was especially true in the small Micronesian islands north of the equator. The first military actions in what became the Japanese mandate were actually taken by the British battle cruiser *Hampshire*, which bombarded the radio station on Yap and cut some undersea cables, but did not occupy the island.²¹⁵ Despite efforts by the British to

²¹³ Stephen Winsor Reed, *The Making of Modern New Guinea*, Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society, vol. 18, 1942. (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1943), 22, 29, 47, 54.

²¹⁴ Werner Levi, "American Attitudes toward Pacific Islands, 1914-1919," *Pacific Historical Review* 17, no. 1 (1948): 55-64, p. 60.

²¹⁵ Hiery, *The Neglected War*, 25-27.

convince Japan to limit its activities to German concessions in China, the Japanese moved to occupy Micronesia between September 29 and October 21, 1914 under the pretext of hunting down the German Asiatic Squadron.²¹⁶ Despite the general lack of resistance in Micronesia, Hiery notes that there was an offer from the last Spanish governor of the Caroline Islands, Eugenio Blanco, to supply several thousand Filipino troops for the defence of the German islands, and speculates that the Americans may have been using this as a cover to assist the Germans in preventing Japanese expansion into the area.²¹⁷ I have not found any mention of this operation, or of Blanco, in the American records, however US officials' desire to avoid Japanese expansion in the Pacific was well-known. It is therefore not inconceivable that some American officials were looking for creative ways to help the Germans in staving off the Japanese – Breckenridge Long might well have approved of such a suggestion.

That Japan moved into Micronesia was not surprising, there was a longstanding Japanese interest in these islands, though perhaps not as much as in mainland Asia. With the support of the Japanese Government, Japanese firms had been trading in Micronesia since the 1880s and at the beginning of the war Japan had a virtual trade monopoly on some islands.²¹⁸ When Japanese forces did move to occupy the islands, the strategic logic seems to have had more to do with diplomacy than economics: Japanese forces started with the islands furthest from Japan and worked their way back, carefully watching for the reactions of their allies.

Located about midway between Guam and Palau, Yap was one of the larger and westernmost of the Caroline Islands and served as a key station for undersea cables connecting China, the Philippines, Hawaii, Guam, and the Dutch East Indies. When Japanese forces occupied the island, they raised a Union Jack alongside the Japanese flag, only to quietly

²¹⁶ Ibid., 27.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 20.

remove it later.²¹⁹ The Japanese were well aware of the strategic importance of Yap for undersea cables, and they would almost certainly have known that the Americans relied on these cables as an auxiliary means of communicating with the Philippines and Shanghai.²²⁰ Japan may have had other ambitions among the German colonies in the Pacific, Japanese ships visited several islands before the end of the war, and asked probing questions of locals.²²¹ However Japanese troops conspicuously did not occupy the phosphate-rich island of Nauru, which was captured by the Australians on November 6, 1914 (more on this later), perhaps because they had already secured another source of phosphates at Angaur in the Palau Islands. Japan did not press any territorial claims in Paris beyond the islands they actually occupied. They did, however, make some attempts to push the Open Door principle into the Pacific mandates, to American approval but Dominion consternation.²²²

Despite this support, the Japanese administration in Micronesia worked very hard to exclude foreign commerce and to develop industries in the islands as quickly as possible during and after the war.²²³ This included American interests, most notably an American company called Atkins, Kroll & Co., who had considerable trading interests in the American territories in the Pacific as well as with German areas. As early as January 1 1918, Atkins, Kroll & Co. complained to the State department of Japanese policies excluding them from trade in the region and privileging Japanese companies.²²⁴ This correspondence continued into the 1920s and the company continuously lobbied the State department to press the mandate idea harder,

²¹⁹ FRUS, 1920, vol. 1, doc. 114, "The Netherlands Legation to the Department of State, Washington, March 25, 1920"; Hiery, *The Neglected War*, 29.

²²⁰ NARA, RG 256, roll 350, doc. 185.119/56, "Message to the President from Walter S. Rogers, American Committee on Public Information," Paris, 30 January, 1919.

²²¹ Hiery, *The Neglected War*, 29.

²²² NARA, RG 256, roll 123, doc. H.D. 116, "Notes of a Meeting of the Heads of Delegations of the Five Great Powers held in M. Pichon's Room, Quai D'Orsay. Paris, on Wednesday, December 24, 1919, at 10:30 A.M."

²²³ Hiery, *The Neglected War*, 132-135.

²²⁴ NARA, Archives 2, RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal File 1910-1929, from 611.629 Ruhr-Marshall to 611.62M 31/21a, box 5877, file 5, doc. 611.62m 31/19. The document dated to 1918 is an enclosure within correspondence from 1921.

frequently citing the League Covenant, and pressing for the internationalisation of Yap and Jaluit, and for all other measures to be taken to ensure equality of access for American businesses. For instance, in a letter from their lawyers to the State Department on September 20, 1919, Atkins, Kroll, and Co. said:

‘It is respectfully requested that the American representatives be instructed at once to insist upon the inclusion in the Mandates of terms which would, without any question, protect American trade and which would assure equal rights and privileges in the Islands. These terms should be so specific as to permit no interpretation by the officials of the powers holding the Mandate.’²²⁵

This actually represented a smaller request than they had initially made: on the first of January, 1918, the company had advocated for American annexation of the islands saying in a letter to the State Department that ‘Politically, the acquisition of these Islands would be most important as with them, we would have a path of American Possessions clear across the pacific...’²²⁶ Here we have a company advocating for a significant expansion of American empire in pursuit of a bit of additional copra.²²⁷

There was also a curious situation on the island of Jaluit in the Marshall Islands. The most important Europeans on the Japanese-occupied island, including the head of the local Boston Missionary Society outpost as well as the caretaker of Jaluit Gessellschaft properties, were naturalised American citizens.²²⁸ These were, of course, minor concerns for the US Government on the whole, but the behaviour of the Japanese occupation authorities, which were not far different than those of the Dominions, clearly inspired the concerns articulated by the Americans in the mandates. Which, as we saw in chapter one, most notably included preventing monopolies and ensuring civilian access for missionary and charitable activities. What is clear, then, is that not only were the Americans worried about the strategic value of the

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Jaluit Gessellschaft was the German company that had handled approximately 75 per cent of the copra trade in the Marshall Islands before the war. Ibid.

Japanese mandate, though this was their primary concern, they were also keen to facilitate continued economic and civilian access into these areas.

The Japanese Mandate for the North Pacific, commonly known as the South Seas Mandate, but formally called the 'Mandate for the German Possessions in the Pacific Ocean Lying North of the Equator,' went by a number of names. Whatever one cared to call it, by the time it came into existence, Japan had already significantly altered the realities on the ground in Micronesia, most notably settling large numbers of Japanese citizens, as well as some Koreans, on Saipan.²²⁹ The Japanese were also apparently not shy about providing liquor to the indigenous inhabitants prior to the introduction of the mandate, including using it to entice workers to the phosphate island of Angaur.²³⁰ It is an interesting point that the mandates system was effective in convincing Japan to ban the sale of liquor to indigenous populations, this was a stipulation of all the 'B' and 'C' mandates, and one that Japan only introduced after the mandate was put in place.²³¹ They had also expelled many of the German missionaries working in the islands, and concluded a contract with Nan'yo Boeki Kaisha (NBK) granting it a monopoly on government shipments between Japan and Micronesia.²³² These actions would all have violated the mandate, and must be understood as having helped to inspire it, although they did not much differ from the behaviour of other powers occupying German Pacific colonies. Japan largely succeeded in creating a *fait accompli* in what was to become their mandate, although they were forced to accept the principle of open access. Japan had pushed out most foreigners during the war and brought in a large number of Japanese citizens, entrenching themselves against attempts by Europeans or Americans to gain influence or commercial access.

²²⁹ Hiery, *The Neglected War*, 137.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 138-141.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 138.

²³² *Ibid.*, 151-152

Another aspect of commercial access was that the American Government relied on civilians to relay security information to relevant agencies, as noted by Breckenridge Long in 1918:

‘So that because of the fact that American vessels have been denied the privilege of coasting between and stopping at the islands in these three groups, we are without information as to what has been done by way of defence and fortification in those islands. It has been rumoured that the Japanese have fortified to a considerable extent a few of them.’²³³

The US Government could accept some commercial losses on the part of American companies trading in the Pacific. However, it continued to correspond with companies like Atkins, Kroll & Co., and to advocate for greater access for American firms to markets and resources in the Japanese mandate, in part because it served their security interests.

The issue of communications had come up repeatedly at the Paris Peace Conference, and Wilson had attempted to make clear his reservations about Japanese control of the island of Yap.²³⁴ The Yap-Guam and Yap-Shanghai cables had been completed originally in 1905. Although there were alternative cable routes that American messages to Guam and the Philippines could take, the ones that ran through Yap were considered to be vital strategically, not in the least because they also facilitated communications with China and the Dutch East Indies.²³⁵ The Peace Conference had not resolved the issue of cables on Yap. While the island is north of the equator, and thus fell within the lines of Japanese assignment, the US Government maintained that Yap had been explicitly excluded from the agreement of May 7

²³³ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 2, doc. 432, “The Third Assistant Secretary of State (Long) to the Assistant Secretary of the Commission to Negotiate Peace (Harrison), Washington, December 14, 1918.” See especially Enclosure entitled “Memorandum by the Third Assistant Secretary of State (Long) on the Disposition of the Ex-German Islands of the Pacific Ocean Now in Possession of Great Britain and Japan, Washington, December 14, 1918.”

²³⁴ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 5, doc. 11, “Notes of a Meeting Held at President Wilson’s House at the Place des Etats-Unis, Paris, on Monday, April 21, 1919, at 4 p.m., Paris, April 21, 1919, 4 p.m.”

²³⁵ LOC, U.S. American Commission to Negotiate Peace, box 29, William Churchill, “Pacific islands of Germany,” 1918, p. 12; NARA, RG 256, Roll 350, doc. 185.119/56, “American Committee on Public Information,” Paris, 30 January, 1919.

and was to be handled separately.²³⁶ As Secretary of State Hughes said in a cable to the ambassador in Great Britain in 1921: ‘The Island of Yap, because of its special characteristics and availability for communication purposes, should be treated specially, and negotiations to this end are in progress. It is not desired to include Yap in the present representations as to terms of mandates.’²³⁷ Much to the chagrin of American officials Yap was not excluded from the terms of the Japanese South Seas Mandate in the understanding of the other powers, and instead the issues surrounding Yap were relegated to a future conference on cables that was held in Washington in 1920, but did not actually provide resolution.²³⁸ The outcome was a good deal of ambiguity about the status of Yap, with all but Washington accepting that it was part of the Japanese mandate confirmed by the League Council on December 17, 1920. By this time, of course, the Senate had refused to ratify the Treaty of Versailles or join the League of Nations, further complicating the relationship between the United States and the Japanese mandate.

The result was, as with the other mandates, a series of discussions and agreements between the United States and the mandatory power granting Americans the same rights as League members in the mandates. The treaty with Japan was signed on February 11, 1922, shortly after the Washington Naval Conference ended, and its title is quite revealing of American priorities in the Japanese mandate, it was entitled: ‘Treaty Between the United States and Japan regarding Rights of the Two Governments and their Respective Nationals in the Former German Islands in the Pacific Ocean North of the Equator, and in Particular the Island of Yap.’²³⁹ This treaty recommitted Japan to the terms of the mandate, assured the United States

²³⁶ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 5, doc. 11, “Notes of a Meeting Held at President Wilson’s House at the Place des Etats-Unis, Paris, on Monday, April 21, 1919, at 4 p.m., Paris, April 21, 1919, 4 p.m.”

²³⁷ FRUS, 1921, vol. 2, doc. 98, “The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Great Britain (Harvey), Washington, August 4, 1921 – 8 p.m.”

²³⁸ Huntington Gilchrist, “The Japanese Islands: Annexation or Trusteeship?,” 637.

²³⁹ Charles Evans Hughes, and Kijuro Shidehara, “Treaty between the United States and Japan with Regard to the Former German Islands in the Pacific Ocean, in Particular the Island of Yap.” *American Journal of International Law* 16, no. S2 (1922): 94–98, 73.

that it was to be treated on par with League members in the mandate, and, most importantly assured the US Government that its communications across Yap were protected. The third article of the treaty described these rights as follows:

‘The United States and its nationals shall have free access to the Island of Yap on a footing of entire equality with Japan or any other nation and their respective nationals in all that relates to the landing and operation of the existing Yap-Guam cable or of any cable which may hereafter be laid or operated by the United States or by its nationals connecting with the Island of Yap.’²⁴⁰

Thus the Yap problem was solved, the United States got free access to the island for communications, a right not possessed by other League members, in return for recognising Japan’s claim to a mandate over the islands. Of course, this only worked so long as there was no military conflict in the area, which leads to perhaps the most important provision of the Pacific mandates: the non-militarisation clauses.

Non-militarisation clauses existed in all of the mandates but were of particular relevance in the Japanese mandate given American and Dominion fears of a future conflict with Japan. These measures can be broken down into two distinct pledges: the non-recruitment of indigenous troops from mandates, which was not a major issue in Micronesia given its small population. The non-fortification of mandates, a major concern for other powers because owing to concerns that Japan might construct submarine or air bases in the former German islands. Officials in the State Department’s Far Eastern Division were apparently very concerned during the war that these islands would be a serious threat to communications with American possessions in the Pacific in the event of a war with Japan on account of their use as military bases.²⁴¹ The Dominions were equally concerned about Japan using these islands as military staging grounds, and there was, for once, very little resistance from them on this aspect of the

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 76.

²⁴¹ Werner Levi, “American Attitudes toward Pacific Islands, 1914-1919,” 60. The author of this article seems to have spoken to Breckenridge Long sometime between these events and the publication of the cited article in 1948 regarding the discussions of the Far Eastern Division during the First World War.

mandates system. The primary issue with the non-militarisation clauses was that they lacked any meaningful enforcement mechanisms. In theory, civilian access in the form of missionaries and commercial enterprises should have been able to indicate to the American Government if major military developments were being undertaken. On February 11, 1922 the United States received Japanese assurance that ‘the usual comity will extended to nationals and vessels of the United States in visiting the harbors and waters of those islands.’²⁴² In practice, the Japanese Government erected numerous bureaucratic barriers that made travel very difficult for Americans, and thus made it hard for the United States Government to receive reliable information regarding the situation on the ground in the Japanese mandate.²⁴³

This issue was never really resolved, and rumours persisted throughout the mandate period that Japan was illegally constructing fortifications in the formerly German islands. Which would have violated the terms of Article 22, the mandate agreement, and the Washington Naval Arms Limitation Agreement.²⁴⁴ Whether these rumours were true or not – and it seems they were not, at least until about 1934 – the US Government, along with the Dominions saw the status of these islands as mandated territory as the best way to prevent Japan from taking advantage of their strategic positions for military purposes.²⁴⁵ The Washington Naval Armaments Treaty also prohibited Japan from building fortifications in the mandated islands, but it expired at the end of 1936, leaving only the mandate (including the treaty with the United States that gave American assent to the mandate) as a legal barrier to

²⁴² Charles Evans Hughes, and Kijuro Shidehara, “Treaty between the United States and Japan with Regard to the Former German Islands in the Pacific Ocean, in Particular the Island of Yap,” 78.

²⁴³ Richard Dean Burns, “Inspection of the Mandates, 1919-1941,” *Pacific Historical Review* 37, no. 4 (1968): 445–62, 448-49.

²⁴⁴ Rumors abounded in the United States and the Dominions that Japan was secretly building fortifications, the Japanese Diet was also aware of these rumors. The governments took them seriously enough to investigate and issue reports. See for example NAA: A981, MARS 2 Part 2 “Marshall Islands and Caroline Island (Japanese Mandate) Miscellaneous Reports and General Information II”; FRUS, 1934, vol. 3, doc. 862i.01/286, “The Ambassador in Japan (Grew) to the Secretary of State, Tokyo, March 7, 1934. Received March 24”; TNA, CO 323/1234/8, “Effect on Japanese Mandates in Southern Pacific of Japan’s Withdrawal from League of Nations.”

²⁴⁵ Burns, “Inspection of the Mandates,” 459.

this kind of construction. Of course, this did not prevent Japan from using the islands for military purposes, which they did extensively before and during the Second World War, but it did make this usage illegal. The United States even brought this violation against Japan at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, where violations of the mandate were repeatedly invoked against Japan despite being a very technical subject in a tribunal that dealt with unspeakable atrocities.²⁴⁶

The United States did not obtain everything its nationals or officials might have hoped for from the islands Japan acquired from Germany. Nevertheless, it successfully advocated for those islands to be placed under mandate, and later leveraged that status to pursue its strategic interests. The United States sacrificed commercial interests in the region by not securing the Open Door, and was stonewalled by Japanese officials in gaining civilian access. Nevertheless, the US Government managed to protect its communications through Yap by securing a treaty with Japan, and to gain an agreement – even though Japan violated it – to prevent the fortification of these islands. Ultimately the American Government used the mandates system in the South Seas Mandate to constrain Japan’s ability to make strategic use of the area. It continued to use the language of the mandates throughout the Interwar Period, and after the Second World War, to bolster its position in the Pacific.

New Zealand’s Mandate for Samoa

Writing for Foreign Affairs in 1922, George H. Blakeslee described the Samoan Mandate as being ‘next in importance to the Japanese Mandate, from an American point of view...’²⁴⁷ Despite this statement, none of the major reasons he highlights for the importance of the Pacific mandates as a whole apply to Samoa. These include strategic value in a potential

²⁴⁶ University of Virginia School of Law, Papers and Official Records from the IMTFE, created and collected by George Carrington Williams, 1945–1948, box 6, folder 7, “Violation of the Treaty for Mandated Islands Brief.”

²⁴⁷ George H. Blakeslee, “The Mandates of the Pacific,” *Foreign Affairs* 1, no. 1 (1922): 98–115, p. 106.

conflict between the United States and Japan, and, to a lesser extent, copra and phosphate resources. Though he qualified the latter by saying ‘while they are valuable tropical possessions, it is certain that they can never rank with such islands as Java or the Philippines.’²⁴⁸

Blakeslee was not alone in his assessment of Samoa’s value to the United States: in 1918 William Churchill said of Samoa in his book prepared for The Inquiry that ‘The military harbor of Pango-Pango [sic] is absolutely essential to the growing needs of America in the Pacific...’²⁴⁹ He went further to say that:

‘New Zealand for the present holds all that part of Samoa which has economic value. Our administration of the life of the Samoans has been uniformly successful, the islanders have been better in their education, in their health and in their wealth by the administration arranged for them in a sensible paternal fashion by a line of naval commandants. The Samoans when under German rule in the western half of the archipelago have looked with great envy upon the pleasant and prosperous condition of the members of their race which have been living under the American flag. It might be that it would be considered worth while to bring all of Samoa under one government and since it is inconceivable that we should give up that possession of Pango-Pango [sic] which has been ours for the last eighty years we might as well face the possibility that the various divisions of the archipelago should be re-united and come under American rule.’²⁵⁰

The Americans did not end up seeking to take over Western Samoa after the war, but the attitude that American administration in Samoa was better than its counterparts to the west persisted. As did the idea that the indigenous population would prefer to live under American administration. Both authors point to the most important factor in American policy about Samoa: it was all about strategy. The United States had little commercial interest in the islands, though this did not prevent them from arguing with New Zealand for many years over Samoan tariffs. The Americans were chiefly interested in maintaining peace and good order so that the

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 98.

²⁴⁹ LOC, U.S. American Commission to Negotiate Peace, Box 29, William Churchill, “Pacific islands of Germany,” 1918, 237.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 238-239.

naval station in Pago Pago remained a secure base from which to project American power into the Pacific, and the mandate proved a useful tool in pursuit of that goal.

On August 29th 1914, New Zealand troops marched into Apia unopposed and occupied Western Samoa.²⁵¹ This move was unsurprising given that both Australia and New Zealand had been concerned about German possession of islands that lay along the steamer route to North America since the partition of 1899.²⁵² New Zealand and Australia were also the main trading partners for Samoan businesses, so the occupation was initially welcomed by German businessmen since it should have favoured their interests.²⁵³ Their optimism was short-lived, however, as the New Zealand military administration headed by Colonel Robert Logan promptly started interning Germans. It also began enacting changes such as switching from the mark to the pound and eliminating government-funded positions such as the Apia harbour police health inspector.²⁵⁴ Health went on to be a major issue in Samoa, to which we will return shortly. While the tone of the administration that began with harsh measures against the Germans in 1914, was consistent at least until the mandate was enacted, with Logan becoming progressively more autocratic and unpredictable until his departure in January 1919. Logan spent his time in Samoa antagonising the Germans, ultimately deporting all of them to New Zealand and liquidating their businesses, which proved beneficial to the American traders there, much to Logan's annoyance. This was made worse by an increasing share of Samoan exports,

²⁵¹ Some historians claim that this was the first German territory to be occupied during the war (see Hiery, *The Neglected War*, 23), while others contend that it was Togoland (Mahon Murphy, *Colonial Captivity During the First World War: Internment and the Fall of the German Empire, 1914-1919* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018], 38, 43). It seems that the latter group are correct, as the British report that the Acting Governor of Togoland surrendered on August 26, 1914. See *Report on the British Mandated Sphere of Togoland for 1920-21* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1922), p. 4.

²⁵² Paul Kennedy, *Samoan Tangle: A Study in Anglo-German-American Relations 1878-1900* (St. Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1996), 243-44.

²⁵³ Mahon Murphy, *Colonial Captivity During the First World War*, 38.

²⁵⁴ Hiery, *The Neglected War*, 164.

mainly copra, going to the United States on American ships since New Zealand shipping was tied up by the war.²⁵⁵

In 1916 the military administration of Western Samoa issued a proclamation effectively banning the export of copra and coconuts to the United States, which resulted in protests by the American consul in Apia to Logan on the basis that these restrictions violated the 1899 treaty.²⁵⁶ Further disputes involving the State Department, the Commerce Department, private companies, the military administration, and some organs of the British Government continued for some time over the shipment of copra to San Francisco. With Logan doing his utmost to cause trouble for everyone when trade with the United States was concerned.²⁵⁷ Logan's motivations for these policies are not clear, in 1924 the American acting consul in Apia surmised that he simply 'hated Americans.'²⁵⁸

Logan's erratic behaviour had its greatest impact at the end of the war, when he allowed the New Zealand ship *Talune* to dock at Apia on November 7, 1918. This ship had passengers suffering from influenza, and was not subjected to quarantine restrictions, despite charging higher fares for passengers joining the ship in Fiji on the expectation of being quarantined in Apia.²⁵⁹ Some of the passengers later testified that although they were visibly ill, they had not been inspected by the doctor upon arrival.²⁶⁰ Once the flu got into Western Samoa, it spread

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 159.

²⁵⁶ NARA, Archives 2, RG 59, Department of State Decimal File 1910-29, From 611.62M 31/22 to 611.633M/2, box 5878, File 2, doc. 611.62m9, "American Consulate, Apia, Samoa," March 27, 1916, "Subject: Prohibition against shipping copra or cocoanuts to any but British ports."

²⁵⁷ Practically the entire file contains records of such disputes. NARA, Archives 2, RG 59 Department of State Decimal File 1910-29, From 611.62M 31/22 to 611.633M / 2 Box 5878, File 2.

²⁵⁸ NARA, Archives 2, RG 59, General Records of the Department of State Central Decimal File, 1910-1929, from 611.629 Ruhr-Marshall to 611.62M 31/21a, Box 5877, file 5, doc. 611.62m31, "John U. Vesser Esq. U.S. Acting Consul at Apia, Ululalooa Plantation Near Apia, Samoa, May 6th 1924," p. 1.

²⁵⁹ Hiery, *The Neglected War*, 172-173.

²⁶⁰ Gavan Duffy, *The British Empire's Southern Dominions and the Emergence of the League of Nations "C" Mandates, 1914-1926*, 75. The author notes that there is some debate about whether the administration in Western Samoa were aware of the influenza epidemic before the ship arrived.

extremely quickly through the territory, such that by the end of the outbreak in 1919 more than 20 per cent of Samoans had succumb to the illness.²⁶¹

To the east the story was quite different, the man in charge in American Samoa, John Poyer, took advantage of his nearly dictatorial powers to prevent the disease from spreading, leaving it as one of the few territories in the world to escape the pandemic.²⁶² The American administration imposed strict and effective quarantine measures, working closely with the indigenous chiefly structures that had long been part of the American Samoan administration, indigenous officials helped enforce quarantine measures, and were generally supportive of these policies as they heard about the high death-toll in Western Samoa.²⁶³ Of course there were complaints about the impact of quarantine measures, including from Colonel Logan, who had sent his personal ship with a load of mail bound for San Francisco in late November to Pago Pago. When the ship arrived, its crew were informed that they would have to observe quarantine measures, and they returned to Apia without delivering the mail. Logan, apparently incensed, cut off radio contact with the Americans shortly thereafter.²⁶⁴ In December, medical officials in American Samoa got together a convoy including three doctors and nearly 30 assistants to send to Western Samoa, they radioed Apia asking permission to sail across, but their offer was never acknowledged, and they sat idle in Tutuila while influenza killed scores of Samoans less than 50km to the west.²⁶⁵ Whether the Samoans knew at the time that Logan had prevented them from receiving help from their American neighbours or not, they certainly knew within months of the stark disparity in how the different parts of the Samoan archipelago

²⁶¹ Susan Pedersen, "Samoa on the World Stage: Petitions and Peoples before the Mandates Commission of the League of Nations," 242.

²⁶² John Ryan McLane, "Paradise Locked: The 1918 Influenza Pandemic in American Samoa." *Sites* (Palmerston North, N.Z.) 10, no. 2 (2013): 30-51, pp. 39-40, 31.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 43-44.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 41-43.

had faced the influenza epidemic, and quite understandably, blamed the difference in administering power for this contrast.

Logan was ultimately sent for home leave in January 1919, though not before brusquely dismissing a deputation of Samoan notables demanding an inquiry into the influenza outbreak on January 4.²⁶⁶ He was replaced by Colonel Robert Tate at the end of January, who was a much less tumultuous figure than Logan. However, the rage of Samoans against the failures of the New Zealand administration, made all the more stark by American successes across the water, were not tempered by this replacement, nor by his similarly dismissive behaviour towards them. All of this was taking place as the terms for the mandates were being discussed in Paris, not that anyone cared to consult the Samoans about their preferences, though they did clearly express to Tate upon his arrival that they would prefer Western Samoa be transferred to American control.²⁶⁷ This is almost certainly a reflection of the different experiences of Western and Eastern Samoa during the influenza epidemic, though it may also confirm some of what William Churchill had said in 1918. Naturally, neither Tate nor the negotiating parties in Paris paid any heed to these preferences, but the Samoans in both territories by this time had become fed up with the misdeeds of their colonial rulers and resistance movements, different but connected, began to arise across the Samoan archipelago.

The word *Mau* in the Samoan language means ‘to hold fast, or to stick firmly to an opinion.’²⁶⁸ The term was used to describe the various resistance movements that arose in Samoa, including the groups that orchestrated such resistance as well as the resistance itself, well before the First World War. Mau movements had existed under the German administration before, but those that arose in both American and Western Samoa starting around the end of

²⁶⁶ Hiery, *The Neglected War*, 176.

²⁶⁷ Pedersen, “Samoa on the World Stage,” 242.

²⁶⁸ David A. Chappell, “The Forgotten Mau: Anti-Navy Protest in American Samoa, 1920-1935,” *Pacific Historical Review* 69, no. 2 (2000): 217-60, p. 231.

the influenza epidemic were of a different character.²⁶⁹ It is worth noting that despite their differences, the Mau movements in Western and Eastern Samoa were in contact with one another by the late 1920s at the latest, and large numbers of Samoans routinely travelled between the different parts of the archipelago. This transfer of ideas and individuals influenced how officials in the United States viewed developments in the mandate for Western Samoa.²⁷⁰

The Western Samoan Mau movement dominates the historiography of the mandate period in Samoa.²⁷¹ This resistance was the most prominent feature after the influenza epidemic in the life of residents of the Samoan mandate, and received a great deal of attention in the Permanent Mandates Commission, and was thus a very public affair for New Zealand.²⁷² Logan's disastrous handling of the influenza epidemic most certainly harmed the reputation of the New Zealand administration from the start, but the combination of falling copra prices and rising import prices – driven in large part by import tariffs designed to improve New Zealand trade against American competition – seems to have been the central cause of unrest in the 1920s.²⁷³ Things were relatively quiet until about 1926, quite possibly because Samoan society was reeling from the loss of nearly a quarter of the population, but by 1928 a majority of indigenous Samoans were participating in Mau-led boycotts of the administration.²⁷⁴ On December 28, 1929, now known in Samoa as Black Saturday, a demonstration by the Mau in Apia ended with New Zealand military police opening fire on the demonstrators, killing at least

²⁶⁹ I. C. Campbell, "Resistance and Colonial Government: A Comparative Study of Samoa," *The Journal of Pacific History* 40, no. 1 (2005): 45–69, pp. 47–48.

²⁷⁰ Chappell, "The Forgotten Mau," 232; "Observations of the New Zealand Government on the Decisions of the Council Concerning the Report of the Permanent Mandates Commission on the Work of its Tenth Session," *League of Nations Official Journal* vol. 8, no. 11, (November 1927): 1556–1561, p. 1559.

²⁷¹ Campbell, "Resistance and Colonial Government," p. 46.

²⁷² The troubles in Western Samoa came before the PMC many times over the years, references to which can be found in the League of Nations Official Journal starting in vol. 8 (1927), and by vol. 19 (1938) the Commission noted 'the statement of the accredited representative that the attitude of non-co-operation adopted by a certain section of the natives has now ceased' see "Third Meeting (Private and Public), Held on Friday, January 28th, 1928, at 3.30 p.m." *League of Nations Official Journal* vol. 19, no. 2, (February 1938): 89–107, p. 103.

²⁷³ Campbell, "Resistance and Colonial Government," 64; Hiery, *The Neglected War*, 198.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 249.

8 Samoans including one of the Mau's most prominent leaders.²⁷⁵ This was the most dramatic point in the protest movements anywhere in the Samoan archipelago, and provoked a flurry of writings, including an article in *Foreign Affairs* by J. B. Condliffe in April 1930, in which he comments that 'New Zealand opinion, naively self-conscious, chafes under the half-truths reproduced in certain American papers...'²⁷⁶ Things slowly calmed down in Western Samoa after that, but the Samoans never really forgave New Zealand for its misrule, and the global opinion of New Zealand's mandatory rule, as exemplified in American writings and League publications, was distinctly unimpressed.

In addition to resisting the New Zealand authorities directly, the Samoan people made use of one of the innovative features of the mandates system and sent a number of petitions to the League of Nations starting in the late 1920s.²⁷⁷ The most prominent of these was one dated to March 9th, 1928 – two years before Black Sunday – which 7982 out of an estimated 8500 taxpayers signed, demanding transfer or termination of the mandate in favour of self-government.²⁷⁸ The Mau had nothing to do with the status of mandate per-se, and indeed it may be that New Zealand's violations of the mandate principle, mainly in the form of import duties, created or exacerbated some of the grievances of the Samoans expressed by the Mau. Whether the mandate, so-opposed by New Zealand in Paris and accepted only at American insistence, had any impact on the deterioration in New Zealand-Samoan relations is hard to say, but the United States watched events in Samoa nervously, having had some experience of Samoan resistance of their own.

The much less studied American Samoan Mau movement started around 1920, and its focus was on the specific naval administrators of the time and on copra prices. The prices for

²⁷⁵ Pedersen, *The Guardians*, 187.

²⁷⁶ J. B. Condliffe, "New Zealand's Troubles in Western Samoa," *Foreign Affairs* 8, no. 1/4 (1930): 474.

²⁷⁷ Pedersen, "Samoa on the World Stage," 237.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 231-32.

copra in 1919 were the highest ever, and this provoked speculation among Samoans that the administration was, or had been, stealing some of their money.²⁷⁹ There was also discontent about a new rule banning interracial marriage, and pay disparities between navy men and locals recruited to work for the administration.²⁸⁰ The causes of the American Samoan have been attributed to various factors. These include friction between different notions of civility in governance between Samoans and US officials; the effective freezing of the formerly dynamic Samoan political order by its incorporation into colonial governance structures; the meddling of half-Samoan *afakasi* as an incipient nationalist movement; or as a combination of some or all of these factors.²⁸¹ Regardless of its cause, the Mau in American Samoa, while a serious challenge to the administration, was not an all-out call for independence or a demand for the United States to leave the islands. The movement heightened the sensitivities of the naval administration and produced changes in local governance, and may have led Congress to finally authorise the Deed of Cession in 1929, after about 30 years of legal limbo for the territory.²⁸² The American administration had long also been conscious of the effect that events in Western Samoa could have on their own relations with the indigenous Samoans, with notable reforms in government made in response to the Lauaki Affair in 1905.²⁸³ The west to east transfer of ideas and resistance was to become more of a concern once the Western Samoan Mau began to demand self-government, which could have morphed into a threat to American possession of the naval base at Pago Pago. This also gives some indication of why the Americans were so concerned about the tariff dispute that began with New Zealand in 1920, not only was American

²⁷⁹ Chappell, "The Forgotten Mau," 233.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 235-36.

²⁸¹ I. C. Campbell, "Chiefs, Agitators and the Navy" *The Journal of Pacific History* 44, no. 1 (2009): 41-60; David A. Chappell. "The Forgotten Mau.," I. C. Campbell. "Resistance and Colonial Government."

²⁸² Chappell, "The Forgotten Mau," 218.

²⁸³ This was an incident in German Samoa where local challenges to German authority were met with the dissolution of structures of indigenous government and representation, as well as the exile of some of the movement's leaders. See Campbell, "Resistance and Colonial Government," 49.

trade with the mandate for Western Samoa threatened, but their ability to gauge and understand the unrest that was brewing there, which might spread eastward, was also imperilled.

As much as the Mau movements may have heightened American sensitivities in Samoa, the most prominent issue for the US was the creation of import duty against all non-British goods entering the territory enacted in April 1920. This duty charged British goods 15 per cent *ad valorem* and all other goods 22.5 per cent, a difference of 7.5 per cent commented upon by American officials.²⁸⁴ This was enacted before the mandate came into force in 1921, but, for the Americans at least, was not allowed because the 1899 treaty prohibited discrimination against British, American, or German goods in any part of Samoa. This would be the binding legal basis of their arguments against the import duty for the entirety of the mandate period, as the issue was never really resolved. Despite the existence of a secure legal instrument—whose validity was never explicitly denied by Britain or New Zealand in their correspondence with the United States—the State Department and several interested Americans continued to invoke the mandate. They did so not in letter but in spirit, treating it as a barrier to the imposition of such a preferential duty. The opinion of the US Government that the tariffs imposed by New Zealand violated not only the Tripartite Agreement, but also the principles of the mandate was confirmed in a message from the Ambassador in Great Britain to the Secretary of State on April 10, 1924, in which he said:

‘I had a personal conference today with the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in relation to discriminatory tariff imposed by New Zealand. I explained to him provisions of tripartite convention of 1899 which is still in force, also that the imposition of this tariff was in violation of the principle of mandated German territory which had been conceded by Japan, France, Belgium and by the British Government in exchange of communications in reference to Central African treaty.’²⁸⁵

²⁸⁴ George H. Blakeslee, “The Mandates of the Pacific,” 108; FRUS, 1922, vol. 1, doc. 8, “Memorandum by the Technical Adviser of the American Delegation (Blakeslee) of a Conversation at the Home of the Secretary of State, December 8, 1921, 3 p.m.”

²⁸⁵ FRUS, 1924, vol. 2, doc. 611.62m31/24, “The Ambassador in Great Britain (Kellogg) to the Secretary of State, London, April 10, 1924 – 5 p.m., Received April 10 – 2:25 p.m.”

The connection to Africa here is significant, as it shows that there was a recognition that precedent might be transferred between mandates. We will see this pattern again in the next chapter, where African mandates were again raised in trade disputes between Britain in the United States in the 1920s. This appeal on the legal basis of the 1899 convention and the moral basis of the mandates was not limited to government officials. In an article appearing in *The Samoa Times* on May 9th, 1924, the local agent of Atkins, Kroll & Co. in Apia used the terms of the mandate to argue against the preferential tariff imposed by New Zealand. He contrasted this with American Samoa where New Zealand enjoyed trade equality with the United States and where foreign goods were cheaper.²⁸⁶ This article further notes that Americans were pressing for the elimination of the preferential tariff not only the grounds of prewar agreements, but also on their participation in the war and on the welfare of the indigenous inhabitants.²⁸⁷ Also in 1924, the same author wrote to the Acting American Consul at Apia to present several additional arguments for eliminating the tariff. He noted that a number of American firms, including his own, had gone out of business in Western Samoa. He also reiterated an argument made by William Ormsby-Gore (former British representative to the PMC and then Under-Secretary of State for Colonies) that the imposition of the tariff was ‘strictly contrary to the announced intentions of the League of Nations, from whom they held the mandate.’²⁸⁸ Finally, he argued that on the basis of American success and New Zealand failure in the influenza epidemic that ‘All other nations should be interested in the success of the United States in the case now presented for fair dealing.’²⁸⁹

²⁸⁶ NARA, Archives 2, RG 59, General Records of the Department of State Central Decimal File, 1910-1929, from 611.629 Ruhr-Marshall to 611.62M 31/21a, Box 5877, File 5, 611.62m31/14, “Article from ‘The Samoa Times’, Apia, Western Samoa, 9 May 1924.”

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ NARA, Archives 2, RG 59, General Records of the Department of State Central Decimal File, 1910-1929, from 611.629 Ruhr-Marshall to 611.62M 31/21a, Box 5877, File 5, 611.62m31/14, “Message from H. J. Moore to John U. Vebber Esq. U.S. Acting Consul at Apia,” p. 1.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 1-2.

The invocation of the mandate as a negotiating tool here is revealing, the United States had a preexisting treaty that much more firmly gave them rights of equal access for trade in Samoa, one that the mandate did little to enhance. The use of the mandate can be understood partly as just another tool in the arsenal of American diplomats and businessmen: it was an argument that they could use, so they did. However, there is more to it, the Americans were promoting a broader vision of a reformed imperialism in which the advancement of the indigenous populations towards self-government was the espoused goal. One of the chief mechanisms to make this happen was to enhance their trade with the outside world, even without the Open Door, which offered clear benefits to the world's preeminent trading power. The Samoan market was small, although significant for American Samoa, where the United States was keen to avoid another outbreak of resistance to its rule inspired by the disturbances in Western Samoa. So, the principle of the mandates, even if it did not include Open Door provisions in the case of 'C' mandates, proved a useful tool for American government officials and private interests in Samoa. It was used as a mechanism to promote both their commercial dominance in the territory and their overriding vision for an imperialism that served to promote American dominance in the Pacific. This was done not only the basis of legal rights, but also on the moral basis of internationalism, even if the United States was not a part of the main internationalist forum. Here we can start to see a trend emerging of American uses of the mandates both as a tool to gain to access to territories within the system, and as an instrument to shape the international order of the League from the outside.

The 1899 treaty in Samoa was an early version of the Open Door policy that the United States pursued through the creation of the mandates system, and it was referred to as such in communications between the United States and New Zealand in 1934.²⁹⁰ The United States

²⁹⁰ FRUS, 1934, vol. 1, doc. 611.62M31/81, "The Ambassador in Great Britain (Bingham) to the Secretary of State, London, August 16, 1934, Received August 24."

further withheld its formal recognition of New Zealand's mandate until the tariff issue was resolved. This was possible American Government argued that the mandate was not to be confirmed by the League but by the Allied and Associated Powers, and that because the United States was not a member of the League, a bilateral treaty was required.²⁹¹ New Zealand argued that the United States had violated the 1899 treaty by extending its coastwise shipping laws to American Samoa, which restricted trade with U.S. ports to American-flagged vessels. It demanded that this policy be repealed before import duties on American goods were lifted in Western Samoa.²⁹² These laws, however, were not enacted until June 1920, and not extended to insular territories until 1922, thus the New Zealand import duty was not enacted as retribution for the American action, which was regardless not put in place because of American Samoa but due to mainland concerns.²⁹³ Whether the American laws discriminating against British shipping in American Samoa were intended to contravene Article 3 of the 1899 convention was debated within US government agencies even as they were discussing the dispute with New Zealand.²⁹⁴ The issue of discriminatory treatment remained under discussion between the United States, Britain, and New Zealand from 1920 into the 1930s without a satisfactory conclusion, until discussion of the matter lapsed after about 1934, where there seems to have been a tacit agreement to disagree.²⁹⁵ This left the New Zealand mandate de jure

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² FRUS, 1927, vol. 2, "Interpretation of Convention of December 2, 1899, and Merchant Marine Act of 1920 with Respect to British Commercial Rights in American Samoa," doc. 611.62m 31/38a, "Memorandum by the solicitor for the Department of State (Hackworth), Washington, April 30, 1926."

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Last references in FRUS, 1934, vol 1, "New Zealand, Representations Regarding Discrimination Against American Commerce in the New Zealand Mandate of Western Samoa," see: doc. 611.62M31/80a, "The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Great Britain (Bingham), Washington, August 3, 1934;" doc. 611.62M31/81, "The Ambassador in Great Britain (Bingham) to the Secretary of State, London, August 16, 1934, Received August 24;" doc. 611.62M31/82, "The Vico Consul at Wellington (Hoffmann) to the Secretary of State, Wellington, September 13, 1934, Received October 10;" doc. 611.62M31/81, "The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Great Britain (Bingham), Washington, October 17, 1934;" doc. 611.62M31/82, "The Secretary of State to the Consul General at Wellington (Bucklin), Washington, October 18, 1934;" doc. 611.62M31/84, "The Consul General at Wellington (Bucklin) to the Secretary of State, Wellington, December 4, 1934, Received January 2, 1935;" and doc. 611.62M31/85, "The Chargé in Great Britain (Atherton) to the Secretary of State, London, January 7, 1935, Received January 16."

unrecognised by the United States, though this had no functional impact on its operation. In essence the United States attempted to leverage the language and stipulations of the mandates system to gain commercial access for American nationals to Western Samoa on better terms, and to protect its own strategic interests in the archipelago.

Australia's New Guinea Mandate

On January 24, 1919, during early discussions about the former German colonies, Australian Prime Minister William Hughes stated that New Guinea was ‘as necessary to Australia as water to a city.’²⁹⁶ Hughes was Wilson’s most vehement opponent when it came to the mandates system, and New Guinea and its associated islands were at the centre of Hughes’ desires for Australian compensation for the war. Although couched here in strategic terms, Hughes’ justification for Australia’s claim to New Guinea was underpinned by broader imperial logics including economic considerations and national prestige.

The formal title of the mandate that included New Guinea was the *Mandate for the German Possessions Situated in the Pacific Ocean Situated South of the Equator Other than German Samoa and Nauru*.²⁹⁷ This gives some indication of how the Pacific mandates were conceived in Paris, the New Guinea mandate being the largest portion of territory that the others had essentially been carved out from during the war, or in the case of Nauru because of its phosphate resources (more on that soon). The territory in question comprised the northeastern portion of the island of New Guinea, with the Australian territory of Papua to the south, and a part of the Dutch East Indies to the west, as well as the Bismarck Archipelago, the island of Bougainville in the Solomon Islands chain, and some other outlying islands. From the first discussions of the mandates these territories were all considered together, notably by the man

²⁹⁶ NARA, RG 256, Roll 338, doc 185.115/18, “Excerpt from the Minutes of a Meeting of the Bureau of the Conference B.C. 10, held on Jan. 24, 1919, 3 P.M.,” p. 8.

²⁹⁷ NAA: A11804, 1926/318, “New Guinea. Mandate & Administration Annual Reports,” p. 121.

most interested in their fate: William Hughes, who, according to George Louis Beer, ‘did not distinguish between the cases...’²⁹⁸

The New Guinea campaign had been fairly brief, though not as quick as the other Pacific campaigns, and had resulted in Australian soldiers taking control over all of German New Guinea – at least to the extent that the Germans had controlled it – by the end of January 1915.²⁹⁹ New Guinea was, however, different from Samoa and Micronesia in that there was resistance from the Germans, albeit not very much. The most notable action was a skirmish over the Bitapaka radio station near the territorial capital of Rabaul on 11-12 September 1914.³⁰⁰ There were fewer than 50 deaths in all from this engagement, most of whom were indigenous.³⁰¹ But this was precisely what was so unsettling about the resistance for the Australians: the Germans had armed Melanesians to fight against white troops.³⁰² The recruitment of indigenous populations for military service by the Germans troubled the Australians, as it troubled their allies fighting in German colonies in Africa – despite the active recruitment of colonial troops by Britain and France in large numbers – and is almost certainly part of the reason why this sort of recruitment was banned under the mandates. It may also have been part of why the Australians were willing to negotiate more generous conditions of surrender in New Guinea than their compatriots had in Samoa. The capitulation was signed on September 17, with Australia agreeing to repatriate those who wished to leave, while most of those who remained were allowed to keep their jobs.³⁰³ Captain Detzner evaded capture by the Australians in the New Guinea interior for the entirety of the war with the help of the indigenous population and some German missionaries, but he had very little impact on the

²⁹⁸ LOC, George Louis Beer Diary, p. 20.

²⁹⁹ Hiery, *The Neglected War*, 25-26.

³⁰⁰ Reed, *The Making of Modern New Guinea*, 85.

³⁰¹ Hiery, *The Neglected War*, 25.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid.; Reed, *The Making of Modern New Guinea*, 85.

Australian military administration, which was, like its German predecessor, clustered around the coast and islands.³⁰⁴

The Australian troops occupying New Guinea behaved badly, even by the standards of the time: drunkenness and looting were rampant at the beginning, at first the looting was focused on the Germans, but over time also came to include the livestock and other possessions of the indigenous and Chinese populations.³⁰⁵ The Australian soldiers occupying New Guinea adopted something of a conquest mentality, looking to extract as much wealth from the territory for themselves as they could.³⁰⁶ This is not altogether surprising given that the Australian administration of neighbouring Papua was driven almost entirely by the desire to extract wealth quickly, mainly in the form of gold, and showed very little interest in development or the welfare of the indigenous population.³⁰⁷ Gold was not an easy thing for soldiers on quick tours of duty in New Guinea to make money on, so they contended themselves with shipping bird skins with the feathers still attached to Australia, circumventing customs regulations.³⁰⁸ Papua's main export was gold until 1916, and those responsible for its extraction had mainly been Australians.³⁰⁹ The image of the German portion of New Guinea as a place of even greater potential was depicted from the start of the war by Australian papers, notably by the *Rabaul Record*, a monthly paper run by the Australian military administration, which had a particular fixation on the potential for gold mining.³¹⁰ Gold was a going theme for New Guinea, other minerals were sometimes mentioned as well, but with much less enthusiasm, such as in a British government publication from 1920 where remarks about gold finds in Dutch New

³⁰⁴ Hiery, *The Neglected War*, 25-26.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

³⁰⁹ Hank Nelson, *Black, White and Gold: Goldmining in Papua New Guinea 1878-1930* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2016), v, 266.

³¹⁰ Hiery, *The Neglected War*, 47.

Guinea offered further support to the idea that German New Guinea would prove a lucrative source of the metal.³¹¹

While gold was the mainstay of Australia's Papua territory, the Germans had set up an economy in New Guinea based around plantations growing copra and using forced and semi-forced labour to make it profitable.³¹² The Australians had little interest in interfering with this system, but they did, like New Zealand, want to take control of the economy and make the colony pay. British currency was therefore introduced in 1916, and a pay cap set for indigenous labourers at a level approximating the standard pay that they had received from the Germans.³¹³ While the Australian administration continued the German forced-labour regime, it liked to contrast itself with the Germans, who, according to a report from 1921, 'gave more facilities for the recruiting of natives.'³¹⁴ This practice of relying on indentured labour to work on the mostly white-owned plantations, and using recruiters who went into the interior of New Guinea and other islands to induce indigenous people to undertake this kind of labour continued and even expanded under the Australians.³¹⁵

The Australian authorities actively supported this industry, seeing it as one of the main mechanisms to make the colony less of a financial burden. Another way was through the taxation system, which charged monetary taxes but exempted indentured labourers, missionaries, police, and fathers of large families. Thereby forcing indigenous populations to either work on plantations, or to otherwise enter into the money economy in order to pay their taxes, and therefore work on the production of cash-crops like copra.³¹⁶ This was particularly

³¹¹ NARA, Archives 1, RG 46, Records of the US Senate Committee, Papers Including Hearings Com. on Foreign Relations, Sen 67A-F9 Box 115, "Former German Possessions in Oceania," published by H.M. Stationary Office, 1920, 64.

³¹² NAA: A11804, 1926/318, "New Guinea. Mandate & Administration Annual Reports," p. 270.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 276-277; Hiery, *The Neglected War*, 75.

³¹⁴ NAA: A11804, 1926/318, "New Guinea. Mandate & Administration Annual Reports," 270.

³¹⁵ Margot Hentze and Stephen Henry Roberts, *Labour Conditions in the Mandated Territory of New Guinea* (Sydney: Federal Mutual Chambers, 1933), 10-11.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

important since in the early years the major source of revenue for the territorial administration came from an export duty on copra.³¹⁷

Like the other German colonies in the Pacific the main crop was copra, which was exported primarily aboard ships of the Australian company Burns Philp & Co. until 1907, when the German Norddeutscher Lloyd began to outcompete them by operating at a loss and receiving government subsidies.³¹⁸ Shortly after Australia occupied the territory, Burns Philp & Co. returned to the New Guinea market, receiving an effective monopoly on shipping in the territory for both exports and provisioning.³¹⁹ This was a lucrative business for Burns Philp, and did not cut into any existing American business interests dating from the German period, however it did show that if left to govern New Guinea unsupervised, the Australian Government was likely to facilitate monopolistic practices that would prevent American companies from becoming involved in the territory.

It is easy to see how the American Government and private industries came to perceive monopolisation as a threat to their participation in the potentially lucrative gold and shipping industries in New Guinea. However, these were not the only resources of interest to Americans in New Guinea, it was believed that there were commercially viable quantities of oil in the territory. As we will see in other regions, the United States Government was eager to ensure that American companies could secure a share of any new oil resources found in the territories captured during the First World War. It should be noted that British and Dominion authorities were not entirely sympathetic to American concerns about the petroleum output of British companies. A correspondence between the British Government and the US ambassador noted that the United States controlled about 70 per cent of global oil production (80 per cent if

³¹⁷ NAA: A981, League Man 19, "External Affairs Department. League of Nations. Mandates, Texts etc.," p. 45.

³¹⁸ NARA, Archives 1, RG 46, Records of the US Senate Committee Papers Including Hearings Com. on Foreign Relations, Sen 67A-F9, Box 115, "Former German Possessions in Oceania," 38-39; Hiery, *The Neglected War*, 59.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

American-controlled production in Mexico is included) against Britain's approximately 2.5 per cent (or 4.5 per cent if British-controlled production in Persia is included).³²⁰ They complained further that the US Government was using its influence in Latin American countries like Haiti and Costa Rica to prevent British companies from gaining oil contracts there.³²¹ We will return to oil questions again in chapter 4, where this correspondence is explored in greater detail. In the mandate for New Guinea the presence of oil was purely speculative, and the 'C' mandates did not include the Open Door provisions that the United States used to get its oil companies involved in Iraq. But this did not prevent the US from connecting the issue of petroleum extraction in New Guinea to American acceptance of the mandates system as a whole, with the Secretary of State writing the following to the Ambassador in Great Britain on July 24, 1922:

'It appears that on November 22, 1921, an official statement was made in the Australian Parliament regarding oil deposits in mandate New Guinea indicating, if the statement has been correctly transmitted to my Government, that it was at that time the purpose to reserve all such deposits for the exclusive use of the authorities administering the mandate. Previous to this, the feeling was expressed in the Australian Parliament that under class 'C' mandates, such as that of New Guinea, the mandatory might impose whatever restriction it pleased upon both men and goods. Statements of this tenor are less disturbing if it is assumed, as my Government has been inclined to do, that the views of the Government of the United States regarding mandates and the acceptance in general of these views by His Majesty's Government had not at that time been made known to the officials of the Commonwealth. My Government has not been made aware, however, of any subsequent correction of these statements or of any further announcements of a more reassuring nature; and American interests are left in uncertainty regarding the possibility of participation in certain important branches of economic activity in New Guinea.'³²²

As is clear from this note, the US Government was concerned at the highest levels with ensuring that American companies would have a share of any resources found in New Guinea. The Secretary of State promptly got to work on negotiating a treaty to define the relationship

³²⁰ NAA: A981, League Man 6, "External Affairs Department. League of Nations. Mandated Territories. Economic and Other Rights – United States attitude," pp. 5- 6.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

³²² FRUS, 1923, vol. 2, doc. 154, "The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Great Britain (Harvey), Washington, July 24, 1922 – 2 p.m."

between the United States and the 'C' mandates other than Samoa. Although the articles of this proposal are too long to quote here in their entirety, Articles 4-7 sought to protect existing American property, and ensure that American nationals and companies would receive equal treatment as those of the mandatory power with respect to residence and economic activities. These articles also set out to prevent differential export and import duties being charged against Americans, and that Americans would receive treatment equal to the most generous afforded to any member of the League of Nations or sub-unit thereof.³²³ Article 8 went even further, it opens with the statement 'Concessions having the character of a general monopoly shall not be granted.' With some exceptions given for public works, the article finishes by saying: 'Concessions for the development of the natural resources of the mandated territory shall be granted by the Mandatory to nationals of the United States of America on an equal footing with its own nationals.'³²⁴ The intention here is clear: the United States Government was using its leverage over recognition of the mandate, and the language of openness (albeit not the Open Door), to press for access. It sought to ensure that American companies and individuals would have access to the potentially lucrative oil and gold in the territory, as well as any other resources emerged in the territory.

The concerns over oil in New Guinea proved to be a moot point, since no commercially viable deposits were found in New Guinea or neighbouring Papua. It was reported in the annual report of 1930-31 that the search for oil in Papua had been abandoned, but the author commented that they still held out some hope that it might be discovered elsewhere in the territory.³²⁵ American companies ultimately showed only a limited interest in New Guinea's

³²³ TNA, Imperial Conference 1923, Committee on the Position of the United States of America in Relation to C Mandates, "Draft Convention concerning the territory formerly the German Protectorate of South-West Africa, the island of Nauru and the former German island possessions in the Pacific Ocean south of the Equator other than the island of Nauru and former German island of Samoa," London, October 25, 1923, 3-4.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ NAA: M3816, 3, "Copies of annual reports, and excerpts from annual reports for the Territory of Papua, and the Mandated Territory [sic] of New Guinea, 'Territory of Papua, Annual Report for the Year 1930-1931,'" p. 4.

resources, but the US Government had thrown a great deal of weight into ensuring that if resources were found there in quantity, American companies and individuals would be involved on favourable terms. There is a notable difference here with other territories where there were lucrative natural resources, such as nearby British Malay where huge amounts of rubber and other products were produced with only minimal American involvement. This cannot be accounted for by a lack of enthusiasm on the part of American companies to become involved in colonial enterprises, nor from an unwillingness on the part of the United States Government to advocate on behalf of American companies. Rather it stems from the European powers working where possible to exclude foreign competition in their colonies, a fact at the very core of the economic motivations for colonialism. When it came to mandated territories, however, the US Government had a great deal of leverage. This came from American participation in the war, as well as the language that had been employed at the Paris Peace Conference and enshrined into the League of Nations to open these territories up to American competition in economic pursuits.

The Americans had a few non-economic interests in New Guinea. There were American anthropologists interested in the indigenous population, and some American missionaries that went to work in the territory, and in a case particularly reminiscent of American colonial practice in Puerto Rico, some doctors who went to conduct research into hookworm. Missionaries, and to a lesser extent anthropologists, were part of the standard repertoire of international colonialism, and it was not unusual that the United States insisted upon the protection of the right of missionaries to travel to the colonies of other empires to conduct their work. This pattern, as we will see, was much more significant in Africa than in the Pacific, and in the Middle East a similar pattern emerged with archaeologists, but the consistent use by the US Government of the mandates as a tool to gain access is revealing.

One particularly revealing episode began with the arrival of an American doctor to Rabaul (the capital of New Guinea) around the end of the war. He had come to test out remedies against hookworm, in an effort reminiscent of similar American experiments in Puerto Rico against the parasite, which Daniel Immerwahr has thoroughly shown was used as a test-bed for experimental treatments starting around 1905 and continuing into the 1930s. It was towards the end of this period that Cornelius P. Rhoads was conducting medical experiments on Puerto Ricans and claimed in a letter to have killed eight people and to have transplanted cancer into even more.³²⁶ The nature and extent of the hookworm experimentation in New Guinea is hard to discern from the available sources, but the use of colonised areas to conduct medical experiments was clearly part of the American imperial repertoire. The extension of this practice to New Guinea, with the blessing of the Australian authorities, where American doctors could conduct their experiments and further shield the US Government from culpability, clearly suited well the interests of a government that was looking to the colonies to find a cure for hookworm to help reduce the impact of the disease in the American South.³²⁷ Not only was the United States Government leveraging the mandates for access to resources and economic opportunities, though this was their primary interest in New Guinea, they were also using the system to facilitate an expansion of their research networks into territories that might otherwise be closed.

New Guinea was by far the largest, and seemingly the most lucrative, of the Pacific mandates at the beginning of the period, though it ultimately failed to produce commercially viable oil deposits or to attract much in the way of American involvement during the mandate years. Nonetheless, the US Government worked hard to ensure that any valuable commodities

³²⁶ Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A Short History of the Greater United States*, (London: Bodley Head, 2019), 138-144.

³²⁷ Hiery, *The Neglected War*, 69-70; Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire*, 138-142.

that were found would be open to American investment as well as for civilians to pursue missionary and research activities in the region. The Australians made little effort to govern in the spirit of the mandate, particularly with regard to serving the interests of the indigenous population, and instead pursued monopolisation in the oil and transport sectors from the outset of the mandate period. The United States Government used the language of the mandates in New Guinea to gain Australian agreement to roll back the monopolies and allow American companies and individuals to participate in essentially any area they wanted in the territory. In return, Australia secured American recognition of its mandate over the territory, which was seen as a necessary strategic shield, even without the right to build fortifications or recruit indigenous troops.

The British Empire Mandate for Nauru

The island of Nauru, sometimes called Pleasant Island, was annexed by Germany in 1888 as part of the Marshall Islands. Unlike the other mandates in the Pacific, Nauru was of little interest to the United States because the only major resource on the island was phosphate, which the United States had in ample supply. Nauru, then, is something of a counterexample to the other Pacific mandates as the US had little to gain from insisting upon any kind of rigorous adherence to the principles or stipulations of the system. This allowed the mandatory to establish a massive monopoly and govern the territory in its own interest without complaint from the Americans. This case demonstrates the significant influence American involvement had on the administration of other Pacific mandates. In this one instance, where the United States had no interests to pursue, the mandate system had the least effect on how the territory was governed. It is important to note that the shift from German to British/Australian administration had significant consequences and marked a major turning point in Nauruan

history. However, few of these consequences appear to have stemmed from the territory's designation as a mandate, rather than from the broader change in colonial authority.

Nauruan history in the colonial period is dominated by the phosphate extraction industry, which began in 1905 when the first concession to mine phosphates there was granted to the German Jaluitgesellschaft company for 94 years commencing on April 1st, 1906. The company's concession extended to the entirety of the Marshall Islands, however the rights for phosphate extraction on Nauru were sold on January 22, 1906, to the British-registered Pacific Phosphate Company.³²⁸ This company also had the rights to extract phosphates from Ocean Island, now called Banaba, about 300 kilometres east of Nauru, which was under British sovereignty.³²⁹ One of the key differences between Nauru and the other major phosphate island in German Micronesia, Angaur, was that in Nauru the private extraction rights belonged to the British Pacific Phosphates Company, whereas in Angaur they had belonged to Deutsche Südseephosphat-Gessellschaft.³³⁰ This meant that when the Japanese took over Angaur they could also claim all of the extraction rights as captured German property, whereas in Nauru the property rights of the British company would have to be reckoned with. Before the First World War, Nauru exported large quantities of phosphates to Germany, Australia, and Japan. After being surrendered to Australian forces in September 1914, they went to Australia, Japan, and New Zealand.³³¹

³²⁸ A. H. Charteris, "The Mandate Over Nauru Island," *British Yearbook of International Law* 4 (1923): 137, p. 138; although the company was registered in Britain, approximately 1/3 of its shares were held by German firms before WWI, see Cait Storr, *International Status in the Shadow of Empire: Nauru and the Histories of International Law*, Cambridge Studies in International and Comparative Law, 150 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 128.

³²⁹ Charteris, "The Mandate Over Nauru Island," 138; Cait Storr tells a slightly different story of how the concession for Nauruan phosphate rights came into the hands of the Pacific Phosphate Company, the key difference being that unlike contemporary Americans she states that these interactions took place in and around 1900 rather than 1905-1906, see Storr, *International Status in the Shadow of Empire*, 127-128.

³³⁰ Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire*, 65-66.

³³¹ NARA, Archives 1, RG 46, Records of the US Senate Committee Papers Including Hearings Com. on Foreign Relations, Sen 67A-F9, Box 115, "Former German Possessions in Oceania," 67.

The American planners at the Paris Peace Conference were well aware of the immense value of the phosphates in Nauru, including the history of their extraction.³³² They were also aware of their potential impact on the whole Pacific settlement, with William Churchill saying of Nauru in his 1918 report: ‘Here again we have an element of essential economic value. It will be a not inconsiderable factor in the debates upon the future disposition of the Pacific Islands.’³³³ The question then is what the United States Government did about this immensely valuable resource and the island that contained it. The other major phosphate islands in the region were already claimed, Japan held Angaur militarily and received it as part of the South Seas Mandate, and Britain held sovereignty over Ocean Island as part of the Gilbert Islands (modern Kiribati).

It would not have been surprising for the United States to have pushed to take over this one small parcel of German territory, or to at least receive a share of its phosphate wealth. However, even those who advocated annexationist policies generally showed little enthusiasm for Nauru. In the same memorandum where he advocated for the annexation of Yap, Samoa, and some other islands, Breckenridge Long wrote of Nauru and the other formerly German islands besides Samoa that ‘the United States has little or no interest in the ownership of those [islands].’³³⁴ For a territory with such massive economic value Long was surprisingly uninterested, he discussed in the same memorandum a number of Guano islands between Hawaii and Samoa, but always from the strategic perspective stating: ‘Generally, they are not valuable. From a naval or strategic standpoint, they are not very valuable, except insofar as

³³² *Ibid.*, 65.

³³³ LOC, U.S. American Commission to Negotiate Peace, Box 29, William Churchill, “Pacific islands of Germany,” 1918, 206-207.

³³⁴ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 2, doc. 432, “The Third Assistant Secretary of State (Long) to the Assistant Secretary of the Commission to Negotiate Peace (Harrison), Washington, December 14, 1918.” See especially enclosure “Memorandum by the Third Assistant Secretary of State (Long) on the Disposition of the Ex-German Islands of the Pacific Ocean Now in Possession of Great Britain and Japan, Washington, December 14, 1918.”

they might be fortified or used, some of them, for naval bases. In them the United States has an interest.’³³⁵ This indifference on Long’s part to the economic value of Nauru can be explained in a number of ways: first, the United States was not a major destination for Nauruan phosphates, because the United States already had rich sources of natural phosphates. These were present in both the continental United States as well as islands in the Pacific and the Caribbean that had been annexed under the 1856 Guano Islands Act, most of which was consumed domestically.³³⁶ Second, a process for synthesising ammonia, an alternative to guano and other natural phosphates in fertiliser, had been invented in Germany in 1909, and had become industrially viable during the First World War.³³⁷ While this latter development was not mentioned directly in the papers that dealt with Nauru, the United States Department of Commerce had reports as early as 1916 that processes for manufacturing artificial nitrates for use as fertiliser and in munitions from coal were practical.³³⁸ The Acting Secretary of Foreign and Domestic Commerce wrote in November 1916 of these reports that ‘This somewhat exhaustive study would indicate strongly, that in the early future, ... we may practically free ourselves from dependence upon Chile saltpeter.’³³⁹ This indicates that well before the Paris Peace Conference the US Government was coming to the conclusion that imports of fertiliser, for which Nauru had never been a major source, would soon be superfluous to domestically available, industrially produced, supplies.

Daniel Immerwahr discusses some of this in *How to Hide an Empire*, but does not explore the important connection here: the United States had amassed quite a few territorial claims in the Pacific and the Caribbean in order to ensure supply of phosphates and to get

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Rebecca Gruskin, “The Value within Multiform Commodities: North African Phosphates and Global Markets in the Interwar Period,” *Journal of Global History* 16, no. 3 (2021): 315–35, p. 325.

³³⁷ Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire*, 57.

³³⁸ NARA, Archives 2, RG 40, General Records of the Department of Commerce Office of the Secretary, File 74289.

³³⁹ Ibid.

around the British monopoly on guano.³⁴⁰ He rightly points out that the desire for guano had motivated a very large expansion of American authority into the Pacific in the nineteenth century.³⁴¹ He also notes the important consequences of the development of synthetic ammonia for the German munitions industry. He also remarks that the development of synthetic rubber during the Second World War led the US Government to have a much smaller reliance on colonial territories, and no longer needed to adjust foreign policy to ensure a supply of this resource.³⁴² However he does not make the connection that the invention of an industrially viable alternative to natural phosphates reduced the United States' long-term dependence on the colonial territories that produced them. While this shift did not immediately remove the need for natural sources, it signalled a future in which those territories would no longer be of strategic concern once domestic reserves were exhausted. This is not to suggest that ammonia manufacturing replaced mined phosphates in the United States, but rather that Immerwahr's logic regarding rubber in the post-Second World War period can also be applied to American attitudes toward the phosphate islands acquired from Germany after the First World War.

One finds scant references to phosphates as a strategic resource in The Inquiry files, and even scantier reference to Nauru as a major concern for the American peace planners. This same sense of disinterest in phosphates also appears in the American considerations of Angaur in the Japanese mandate, where the priority was firmly based on security. This can be understood as the nexus then of the United States having a secure and now expandable supply of phosphates, and a lack of strategic concerns since it was a near certainty that the territory would end up in the hands of Britain, Australia, or New Zealand.

³⁴⁰ Guano is the accumulated excrement of birds or bats, and is used as a fertiliser; on Nauru what was mined was tricalcium phosphate rock, which American officials believed was the result of rain washing guano into the coral lime of the island and forming insoluble calcium phosphate. See NARA, Archives 1, RG 46, Records of the US Senate Committee Papers Including Hearings Com. on Foreign Relations, Sen 67A-F9, Box 115, "Former German Possessions in Oceania," 65.

³⁴¹ Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire*, 63.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 57-58, 270.

At the Paris Peace Conference Nauru was an issue, not so much for the United States as for the British Empire delegation. Australia had occupied the island early in the war, but New Zealand was also very interested in the value of Nauruan phosphates for its own agricultural enterprises. Prime Minister Massey said of Ocean Island and Nauru at the 1917 Imperial War Conference that ‘These islands, I am very strongly of opinion, will be very urgently required by the Australians and New Zealanders in years to come.’³⁴³ The issue of who would receive the mandate for Nauru was not cleared up before the conference began. On May 6, 1919, when the assignment of the other Pacific mandates was agreed upon, Lloyd George is recorded saying:

‘having regard to the island of Nauru, some difficulty had arisen as the Governments of the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, all had certain interests. He suggested the best plan would be to give the Mandate to the British Empire which would arrange exactly how it would be dealt with.’³⁴⁴

Wilson said that if this were done it would not be possible to hand the mandate over to one of the dominions, and further that the Open Door ought to be applied in the territory. Lloyd George opined that a tariff should be allowed in order to raise revenues for the territory, but the subject lapsed when the French Minister for the Colonies, M. Simon, entered the room and the topic changed to the African mandates.³⁴⁵ The subject does not appear to have resurfaced in those preliminary discussions of who would serve as mandatory states, leaving Lloyd George’s suggestion as the de facto solution.

The result followed Lloyd George’s suggestion, in May it was agreed that the mandate for Nauru would be ‘conferred upon his Britannic Majesty.’³⁴⁶ This is the same construction used in the mandates given to Britain in Africa, but lacks the additional phrase found in the

³⁴³ TNA, CAB 32/1, “Imperial War Conference 1917 Minutes of Proceedings,” p. 179.

³⁴⁴ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 5, doc. 47, “Notes of a Meeting Held in M. Pichon’s Room at Quai d’Orsay, Paris, on Tuesday, May 6, 1919, at 5:30 p.m.”

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ League of Nations Council, *Mandate for Nauru* (London, H. M. Stationery Office, 1921), p. 2.

New Guinea mandate ‘to be exercised on his behalf by the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia.’³⁴⁷ The implication here is that Great Britain was responsible to administer the mandate, and there were no provisions in the mandate agreement itself, dated to December 1920, for the sharing of these responsibilities with Australia or New Zealand.³⁴⁸ It hardly mattered, however, what the wording of the mandate was, as someone would have had to care enough about Nauru to protest its violation. The only ones concerned enough were Australia and New Zealand, who had been satiated with an agreement between the three governments concluded on July 2, 1919 called the Nauru Island Agreement.

The agreement established a system of power and resource sharing, placing the island under the authority of an Administrator appointed by the Australian Government for an initial five-year term, after which a replacement would be selected by mutual agreement of the three governments.³⁴⁹ In the event, it was always an Australian who administered Nauru, leading the State Department to note that Australia was the acting mandatory.³⁵⁰ They noted the origin of this unusual situation as:

‘The deposits at Nauru had been exploited by a German corporation, the Pacific Phosphate Company, which was taken over by the British, Australian, and New Zealand Governments under an agreement of July 2, 1919. In virtue of that agreement the British Empire’s mandate was assigned to Australia for 5-year periods.’³⁵¹

This is a very strange comment, since earlier records had shown that the State Department was aware that the Pacific Phosphate Company was British. It is possible that they had been

³⁴⁷ League of Nations Council, *British Mandates for the Cameroons, Togoland and East Africa* (London: H.M. Stationary Office, 1923), p. 2; NAA: A11804, 1926/318, “New Guinea. Mandate & Administration Annual Reports,” pp. 121-122.

³⁴⁸ League of Nations Council, *Mandate for Nauru*, 3.

³⁴⁹ NAA: CP103/11, 455, “Nauru Reports (Valuable Spares) [Note consists of various printed Australian Government Reports],” p. 227.

³⁵⁰ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 13, “Part I – The Covenant of the League of Nations.” Reference is to the appended table titled “Data on Mandated Territories,” specifically the line identifying the mandatory for Nauru as “British Empire (Australia acting),” appended to the Covenant under the text of Article 22.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, this quote can be found 1-2 pages before the table cited above, depending on the edition used.

confused by the auction of company shares that had been held by German firms during the war.³⁵²

The administrator was somewhat beside the point for these three governments. The real issue was phosphates, and this was resolved by establishing a three-man commission, one appointed by each government and serving at its pleasure, to manage them, which came to be called the British Phosphate Commission. This commission superseded the rights of the Pacific Phosphate Company and set out that that anyone holding claims to phosphates or related equipment would be compensated by the three governments. Interestingly, Article 13 of the Nauru Island Agreement provided that:

‘There shall be no interference by any of the three Governments with the direction, management, or control of the business of working, shipping, or selling the phosphates, and each of the three Governments binds itself not to do or to permit any act or thing contrary to or inconsistent with the terms and purposes of this Agreement.’³⁵³

This is a clear violation of the mandate principle of governing in the interests of the inhabitants, as it explicitly meant that the Administrator, appointed as he was by the Australian Government, had no authority over the commission which managed the island’s only major resource, and which paid his salary.

It was also a clear violation of the non-monopolisation principle so insisted upon by the United States Government in the other Pacific mandates. This issue was mentioned by William Ormsby-Gore in the Imperial Parliament debate over Nauru on June 20, 1920, where he wondered if by establishing such a monopoly they might be opening the door for France or any other mandatory to do the same.³⁵⁴ The establishment of this monopoly also violated the agreement between the United States and Britain from 1923, specifically Article 8, which

³⁵² Storr, *International Status in the Shadow of Empire*, 138.

³⁵³ NAA: CP103/11, 455, “Nauru Reports (Valuable Spares) [Note consists of various printed Australian Government Reports],” p. 227.

³⁵⁴ NAA: A518, C849/1/2, “Nauru – Annual Report to League of nations for 1921 [2cms],” “Extract from the British Hansard of debate in Imperial Parliament, 20th June, 1920, on the Nauru Agreement Bill,” p. 3.

contained the provision that: ‘...there shall result therefrom no monopoly of the national resources for the benefit of the mandatory and its nationals, directly or indirectly, nor any preferential advantage which shall be inconsistent with the economic, commercial and industrial equality hereinbefore guaranteed.’³⁵⁵ This agreement was made several years after the Nauru Island Agreement explicitly established a monopoly for the exclusive benefit of the mandatory state and its associates. The lack of US action over Nauru, despite the 1923 agreement and the concerns it had raised among British and Dominion representatives during negotiations, is telling. When its own interests were not directly concerned, the United States made little effort to enforce the principle of non-monopolisation.³⁵⁶

The United States’ limited engagement with Nauru had considerable impacts on the territory, mainly that the protections provided by the mandates system were not enforced as rigorously there as they were elsewhere. Adherence to protocol over the island, particularly the provision that the mandatory could not be changed, was essentially ignored. This is shown, for instance, in the accession records to *The Protocol Relating to Military Obligations in Certain Cases of Double Nationality*, where Australia is recorded as having acceded on July 8, 1935, and underneath this is included the following statement ‘This accession includes also the territories of Papua and Norfolk Island and the mandated territories of New Guinea and Nauru.’³⁵⁷ This shows that the international community had accepted that Australia was in effect the mandatory for Nauru, despite there never having been a formal transfer of the

³⁵⁵ TNA, Imperial Conference 1923, Committee on the Position of the United States of America in Relation to C Mandates, “Draft Convention concerning the territory formerly the German Protectorate of South-West Africa, the island of Nauru and the former German island possessions in the Pacific Ocean south of the Equator other than the island of Nauru and former German island of Samoa,” London, October 25, 1923, pp. 3-4.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., “Conclusions of a Meeting of the above Committee, held at the Colonial Office, S.W., on Tuesday, October 23, 1923, at 4 p.m.,” p. 2.

³⁵⁷ FRUS, 1930, vol. 1, Treaty Series No. 913, “Procès-Verbal Regarding the Deposit of the Ten Ratifications or Accessions Referred to in Article 11 of the Protocol Relating to Military Obligations in Certain Cases of Double Nationality, Signed at the Hague, April 12th, 1930,” see in particular line (6): “Instrument of accession Australia, deposited July 8th, 1935,” which reads ‘This accession includes also the territories of Papua and Norfolk Island and the mandated territories of New Guinea and Nauru.’

mandate from the United Kingdom, a situation to which US acquiescence would have been essentially unimaginable in any other mandate. It is also notable that the administrators in Nauru wielded much more authority than did their counterparts in other ‘C’ mandates. As noted by Lucretia L. Ilsley in the *American Political Science Review* in 1934: ‘Judicial powers of the administrator, in addition to certain appointive powers, are limited to pardon and remission of sentence, except in Nauru, where the administrator has made procedural rules, sat on courts, and heard appeals.’³⁵⁸ She also comments that in Nauru after 1927, the composite European and indigenous advisory council was superseded by appointed members representing the European, Chinese, and Nauruan populations.³⁵⁹ This was at the same time that in Samoa the Americans and the Mau movement were putting pressure onto the New Zealand administration to more effectively integrate the indigenous population into administrative structures by appointing indigenous officials nominated by the indigenous population themselves.³⁶⁰ Again we can see the indifference of outside powers to the expansion of Australian authority in a mandated territory that it was not even authorised to hold. The main ruling authority was, in practice, a monopolistic commission that was operated by, and for, the mandatory state and its associates.

This is further illustrated by the treatment of the indigenous population, where despite the provisions of the mandate that Nauru be governed in the interest of its indigenous inhabitants, a letter from the British Phosphate Commissioners, and approved by Australian Prime Minister William Hughes, from July 1921 notes that:

‘while the native land-owners in Nauru and Ocean Island will probably receive about the same amount of available cash to use as they may choose it is not

³⁵⁸ Lucretia L. Ilsley, “The Administration of Mandates by the British Dominions,” *The American Political Science Review* 28, no. 2 (1934): 287-302, p. 290.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 292.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

proposed to provide for the future of the Nauruans to the same extent as is being done for the natives in Ocean Island.³⁶¹

One might expect from the mandates that the obligation to govern in the interests of their inhabitants would have encouraged better treatment than in colonies held in full sovereignty like Ocean Island. But the three countries involved clearly viewed Nauru merely as a source of phosphates and profits, and the United States, who had used the obligation to govern in the interests of the native population as a point of leverage in Samoa, remained silent on the issue in Nauru. This of course is best understood in light of the United States having nothing to gain from raising protests to these violations, and that in the absence of American protests, the mandates system amounted to little more than a rhetorical change to colonialism.

Conclusion

In a memorandum from the Office of the Economic Adviser to the Department of State dated June 17, 1925, the connection between American insistence on economic equality in the Pacific mandates is explained:

‘I believe that, as a matter of policy, the United States should not acquiesce in the application of British preferences to mandated territory. Such application is not merely inconsistent with the mandate principle, but, if acquiesced in by the United States, would make it harder for this Government at the opportune time to take up the general question of British imperial preference.’³⁶²

This statement shows that the State Department was actively using the principle of the mandate to pursue economic equality not merely for its own sake – the note goes on to say ‘our present interest in the question does not appear to be very great...’ – but as a tool to use in pursuit of better trading conditions with the British Empire as a whole.³⁶³ The United States was thus

³⁶¹ NAA: A3932, SC227, “Nauru Estimates Control of Administration – Pacific Phosphate Company,” letter from The British Phosphate Commissioners, 25th July 1921, p. 4.

³⁶² NARA, Archives 2, RG 59, Department of State Decimal File, 1910-29, From 611.62M 31/22 to 611.633M /2, box 5878, file 1, “Memorandum: British ‘C’ Mandates’ from the Office of the Economic Adviser,” dated June 17, 1925, p. 10.

³⁶³ Ibid.

willing to give up a number of valuable territories and resources, particularly phosphates and copra, although it never fully abandoned its rights. What was at issue was not simply a share in the relatively small markets and resources of the former German colonies. Rather, the real object of American diplomacy was the principles of the mandates system being taken as binding on the whole, because of the broader leverage they provided in international negotiations.

Other concerns were certainly at play, including the strategic situation in the Japanese mandate, the potential for unrest in American Samoa, and the possibility that valuable oil reserves might be discovered in New Guinea. Nevertheless, in the Pacific mandates overall, the United States accepted a weaker form of the mandate system, largely because its direct interests were limited. Still, it insisted that the system exist and be broadly upheld in the region, both to protect American strategic interests and to provide leverage in trade negotiations with Britain, as well as to support the broader expansion of the US role in global economic and political affairs.

In the Pacific the United States helped to ensure that the mandates system would be applied to all of the formerly German insular possessions. It ensured that this system would help to protect American interests in the region by creating barriers to Japanese militarisation, avenues for civilian and commercial entrance by US nationals, and, at least in theory, access for American firms to valuable commodities in the region. The record of American success in the Pacific mandates was, as we have seen, mixed. In the Japanese mandate the United States was successful in preventing militarisation until the system began to break down in the 1930s, and it were also able to acquire special communications rights on the island of Yap. In Samoa there were partial successes in using the system to modify New Zealand behaviour in order to protect US administration of American Samoa and the withholding of formal recognition of the mandate because of tariffs imposed in the territory by New Zealand. In New Guinea the

United States leveraged the system to gain equality of opportunity in the extraction of natural resources, particularly oil, though the lack of commercially viable finds largely mooted this success. In the case of Nauru, US authorities seem to have felt that they did not have any concrete issues to pursue, and therefore made little effort to uphold the mandates system in that territory, resulting in minimal enforcement of the provisions of the mandates system there.

Taken together, this shows that the mandates system in the Pacific was shaped by the United States to serve its own interests, and that it used the system as a vehicle to pursue those interests across the region. In Nauru, where there were no major American interests and therefore no insistence on adherence to the system, it functionally lapsed. Without the continued advocacy and efforts of American officials the mandates system had practically no effect in Nauru, with a massive monopoly being created over the only major resource, and governance designed entirely for the benefit of the administering powers, some of them not authorised to act in this capacity by any relevant body. This shows that without American efforts the mandates system in Pacific amounted to little more than a rhetorical gloss over the continuation of colonialism as it was practiced elsewhere. This forms part of a broader pattern throughout the mandates, that not only was the American delegation pivotal in the design and creation of the mandates system, but that without continued American insistence on adherence to at least the aspects of the system that directly affected US interests, it lapsed into a continuation of prewar colonialism with only minor alterations.

Chapter 3: The African Mandates

Although busier than the Pacific, there was little combat in the German colonies in Africa during the First World War, with the notable exception of East Africa. Here, a force composed mainly of indigenous Africans commanded by Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck managed to evade Allied forces until the end of the war.³⁶⁴ Africa was tangential from a military standpoint, with few major objectives on the continent, and although German forces in East Africa evaded capture, most German territory was in Allied hands by mid-1915.³⁶⁵ Despite its relative insignificance in a military sense, the African theatre attracted a good deal of attention in Europe during and after the war. This was partly because the campaign in East Africa was one of the few German successes during the war, but also because European publics had become accustomed to wars resulting in the transfer of African territories between colonial powers.

In the peace as in the war, Africa was a sideshow, but when it came to the colonial question or the concept of mandates, Africa was front and centre. Not so much because the German colonies in Africa were seen as valuable assets in and of themselves, but because these were large territories placed prominently on the map, and European publics could be convinced that they were getting some kind of restitution for the destruction of the war. The horse-trading of territories in Africa was something that European publics and statesmen were used to, even in the context of internationalised colonies like Morocco. As recently as 1911 France had ceded territory from the Congo (joined afterwards to German Cameroons) to secure German recognition of French rights in Morocco.³⁶⁶ Africa was the ideological centre of mandates,

³⁶⁴ Gearóid Barry, Enrico Dal Lago, and Róisín Healy, eds., *Small Nations and Colonial Peripheries in World War I* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 285-287.

³⁶⁵ Bill Nasson, "More Than Just von Lettow-Vorbeck: Sub-Saharan Africa in the First World War," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 40, no. 2 (2014): 160-83, pp 162-63.

³⁶⁶ Étienne Antonelli, *L'Afrique Et La Paix De Versailles* (Paris: B. Grasset, 1921), 86-87.

because it was in Africa that precedents for internationalised colonies were most prominent, such as agreements over the Congo basin and Morocco, and because those in the Pacific such as the Tripartite Agreement over Samoa and the New Hebrides Condominium, were seen as failures.³⁶⁷ Another factor was that in the European and American mind, it was in Africa that the civilising mission was most urgently required, and where colonial abuses, chiefly Belgian and German, were still fresh in the public consciousness.

Despite its size and potential as war trophies, Germany's empire in Africa had little economic value. The German colonies in Africa had never been profitable, they were always a burden on the German treasury on the whole, even if at times one of them had a positive trade balance. They also failed to produce any strategic materials in meaningful quantities, they produced cotton, cacao, rubber, and some minerals, but never enough to significantly alter the German balance sheet or avoid massive imports of raw materials from foreign territories to feed German industry. If the colonies were insignificant for Germany economically, despite some sentimental value, then they were doubly so for the United States and the other European Empires. Yet the European powers, mainly the British and French, were eager to seize Germany's African territories. This was in part because they were lightly defended, but also because there was the potential that their harbours and radio receivers had the potential to be used by commerce raiders.³⁶⁸

The best way to grasp American interest in the African mandates is by understanding the centrality of Africa to the entire conception of colonialism in the early twentieth century, and, by extension, the mandates. Africa was the intellectual centre of colonial thought, when discussing how to make colonialism better, whether in the sense of reducing its horrendous

³⁶⁷ Elizabeth Van Maanen-Helmer, *The Mandates System in Relation to Africa & the Pacific Islands*. (London: P.S. King, 1929), 24; Beer, *African Questions at the Paris Peace Conference, with Papers on Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Colonial Settlement*, 421-422.

³⁶⁸ Nasson, "More than Just von Lettow-Vorbeck," 164.

impacts on indigenous populations or in trying to improve the economic output of colonies, Africa was the first area that sprang to mind. This is clearly visible in several aspects of the 'B' mandates, which had more stipulations than other classes. Most of these extra requirements were focused on what might today be termed humanitarian considerations, like suppressing the slave trade and prohibiting the distribution of alcoholic drinks to indigenous persons. These restrictions clearly reflected past issues relating to the conduct of European empires on the continent, and showcase a more ideological element of the mandates system than do some of the economic and military restrictions. The United States was interested in part because some of these issues struck a chord with the American people, and the US Government was able to enshrine numerous principles into the African mandates that were significant to the American public.

To assess the importance of the African mandates to the United States, this chapter is organised thematically, beginning with an overview of Africa's place in the conception of the mandates, followed by an outline of the territories considered and the resources present in them. Thereafter it moves to contextualise the mandates within African colonial history, pointing at how the mandates were developments from previous agreements from the Congo and Morocco, as well as how wartime developments and the failures of these precedents helped to shape the mandates system in Africa. This section will also revisit some of the carveouts of the system discussed in chapter 1, including parts of the German Empire in Africa that were physically excluded, as well as stipulations that were reduced or removed in specific cases.

With this background, we will move to trace some instances of American interactions with the African mandates, noting that there was not a systematic relationship between the United States and the African mandates, but that the status of mandate was frequently employed in African territories as leverage to pursue relevant interests, some of which had more to do with mandates in other regions. Finally, we will turn to Liberia, an independent country where

a mandate was proposed in 1919, to look at American relations with one of the only independent African countries, and where we can see how mandatory status would have constrained American officials in pursuing their economic interests had it been imposed. We will also see how Liberia fit into a pattern of American behaviour where independent states under significant American influence helped promote American interests in international forums. Liberia is a negative case, it was not a mandate, however this case shows that the mandates system prevented exactly the kind of monopolisation that proved profitable in Liberia. This highlights that when the US Government insisted on imposing the mandates system in Africa, it was doing so to hamstring the European powers in their ability to profit from these colonies, unless they found a way to share that profit with the United States.

Unlike in the Pacific or the Middle East, American interest in the African mandates was not centred on any single issue. Their nebulous character, and the recurring pattern that they only became relevant to the US Government when useful as bargaining chips in other negotiations, usually relating to the Middle Eastern mandates, makes them difficult to trace in the diplomatic correspondence of the period. Nonetheless, a number of published sources from the Interwar Period address the African mandates. While the US Government remained only marginally engaged, American and European publics, particularly left-leaning commentators, maintained a strong interest in the mandates as a new experiment in colonial administration.

This chapter argues that American interests played a significant role in shaping the mandates system in Africa, and that the mandatory powers were compelled to accept meaningful limitations both on their authority in the mandated territories and on their ability to profit from them. This argument runs against Susan Pedersen's contention that the significance of the mandates system was primarily in the language of colonialism, by pointing to the Open Door and anti-monopolisation policies that complicated European efforts to benefit

economically from their mandates.³⁶⁹ It further highlights that the significance of the African mandates lies not only in the language surrounding colonialism, but to changes in international law as well as connections to broader shifts in the global economy. The African mandates' relationship with the United States has received scant attention and there have been few recent works regarding the mandates system in Africa exclusively. Recent work on the African mandates includes Sean Andrew Wempe's 2019 *Revenants of the German Empire*, in which he assesses the role of Germans in the mandates system as a whole. He looks particularly at the role of German settlers, mostly in Africa, pointing to the importance of Germans and Germany in understanding the language and discourses of the mandates system.³⁷⁰ Wempe writes not only about Africa, but that was where the Germans were most active and emotionally invested in their colonies, and is naturally the focus of much of his work on Germans' relationships with the mandates. His recent writing is some of the best and most relevant work alongside that of Susan Pedersen, particularly when it comes to Africa.

There have also been a few relevant dissertations, including one published in 2002 by Paul J. Hibbeln concerning the supervision of the League of Nations over the British and French mandates in Africa. As with many works in the broader mandates literature, Hibbeln's project is primarily focused on the relationship between the mandatory powers and the League of Nations, rather than on the relationships between the mandated territories and the outside world, and as such largely leaves the United States outside the scope of study.³⁷¹ Another PhD dissertation on the topic of the mandates system in Africa was published in 1995 by Michael D. Callahan, writing on how the mandates system in Africa altered the culture of colonialism in

³⁶⁹ Pedersen, *The Guardians*, 403.

³⁷⁰ Wempe, *Revenants of the German Empire*, 20.

³⁷¹ Paul Joseph Hibbeln, "'A Sacred Trust of Civilization': The B Mandates Under Britain, France, and the League of Nations Permanent Mandates Commission, 1919–1939," (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2002). <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/sacred-trust-civilization-b-mandates-under/docview/305547167/se-2?accountid=13042>.

the Interwar Period.³⁷² Callahan gives good treatment to the role of the United States in creating the mandates system both during and after the Paris Peace Conference, he notes frequently that the British and French in particular had to continue paying attention to American sensitivities in this respect into the early 1920s, however he posits that American influence became ‘passive, remote, and increasingly irrelevant’ after 1921.³⁷³ Like Pedersen and others, Callahan looks primarily at the mandates system through the eyes of the League of Nations and the mandatory powers within it, leaving the relationship between the United States and the mandates in Africa on the periphery of his study. Callahan has continued to work on the subject of the African mandates since his PhD, publishing a second volume on the subject in 2004.³⁷⁴ This study focuses more on the 1930s. While it notes a number of impacts from the mandates on British and French colonialism, including advances in commercial equality and a reduction in militarism, it remains focused on European actors and largely leaves the United States out of the picture.

William Roger Louis wrote extensively about the mandates in Africa, most of his work on the subject was published in the 1960s, he also wrote specifically about the United States’ role in the creation of the African mandates, particularly the role of George Louis Beer, providing invaluable material for this project.³⁷⁵ These works are limited in their scope primarily to Africa and to a lesser extent the Pacific islands, and their analysis of the role of the United States is generally less ambitious in scope than what is presented here. This project is therefore expanding on his pathbreaking work and attempting to show that the United States

³⁷² Callahan, “Mandates and Empire in Africa,” 1-3.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

³⁷⁴ Michael D. Callahan, *A Sacred Trust: The League of Nations and Africa, 1929-1946* (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2004).

³⁷⁵ Wm. Roger Louis, “The South West African Origins of the ‘Sacred Trust’, 1914–1919,” *African Affairs* 66, no. 262 (1967): 20-39; William Roger Louis, “The United States and the African Peace Settlement of 1919: The Pilgrimage of George Louis Beer” (1963); William Roger Louis, *Great Britain and Germany’s Lost Colonies, 1914-1919* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

was the key player in the creation of the mandates system in Africa and elsewhere. One of Louis' arguments that this chapter helps to reinforce is his contention that: 'The attitude of the United States, along with the attitude of the British left, were the decisive factors in determining the formula of Allied peace-making in Africa.'³⁷⁶ Other works from this period include Robert L. Bradford's PhD dissertation on the mandate for Southwest Africa and its relationship with the 'Sacred Trust' articulated in the League of Nations Covenant.³⁷⁷ As with many such focused works there is a much greater depth of analysis on the particular mandate than can be rendered here. He also gives a great deal of consideration to the role of the United States in creating the mandates system and to the concession of Southwest Africa as a C rather than a B mandate, noting in particular the role of G. L. Beer.³⁷⁸ This is another instance in which the groundwork for this project was laid some 60 years ago. While American influence on specific mandates has been noted, the United States' broader influence on the system, both regionally in Africa and globally, has been hitherto left underexplored.

Beyond the mandates themselves, there have been a number of works on the United States' relationship with Liberia during the Interwar period, which help to connect this work to the broader historiography of American relations with Africa as a whole.³⁷⁹ There has also been some writing, mostly journal articles, about the importance of the First World War's African theatre, both from an African perspective as well as a European one, these have some uses in

³⁷⁶ Louis, "The South West African Origins of the 'Sacred Trust'," 29.

³⁷⁷ Robert Laroy Bradford, *The Origin And Concession Of The League Of Nations' Class 'C' Mandate For South West Africa And Fulfilment Of The Sacred Trust, 1919-1939* (PhD diss., Yale University, 1965) Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/origin-concession-league-nations-class-c-mandate/docview/302155003/se-2?accountid=13042>.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁷⁹ David Peter Kilroy, "Extending the American Sphere to West Africa: Dollar Diplomacy in Liberia, 1908–1926" (PhD diss. University of Iowa, 1995), <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/extending-american-sphere-west-africa-dollar/docview/304202157/se-2?accountid=13042>; Leigh A. Gardner, *Sovereignty without Power: Liberia in the Age of Empires, 1822–1980*, *Cambridge Studies in Economic History – Second Series* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023)

understanding how the war changed perceptions in and of Africa that were consequential for the mandates.³⁸⁰

What the Mandates Meant in Africa

Even before the concept of mandates came together in advance of the Paris Peace Conference, discussions on the future of Germany's former colonies had become centred on Africa. This was true for both Americans and Europeans, although in the United States the discussion was mainly academic due to more limited American involvement on the continent. This is not altogether surprising given the previous decades of experimentation in Africa with mechanisms intended to oversee colonialism and reduce abuses against indigenous populations as well as inter-imperial rivalries. Ideas about colonial reform after the war were circulating in a very wide network of government officials, academics, and the general public, with key figures from *The Inquiry* and its equivalents engaging in vigorous debates and discussions through pamphlets and articles during and after the war.³⁸¹ Here we will consider briefly the convergence of views between some American and British thinkers on what was needed in Africa, using as examples Beer's studies for *The Inquiry* and some pamphlets published in Britain. These British pamphlets contain ideas generally associated with the left-wing in British politics, espousing something like a reformist imperialism, which neatly fit with American goals and methodologies as espoused by Beer, and form the intellectual basis for many provisions of the mandates system.

³⁸⁰ Nasson, "More Than Just von Lettow-Vorbeck"; Gearóid Barry, Enrico Dal Lago, and Róisín Healy, eds. *Small Nations and Colonial Peripheries in World War I*; Robert Gerwarth, and Erez Manela, "The Great War as a Global War: Imperial Conflict and the Reconfiguration of World Order, 1911–1923*," *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 4 (September 2014): 786–800.

³⁸¹ See for example: Leonard Woolf, *Mandates and Empire* (London: British Periodicals Limited, 1920); A. J. Toynbee, *The League in the East* (London: British Periodicals Limited, 1920); "Windows of Freedom," *Round Table* (London) 9, no. 33 (1918): 1-47; Norman Maclean Leys, *A Plan for Government by Mandate in Africa* (England: League of Nations Union, 1921).

George Louis Beer advocated for the application of the Open Door principle to all of sub-Saharan Africa in 1918, even before there is evidence of him having heard of the mandates idea.³⁸² He framed this explicitly as the ‘amplification’ of the 1885 Congo agreement, and noted that the logical extension of this line of thinking would be the application of the Open Door to all independent areas, which he noted: ‘may be very awkward for the United States, in view of the existing tariff arrangements in force in Hawaii, Porto Rico, and the Philippines and the preferential agreement with Cuba.’³⁸³ He outlined several key components of the Open Door that were repeated in the architecture of the mandates system, including the implication that the Open Door meant equality of access for traders and settlers. He specifically mentioned the free shipment of colonial products to any destination, under any flag, as well as equal opportunities in concessions for the development of public works and natural resources.³⁸⁴

These articulations of what the Open Door meant were important in framing how the mandates system worked, and in particular how the system operated to undercut some of the existing logics of colonialism. This was also expressed in the same breath as an admission that no such system operated in American territories, like Puerto Rico, or even independent countries under American influence, like Cuba, showing that Beer recognised this as a fundamentally unequal imposition in Africa. Here, American influence would be able to grow at the expense of the European empires, whereas in the areas under American influence, whether independent or not, American interests would be protected from the greater competition engendered by the Open Door. This may also be connected to his advocacy at the Paris Peace Conference for an American mandate in Cameroons, which is otherwise difficult to explain given his negative views of the territory’s economic potential, as it would have

³⁸² LOC, U.S. American Commission to Negotiate Peace, box 12 George Louis Beer, “Central Africa The Economic Aspects of the Problem,” 1918, 30-33.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 32-34.

afforded an opportunity to demonstrate to the Europeans American commitment to the Open Door in a territory under US control.³⁸⁵

Beer's statements on Africa were essentially ideological, much like his counterparts on the British left, he envisioned many of the stipulations that went into the mandates system as mechanisms to reduce the harms of colonialism and make the civilising mission more effective. Africa was the ideal place to consider these ideas because it offered relatively little in the way of economic value, but was very large in area and population, and had been for centuries a location of horrible abuses perpetrated against the indigenous populations. Here, international schemes of supervision and equal access could be suggested without stepping on the toes of the American enterprises that depended on coercive labour practices and protected economic access for their profits. Ideas of colonial reform like Beer's found their way into American ideas for the mandates system chiefly through Africa because here the United States had so few direct interests, and the ideas fit with Wilson's altruistic portrayal of American influence. The conditions imposed could benefit the United States in Africa, but were mainly useful because Africa could be centred in discussions and the same conditions imposed on other colonial territories in the Middle East and the Pacific where they were used to pursue more concrete American interests.

Africa was the emotional and ideological core of discussions around colonialism on the other side of the Atlantic as well. One finds in British left-wing writings of the period far more discussion of colonialism in Africa than Asia, the Pacific, or any other area. Take for example a pamphlet by influential author Leonard Woolf from 1920 entitled 'Mandates and Empire' in which he argued that the mandates system 'is in fact the opposite of imperialism.'³⁸⁶ He confined himself in this pamphlet to discussing the African mandates, noting that A. J. Toynbee

³⁸⁵ LOC, Diary of George Louis Beer, 2-3.

³⁸⁶ Woolf, *Mandates and Empire*, 7.

dealt with Asia in another pamphlet in the series, though neither of them discuss the Pacific mandates at all.³⁸⁷ Woolf, unlike Toynbee, describes the indigenous inhabitants of the area under study as ‘primitive and agricultural,’ and highlights how economic exploitation, largely in the form of land alienation, produced compulsory labour and atrocities.³⁸⁸

The distinction being drawn between African and Middle Eastern societies has a lot to do how Europeans and Americans tended to view these groups, but Woolf’s focus is also revealing about what the mandates system was meant to accomplish. While describing the ultimate goals of the system, which he largely does by going over the stipulations of Article 22, he notes that ‘The Europeans went into Africa for economic purposes’ and that the deprivation of freedom and colonial abuses had essentially stemmed from this fact.³⁸⁹ Although this pamphlet was from after the mandates system had been created, whereas Beer’s suggestions from before 1919 were ultimately included in the system, they were only written about two years apart, and show the convergence of ideas in Britain and the United States over the direction of colonial reform. One important aspect of Woolf’s writing is that he highlights the moralistic dimensions of the economic problem: Africans had been subjugated for economic purposes and by an economic system, and the remedy articulated by the mandates system was, at its core, an economic shift towards a goal of ultimate independence. This, he argues, follows some positive examples of British governance in West Africa, where Britain had promoted the economic wellbeing of the indigenous inhabitants – precisely the same areas that Beer identified as exemplars for how German colonies could be made more profitable.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁷ Toynbee’s treatment of Asian colonialism gives less consideration to the economic aspects of the mandates system than does Woolf’s, being much more focused on the political domination that has characterised western imperialism in Asia and the potential of the mandates system to develop self-government there. See A. J. Toynbee, *The League in the East*.

³⁸⁸ Woolf, *Mandates and Empire*, 8,10.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁹⁰ LOC, U.S. American Commission to Negotiate Peace, box 12 George Louis Beer, “Central Africa The Economic Aspects of the Problem,” 1918, 77.

This points to a convergence of Anglo-American views on what the economic aspects of the mandates system meant in Africa. These were meaningful changes, and they might benefit the non-mandatory powers and other League members, but ultimately it was an ideological shift meant to help protect Africans against colonial abuses and foster capacity for eventual self-government. This stands in stark contrast to what the system meant in the Pacific, where economic aspects were applied selectively and only really at American insistence, and where the major goal was military neutralisation of mandated territories. In the Middle East, as we will see, the economic and political logics of the system were flipped, in Africa the economic aspects of the system were meant to build towards the political goal of self-government, in the Middle East the economic aspects were meant to ingrain Western powers into the key resources of the region in advance of political self-determination in the region. A lot of the reasons for these differences have to do with the territories themselves, the petroleum resources that were so coveted in the Middle Eastern mandates did not rely on local labour, and once the rights to them had been acquired what was needed were pliant governments that would protect those rights. In Africa, economic resources were extraordinarily labour-intensive to extract, being mostly agricultural and mineral products. The mandates system was meant to help institute a system that would facilitate this labour in a manner less horrific for the indigenous inhabitants – or at least for the Western publics that read about them – and that might eventually produce some form of self-government.

As we dive into the specifics of the African mandates it is worth keeping in mind these Anglo-American conceptions of what the mandates were meant to achieve and how. In Africa the goal was ideological: to improve the lot of the African population by reforming colonialism and placing it under League supervision. This was the goal for sections of the public in Europe and North America, however as noted by Norman Leys, a British author who had worked for many years in the East African colonial service: ‘Unavoidably, no doubt, the terms of mandates,

like the terms of the Covenant itself, must betray the almost exclusive preoccupation with economics that is characteristic of the thought of our time.³⁹¹ Leys was essentially correct in his understanding, that for the governments of Europe and the United States, the mandates were an economic question. However, he missed a point of political economy that had to do with people like himself: the mandates were also calculated to balance economic gain with satisfying the desires of an increasingly empire-sceptic public. The views of people like Leys or Leonard Woolf, who saw the mandates as a mechanism to reduce the harms of colonialism, found a welcome reception among American officials. For the Americans it was easier to support this type of reformist imperialism since there was less opposition in the United States from large corporations that had profited from the exploitation of African colonies than there was in Britain, France, or Belgium.

Beer is emblematic of this positive reception, but one can also see how the Open Door aspect of the mandatory idea mirrored practices with which the US Government had become comfortable in the preceding decades. American corporations in the Caribbean, often backed by the US Government, had established systems of economic extraction for mineral and agricultural resources where local populations largely governed themselves in ways that benefitted these corporations, and by extension the United States.³⁹² Besides some interventions into Latin American countries, including during the Wilson administration, where governments had ceased to govern in the interests of American corporations' profits, this system had worked well to mask the exploitation of tropical areas under a veneer of self-determination. This pattern thus made sense for the Americans to pursue in conjunction with European publics that were becoming increasingly suspicious of the human costs of

³⁹¹ Leys, *A Plan for Government by Mandate in Africa*, 4.

³⁹² These systems were diverse and changed over time, but can generally be categorised as evolving through the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, through Dollar Diplomacy, and then into the similar practices of the Wilson administration.

colonialism in Africa. Especially since there was already one example of an American-backed independent republic in Africa where the Latin American pattern was working about as well as it had in the Caribbean.

War and Geography in the African Mandates

The Germans had made some preparations for military action in Africa, there were some German troops in many of the colonies supplemented by thousands of Africans that had been trained to help defend the German Empire.³⁹³ Despite its size and the defensive preparations, German Africa largely fell into Allied hands within a few months – East Africa was the exception – almost entirely at the hands of British, French, Belgian, and South African troops. Africa as a theatre of European warfare was not a new phenomenon, and there had been threats of military confrontation in Africa as recently as 1911, during the Second Moroccan Crisis. However, in Central and Western Africa, including most of German Africa, there were several agreements before the war that were meant both to reduce the underlying causes of conflict through free trade, and to ensure the area's neutrality in the event of a war. The most important was the General Act of the Berlin Conference of 1885, which was in many respects a direct predecessor of the mandates system, particularly in its emphasis on reducing economic rivalries in Africa by preventing monopolies and establishing the rights of free trade and civilian access. However it had proven ineffective, according to Beer because of a lack of enforcement and interpretative mechanisms, in that free trade had been essentially nullified in both the French and Belgian sections of the Congo Basin, leading to well-documented atrocities.³⁹⁴ The idea that the provisions of the Congo agreement – which also covered the Niger River basin in West Africa – would reduce imperial rivalries and prevent warfare in the

³⁹³ Beer, *African Questions at the Paris Peace Conference, with Papers on Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Colonial Settlement*, ed. Louis Herbert Gray, 269-270.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 78-80.

colonies by declaring these areas to be neutral was a clear failure right at the beginning of the First World War, leading to the emergence of an African theatre.

Togoland was the first German colony to be conquered. Despite being only a small strip of land running north from the Gulf of Guinea, it had some economic value because of German investments in cotton production, undertaken to try to reduce dependence on American imports.³⁹⁵ Cameroons took longer to capture, with the last German forces, comprising about 975 Germans and 14,000 Africans, being pushed into the Spanish colony of Rio Muni in early February 1915.³⁹⁶ This was a much larger and more geographically diverse colony than Togoland, the core of which corresponds with modern Cameroon. Though it also included territory in modern Nigeria and a territory known as Neukamerun that had been transferred from French Congo as part of negotiations over Morocco in 1911. The value of Cameroons was largely in its cocoa plantations, however these produced less than one tenth of German consumption before the war, and the colony produced less than the nearby British Gold Coast despite being much larger.³⁹⁷ There were other exports from Cameroons and Togoland, generally more from Cameroons owing to its larger size and population, including palm products (kernels, oil, copra), sisal fibre, and rubber to name a few.³⁹⁸

The other two German colonies were much more valuable economically, German East Africa, which corresponds mainly with modern Tanzania, being widely seen as the most lucrative. Beer, expressing a widely held opinion, said in 1918: ‘Of all the German colonies, East Africa is recognised to be the most valuable, not only on account of its large area and the

³⁹⁵ Murphy, *Colonial Captivity During the First World War*, 38, 43; LOC U.S. American Commission to Negotiate Peace, box 13, Sidney B. Fay, “Conditions of the German Colonies in Africa in 1914,” 1918, 3.

³⁹⁶ F. J. Moberly, *Military Operations, Togoland and the Cameroons, 1914-1916, Compiled, by Arrangement with the Colonial Office, under the Direction of the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defense*. (England: H. M. Stationery Office, 1931), p. 420.

³⁹⁷ LOC, U.S. American Commission to Negotiate Peace, box 12 George Louis Beer, “Central Africa The Economic Aspects of the Problem,” 77.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

general fertility of the soil, but mainly because of its very considerable native population, variously estimated at from 7.5 to 10 millions.³⁹⁹ Another feature of this colony remarked on by Beer was the presence of two ‘virtually autonomous’ states in the northwestern part of the territory known as Ruanda and Urundi.⁴⁰⁰ In considering the population of German East Africa notice had been taken of their effective military service. The reaction to this was decidedly mixed, as most Europeans and Americans did not like the idea of large African armies, which some saw as a threat to civilisation, but it was seen as evidence that these Africans ‘might be trained to productive agriculture.’⁴⁰¹

East Africa had strategic and economic importance too, it had varied climates and could grow a wide range of useful products, it lay between the British colonies of Rhodesia and Kenya, making it useful for transport, and was envisioned by some as an outlet for Indian ‘overpopulation.’⁴⁰² Exports were mainly speculative, and did not include any particularly strategic or unique products. Still, there were some hopes that coffee could be grown in meaningful quantities, though the Germans had attempted this with poor results around the turn of the century.⁴⁰³ More important for the Germans were textile products, mainly cotton and sisal. Some had even hoped that sufficient cotton could be grown in East Africa to reduce dependence on imports from the United States, which before the war had amounted to approximately three fourths of Germany’s total cotton consumption.⁴⁰⁴ The location of the colony was strategic for Britain because it connected Cape to Cairo, and lay along sea lanes

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ LOC, U.S. American Commission to Negotiate Peace, box 14, “The Native Problems in South and Central Africa and The Military Training of Natives as they Affect War Problems and the Peace Settlement,” p. 9; LOC, U.S. American Commission to Negotiate Peace, box 13, Sidney B. Fay, “Conditions of the German Colonies in Africa in 1914,” 5.

⁴⁰² LOC, U.S. American Commission to Negotiate Peace, box 41, George Louis Beer, “The Future of Mesopotamia,” 7; League of Nations Union, *Mandates in Africa, Book 5 of a Series of Text Books Specially Prepared for Study Circles* (England: League of Nations Union, 1922), 19.

⁴⁰³ LOC, U.S. American Commission to Negotiate Peace, box 13, Sidney B. Fay, “Conditions of the German Colonies in Africa in 1914,” 6.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 7.

from South Africa to India and Suez, but British security did not depend on exclusive control; any friendly power holding the territory could have served the same purpose.

Of the German colonies only Southwest Africa had more exports than imports before the war, mainly diamonds, which were the most significant export from all the German colonies in Africa combined, and seem to have originated entirely from Southwest Africa.⁴⁰⁵ In addition to diamonds, which were first located in 1908, there were some copper mines in the northern part of the territory.⁴⁰⁶ Besides mineral wealth, there was a substantial cattle industry, as well as some farming, however the arid climate meant the possible expansion of these industries was quite limited.⁴⁰⁷ The climate also meant the population of the territory was small relative to its size, though this also had to do with genocides perpetrated by the Germans against indigenous groups in the years preceding the First World War. These had not only resulted in the death of a large portion of the indigenous population, but also the confiscation of their lands and cattle, only for them to be handed over to German settlers, giving the colony the dubious distinction among German colonies of having a substantial white population.

Unlike other territories, where the Germans were rounded up and expelled, in Southwest Africa they were seen as one of the most valuable assets in the territory. This can be explained by the impacts of German policies that had massively reduced the indigenous population, leaving the territory sparsely populated even with the Germans.⁴⁰⁸ This went on to cause questions about the mandates system as a whole when South Africa moved to grant the Germans citizenship, however this was of little concern to the US. Southwest Africa can be understood something like Nauru in the Pacific, it was valuable for the power that held it, but

⁴⁰⁵ LOC, U.S. American Commission to Negotiate Peace, box 12, George Louis Beer, "The German Colonies in Africa," 1918 (Carbon), p. 25.

⁴⁰⁶ LOC, U.S. American Commission to Negotiate Peace, box 13, Sidney B. Fay, "Conditions of the German Colonies in Africa in 1914," p. 2.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ Mads Bomholt Nielsen, "Delegitimizing Empire: German and British Representations of Colonial Violence, 1918-19," *International History Review* 42, no. 4 (August 6, 2019): 833–50, p. 843.

was not particularly strategic and did not directly interest the United States. It was, therefore, a useful bargaining chip with the annexationist Dominions, in this case by making it a ‘C’ mandate instead of a ‘B’ mandate, and quietly ignoring South African violations of the economic stipulations of the mandate. A policy very similar to Nauru, where the US Government had ignored violations to gain Dominion support for the system in areas that were of greater concern for the United States.

Africa in Paris

Germany’s empire in Africa was tempting to the Allies chiefly because it was large and widely dispersed. The United States was at best tangentially interested, although Beer saw more potential in Africa than most, and even advocated for an American mandate over Cameroons.⁴⁰⁹ His assessments of German Africa are quite informative as to what the US Government saw there, since he was the American to ask in Paris about colonial affairs, particularly African ones. His general view of their economic value was distinctly negative, saying in a 1918 report for *The Inquiry*: ‘The illusion created by Africa’s vast bulk has established a false idea of the volume of Central Africa’s foreign trade. In point of fact, this commerce was relatively, if not absolutely, insignificant...’⁴¹⁰ His view of Africa’s future prospects was not much brighter, particularly when considering the German colonies. He noted some valuable mineral resources and was optimistic about the potential for palm oil and vegetable fats, but saw the German plantation systems for coffee, cacao, and rubber as failures compared to British practices.⁴¹¹

Beer was not the only one commenting on Africa for *The Inquiry*, but he was the most influential, and his influence went beyond assessments of the African economy to matters of

⁴⁰⁹ LOC, Diary of George Louis Beer, 2-3.

⁴¹⁰ LOC, U.S. American Commission to Negotiate Peace, box 12 George Louis Beer, “Central Africa The Economic Aspects of the Problem,” 46.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 93, 50-51, 73.

governance in Africa and throughout the mandates. Beer's enthusiasm for the mandates system, and for American participation in administering a mandate, connect with his view of Africa's development having been hampered by the restrictive economic systems applied there. Sidney B. Fay, a historian who later won the George Louis Beer Prize, gave an important report to The Inquiry in January 1918 based on German sources.⁴¹² He showed less optimism about the German colonies in Africa than Beer, noting their failure to meet expectations of contributing raw materials, mainly food, to Germany.⁴¹³ His general pessimism about economic prospects in these colonies, however, did belie some American interests, he noted that: 'Germany feels strongly that at present she has "to pay tribute to the United States" for more than three-fourths of the immense amount of cotton which the German mills use each year.'⁴¹⁴ Maintaining the American share of German cotton imports gave some impetus to the Open Door, since it removed any protectionist barriers that might advantage production in the mandates over the open market. Fay's larger assessments of economic potential in German Africa were quite negative, and he surmised that 'in the production of raw materials German East Africa is of far greater importance than the three western colonies.'⁴¹⁵ This assessment, alongside his negative view about the potential of Southwest Africa help to explain why the United States was willing to acquiesce to a 'C' class mandate there.

Fay also offered peace planners a grim view of German militarism in Africa, explaining that before the war Germany had been steadily gaining influence in Portugal's colonies, and conjecturing in relation to the 1911 Moroccan crisis that: 'in making the ostensible demands on Morocco it is not impossible that the true aim of Germany was to force from France large

⁴¹² LOC, U.S. American Commission to Negotiate Peace, box 13, Sidney B. Fay, "Conditions of the German Colonies in Africa in 1914."

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

concessions from the French Congo thus extending the Kamerun to the south and east.’⁴¹⁶ He further pointed to ‘the aggressive intentions on the part of the Germans in Africa’ by highlighting Germany’s large expenditures on military campaigns there, and refusal to guarantee the neutrality of French and Belgian colonies in negotiations preceding the war.⁴¹⁷ This likely contributed to the inclusion of the non-militarisation clauses in the ‘B’ mandates and reinforced the desire to bar Germany from regaining any colonies, despite their limited economic value. Fay’s view in his 1918 report seems to have been that the only German colony with much economic value was East Africa, and that Germany was intent on expanding in Africa as a means of increasing its ability to produce goods to substitute imports and increase military and economic autonomy. When understood in conjunction with Beer’s slightly more positive assessment, American negotiators approached Africa with the main goal of trying to prevent a resurgence in militarism. But they also intended to structure African colonies to maintain American market share in Europe, by preventing European countries from substituting American products for African ones, the mechanisms for achieving these goals are readily appreciable in the terms of the ‘B’ mandates.

In discussions about the African mandates during the Paris Peace Conference, American priorities were largely aligned with their European counterparts. Nobody wanted to see more warfare among Europeans in Africa, the idea of missionary access for all states was uncontroversial, as were measures to suppress the slave trade, the arms trade, and to prevent liquor sales to indigenous populations. The Americans had few direct economic interests, and as shown above, their experts had little hope for economic prospects in the German colonies. However, they were still insistent on the Open Door, at least outside Southwest Africa. The European powers were willing to acquiesce, perhaps in the belief that the Open Door

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 11-12.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 12.

commitment in the mandates would prove as ineffectual as the commitment to free trade in the Congo basin had been a few decades earlier. The seeming agreement on the purpose of the mandates in Africa, central as they were to the image the Peace Conference wanted to project of an impartial settlement of colonial claims, particularly since this was the first major issue addressed by the conference, masks serious disagreements over what a mandatory regime meant in the African context.

Africa had a number of unique problems related to the mandates, first was militarisation: none of the powers wanted warfare on the continent, many of them – particularly South Africa – were very concerned about the raising of large armies composed of Africans, but France was keen on using its newly expanded holdings in Africa to provide a source of soldiers for any future conflicts in Europe.⁴¹⁸ In negotiations, the anti-militarisation camp essentially won out, construction of fortifications in mandates was forbidden as was recruiting of indigenous persons for military service outside of the territory.⁴¹⁹ The final phrasing of all of this was agreed to on January 30, 1919, as part of the initial mandates discussions, and was suggested by Canadian Prime Minister Robert Borden:

‘They further consider that other peoples, especially those of Central Africa, are at such a stage that the mandatory must be responsible for the administration of the territory subject to conditions which will guarantee the prohibition of abuses such as the slave trade, the arms traffic and the liquor traffic, and the prevention of the establishment of fortifications or military and naval bases and of the military training of the natives for other than police purposes and the defence of territory, and will also secure equal opportunities for the trade and commerce of other members of the League of Nations.’⁴²⁰

This made the non-militarisation clauses very clear, but France was not satisfied, with both Pichon and Clemenceau insisting that ‘France could not renounce the right of raising

⁴¹⁸ Beer, *African Questions at the Paris Peace Conference, with Papers on Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Colonial Settlement*, ed. Louis Herbert Gray, 274-276.

⁴¹⁹ FRUS, *The Paris Peace Conference*, vol. 3, doc. 55, “Secretary’s Notes of a Conversation Held in M. Pichon’s Room at the Quai d’Orsay, Paris, on Thursday, January 30, 1919, at 15 Hours 30, Paris, January 30, 1919, 3:30 p.m.”

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*

volunteers in the countries under her administration, whatever they might be.⁴²¹ The discussion then went down a path of negation in detail, with Lloyd George opining that France would still be allowed to raise troops for the defence of the territory as provided for in Borden's formula, so long as they were not 'drilling the natives and raising great armies.'⁴²² To which Clemenceau replied that this was not his intention, but he wanted it to be ensured that in the case of a general war, implied to be once again against Germany, that France would have the right to recruit troops in mandates. As recorded by the secretary at this meeting: 'Mr. Lloyd George said that so long as M. Clemenceau did not train big nigger armies for the purposes of aggression, that was all the clause was intended to guard against.'⁴²³ Wilson and the others present agreed, and promptly moved on to discussing the Middle Eastern mandates. This episode is revealing, and as the legal instruments establishing the mandates progressed a French exemption from the non-recruitment provision of the system was codified by a line in the text of the French mandate for Cameroons, and confirmed in a treaty with the United States, that was absent from the British mandate for Cameroons: 'It is understood, however, that the troops thus raised may, in the event of general war, be utilised to repel an attack or for defence of the territory outside that subject to the mandate.'⁴²⁴ This was in effect a buy out for the French over the mandates system, they would agree to accept the system as a whole, including in the Middle East, in return for the unique right to raise troops in mandated territory in Africa for use in a general war.

The second issue was territorial, many of the European empires saw the end of the war as an opportune moment to regain territory from Germany, or to gain new territory as

⁴²¹ Ibid.

⁴²² Ibid.

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ "Convention Between the United States of America and France Relating to the Part of the Cameroons Under French Mandate" *The American Journal of International Law* 18, no. 4 (1924): 189–93, p. 190; League of Nations Council, *British Mandates for the Cameroons, Togoland and East Africa*, 3.

reparations for the war. The most prominent issue was the French claim over the territory transferred to Germany in 1911 as Neukamerun, which France regained without a mandate. Another area that was transferred in full sovereignty was the small Kionga Triangle, transferred from German East Africa to Portuguese Mozambique. As readers will recall from the first chapter, in both cases the framers of the peace were careful to portray the transfers as retrocessions rather than the granting of new territories to preserve the precedent being establishing by the mandates of non-annexation. In the case of Neukamerun this was returned to France by the abrogation of the treaties signed in 1909 and 1911 to resolve the Moroccan crises.⁴²⁵ For the Kionga Triangle there was less formality, with Lord Milner saying in a letter that was later accepted by the Paris Peace Conference: ‘that no question of mandate was raised in this case, as Portugal is the original and legitimate proprietor of the territory in question, and that the present acknowledgment of her claim may justly be considered as an act of restitution.’⁴²⁶ The larger abrogation of Franco-German agreements makes sense even without Neukamerun, though it did help France reduce the area under mandate. However, the necessity of clarifying at such a high level that Kionga was being returned, not given, to Portugal and that therefore no consideration of a mandate was needed, is telling. The Kionga Triangle was a tiny territory with no significant economic value. Britain showed no objection to it being severed from East Africa, and none of the other powers expressed any interest. However, the fact that the Conference went to the trouble of clarifying that it was a retrocession demonstrates that non-annexation had become the new precedent for colonial territory, and that violations of the mandate principle had to be explicitly justified. This points us back to the importance of Africa in the minds of an increasingly empire-sceptic public as exemplified by Leonard Woolf

⁴²⁵ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 4, doc. 7, “Secretary’s Notes of a Conversation Held in M. Pichon’s Room at the Quai d’Orsay, Paris, on Tuesday, 25th February 1919 at 3 p.m., Paris, February 25, 1919, 3 p.m.”

⁴²⁶ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 8, Appendix D to HD-60, “Extract From a Letter of Lord Milner to M. Dutasta” London, August 14, 1919.

and his ilk. European and American publics had come to expect a Wilsonian peace and an end to imperial horse-trading in addition to new and renewed provisions to lessen the impact of colonialism on colonised populations and reduce its propensity to fuel inter-imperial rivalries.

These areas were not the only territorial disputes, the allocation of territories to be placed under mandate loomed. Beer's enthusiasm for an American mandate over Cameroons foundered on the shoals of French territorial ambitions and an Anglo-French partition of territories in West Africa from 1916. This partition was originally a provisional military agreement to split Togoland and Cameroons, but by March 1919 the Peace Conference was quite overburdened with colonial issues, and, as Michael D. Callahan has shown, the French took advantage of Milner's general disinterest in West Africa to make this division permanent.⁴²⁷ However the idea of getting the Americans to take on a mandate was attractive to the Europeans, with Lloyd George suggesting in August 1918 that Britain might be able to preserve gains in the Pacific and Middle East in return for handing over African territory to the United States.⁴²⁸ Borden apparently thought that East Africa might prove attractive to the Americans as a place to 'ship all their negroes,' apparently forgetting the entire history of Liberia.⁴²⁹

An American mandate for Southwest Africa was never really in the cards. South African insistence on taking over the territory after the war was quite pronounced, and the need to get Smuts on board with the mandates plan to counterbalance the vehemently annexationist Australian and New Zealand representatives meant that it was not worth discussing. These were the same factors that allowed South Africa to claim Southwest Africa as a 'C' mandate, the only exception to the geographic grouping of mandates into classes. Wilson had been

⁴²⁷ Callahan, "Mandates and Empire in Africa," 70.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

sympathetic to Smuts' desire to annex Southwest Africa, but recognised that if he assented to South African annexation, it would be very difficult to prevent the other Dominions, and most importantly Japan, from pressing annexationist claims. William Roger Louis has commented extensively on this episode, contending that the mandates system as a whole can be partly explained by the negotiations between Wilson and Smuts that took place in late January 1919. It was then that Smuts was able to create a compromise between the annexationist Pacific Dominions and President Wilson by suggesting the 'C' class mandate, a category into which Southwest Africa easily fell.⁴³⁰

East Africa, considered the most valuable of the territories in Africa, kept coming back up because, as House relayed to Wilson following a conversation with Lloyd George in October 1918:

'Great Britain desired the United States to become trustee for German East African colonies. ... Southwest Africa and the Asiatic islands belonging to Germany must go to the South Africa Federation and to Australia respectively; that unless this was done Great Britain would be confronted by a revolution in those dominions.'⁴³¹

However House was not convinced about East Africa, saying in the same note to Wilson: 'My feeling as to his suggestion regarding German East Africa is that the British would like us to accept something so they might more freely take what they desire.'⁴³² This points to one of the abiding concerns for the Americans with mandates in Paris, they needed to avoid touching the pitch of colonialism in order to maintain a morally superior negotiating position. The American delegation was not eager to accept a mandate for any territory, though Wilson had some hopes for a US mandate in the Middle East. But he knew that it would be difficult to persuade Congress, and the Paris Peace Conference was reluctant to further delay African questions for

⁴³⁰ Louis, "The South West African Origins of the 'Sacred Trust'," 32-36.

⁴³¹ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol.1, doc. 347, "The Special Representative (House) to President Wilson, Paris, October 30, 1918."

⁴³² Ibid.

a speculative US mandate for East Africa, leaving the proposal dead in the water. This may have been for the best, as Belgian officials—who were not represented at the high-level discussions where most mandate decisions were made—were especially eager to claim a portion of German East Africa.

Belgium had, to put it bluntly, as reprehensible a colonial record as could be imagined. One of the main justifications for taking Germany's colonies was that they had behaved poorly in administering them, even by the standards of imperialism in Africa, making Belgian claims to a share of German territory awkward. But in May 1919, the Belgian Government raised the issue of Germany ceding its colonial territories to the 'Five Allied and Associated Powers' because they did not want to be excluded. This was not merely a technical legal issue; it was recorded in this discussion that:

'Belgium maintained that she had, at the request of the Allied Governments, taken a very active part in the military operations in Africa, and she now occupied and administered valuable territories in East Africa. Consequently, were anything done to give the Belgian people the impression that in the allocation of mandates their claims would be excluded, would be interpreted by them as an unfriendly act, and would place the Government in an awkward position.'⁴³³

To address these concerns, Robert Lansing suggested substituting 'Principal' for 'Five,' changing the phrase to 'Principal Allied and Associated Powers.' This formulation was agreed upon and later formalised. A letter was then addressed to the Belgian Government assuring them that: *'Il est bien entendu que cette décision ne préjuge en rien l'attribution des mandats pour les territoires des colonies allemandes.'* The revised phrasing carried legal weight, appearing in the final version of the treaty and providing the basis for future American

⁴³³ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 4, doc. 41, FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 4, doc. 41, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of Foreign Ministers Held in M. Pichon's Room at the Quai d'Orsay, Paris, on Saturday, May 3, 1919, at 4 p.m." There were no Belgian representatives present at the meeting, making it difficult to ascertain who exactly in the Belgian government was making the claim.

arguments about its rights in mandated territories.⁴³⁴ But the Belgians had raised the issue of their compensation in Africa, and there were no territorial reversions to buy them off as had been done with Portugal. In June, along with the rest of the African mandates, Belgium was awarded its own small territory known as Ruanda-Urundi to be held under 'B' mandate.⁴³⁵ This was a smaller territory than initially claimed, but it seemed to placate the Belgians, and was the only example of a mandate being given to one of the small nations as Wilson had originally envisioned.⁴³⁶ Beer, for his part, was quite unhappy saying that 'This agreement cannot be defended except on grounds of merest expediency.'⁴³⁷

So, the lay of the land after the Paris Peace Conference in Africa was about what one might have expected. France received the lion's share of West African territories with small carveouts left to Britain and a special exemption for military recruitment. South Africa took Southwest Africa under generous terms as a 'C' mandate, and Belgium received a small but significant mandate carved out of East Africa. The British delegation, for its troubles, got a 'B' mandate that was by all accounts the most valuable of the territories, and that would complete a British-administered line of territories stretching from the Cape to Cairo. That these discussions continued to be held at the highest levels, and that American officials and experts continued to be involved despite a lack of material American interests points to the importance of the African settlement as part of the mandates system's broader relevance to American policy. The 'B' mandates moralised empire under international supervision and allowed the publics of the United States and Britain to feel that imperialism was being reformed. The

⁴³⁴ See FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 5, doc. 39, "Notes of a Meeting Held at the Quai d'Orsay, Paris, Friday, May 2, 1919, at 4 p.m." and FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 4, doc. 41, "Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of Foreign Ministers Held in M. Pichon's Room at the Quai d'Orsay, Paris, on Saturday, May 3, 1919, at 4 p.m."

⁴³⁵ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 9, Appendix C to HD-116, "Convention Relating to the Mandate for the Part of German East Africa Assigned to Belgium."

⁴³⁶ LOC, Diary of George Louis Beer, 81.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, 136.

Americans gave up nothing, the Open Door was enshrined into the African mandates, ensuring that if anything of value appeared in these territories, Americans would have equal access, and it would not threaten the United States' economic hold on other tropical territories. The Americans got access to Africa for missionaries, international oversight, and anti-militarisation and anti-trafficking laws that fit with American conceptions about how colonialism ought to be done. And, perhaps most importantly, the theoretical commitment to eventual independence for the mandates meant that as time went on the United States could look forward to the likely emergence of weak but independent states in Africa, just like in Latin America.

American Interests in Africa

As we have already seen, American officials saw little promise in the African mandates, and what little economic potential they saw in these territories was protected by the Open Door. The importance of the Africa was in its centrality to the larger issue of mandates, to get access to Iraqi oil and to prevent Japanese submarine bases in Micronesia, one had to go through Togoland. This sounds perverse, but it reflects what was happening to colonialism at the end of the First World War. The United States had managed to insinuate itself into the world of colonial reform through both participation in the war and through Woodrow Wilson's statements about what the peace should bring. While the major US interest in the African mandates was in creating a larger system to serve American interests elsewhere, there were some concrete incentives for what the US hoped to achieve through the institution of mandates in Africa.

Just like in the Pacific, almost immediately after declining to join the League of Nations the US Government embarked on a treaty-making campaign with each of the mandatory powers to secure its interests in mandated territories. These treaties covered quite a few humdrum aspects of territorial administration, things like the application of extradition treaties,

but the most important were that the US Government insisted that it retained all the same rights as League members. Most significantly, Open Door economic access, missionary rights, and the requirement to submit a copy of each territory's annual report to the US Government. However, unlike the Pacific, the United States had few concrete interests in Africa, but rather a general desire to ensure that any benefits accruing to mandatories or League members would end up being shared by the United States. Also important were what might today be termed humanitarian goals, mainly missionary and educational activities, the suppression of slavery, and the prohibition of alcohol were also included in these treaties. That the United States went to the trouble of pursuing treaties for each mandate, including the tiny landlocked Belgian mandate, shows that the US government imagined that these could prove to be useful negotiating tools with foreign governments. It also provided legal recourse in case something of value was discovered in these territories, despite the pessimistic assessments of US experts.

Because the United States was largely unconcerned with African mandates, it is in diplomatic exchanges relating to other mandates that one can find the most interesting revelations of American interests in the African mandates. References to the Open Door surfaced in American discussions of the African mandates, though they were typically framed as extensions of broader concerns focused on the Middle East. One revealing episode in American interactions with the African mandates comes from British correspondence from the early 1920s concerning Tanganyika, where a treaty between Britain and the United States was formulated in order to give American assent to the mandate for East Africa. These negotiations tended to lump together 'the tropical African mandates' as the terms of these agreements were functionally identical.⁴³⁸ Interestingly these treaties were 'drawn up after the model of American-Japanese treaty...' that confirmed the Japanese mandate in the Pacific.⁴³⁹ The

⁴³⁸ TNA, CO691/59, "Tanganyika Territory, 1922," p. 188.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, 193.

transfer of language between mandate treaties of course makes sense, particularly in respect of conditions like the furnishing of reports to the League and the US Government which were common to all mandates. However the insistence of the US Government on the inclusion of protections such as the right of American missionaries and philanthropic officials to teach in English, which they said were derived from proposed articles for the treaties concerning Syria and Palestine, into the treaties for both the British and French mandates in Africa is revealing of the American tendency to group the mandates together.⁴⁴⁰ This tendency is highlighted very clearly by a statement from the State Department to the British Chargé d'Affairs on July 8 1922, regarding the treaty with Britain concerning the African mandates which articulated that 'It is especially desired that the model of the Treaty with Japan should be followed as closely as possible.'⁴⁴¹

The negotiations between Britain and the United States over African mandates also attracted some attention from European governments, for instance a note from the Italian embassy in London dated June 29, 1922 contained the following consideration:

'if, as the result of direct negotiations between the British Government and that of the United States, ... the better terms are assured to the latter than are acquired by all other states who are members of the League of Nations from the draft mandates approved by the League of Nations from the draft mandates approved by the League itself, similar terms should be extended to Italy and to all ... members of the League of Nations.'⁴⁴²

The British replied to the effect that the negotiations were merely assuring the United States the same rights possessed by League members without any extras.⁴⁴³ But Italian concerns are revealing of just how powerful the American negotiating position was, that it was feared that

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., 223-224.

⁴⁴¹ The document offers no indication of its authorship, being cited merely as a memorandum handed to the British Chargé d'Affairs in Washington by the State Department. Ibid., 193.

⁴⁴² Ibid., 184.

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 185.

the United States might be able to secure better terms in mandates than did all other members of the League combined.

In Africa, at least, the United States did not pursue any benefits for itself or its citizens that did not accrue to members of the League. Though the US Government did insist on the transfer of language from its treaty with Japan be extended to African mandates, including provisions on religious freedom and missionary access.⁴⁴⁴ While this was not a major departure from the spirit of the previous version of the article, the US Government's propensity to obstruct the mandates over such matters is notable. That the mandatory powers were willing to revise their language to reflect American concerns reveals the extent of US influence over the definition of mandatory status. The African mandates here are somewhere in the middle, they are not prioritised like the Middle Eastern mandates, but once American officials decided that there was a right worth pursuing in one mandate, they would insist that it be protected in others. This could sometimes lead to essentially superfluous protections, as in the case of British East Africa where the US 'anticipated that His Majesty's Government will have no objection to the inclusion of a similar provision protecting the right of Americans to teach in English.'⁴⁴⁵ Of course this was unlikely to be an issue in a territory administered by Great Britain, but the United States wanted to flatten the mandates system administratively and to ensure that its citizens had, as much as possible, the same rights in all mandated territories. The African mandates were central to this, being a location in which strategic and economic concerns were more muted than in the Pacific or Middle East, and where the US could approach the mandates as a system rather than as a diverse array of territories, by insisting on rights in African mandates the US could more effectively demand them in the Middle East, and could use the gains it had made in the Pacific to help justify them further.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 190.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 224.

The African mandates were therefore extremely important to the United States Government since they could be used to justify positions taken elsewhere as being general positions vis-à-vis mandated territories. Negotiations pertaining to the African mandates held by Great Britain were undertaken almost entirely with respect to East Africa, and applied to the mandates for Togoland and Cameroons *mutatis mutandis*.⁴⁴⁶ The importance of the African mandates to the United States can be understood most effectively by looking at how they came up with respect to Middle Eastern mandates, notably in terms of the extension of preferential trade arrangements to mandated territories.

Probably the best example concerns orange exports from the Palestine mandate, a subject to which we will return in greater detail in the next chapter. For now, it is more important to focus on how the African 'B' mandates emerged in correspondence between Britain and the United States. The substance of the citrus issue will be addressed in the next section, where it can be properly situated within its Middle Eastern context.

The issue began in the summer of 1932, with a British enquiry to the US Government over its view of the UK extending Imperial Preference, a form of preferential tariff treatment accorded to territories within the British Empire, to imports from Palestine. To understand the relevance, we must begin by parsing the first communication from the British Ambassador to the Secretary of State dated 15 July, 1932:

'His Majesty's Government desire to enquire whether the United States Government feel any objection to this proposal, though they do not consider that the United States Government would be entitled under the most-favoured nation provisions of the Convention of Commerce ... signed on July 3rd, 1815 to claim that Imperial preference should also be extended to goods the produce or manufacture of the United States. At the same time it is of course not proposed that the Government of Palestine should grant a preference to British produce imported into Palestine. I am to add that as regards the degree of preference to be accorded to Palestine it is proposed to grant the preference which is accorded to goods consigned from and grown, produced or

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 197.

manufactured in certain other mandated territories administered by ... the United Kingdom.’⁴⁴⁷

There is a lot to unpack here, and this is not the entire text of the note. Most Favoured Nation status is meant to be reciprocal, and the British Government here is making clear that it considers Imperial Preference to be a separate matter – this was a larger issue at the time, but the US Government overall accepted it. The British Government is here stating that they intend to apply imperial preference to imports from Palestine, which they claim to have already accorded to other British mandates, but that ‘of course’ the Government of Palestine will not reciprocate. The reason it is obvious that they will not reciprocate is because this would violate the terms of the mandate, which would have been so obvious to all concerned that it did not merit direct mention. That alone is interesting, but even more so for our purposes is the American reply from the Acting Secretary of State: ‘My preliminary reply was a bare acknowledgment of the note with the request to be informed of the preferences apparently already granted to other mandated territories.’⁴⁴⁸ The State Department was apparently unaware that Imperial Preference was being extended to mandated territories in Africa – the reply to this note a few days later specified that Imperial Preference had been granted to all British ‘B’ mandates in Africa – until it came up in relation to a Middle Eastern ‘A’ mandate.⁴⁴⁹ This alone is quite revealing about the B mandates in the American conception, they were peripheral and largely went under the radar except when they came up in relation to mandates that the State Department was actively paying attention to. It is also telling about Britain’s view

⁴⁴⁷ FRUS, 1932, vol. 2, “Representations to the British Government Against Proposal to Grant a Preference to Palestinian Produce Imported Into the United Kingdom,” doc. 641.67n3/2, “The British Ambassador (Lindsay) to the Secretary of State, Washington, 15 July, 1932,” “The Acting Secretary of State to the Chargé in Great Britain (Atherton), Washington, July 30, 1932 – 2 p.m.”

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., doc. 641.67n3/4, “The Chargé in Great Britain (Atherton) to the Secretary of State, London, August 3, 1932 – 4 p.m., Received August 3 – 12:05 p.m.,” doc. 641.67n3/5, “The British Chargé (Osborne) to the Secretary of State, Washington, August 6, 1932,” doc. 641.67n3/11, “The Secretary of State to the British Chargé (Osborne), Washington, August 27, 1932.”

of American interests in the mandates: British officials seem not to have said anything to the Americans when imperial preference was extended to African mandates, but felt they had to write the State Department when the same was done in Palestine.

This whole exchange illuminates the place of the mandates in US-UK relations in the early 1930s. There was a clear attempt here to undermine some key economic provisions of the mandates, and this was being done through legal mechanisms: Britain considered the Open Door in mandates under its control to apply only for imports and not exports, but for imports into Britain ‘These territories enjoy the same treatment as British colonies...’⁴⁵⁰ As the exchange went on, Assistant Secretary of State, James Grafton Rogers, wrote a message to the British Chargé that contains the following phrasing: ‘...the Government of the United States has been unable to perceive any ground upon which Tanganyika, the Cameroons under British mandate, and Togoland under British mandate should, in matters of trade preference, be treated as if they were possessions of the mandatory power.’⁴⁵¹ This was the same as their Palestine policy, and the whole issue had arisen only because of its proximity to Palestinian issues. The American officials involved seem to have cared only about Imperial Preference in these African territories to the extent that a precedent could be set for the Middle Eastern territories central to American mandate policies, where trade concerns were much larger. The construction of the reply is important too, Rogers said that the United States viewed Palestine as a ‘foreign country’ within the meaning of the terms of the trade treaty between Britain and the United States, and said that the American position in relation to these African territories was ‘the same as is its position with regard to Palestine.’⁴⁵² The legal questions this raises are multitudinous, for these

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., doc. 641.67n3/5, “The British Chargé (Osborne) to the Secretary of State, Washington, August 6, 1932.”

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Ibid.

to be countries foreign to both Britain and the United States they would have had to have an independent legal existence, but they lacked self-government.

There is much more that could be said about this event, the Americans reached out to other governments to survey their opinions, with the exception of France, most agreed with the American position.⁴⁵³ What is perhaps most interesting about this is that while other countries which exported oranges to Britain, mainly Spain and Brazil, objected to the extension of Imperial Preference to Palestine, only the United States objected to its extension to African mandates as well.⁴⁵⁴ This shows that while plenty of states were happy to use mandatory status to further their own interests in negotiations with mandatory powers, only the United States extended these issues to mandates as a system. The principled nature of this objection is obvious given the paucity of references to actual American interests in the African territories in question, demonstrating that the US Government was insistent that the Open Door should apply equally across the ‘A’ and ‘B’ mandates – except of course in Iraq, which will be discussed in the next chapter – and not ignored simply because there were no direct American interests at stake.

The issue of oranges offers a useful lens through which to understand the US relationship with the African mandates. We will return to the Palestine mandate, Imperial Preference, and citrus exports in the next chapter. For the African mandates, these concerns were clearly of less immediate relevance to the State Department than British orange imports

⁴⁵³ Ibid., doc. 641.67n3/9, “The Chargé in Great Britain (Atherton) to the Secretary of State, London, August 31, 1932 – 2 p.m., Received August 31 – 10:35 a.m.,” doc. 641.67n3/10, “The Chargé in Great Britain (Atherton) to the Secretary of State, London, August 31, 1932, Received, September 9,” doc. 641.67n3/11, “The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in France (Edge), Washington, September 10, 1932,” doc. 641.67n3/14, “The Chargé in France (Mariner) to the Secretary of State, Paris, September 23, 1932, Received October 5,” doc. 641.67n3/16, “The Ambassador in Brazil (Morgan) to the Secretary of State, Rio de Janeiro, September 30, 1932, Received October 8,” doc. 641.67n3/17, “The Chargé in Italy (Kirk) to the Secretary of State, Rome, October 22, 1932, Received November 9,” doc. 641.67n3/18, “The Ambassador in Spain (Laughlin) to the Secretary of State, Madrid, October 28, 1932, Received November 11.”

⁴⁵⁴ TNA, CAB 24/233/31, “Imperial Preference for Palestine,” pp. 1-2.

from Palestine. Yet when the African mandates did arise in diplomatic correspondence, American officials were firm in asserting their principles. They emphasised the significance of territorial status—these were not colonies, but foreign countries, at least in matters of trade. This marked a fundamental shift in the trajectory of colonialism: one not only initiated by American intervention, but sustained by intermittent US engagement, which helped to keep the mandates beyond the bounds of the British trade empire.

Unlike the Pacific and Middle Eastern mandates that commanded meaningful attention from the State Department in their own right, the African mandates only came up sporadically, this makes them exceptionally difficult to trace in diplomatic sources. Despite only occasional attention, the mandatory powers were keenly aware that their policies in African mandates had to either fly under the American radar or not conflict with American priorities. The key to understanding this relationship is to recall what the African mandates offered the United States, and what they meant. The African mandates set a precedent for a new version of colonialism. They served as the moral centre of the mandates system, where the United States did not have to sacrifice material interests, like oil or strategic islands, to uphold Wilsonian principles, and where there was leverage for other, more important, mandates.

Liberia

When planners spoke of African questions before and during the Paris Peace Conference, they generally meant the German colonies on the continent. Sometimes this was wrapped up in considerations of how previous agreements about the continent, most frequently those concerning Morocco or the Congo basin, might be reformulated. Less frequently discussed were the two independent African states that had sent representatives to Paris: Ethiopia and Liberia. These representatives were not invited to participate in discussions surrounding the fate of African colonies as this very quickly became the preserve of the most

powerful states. This says something about the pronouncements that these colonies were ‘not yet ready to stand by themselves’ while nearby states were, technically, fully equal members of the Conference. Ethiopia attracted little attention at the conference, but Liberia came up repeatedly in discussions about mandates.

Liberia and the United States have an entangled history, one that helped keep Liberia independent against European pressures. This did not mean, however, that Liberia was kept free of foreign influence. The state was deeply reliant on the United States for all manner of advice and assistance, as exemplified by their request in December of 1918 that the State Department recommend an American who was ‘familiar with Liberia’s internal questions’ to serve on the Liberian commission to the Paris Peace Conference.⁴⁵⁵ Another indication of Liberia’s dependence on the US was that this commission was proposed to be financed by a loan from the US.⁴⁵⁶ The proposed commission was then ‘to be closely associated and to act in complete harmony with the delegates of the United States...’.⁴⁵⁷ This shows just how much power the United States had over Liberian foreign policy going into the Paris Peace Conference, and despite being an independent African state, Liberia was no more able to act independently than any of the colonies.

As argued by David Kilroy and Leigh Gardner, Liberia had been, like a number of Caribbean countries, a subject of American Dollar Diplomacy.⁴⁵⁸ Even within Liberia, the influence of colonialism was deeply felt, with Christine Whyte noting that ‘Liberian society mirrored many of the structures of the colonial state in Africa.’⁴⁵⁹ Partly this adoption of a

⁴⁵⁵ FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 1, doc. 274, “The Acting Secretary of State to the Commission to Negotiate Peace, Washington, January 2, 1919 – 2 p.m., Received January 3 – 2:30 a.m.”

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ NARA, RG 256, roll 198, doc 183.9, Liberia, “Telegram received January 7, 1919.”

⁴⁵⁸ Kilroy, “Extending the American Sphere to West Africa: Dollar Diplomacy in Liberia, 1908–1926,” 5; Gardner, *Sovereignty without Power*, 198.

⁴⁵⁹ Christine Whyte, “A State of Underdevelopment: Sovereignty, Nation-Building and Labor in Liberia 1898–1961,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 92 (2017): 24–46, p. 24.

European-style colonial ethos – which included an emphasis on development that mirrored ideas about the civilising mission found in European empires and in the architecture of the mandates – was a mechanism by the Liberian governing elite to protect itself from European incursions.⁴⁶⁰ This quasi-colonial status, where Liberia's economy, and by extension much of its politics, were under the control of the United States while the state remained nominally independent, did not escape the understanding of outside powers. European governments often approached the United States first when it came to issues arising between themselves and Liberia, as they viewed the US as the real powerbroker in the country, even though they formally recognised it as an independent state. This continued at the Paris Peace Conference, where Britain and France – both with colonies bordering Liberia – hoped to convince the United States to do more to prevent cross-border incursions.⁴⁶¹

The Americans, mainly Beer and Lansing, worked to keep Liberia out of discussions in Paris while the British tried to persuade them to take on a mandate for the territory. This would have been awkward for several reasons, and, as Lansing said, it would only be possible by a treaty with Liberia, presumably since the United States had recognised Liberian independence since 1862.⁴⁶² Beer recorded in his diary from February 1919 an interesting observation about the meaning of a Liberian mandate, he said that if the US (and the Peace Conference) imposed an American mandate over Liberia: 'we would be open to charge of bad faith towards 50,000 Liberians who to us are Liberia. To British real Liberia are 2,000,000 unruled and unpacified natives.'⁴⁶³ The distinction he was drawing was almost certainly between Liberians of African American descent and indigenous Africans. The United States had been supporting a republic run by a small elite around the capital that, like many colonies, struggled to exert control over

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., 24-25.

⁴⁶¹ LOC, Diary of George Louis Beer, 25, 27.

⁴⁶² Ibid., 24.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

the hinterland. The British wanted the United States to take responsibility for all of Liberia, sometimes suggesting taking on a mandate, because disorder in the uncontrolled hinterland was impacting neighbouring colonies, but this would have been a burden for the US with little financial incentive.⁴⁶⁴

The American view of Liberia is nicely summed up in a study prepared for the American delegation to the Paris Peace Conference by W. W. Willoughby and C. G. Fenwick in 1918 entitled *States Less than Sovereign*.⁴⁶⁵ The title is revealing enough, but these academics described Liberia's international status as an 'Independent state under the informal protection of the United States.'⁴⁶⁶ They also noted that the US had, since 1911, appointed a Receiver General in charge of Liberia's finances, and that this was the result of a US-issued loan secured by Liberia's customs revenues.⁴⁶⁷ Some other revenues from rubber and the head tax were further designated as loan security, and, perhaps more tellingly, in describing Liberia's internal situation these American experts state that: 'The police administration of the country is assisted by a frontier police force organised by military officers designated by the United States ... whose primary duties are to protect the security of the revenue.'⁴⁶⁸ This was a model subordinate state under American-style neocolonialism. Liberia was financially controlled by the United States through loans that allowed direct American financial oversight, as well as military forces that acted through the authority of local government but were 'designated' by the US to protect revenue for loan repayment.

This tells us why the Americans wanted to avoid a mandate for Liberia, the idea was to keep Liberia as it was and not subject it to any additional oversight or restrictions as a mandate.

⁴⁶⁴ FRUS, 1919, vol. 2, doc. 430, "The Commission to Negotiate Peace to the Acting Secretary of State, Paris, April 30, 1919, 6 p.m., Received May 1, 3.33 a.m."

⁴⁶⁵ LOC, U.S. American Commission to Negotiate Peace, box 6, W. W. Willoughby and C. G. Fenwick, "States Less Than Sovereign," 1918.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

The United States pushed for the mandates system elsewhere in Africa to introduce restrictions on governance, in Liberia they avoided the system precisely because of its restrictiveness. The US had already taken effective control of the Liberian Government by financial means, and there was little left to gain. A mandate would have meant international reporting and oversight, as well as the Open Door, which would have made it harder to ensure that any profits to be gained in Liberia flowed to the United States. This was, after all, the point of the Open Door provisions in the African mandates: to level the playing field for non-mandatories. But in Liberia the United States would have lost its advantage, in the former German colonies it gained access that might otherwise have been restricted.

What Liberia represents is both the goal of the mandates system and its antithesis. Liberia is an example of American-style neocolonialism around the time of the First World War: it was an independent state, economically controlled by the United States through a kind of joint venture between the private sector and the Department of State. It was also protectionist; no other powers were able to benefit from Liberian resources as the US was - the door was distinctly closed in Liberia. It was an example of the kind of independence envisioned by the mandates system, not one of true equality with powerful states, but a kind of subservient independence where the state stood on its own so long as it governed in the best interests of outside powers. As we will see in the next chapter, this was precisely the type of independence that Iraq achieved through the mandates system. It is emblematic of US influence that the Open Door was not applied in Liberia, the State Department knew that the Open Door stood in the way of making a colony profitable for the power governing it, and this incentivised independence once an economy had been built up. By having the Open Door present in the African mandates, it was ensured that if one became lucrative the US would have a chance to get in on the action. It also provided that when eventual independence came, the US would be

in a position to ensure that African mandates did not become European-influenced equivalents of Liberia.

This came into greater focus after the First World War, when Liberia, facing significant internal troubles and already struggling to service the loan from the US, entered the view of Harvey Firestone's rubber and tire corporation. After Britain implemented the Stevenson Restriction Act in 1922, which placed production quotas on British rubber plantations, American access to global rubber markets suddenly became restricted, more than doubling prices, leading American corporations like Firestone to begin looking for sources outside of British control.⁴⁶⁹ This is a testament to the power of protectionism, and something that the Open Door would have prevented had it been applied to all colonies rather than just those under mandate, as rubber was not easily produced in Europe or the United States. There were extensive discussions about rubber production in the Philippines, including by Firestone executives, however this presented a jurisdictional issue.⁴⁷⁰ Although the Philippines had been under American control since 1898, measures intended to slowly transition governmental authority, and eventually sovereignty, to the people of the territory had been implemented under public pressure in the US. In 1916 Woodrow Wilson signed into law the Philippine Autonomy Act, which not only marked a formal promise by the US Government to grant the Philippines eventual independence, but also established an elected legislature with considerable authority composed entirely of Filipinos. This was what stood in the way of Firestone's plans for Philippine plantations, the legislature had passed a law limiting foreigners' land holdings to 2,500 acres, nowhere near enough to supply a rubber empire.⁴⁷¹ The Firestone rubber company promptly started looking elsewhere, but it is telling that the same forces which pushed the

⁴⁶⁹ Gregg Mitman, *Empire of Rubber: Firestone's Scramble for Land and Power in Liberia* (New York: The New Press, 2021), 22-24; Whyte, "A State of Underdevelopment: Sovereignty, Nation-Building and Labor in Liberia 1898-1961."

⁴⁷⁰ Mitman, *Empire of Rubber*, 27-28.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

United States to slowly facilitate Philippine independence kept an American company, with support from parts of the US Government, from establishing a plantation on US soil. The Philippines was often cited as a model for the mandates, and it was the same impulses, at the same times, and in the same institutions, that created their parallel frameworks of gradual emancipation into the society of nations.⁴⁷²

Liberia, unlike the Philippines or the mandates, was already a fully sovereign state, albeit one with significant outside interference. Liberia was already in the American sphere of influence and had a loan that the US Government wanted to see repaid, this helped to garner State Department support for Firestone's plans to establish a rubber industry there. The State Department shared detailed reports with Firestone about Liberia's geography around 1923, giving the company everything it needed to assess suitability for large-scale rubber production.⁴⁷³ The reasons for government, especially State Department, support for the Firestone scheme in Liberia are complex, and are beyond the scope of this study, but they intersected with racial politics in the United States as well as the strategic supply of rubber and ensuring the United States maintained a toehold in Africa.⁴⁷⁴ In 1928 the Assistant Secretary of State explained State Department interest in Liberia: 'the successful development of Liberia is an object of distinct interest to us both on account of the Department's traditional friendly interest in the welfare of Liberia and on account of its desire to assist American business and to obtain new sources of rubber supply.'⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷² See for instance a 1923 debate over nationality in mandated territories, where the Philippines was explicitly cited as a model. In "Sixth Meeting (Public), held at Geneva on Friday, April 20th, 1923, at 10.30 a.m." *League of Nations Official Journal* vol. 4, no. 6 (June 1923): 567-572, p. 569.

⁴⁷³ Mitman, *Empire of Rubber*, 29.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 58-60; Kilroy, "Extending the American Sphere to West Africa: Dollar Diplomacy in Liberia, 1908-1926," 417-418.

⁴⁷⁵ FRUS, 1928, vol. 3, "Liberia: Appointment of John Loomis as Financial Adviser to the Republic of Liberia Succeeding Sidney de la Rue", doc. 882.6176 F51/250a, 'The Assistant Secretary of State (Castle) to the Minister in Liberia (Francis), Washington, December 12, 1927.'

While a revealing episode on the nature of American neocolonialism there is not space here to delve into the Firestone company's plantations in Liberia. It will have to suffice to say that over during the 1920s the company developed one of the largest sets of plantations anywhere in the world to grow rubber destined for the US.⁴⁷⁶ Labour conditions in this industry, like many African plantation industries, were appalling, and there was even a League of Nations inquiry into slavery in Liberia, although this was more about the shipment of young men for labour in Spanish Guinea than local rubber plantations.⁴⁷⁷ What is important in the development of rubber plantations in Liberia for our purposes is what it reveals about the meaning of independence for African territories in the context of the mandates system. As in chapter one, the United States helped insert the concept that independence was the goal of colonialism into the structure of the mandates system. The meaning of this independence can be readily observed in Liberia. Here, the US leveraged the weak Liberian Government through debt diplomacy to accept a large degree of American control, without much responsibility, and to facilitate the creation of a massive resource-extraction industry that served American interests.

As other historians have noted, this represented an extension of American practices from the Caribbean into Africa, helping to contextualise my argument that the United States used its strengthened diplomatic position to expand its influence on the continent through the mandates system.⁴⁷⁸ Liberia is emblematic of what independence meant for mandates, the United States and the Firestone corporation would not have been able to create such a plantations system in a mandated territory or European colony. Even setting aside objections

⁴⁷⁶ Mitman, *Empire of Rubber*, 154, 167.

⁴⁷⁷ "Request by the Government of the Republic of Liberia Regarding the Appointment by the Council of a Member of an International Enquiry Commission on Slavery and Forced Labour in Liberia," *League of Nations Official Journal* vol. 10, no. 10 (December 1929): 1870-71, p. 1871; Whyte, "A State of Underdevelopment: Sovereignty, Nation-Building and Labor in Liberia 1898-1961," 36.

⁴⁷⁸ Kilroy, "Extending the American Sphere to West Africa: Dollar Diplomacy in Liberia, 1908-1926," 8, 43; Gardner, *Sovereignty without Power*, 198.

to the labour system used on these plantations, the United States would have faced a far stronger negotiating partner had it attempted to establish similar operations in a territory governed by a European power. It might also have been forced to make concessions on unrelated trade matters important to that partner—perhaps even on oranges from Palestine. That Liberia remained outside the mandates framework thus suited American interests: the United States could maintain a profitable presence without the constraints that came with mandatory status. This points to an understanding that the mandates system imposed real limitations on the mandatory powers and that any territory placed under mandate risked becoming entangled in broader international debates.

Conclusion

The United States had few direct interests in the African mandates, though it were keen to ensure that any opportunities that might arise in them would be open to Americans. The African mandates were important to the United States mainly because of their centrality in the broader system of mandates and the changes that it brought to international law and colonialism. The central aim of these changes was to reduce inter-imperial rivalries by internationalising the benefits of colonialism through the Open Door. They were also aimed at ensuring the ‘civilising’ mechanisms of colonialism, mainly missionary and humanitarian work, as well as public works and economic development, were open to participation from all states and overseen by the League of Nations. These stipulations together pointed towards the promise of the mandates to prepare these territories for eventual independence—once they were deemed to have met Euro-American benchmarks of civilisation—a trajectory that mirrors American policy towards the Philippines in the years before the war. The meaning of this independence, as exemplified by Liberia, shows how independent African states could be influenced using debt-based diplomacy to allow massive resource monopolies controlled by

foreign interests, a pattern that also prevailed in parts of Latin America under American influence.

The provisions of the mandates system notionally protected mandated territories from this kind of monopolisation. As we will see with the case of Iraq in the next chapter, the real aim of these protections was to prevent mandatories from setting up monopolies that excluded the United States – this was the true meaning of the Open Door in the African mandates. This, alongside some of the provisions of the mandates, significantly undermined the logic of European colonialism in Africa. It made mandates more expensive to administer, as well as subjecting them to additional scrutiny, and took away almost all the benefits of holding the territories. This was, in effect, a long run strategy to ensure that if these African territories ever became valuable the Americans would have a chance at becoming involved.

This is not to overstate America's strategic considerations; the mandates were a compromise made in Paris between a particular segment of the American policymaking establishment and their European counterparts. After the Peace Conference, the US Government largely lost interest in the African mandates except when they came up in relation to other matters of concern, particularly the Middle Eastern mandates. Some segments of the American public continued to care, with those interested in missionary work, as well as some African American groups who wanted to help African development.⁴⁷⁹ But these garnered little organised support from the State Department, mainly because the opportunities for which the door was left open failed to materialise, and without significant financial interests, the African mandates largely slipped under the radar. To put it briefly, the United States helped to establish the mandates system in Africa to reduce inter-European rivalries and to keep the door open in

⁴⁷⁹ Mitman, *Empire of Rubber*, 62; Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010). This book explores the connection between African Americans and American foreign policy in Africa, particularly in Togo, much more deeply than has been attempted here.

case significant economic value was found in these territories. It also acted as a form of leverage for use in other colonial territories placed under the mandates system and beyond.

The centrality of Africa in the conception of the mandates system was useful in framing the changes to colonialism brought about by the mandates system as a whole. It provided context for de-militarisation and anti-monopolisation provisions in the Pacific and gave larger legitimacy to the Open Door provisions that, as we will see in the next chapter, were so crucial to American interests in the Middle East. This all helped to establish new precedents in international law that pushed American influence and American ideas about colonialism further into the world, thereby helping to set in motion intellectual currents that framed colonialism as a temporary measure that would lead to at least nominal independence for colonised territories.

Chapter 4: The Middle Eastern Mandates

The first use of the term mandate in the meaning it would later acquire came from a report by G. L. Beer in 1918 about the future of Mesopotamia, in a section entitled ‘Provision to Safeguard the Open Door.’⁴⁸⁰ American interest in the postwar colonial settlement was shaped in no small measure by Iraqi oil, which also served as a major impetus for the creation of the mandates system as it came to exist. Yet, this conceptual centrality of Iraqi oil to the mandates took a long time to bear fruit, because while the peace was being debated from 1918-1920, the war in the Middle East continued, and became much more complex. This forced peace planners to sit on the sidelines with their ambitious plans for oversight and the Open Door awaiting a final settlement. Meanwhile, Germany’s Pacific and African colonies had been attached to the system, and the idea of mandates had grown into a more global solution to the various regional problems posed by the collapse of the German and Ottoman empires. This meant that while the Middle East was central to American conceptions of, and policies towards, the mandates from the first mention of the term, the Middle Eastern mandates and their all-important oil resources were the last ones to be resolved. It is for this reason that we are looking at the Middle Eastern mandates last, since the agreements between the United States and their European counterparts regarding the Middle East took place in the shadow of the system as it had already begun to operate in Africa and the Pacific.

Although they were last mandates to be approved, the Middle East was at the centre of American visions of the mandates system. It was here that the United States really had interests to pursue, the provision of oil was a major strategic priority for the US, as it was for the European powers, but there were also important trade, cultural, and spiritual interests at stake.

⁴⁸⁰ LOC, U.S. American Commission to Negotiate Peace, box 41, George Louis Beer, “The Future of Mesopotamia,” 12.

This chapter shows the centrality of the Middle Eastern mandates to the American approach to the system as a whole, focused on ensuring access to specific resources, because of US domestic demand and a desire to insulate American producers against competition from mandated territories. In the Middle East, US officials faced stiff resistance from the mandatory powers, whose interests were often at odds with American priorities. As demonstrated in the following pages, the mandates proved a crucial tool in facilitating access to Syria, Iraq, and Palestine. This chapter reveals how the United States designed and used the mandates system to facilitate access to key resources including oil, archaeological sites, and citrus fruits. Of course, there were other areas of interest in the Middle Eastern mandates, but it is with these three examples that we are able to most clearly see the value of the mandate for American officials. The most important provision of the mandates in the Middle East was the Open Door, through which the US Government was able to ensure that, just like in Africa, American importers and investors would have access to new markets and opportunities. The Open Door in the Middle East had a number of different meanings, but came to encompass a set of ideas around equality of access for American citizens, officials, and corporations to the resources of the region. In the formal language of the mandate agreements and the treaties between the United States and the mandatory powers, this often took on the form of ‘commercial equality.’ Meaning the ability of Americans to participate in resource extraction and trade on equal terms with nationals and corporations of the mandatory state, and the prohibition of monopolies that might exclude such participation.

For the United States the difficulties presented by the Middle Eastern mandates were compounded by a massive policy gulf caused by the end of the Wilson administration. Including the death or retirement of the most important American policymakers on mandate questions, including Beer, House, Lansing, and Wilson himself. This meant that a new generation of American statesmen, particularly the three Republican administrations that held

the White House after Wilson from 1921 to 1933, inherited a partially functioning mandates system already in operation in Africa and the Pacific. But the interests at stake in these territories were different, and the Middle Eastern mandates that had been central to the conception of the system remained in limbo.

This chapter looks mainly at what this new generation of policymakers did with the tool of the mandates that they had inherited from the Wilson administration. It looks at the interactions between American officials from the State Department and their counterparts in Britain and France as they navigated disagreements in the Middle Eastern mandates. The central feature of these negotiations was the Open Door that had been so insisted upon by American officials in Paris, which was leveraged again and again to pursue the United States' diverse interests in the region. Most of these uses accorded with the priorities of a previous generation of American statesmen, gaining access to oil in Iraq, an equal share of permits to conduct archaeological digs throughout the region, and in a somewhat surprising turn, fighting a trade battle against British attempts to extend Imperial Preference to citrus exports from Palestine.

These are only a sample of the American interests in the Middle Eastern mandates, but they are representative enough to show that this region was the economic centre of American interest in the mandates system. Further, these examples show that the United States facilitated access to resources in the Middle East using Open-Door provisions, much as they did in Africa, while simultaneously arguing that such provisions prevented the extension of Imperial Preference to mandated territories. American policy towards the Middle Eastern mandates fit into a larger pattern of US engagement with the mandates system whereby State Department officials from the Secretary of State down to the consular level selectively worked to enforce provisions of the system, wielding it as a tool to gain access to the most important resources

available in mandated territories without being forced to shoulder any of the burdens of colonial administration.

For the historian of mandates, the Middle East is a blessing and a curse. The interests of outside powers in the region, including the United States, are so visible and so valuable that it is very easy to become lost in all the arguments and engagements that occupied government officials, businessmen, missionaries, academics, archaeologists, lawyers, and indeed contemporary historians. Unlike the African mandates, which barely registered in the minds of American officials besides their value as leverage in larger negotiations with mandatory powers, the Middle East was of central importance to economic and strategic planning in the Interwar Period. As one might expect, the Middle Eastern mandates have attracted a great deal of scholarly attention over the past century, far more than has been devoted to their Pacific or African counterparts. The purpose of this chapter is not to reappraise the extensive body of scholarship on the history of the Middle Eastern mandates, but rather to reevaluate the American contribution within the broader context of the United States' approach to the mandates as a territorial category. Given the size and diversity of the extant literature, this chapter engages with key scholars within each subsection rather than treating the historiography as a unified whole.

The Middle Eastern mandates were the economic core of American interest in the mandates system. But the Paris Peace Conference had tied US economic interests in the Middle East to ideological and strategic goals in Africa and the Pacific, and necessitated cooperation with British and French officials in defining the contours of what mandatory status meant. The United States operated in the multipolar mandatory field primarily through bilateral engagements, interacting selectively with mandatory powers where American interests were at stake, but eschewing the main multilateral forum of the League of Nations. As illustrated in the previous chapter, mandated territories were linked by their shared status. The interpretation of

what that status entailed in one territory had implications for others, especially regarding trade arrangements and legal minutiae such as import tariffs and Most Favoured Nation status.

This chapter does not seek to give detailed explanations of how Mesopotamian oil was parcelled out among the powers, or how the US Government interacted with the Zionist movement and sectarian difficulties in the Palestine mandate. The main focus is on issues where mandatory status was the pivotal factor in American relations with the Middle East. In short, where the Open-Door provisions of the mandates system allowed US officials to pursue lines of policy that otherwise would have been difficult or impossible.

The material is organised thematically, beginning with an examination of the development of American Middle East policy during the First World War and into the Paris Peace Conference, with a focus on how idealistic goals slowly shifted towards more pragmatic, economically-oriented policy. It then discusses oil in the Middle East, with a focus on Iraq because major oil resources were discovered during the period of the British mandate. This discussion highlights the centrality of oil to the entire history of American policy towards the mandates system. Showcasing how economic provisions were created and then selectively ignored in order to ensure that American companies received an adequate share of oil concessions in the region. From here we move into an assessment of the State Department's approach to archaeology in the Middle East, showcasing how the US Government leveraged mandatory status to promote excavation by Americans, particularly in the mandate for Syria and Lebanon, as it was here that these priorities conflicted the least with religious sentiments as in Palestine and with petroleum interests as in Iraq. Finally, a section on Palestine that considers a little-studied trade disagreement over Britain's extension of imperial preference to citrus imports from the Mandate Palestine, which was briefly mentioned in the previous chapter.

It is worth quickly noting that this chapter is almost exclusively concerned with the territories in which League-sanctioned mandates were enacted. It excludes areas of special interest that were established under the Treaty of Sèvres and abolished by the Treaty of Lausanne, or prospective territories that did not become mandates in the Turkish Straits, Armenia, or Kurdistan.⁴⁸¹

War and Peace in the Middle East

Unlike the Pacific and Africa, where years of military government during the war were followed by relatively quick turns to civilian mandatory administration after the Paris Peace Conference, Middle Eastern questions had been left open after 1919. This was due to renewed hostilities in the former Ottoman Empire, American refusal to ratify the Treaty of Sèvres, and lingering disagreements between Britain, France, and Turkey over the exact partitioning of Middle Eastern territories. During the Peace Conference, representatives of Britain, France, the United States, Italy, and Japan had agreed that the non-Turkish portions of the former Ottoman Empire would be subjected to the mandates system, and that they would be ‘A’ mandates. A status that envisioned a relatively swift movement towards independence, although the sincerity of these commitments can be called into question.⁴⁸² The Treaty of Sèvres had been signed in August 1920, committing the Ottoman Government to the agreements made in Paris, including the League Covenant and mandates system and its concomitant cession of most non-Turkish territories.⁴⁸³ However the signing of this treaty provoked an immediate hostile

⁴⁸¹ While these arrangements are relevant to this study on multiple levels, particularly in terms of the intellectual history of the internationalising currents of thought around colonialism in the Middle East, they had largely ceased to be relevant after the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne was signed and are thus left beyond the scope of this study.

⁴⁸² FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, vol. 3, doc. 54, “Secretary’s Notes of a Conversation Held at Mr. Pichon’s Room at the Quai d’Orsay, Paris, on Thursday January 30, 1919, at 11 a.m., Paris, January 30, 1919, 11 a.m.”

⁴⁸³ Aaron M. Margalith, *The International Mandates*, Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, Extra Volumes New Series, no. 8, (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins Press; H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1930), 149-150; BFSP vol. 113, “Treaty of Peace between the British Empire and

reaction among Turkish nationalists, leading to the formation of a new republican government in Turkey and a renewal of hostilities.⁴⁸⁴ The Middle East largely escaped renewed fighting directly, having been under Allied military occupation for almost two years by that point. But the resurgence of Turkish military strength under new leadership threatened the Allies' ability to enforce the terms of the Treaty of Sèvres.

The San Remo Conference, held in late April 1920 (though the convention is dated to December of the same year) marked the formal allocation of the Middle Eastern mandates, awarding Syria and Lebanon to France, and Palestine and Iraq to Britain.⁴⁸⁵ This conference was convened in the shadow of renewed fighting in the Near East with representatives from Britain, France, Italy, and Japan, to resolve the issues leftover from Paris. The United States did not formally attend the San Remo Conference, but the US Ambassador to Italy, Robert Johnson, was present as an observer, indicating a continued American interest in the Middle East despite the lack of a clear policy.⁴⁸⁶ The most important issues at stake in this conference were the allocation of territories in former Ottoman Empire, the terms of the 'A' mandates to be enacted in those territories, and the rights of foreign powers in the region. The agreements reached at San Remo also marked the formal end of French religious protectorate in the region and a recognition 'in substance,' though not in letter, of the terms of the Balfour Declaration by France.⁴⁸⁷ These terms seem to have been agreeable to the US Government, as American

Allied Powers (France, Italy, Japan, Armenia, Belgium, Czecho-Slovakia, Greece, the Hedjaz, Poland, Portugal, Romania and the Serb-Croat-Slovene State) and Turkey – Sèvres, August 10, 1920," pp. 656-660.

⁴⁸⁴ *Treaty with Turkey: Statements, Resolutions and Reports in Favor of Ratification of the Treaty of Lausanne* (New York: General Committee of American Institutions and Associations in Favor of Ratification of the Treaty with Turkey, 1926), p. 9; Edward Mandell House, *What Really Happened at Paris: The Story of the Peace Conference, 1918–1919*, ed. Charles Seymour (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1921), 195–96.

⁴⁸⁵ LOC, Papers of Huntington Gilchrist, box 26, file 11, "Franco-British Convention of December 23, 1920, on Certain Points Connected with the Mandates for Syria and the Lebanon, Palestine and Mesopotamia"; D. K. Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East 1914-1958*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 61-63.

⁴⁸⁶ FRUS, 1920, vol. 1, doc. 5, "The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Italy (Johnson), Washington, April 20, 1920 – 4 p.m."

⁴⁸⁷ DBFP, ser. 1, vol. 8, doc. 15, "British Secretary's Notes of the Supreme Council, held at Villa Devachan, San Remo, on Saturday, April 24, 1920, at 4 p.m.," 168, 170.

interests were protected by the terms of the mandates system that was reconfirmed by Britain and France at San Remo regardless of the disposition of territories.

In a separate agreement signed at San Remo, Britain and France resolved many of their disagreements over oil supplies, including those in the Middle Eastern mandates. Among the most salient points of this agreement were that France, or a nominee of the French Government, would receive a 25 per cent share of the company controlling Mesopotamian oil supplies, and ‘that the said oil company shall be under permanent British control.’⁴⁸⁸ France also committed under this agreement to the construction of two pipelines and railways for the transport of Mesopotamian and Persian oil to ports on the Eastern Mediterranean ‘through French spheres of influence’ without charging royalties or other extra costs on oil transported or facilities for its transport.⁴⁸⁹ What is most interesting about the San Remo oil agreement was that it conveniently ignored the interests of both United States and the inhabitants of Mesopotamia. Though it did include provisions for the inclusion of ‘the native Government or other native interests’ but only up to a maximum of 20 per cent share of the company controlling the country’s oil resources.⁴⁹⁰ We will return to the issues caused by the San Remo agreements shortly. The most salient point here is that although the US Government refused to participate in the San Remo Conference, the State Department sent an observer who could watch over the negotiations of foreign powers and report their positions back to Washington. This reflects a shift away from Wilsonian engagement in multilateral forums towards a policy of bilateral negotiations over discreet interests after the fact, where American officials could make use of the observations on their counterparts’ positions made at San Remo. As we will see in the rest of the chapter, State Department officials used the Wilsonian language embedded in the

⁴⁸⁸ BFSP, vol. 113, “Agreement between Great Britain and France regarding the Oil (Petroleum) Interests of the two Countries – San Remo, April 25, 1920,” 351.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 351-352.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

mandates through bilateral engagements, enabling the United States to pursue various interests in mandated territories. This allowed the US to avoid participating in the multilateral forum of the League of Nations, where American negotiating power would be blunted by the collective strength of the mandatory powers.

The various agreements, promises, and developments during the war and into the early 1920s had left a chaotic situation on the ground in the Middle East, in which local populations felt betrayed and resented the imposition of European authority. While the legal situation, excepting some technicalities around mandates, was largely resolved by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, whereby the Allies recognised the Turkish Republic as the legitimate sovereign entity in Turkey in return for the cession of the Middle Eastern portions of the Ottoman Empire.

Before and during the Lausanne conference the State Department showed a keen interest in developments in the Near East, with Secretary of State Charles E. Hughes saying to the American Ambassador in France, Myron Herrick, that: ‘it is essential that the Department should be constantly in command of adequate information, keen for the protection of American interests, ready to throw the full weight of our influence...’⁴⁹¹ He said that the US Government would be prepared to send observers to the conference, and outlined an important American goal to ‘maintain the principle of the “Open Door” and equality of opportunity.’⁴⁹² The list of goals was more expansive than this, and included also ‘appropriate undertakings in regard to the freedom of opportunity, without discrimination or special privilege, for commercial enterprise’ and ‘reasonable opportunity for archeological research and study.’⁴⁹³ Just like at San Remo, the US Government dispatched observers to Lausanne to represent these interests, but not to participate formally in the conference since the United States had never been at war

⁴⁹¹ FRUS, 1923, vol. 2, doc. 730, “The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in France (Herrick), Washington, October 27, 1922 – 8 p.m.”

⁴⁹² Ibid.

⁴⁹³ Ibid., doc. 729, “The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in France (Herrick), Washington, October 27, 1922 – 7 p.m.”

with Turkey. The observers sent were US Ambassador to Italy Richard Child and the American Minister at Berne, Joseph Grew. Their instructions from the Secretary of State were to:

‘state the American position if at any time it seems necessary. In view of our direct interests it would expose us to serious criticism were we to keep aloof from the sessions and very likely would put in jeopardy opportunity for complete observation and the use of appropriate influence. The understanding that you are to observe and report, and not to commit yourself without instructions, will fully safeguard your position.’⁴⁹⁴

The State Department had therefore developed an approach to the Near East by the early 1920s of using observers to communicate US positions and to report back on others’ views while avoiding formal multilateral commitments, preferring to negotiate with mandatory powers (and Turkey) bilaterally.

The United States did not sign or ratify the Treaty of Lausanne, indeed the US Government was already negotiating with the mandatory powers to ensure its rights in mandated territories while the Lausanne Conference was ongoing. These negotiations mainly took place between 1921 and 1922, mostly directed by Secretary of State Charles E. Hughes. These were complex and multifaceted, taking place through ambassadors, ministers, and State Department officials in Washington, Paris, and London. The discussions considered all mandated territories simultaneously, including those in Africa, though the sticking points were much more numerous with the Middle Eastern mandates. This added greatly to the complexities of the Middle Eastern mandates as negotiations were ongoing between the State Department and oil companies, between the State Department and the governments of Britain and France, and between the Allies (but not the United States) with the new Turkish Government.⁴⁹⁵ Out of these complex peace negotiations emerged the familiar three mandates

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., doc. 732, “The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Italy (Child), Washington, October 28, 1922 – 7 p.m.” doc. 742, “The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Italy (Child), Washington, November 15, 1922 – 1 p.m.”

⁴⁹⁵ For US negotiations with Britain and France over mandates see: FRUS 1921, vol. 1, docs. 855-862; FRUS 1921, vol. 2, docs. 78-106; FRUS 1922, vol. 2, docs. 108-122, 222-267. For documentation on the Lausanne Conference itself see DBFP Ser. 1, Vol. 18, chapters 2-4.

in the Middle East, in which the United States had no direct role, but loomed in the distance as an interested party with special rights in mandated territories but did not participate directly in the League intended to supervise them.

The Open Pipeline: Mandates and Middle Eastern Oil

The mandate principle for Iraq, as articulated in 1918 by G. L. Beer and later rehashed and summarised by other American experts in Paris always included mention of the hypothesised oil reserves and of the desirability of securing ‘the open-door and equal economic opportunity for all nations...’⁴⁹⁶ But towards the end of 1919, the American position changed after Wilson suffered a stroke and it became less clear that the United States would be involved in any further peace negotiations. This effectively left the Europeans to manage the situation on their own, albeit under the shadow of American influence. During the First World War the United States had been the world’s largest producer of petroleum, according to an estimate made by The Inquiry in 1918, the US had produced 65.72 per cent of the world’s crude petroleum in 1915. At the same time, production in the British Empire amounted to roughly 5 per cent, nearly half of which came from India, and no measurable production from the French Empire.⁴⁹⁷ Oil was the new key resource in the industrialised world; cars, trucks, airplanes, ships, submarines, and tractors all ran mostly on petroleum derivatives, alongside the litany of petroleum products for other uses, oil simply could not be ignored. The history of disputes over the Iraq oilfields in the Interwar Period is an extremely well-told one, there have been countless works published on the subject from a variety of perspectives, including excellent work on American

⁴⁹⁶ NARA, RG 256, M820, roll 410, doc. 185.5137/30, “Summary by C. G. Osgood of A Memorandum: The Future of Mesopotamia by G. L. Beer (Brief for Settlement by Reference to Great Britain),” pp. 1, 9.

⁴⁹⁷ NARA, RG 256, M1107, roll 017, Inquiry doc. 309, “The World’s Oil Supply,” By Ralph Arnold, New York’ p. 4.

participation.⁴⁹⁸ The most relevant is an article by Annie Tracy Samuel from 2014 in which she argues: ‘that the position the United States articulated in the correspondence with Great Britain, both in its construction and in its goal of protecting an open door for American influence in the Middle East, became the basis for US policy in Iraq during the interwar period.’⁴⁹⁹ Like Samuel, this section argues that American Iraq policy in the Interwar Period essentially hinged on the Open Door, and that it was mainly motivated by oil. But it takes this point further by showing that this was one of many uses to which the State Department put the Open Door in its engagements with the Middle Eastern mandates.

Accordingly, this section analyses correspondence between the State Department, oil companies, and the British Government from 1919 to 1928—a period that stretches from the initial acceptance of the Open Door principle in mandated territories to the implementation of the Red Line Agreement, which effectively excluded outsiders from Iraqi oil. There were many more instances of American officials appealing to the Open Door and mandate principles beyond this point, though once Iraq gained independence in 1932 the relevance of mandatory status was much diminished. The reason for this narrow framing is that it was during this 9-year period immediately after the war that the State Department’s policy towards oil in the Iraq

⁴⁹⁸ This is an exceptionally active and contentious field, Jonathan Conlin’s 2024 article is perhaps the most recent contribution: Jonathan Conlin, “‘Fouled by Oil’? Oil Diplomacy and the Lausanne Conference, 1914–1928.” *The International History Review*, (2024), 1–19. But there are many other works with different interpretations, see for example: Gareth G. Jones, “The British Government and the Oil Companies 1912-1924: The Search for an Oil Policy,” *The Historical Journal* 20, no. 3 (1977): 647–72; David S. Painter, “Oil and the American Century,” *The Journal of American History* 99, no. 1 (2012): 24–39; Peter J. Beck, “‘A Tedious and Perilous Controversy’: Britain and the Settlement of the Mosul Dispute, 1918-1926,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 17, no. 2 (1981): 256–76; John A. DeNovo, *American Interests and Policies in the Middle East, 1900-1939*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963); André Nouschi, “Pipe-Lines et Politique Au Proche-Orient Dans Les Années 1930,” *Relations Internationales*, no. 19 (1979): 279–94; Gregory P. Nowell, *Mercantile States and the World Oil Cartel, 1900–1939*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994); Fiona Venn, “A Futile Paper Chase: Anglo-American Relations and Middle East Oil, 1918-34,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 1, no. 2 (1990): 165–184; Luigi Scazzieri, “Britain, France, and Mesopotamian Oil, 1916-1920,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 26, no. 1 (2015): 25–45.; Edward Peter Fitzgerald, “France’s Middle Eastern Ambitions, the Sykes-Picot Negotiations, and the Oil Fields of Mosul, 1915-1918,” *The Journal of modern history* 66, no. 4 (1994): 697–725; William Stivers, *Supremacy and Oil: Iraq, Turkey, and the Anglo-American World Order, 1918-1930* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1982).

⁴⁹⁹ Annie Tracy Samuel, “The Open Door and U.S. Policy in Iraq between the World Wars,” *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 5 (2014): 926–52, p. 926.

mandate crystallised. As a result it is the interactions between British and American officials in this period that illustrates how mandatory status was the key tool in the Department's arsenal to ensure American companies had access to this lucrative resource.

The Peace Conference had left open questions about the Open Door's applicability to the Middle Eastern mandates. The commercial equality stipulations in the League Covenant were notably not directly included in the part of Article 22 that applied to the Middle East. Although Wilson had proposed applying the Open Door early in the Paris Peace Conference, its applicability lacked legal backing at San Remo, where the United States was absent from decisions on the Middle Eastern mandates.⁵⁰⁰

Despite these obstacles, American officials did not abandon their position that the Open Door had been functionally agreed to in Paris, as remarked by Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby on February 24 1921:

'I desire to call to the attention of His Majesty's Government, the fact that, while the draft mandate Form A. was not adopted at Paris, it was the understanding of the American representatives there present, that the British Government entertained and has expressed convictions favourable to said form, and that, presumably, its representatives would exercise their influence in conformity with those convictions.'⁵⁰¹

Included within this, at least for the United States, was the notion of commercial equality. This idea had explicit meaning as codified in each mandate agreement. Nationals of League members could reside and practise their professions in mandated territories. They were

⁵⁰⁰ In Wilson's second draft of the Covenant the terms 'open door' and 'commercial equality' were both used explicitly with reference to all mandates. see David Hunter Miller, *The Drafting of the Covenant* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1928), 89. However, this language was modified substantially such that the version of the Covenant adopted by the League did not include the term 'Open Door', and stipulations regarding commercial equality had been moved to paragraph 5 of Article 22, which dealt only with Africa, leaving its applicability to the Middle Eastern mandates defined in paragraph 4 ambiguous. See "The Covenant of the League of Nations," *League of Nations Official Journal* vol. 1, no. 1, (February 1920): 3-12, p. 9.

⁵⁰¹ TNA, CAB 24/120/26, "Mandates: Note Addressed to the Council of the League of Nations by the United States of America," p. 165. There is a notable similarity in this framing of 'the understanding of American officials' here that was also used when the US government sought to contest the inclusion of Yap within the Japanese mandate, see chapter 2.

also entitled to equal access to resources, government contracts, and leases alongside nationals of the mandatory power.

The meeting at San Remo in April 1920 marked the allocation of the Middle Eastern mandates and included drafts of the mandate agreements themselves. These agreements, rather than Article 22, became the basis for American negotiations with the mandatory powers over their rights, although in the case of Iraq the mandate agreement was not ratified by the League but rather subsumed into a treaty between Great Britain and Iraq in 1922.⁵⁰² The draft mandates agreed upon in San Remo all contained the clause most important to the US that prohibited discrimination against the nationals, companies, or goods from other states. This was the embodiment of the Open Door, and provided the main tool within the mandates system for American officials in negotiating for oil in Iraq.

Shortly after the conference ended, American officials took issue with the oil agreement that had been made alongside the confirmation of the mandates. In the words of the American ambassador to Great Britain, John W. Davis, in May 1920, there existed an:

‘unfortunate impression in the minds of the American public, that the authorities of His Majesty’s Government in the occupied regions had given advantage to British oil interests which were not accorded to American companies, and further that Great Britain had been preparing quietly for exclusive control of the oil resources in this region.’⁵⁰³

Davis went on to suggest a handful of proposals ‘which embody or illustrate the principles which the United States Government would be pleased to see applied in the occupied or mandated regions...’ These were, to paraphrase briefly, that the principles of the draft ‘A’ mandates should be adhered to, equality of treatment in mandated territory, and the prevention

⁵⁰² Draft mandates for Mesopotamia and Palestine dating to 1921 see *Draft Mandates for Mesopotamia and Palestine: As Submitted for the Approval of the League of Nations*. (England: Printed and published by H.M.S.O., 1921); 1922 Treaty of Alliance between Great Britain and Irak in BFSP vol. 119, pt. 1, “Treaty of Alliance between Great Britain and Irak – Bagdad, October 10, 1922,” pp. 389-395.

⁵⁰³ *Correspondence between His Majesty’s Government and the United States Ambassador Respecting Economic Rights in Mandated Territories*. (England: Printed and Pub. by H.M. Stationery Office, 1921), p. 2.

of monopolistic concessions.⁵⁰⁴ This marked the beginning of direct correspondence between the British and American governments over Iraqi oil. This was the main forum in which the matter was resolved, these negotiations being conducted entirely apart from the multilateral frameworks of the conferences or League. The issue proved difficult to compartmentalise, as it touched upon the whole problem of global oil supplies, the idea of equitable treatment for British companies in the United States and Mexico, and the meaning of the mandate principle.

Before he received a reply from Secretary of Foreign Affairs Earl Curzon, Davis wrote another note dated July 28, 1920, in which he protested vigorously against the San Remo Oil Agreement as a violation of the mandate principle, which he also connected to: ‘reports to the effect that the officials charged with the administration of Tanganyika territory have accorded privileges to British nationals that have not been accorded to the nationals of other countries.’⁵⁰⁵ Although this was the only point in the note not concerned with Mesopotamia and its oil resources, the inclusion of the reference to Africa, illustrates how the US Government sought to use the mandates system as a whole to press their interests in the Middle East. The note ended with a request for the British Government to ‘elucidate fully its policy regarding the mandated territory of the Near East and other regions.’⁵⁰⁶ The mandates were thus a useful tool in tying together various strands of negotiation between Britain and the United States.

Curzon’s reply on August 9, pointed out to Davis that ‘the nervousness of American opinion concerning the alleged grasping activities of British oil interests appears singularly unintelligible in view of these facts...’ The facts in question were that ‘the United States produces some 70 per cent of the world’s [oil] output...’⁵⁰⁷ He further pointed to American laws preventing British participation in oil leases in the United States, as well as alleging that

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 2-3.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., 5-6.

the US had used its influence to cancel British oil concessions in Haiti and Costa Rica.⁵⁰⁸ This was, of course, beside the point for the United States, but was salient to British officials who resented American attempts to secure further rights to oil in territories under British administration while excluding British participation in areas under American control or influence. More to the point, Curzon's reply said that he generally agreed with American requests relating to the terms of the mandates, but pointed to the existence of pre-war concessions to the Turkish Petroleum Company (hereafter TPC) for the Mosul oilfields, in which there were a mix of British, French, and German interests. Curzon argued that in effect the continuation of the TPC concession was legal and not a violation of the mandate, and that France had renounced interests in the Mosul oilfields in return for a 25 per cent share in the development of those fields by the TPC.⁵⁰⁹

Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby responded on November 20 via the ambassador in London protesting against Britain's recognition of the rights of TPC and took issue with: 'the provision of the San Remo Agreement that any private petroleum company which may develop the Mesopotamian oil-fields "shall be under permanent British control."' ⁵¹⁰ Curzon replied the next year on February 28 'that the whole of the oilfields to which those provisions refer are the subject of a concession granted before the war by the Turkish Government...' and connected the validity of this claim to one by the Standard Oil Company of rights in the Palestine mandate.⁵¹¹ Curzon essentially argued that what amounted to a TPC monopoly, and the cession of the former German share to France in return for transport facilities from Iraq to the Mediterranean were 'the adaptation of pre-war arrangements.'⁵¹² As a final jab against

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁹ In fact it was not entirely clear at that point whether the TPC or a state enterprise would develop these oilfields, and provisions were made in Curzon's reply for both eventualities, what is recounted here reflects the option of private development that was taken later. Ibid., 6-7.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 8-10.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., 11-12.

⁵¹² Ibid., 12.

American oil policies, Curzon once again highlighted American supremacy in oil production, and pointed to Philippine laws enacted in August 1920 that confined exploitation of oil resources on public lands to Philippine and US citizens and corporations.⁵¹³ What emerges here is that senior State Department officials in 1920 and 1921 saw the mandates system as the most effective means to press for American access to Iraq's lucrative oilfields. At the same time, British authorities, despite their formal acceptance of mandate provisions, worked to exclude the United States from these resources.

Following the replacement of both the Secretary of State and the US ambassador to Britain in March of 1921, there began a shift in the negotiations, though the starting point for these new officials remained the positions taken by their predecessors. The new Secretary of State, Charles Evans Hughes, was a prominent progressive Republican who had run against Wilson in the 1916 presidential election. Unlike many Republicans of the time, including President Harding, he was in favour of the United States joining the League of Nations, and famously played a prominent role in the multilateral Washington Naval Conference in 1921-22.⁵¹⁴ However much Hughes may have favoured multilateralism, it did not prevent him from selective bilateral engagements with Britain and France over US interest in mandated territories. The New ambassador to Britain, George Harvey, was a very close associate of President Harding, but had numerous issues with Hughes.⁵¹⁵ In June 1922 a paraphrased statement from Hughes to Harvey elucidated the State Department's position:

‘The following is the substance of the Department's statement. In the correspondence on mandates this Government has contended and is contending for the broad principle of equality of commercial opportunity. The Mesopotamian oil question furnishes a test of the application of that principle ... It is not the desire of the Department, however, to make difficulties or to prolong needlessly a diplomatic dispute or ... to prevent American enterprise

⁵¹³ Ibid., 13.

⁵¹⁴ Merlo J. Pusey, *Charles Evans Hughes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), 395, 431, 455.

⁵¹⁵ These issues between the two seem not to have had a particular impact on the subjects discussed here, but they did make it into newspapers in early 1923, just a few months before Harvey was replaced in London by Frank Kellogg. See Pusey, *Charles Evans Hughes*, 417-418.

from availing itself of the very opportunities which our diplomatic representations have striven to obtain. If, therefore, American and British interests should enter upon private negotiations on this subject, the Department has no objection...'⁵¹⁶

As this message indicates, the State Department's stance had shifted. It was no longer insistent on the Open Door in Mesopotamia in practice, so long as the door was open to Americans. The note went on to say that the Department had been informed by A. C. Bedford, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey, that a group of seven American companies, together referred to as the 'American group' would send a representative to London to negotiate with British interests.⁵¹⁷ Two days later on June 26, Bedford reported in a telegram to Sir Charles Greenway of the Persian Oil Company that he had conferred with the State Department and had obtained its consent for certain bases for US participation. Most notably 'that the principle of the open door already acquiesced in for mandated territories by the Allied Powers be maintained...'⁵¹⁸ This points to an understanding in the State Department that negotiations directly between oil companies to share in an oil monopoly threatened to undermine the Open Door principle, especially given earlier references to Mesopotamian oil as a test case for this principle.

The negotiations among oil companies started in July 1922, with early meetings hinging on various mechanisms to incorporate the Open Door into arrangements with the TPC. Correspondence between the State Department and Standard Oil of New Jersey (hereafter SONJ) showed that although officially the department was aloof from negotiations, it was kept quite well informed and in essence participated by clarifying its interpretation of the Open Door. The Secretary of State said in a message to Walter Teagle, President of SONJ, that:

⁵¹⁶ FRUS, 1922, vol. 2, doc. 253, "The Acting Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Great Britain (Harvey), Washington, June 24, 1922 – 3 p.m."

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., doc. 254, "The Chairman of the Board of Directors, Standard Oil Company of New Jersey (A. C. Bedford) to the Secretary of State, New York, June 27, 1922, Received June 28."

‘In its support of the Open Door policy it is not this Government’s desire to set up impractical and theoretical principles or to place obstacles in the way of the participation of American companies in foreign enterprise but rather to open to American companies the opportunity for such participation if they desire it. It rests chiefly with American commercial interests themselves, once the opportunity is offered, to determine the extent and terms of their participation and to decide whether under existing circumstances, an adequate opportunity is offered.’⁵¹⁹

This vision of the Open Door as a malleable tool of foreign policy, rather than a rigid principle, reflects the post-Wilson shift towards a utilitarian employment of the mandates system for the pursuit of discreet interests.

This pattern of engagement will by now be familiar to readers from the similar willingness of State Department officials to ignore violations of these principles in Africa and the Pacific. As Frank Costigliola argues, ‘To secure American participation in Iraq, Secretary of State Hughes had to accept a closed-door consortium.’⁵²⁰ He qualifies this by noting that ‘The trick was to adjust the open door to meet such ‘practical’ necessities and still insist on equal opportunities in other parts of the world.’⁵²¹ His assessment is more about oil resources in other parts of the world, but it applies equally well when one considers the flexibility of the Open Door as it applied across mandated territories. The power of the Open Door in the mandates thus lay in its flexible interpretation within the State Department, Frank Ninkovich has argued that the Open Door became globalised in the 1920s, and was promoted from a relatively obscure US policy towards China to ‘a policy of the first rank.’⁵²² The more important point to take from Ninkovich is his argument that the Open Door was not merely an economic policy, but an ‘extension to foreign policy of a domestic tradition of localism and

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., doc. 257, “The Secretary of State to the President of the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey (W. C. Teagle), Washington August 22, 1922.”

⁵²⁰ Frank Costigliola, *Awkward Dominion: American Political, Economic, and Cultural Relations with Europe, 1919-1933* (Ithaca; Cornell University Press, 1984), 150.

⁵²¹ Ibid.

⁵²² Frank A. Ninkovich, *The Wilsonian Century: U.S. Foreign Policy Since 1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 79.

decentralised power... that relied on the informal working of private interests to achieve national ends.⁵²³ Ninkovich's interpretations of the Open Door are supported by the State Department's approach in Iraq. The willingness to 'adjust,' to borrow Costigliola's term, the policy as it was extended to mandated territories in the 1920s illustrates that the strength of the global Open Door lay in its flexibility.

The Treaty of Lausanne was signed in July 1923, recognising the mandates and setting out the provisional recognition of Iraq as an independent state subject to the treaty between Iraq and the UK. This allowed for a final settlement of the TPC issue, including the Open Door and the United States' non-recognition of the prewar concession. The final contours of this arrangement contained a number of mechanisms to ensure that something approximating Open-Door policies would be pursued by the TPC through its subleasing of oil lands. It was also agreed that the previous TPC concession would not be valid, but rather a reformed TPC that included American companies would receive a new concession from the Iraq Government.⁵²⁴

American participation in Iraq's oil industry, which had been the core of the State Department's initial complaint in 1920, was now a (somewhat) separate issue from that of the Open Door in communications between the State Department and SONJ.⁵²⁵ The distinction between the two can be seen in the letter from the President of SONJ, Walter Teagle, to the Department of State from October 25, 1923, where the 'so-called Open Door Policy of the Department' was distinguished from the 'operating and business standpoint' of the company.⁵²⁶

⁵²³ Frank Ninkovich, "Ideology, the Open Door, and Foreign Policy," *Diplomatic History* 6, no. 2 (1982): 185–208, 190.

⁵²⁴ FRUS, 1923, vol. 2, doc. 161, "The Secretary of State to the President of the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey (W. C. Teagle), Washington, November 8, 1923."

⁵²⁵ Ibid., doc. 160, "The President of the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey (W. C. Teagle) to the Department of State, New York, 25 October, 1923, Received October 31"; and doc. 161, "The Secretary of State to the President of the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey (W. C. Teagle), Washington, November 8, 1923."

⁵²⁶ Ibid., doc. 160, "The President of the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey (W. C. Teagle) to the Department of State, New York, 25 October, 1923, Received October 31."

This likely originated from a desire on the part of SONJ to avoid presumptions that the State Department viewed the interests of the company and of the Department as being completely in line. But this divergence seems to have had little meaning to the Secretary of State. He appeared to operate under a conception of the Open Door similar to that outlined by Ninkovich, wherein he was content to allow this private interest to achieve the national end of gaining American access to Iraqi oil.

This is illustrated by a statement Hughes made to the Teagle towards the end of negotiations over the Open Door in December 1923. He argued that the State Department was unconcerned about particularly phraseology, provided that ‘the oil resources of Mesopotamia should not be monopolised and that American interests should not be subjected to injurious discrimination.’⁵²⁷ This makes it very clear that the principle was, fundamentally, equitable participation by American companies in the Iraq oilfields. The State Department was almost exclusively concerned with ensuring that the door was open for American companies to enter Iraq, rather than any abstract principles of openness or a desire to leave the field open to prospective entrants that might appear.

The year 1925 was a propitious one for Iraq’s oil industry. The TPC signed a convention with the Iraq Government legalising its concession for Iraqi oil on March 14, formalising its effective monopoly.⁵²⁸ It was also the year when the first geological surveys were made by the TPC confirming the presence of large amounts of oil in northern Iraq. This set off the race to develop the infrastructure – wells, railways, water, and pipelines – that would make this resource accessible to the world.⁵²⁹ The industry really got going in 1926-27, with many

⁵²⁷ Ibid., doc. 164, “The Secretary of State to the President of the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey (W. C. Teagle), Washington, December 18, 1923.”

⁵²⁸ NARA, Archives 2, RG 59, M722 roll 25, doc. 890g. 6363, T84/322, “Convention between Turkish Petroleum Company, Limited, and Government of Iraq, March 14, 1925.”

⁵²⁹ Ibid., doc. 890g. 6363, T84/288, “Turkish Petroleum Company has 2 Producing Wells in Iraq Eight Other Wells Being Drilled.”

Americans employed in the drilling of wells and their early operations as Iraqi oil finally started to make its way onto world markets after nearly a decade of debate.⁵³⁰ This points to the further significance of American participation in the Iraq oilfields, the American oil industry was extremely well-positioned after the First World War, with experienced workers and managers, as well as significant capital that could be invested into new areas. As it had done for over a quarter century, the Open Door stepped into the breach once again. It offered greener pastures for the American oil industry, all the better amid lingering fears that domestic supplies were being overdrawn and prices might soon rise.⁵³¹

The start of production helped to push a finalisation of the long-debated internal structure of the TPC, leading to a new protocol in March of 1927 that renamed the TPC the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC), and left the American group with a 23.75 per cent stake in the company.⁵³² In 1928 a new agreement was signed between the members of the IPC known as the Red Line Agreement, which amounted to an understanding that members of the IPC would only exploit oil within the former Ottoman Empire through its structures.⁵³³ This agreement marked the death knell of a meaningful Open Door for Middle Eastern oil, not because the United States had abandoned the principle, but because the door had now shut with the Americans on the inside. As noted by Annie Samuel in her detailed study of this subject, the Open Door was not merely a rhetorical device for getting the US into the TPC. Rather it was a meaningful policy for the State Department of ensuring US freedom of action which meant it

⁵³⁰ Ibid.

⁵³¹ NARA, RG 256, M1107, roll 017, Inquiry doc. 309, "The World's Oil Supply, By Ralph Arnold, New York" pp. 6-7, 18.

⁵³² Because 5 per cent of the company went to Calouste Gulbenkian the remaining 95 per cent was split into quarters among the British, Dutch, French, and American interests. See FRUS, 1927, vol. 2, "Continued Negotiations to Ensure Recognition of the Principle of the Open Door in the Turkish Petroleum Company's Concession in Iraq," doc. 890g.6363 T 84/271, "The Associate General Counsel of the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey (Guy Wellman) to the Secretary of State, New York, April 1, 1927, Received April 11"; Samuel, "The Open Door and U.S. Policy in Iraq between the World Wars," 934.

⁵³³ Ibid.

could support and agree to monopolies like the Red Line Agreement, without sacrificing its ability to protest on later policy developments that threatened US interests on the basis of the Open Door.⁵³⁴

The State Department did indeed continue to insist upon the Open Door being observed in Iraq, but it was much less forceful once the major American oil companies were already taken care of.⁵³⁵ Later US policy in Iraq tended to fall back on the set of policies and arguments developed in the 1920s. State Department strategy allowed the meaning of the Open Door to slip from a principled policy of equality, to a more selective use of the Open Door to mean inclusion of Americans on equal terms, whether this was afforded to outsiders or not.⁵³⁶ The major value of the mandates system in Iraq for the State Department was its Open Door provisions, which in this case came to mean equal access for American oil companies. The policies developed in the 1920s of selectively pressing the terms of the mandate to ensure this access continued into the 1930s. Moreover, the State Department regularly indicated that the Open Door was not limited to Iraq, but was an integral part of the meaning of the mandates as a whole. The United States' flexible application of the Open Door, observed in Iraq, followed a pattern already evident in the Pacific mandates discussed in chapter 2, where access to resources and influence mattered more than universal enforcement.

A Resource Unlike Others: Archaeology in the Mandated Middle East

As the debates over Iraqi oil showed, the Open Door was a very powerful tool in the State Department's arsenal when it came to negotiations over the Middle Eastern mandates. Oil was, of course, the most valuable prize in the Middle East, but it was not the only valuable

⁵³⁴ Ibid., 935.

⁵³⁵ There are multiple instances of this pattern found in State Department correspondence of the time, see for example: NARA, Archives 2, RG 59, T1180, roll 12, doc. 890G.6363 WEMYSS, LORD/71 – 890G.6363 WEMYSS, LORD/89.

⁵³⁶ Samuel, "The Open Door and U.S. Policy in Iraq between the World Wars," 935-936.

thing buried in the Middle Eastern soil. There were sites of archaeological interest scattered across all three Middle Eastern mandates, and unlike oil it would not be possible for the State Department to simply insert Americans into an existing monopoly to get access to them. Part of the reason for this is that unlike oil one could not simply substitute one site or artifact for another, weights, volumes, and percentages were meaningless in a field concerned as much with the production of knowledge as with the production of physical resources. This meant that although American policies towards archaeology and antiquities in the Middle East were similarly based on ideas of the Open Door and the mandates system's equality of treatment provisions, what I term the 'archaeological Open Door' functioned quite differently from its commercial counterpart.

This section is of necessity a rather brief consideration of the topic and looks mainly at the Syrian mandate. The territory demarcated as 'Syria' by the postwar peace treaties had been home to a plethora of civilisations for millennia, though Western archaeologists were predominantly interested in the pre-Islamic groups. Excavations focused mainly on Mesopotamian sites in the eastern part of the territory near the border with Iraq, and Phoenician areas that were found in the southwestern area around Mount Lebanon.⁵³⁷ Syria appeared more frequently in American records relating to archaeological controversies because, even before the mandate came into force, French authorities were suspected of favouring their own nationals in excavations in Syria.⁵³⁸ Here, as in the other Middle Eastern mandates, the State Department relied on both the provisions of the mandate agreement and the spirit of the Covenant to advocate for equal treatment of American archaeologists. This illustrates how the

⁵³⁷ Given the early stage of archaeological research at the time and later reinterpretations of artifacts and sites, as well as debates over nomenclature, it is not always clear from direct readings of records from the 1920s and 1930s what groups are associated with particular sites.

⁵³⁸ NARA, Archives 2, RG 59, M722, roll 16, Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Asia 1910-1929, doc. 890d.922/2, "Archeological excavation by the French in the State of Damascus," April 1, 1922, p. 2.

mandates system served American diplomatic efforts in advancing academic as well as commercial interests. There exists a good body of scholarship analysing the changes to Middle Eastern archaeology that took place during the Interwar Period, most notably the shift away from the export of antiquities from their country of origin.⁵³⁹ Country-specific studies pertaining the role of archaeology in nation-building efforts in mandates have also been undertaken, with a particularly relevant doctoral thesis by Sarah K. Griswold concerning archaeology in the French Mandate.⁵⁴⁰ Archaeology was also featured as part of a larger study of the role of experts and expertise in the mandates, this collected volume draws out some of the connections between archaeology, anthropology, and other forms of expertise in the context of the mandates system as a whole.⁵⁴¹ This section takes the above works as a starting point, it does not rehash the nuanced history of archaeology in the region or the changes to regulation of the field in the Interwar Period. Rather it looks at the field through the eyes of the State Department and those it corresponded with to see how mandatory status was leveraged by American officials to ensure access for American archaeologists to sites in mandated territories, much as these officials did for other resources.

It is a striking coincidence that it was in precisely the same areas that foreigners were prospecting for both oil and artifacts in the Interwar Middle East. Although today we tend to view such excavations in very different ways, at the time it made an amount of sense to regulate both as forms of resource extraction. Officials in the Interwar Period regarded antiquities and

⁵³⁹ See for instance James F. Goode, *Negotiating for the Past: Archaeology, Nationalism, and Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1919-1941*, 1st ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007).

⁵⁴⁰ Sarah K. Griswold, "In Search of Civilization: Archaeology and the French Mandate for Syria and Lebanon" (PhD diss., New York University, 2018); Amara Thornton, "Tents, Tours, and Treks: Archaeologists, Antiquities Services, and Tourism in Mandate Palestine and Transjordan," *Public Archaeology* 11, no. 4 (2012): 195–216; Lawrence Davidson, "Biblical Archaeology and the Press: Shaping American Perceptions of Palestine in the First Decade of the Mandate," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 59, no. 2 (1996): 104–114; Magnus Thorkell Bernhardsson, *Reclaiming a Plundered Past: Archaeology and Nation Building in Modern Iraq*, 1st ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005); Thomas Løth Torp-Hansen, "Archaeology in the British Mandate of Palestine between WWI and WWII" (unpublished dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2022).

⁵⁴¹ Philippe Bourmaud, Norig Neveu, and Chantal Verdeil, eds. *Experts et expertise dans les mandats de la Société des Nations: figures, champs, outils* (Paris: Presses de l'Inalco, 2020).

the sites from which they were derived as a kind of natural resource, in particular they tended to be viewed as a sort of mineral resource, sometimes even referred to as ‘mines of archeological remains.’⁵⁴² More broadly, the view of archaeological sites and the antiquities contained in them as analogous to other types of economic endeavours comes from the employment of the language of monopolies and concessions. This language was widely employed by the State Department as it responded throughout the Interwar Period to complaints from Americans that they were being shut out of regions ranging from Albania to Afghanistan by the granting of monopolistic concessions to archaeologists from other countries, most notably France.⁵⁴³ Of course there were also countless references to archaeology in the context of scientific research, artistic or cultural value, and religion. But it was the nexus of these types of references, the more humanistic language being employed to justify the imposition of what was generally a set of economic policies, that makes archaeology an import point in our understanding of United States’ interest in the mandates.

State Department officials at higher levels tended to speak of artifacts and excavations in their communications in homogenising terms, having limited knowledge and expertise on what exactly was being excavated. At the consular level officials seem to have taken a greater interest in the nuances of local excavations and their interactions with the history and identity of local groups. As the examples below demonstrate, there was an understanding that one site could not simply be substituted for another. Although detailed information on findings was being shared through State Department channels, in messages from Washington, the nuances of local archaeology were largely homogenised into terms of access and the Open Door.

⁵⁴² NARA, Archives 2, RG 59, M1037, roll 18, Records of the Dept of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Palestine 1930-44, doc. 867n.927/12, “Archeological Explorations in Palestine and Transjordan During the Year 1930,” p. 11.

⁵⁴³ FRUS, 1923, vol. 2, “Protest by the United States against the grant of exclusive privileges to French archeologists for research in Albania and Afghanistan,” docs. 16-22. Documents are dated between January 5, 1923, and September 9, 1923. These documents record correspondence between the Secretary of State, the Minister in Albania (Grant-Smith), the Ambassador in France (Herrick), and the Chargé in Albania (Swift).

Archaeological excavations, their attendant diplomatic disputes, and the homogenising tendencies of high officials were found throughout the world in the 1920s. Despite the diversity of archaeological sites and the diplomatic and political situations surrounding them, there was a consistent policy in the State Department to facilitate access by American researchers and institutions to sites, and at the core of this policy was the Open Door. This is perfectly exemplified in a message sent on behalf of the Secretary of State by Under Secretary of State William Philips on February 19, 1923, to the American Minister in Albania, Ulysses Grant-Smith, that: ‘In view of the important part which American institutions of learning have taken in archeological research work in various countries of the world it is the Department’s desire to maintain the principle of the ‘Open Door’ for American institutions...’⁵⁴⁴ Although the United States had little basis for asserting the archaeological Open Door in Albania, it did in the Middle Eastern mandates, where treaty provisions and the language of the mandates gave greater weight to its claims for equal access. Here the US and France engaged in disputes over archaeological resources, much as the US and Britain disputed over oil resources, on the basis of the Open Door.⁵⁴⁵ It was not simply that the State Department sought to extend the applicability of the Open Door to this sphere. Rather, careful consideration had been made in the design of the mandates system to ensure access to these archaeological resources in a very similar way to mineral resources through anti-monopolistic and Open Door provisions.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴⁴ FRUS, 1923, vol. 2, doc. 16, “The Minister in Albania (Grant-Smith) to the Secretary of State, Tirana, January 5, 1923, Received January 30.”

⁵⁴⁵ In both cases negotiations lasted long periods of time and the records of them are voluminous and widely distributed, many examples are discussed later in this chapter.

⁵⁴⁶ The text of the Middle Eastern mandates contained articles concerning both varieties of the Open Door within them, for instance Article 21 of the Mandate for Palestine pledged ‘equality of treatment in the matter of excavations and archaeological research to the nations of all States Members of the League of Nations.’ See “League of Nations, Mandate for Palestine, Together with a Note by the Secretary-General Relating to Its Application to the Territory Known as Trans-Jordan,” London: H. M. Stationery Office, December 1922, pp. 6-7. An identical provision was included into the Mandate for Syria and the Lebanon as Article 14, see “Annex 391 a., French Mandate for Syria and the Lebanon,” *League of Nations Official Journal* vol. 3, no. 8 (August 1922): 1013-17, p. 1016. The legal situation of the Mandate for Mesopotamia (Iraq) was a bit more complicated, however the final drafts for this territory included the same provision as Article 14, as did the version that was incorporated into the 1922 Anglo-Iraq Treaty. For this see: Beer, *African Questions at the Paris Peace*

The extension of the Open Door to archaeology was a major postwar development, as the US Government had previously been much less active than its European counterparts in supporting archaeologists with official backing or diplomatic support.⁵⁴⁷ As it became clear that the Ottoman Empire might fall, American archaeologists, working alongside other civilian interests, including missionaries and teachers, began to press the State Department and the peace planners to protect American interests in antiquities and archaeological sites in the former Ottoman Empire. In December 1917, the American Philological Association and the Archaeological Institute of America held a joint meeting at which they passed a resolution urging greater support from the US Government in protecting their interests in the Ottoman Empire, complaining that: ‘the policy of our government has differed widely from that of the European nations, which has been to guarantee ample support and protection to every scientific and philanthropic, as well as every commercial enterprise undertaken by their nationals in the Ottoman Empire.’⁵⁴⁸ This complaint that the US Government had not been as supportive as its European counterparts in protecting archaeological enterprises in the Middle East found its way into the files of The Inquiry. Where it was further noted that while American archaeologists observed Ottoman laws barring the export of valuable antiquities, German and Austrian archaeologists did not, sending artifacts back to museums in their home countries.⁵⁴⁹ The authors of the resolution urged the peace planners to ensure that antiquities laws in Turkey—by which they also meant Syria—were administered impartially. They remarked that, while they themselves were not especially invested in whether artefacts stayed in Turkey or were brought to the United States, that: ‘the public, especially that part of the public which

Conference, with Papers on Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Colonial Settlement, ed. Louis Herbert Gray, 518, 567.

⁵⁴⁷ Bernhardsson, *Reclaiming a Plundered Past*, 50.

⁵⁴⁸ NARA, RG256, M1107, roll 047, Inquiry doc. 1017, Howard Crosby Butler, “A Plea for the Protection of American Educational and Scientific Enterprises in the Ottoman Empire,” p. 2.

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

contributes toward defraying the expense of these costly undertakings [excavations] ... wish to see some of the results of the American enterprises brought to this country and displayed, as part of our educational scheme.’⁵⁵⁰

The export of antiquities from the Middle East was a major issue at the time, and as noted by historian James F. Goode, ‘even the most unenlightened archaeologist or museum director sensed that the day could not be far off when the door to the export of antiquities would be close, perhaps forever.’⁵⁵¹ Middle Eastern nationalisms were closely intertwined with archaeological investigations after the First World War, the sharpest of which was a dispute in Egypt over ownership and access to the tomb of Pharaoh Tutankhamen. This site was discovered relatively untouched since antiquity – a rare and rich find – in 1922 by British archaeologist Howard Carter, sparking a series of disagreements between Carter and the government of newly-independent Egypt. The crux of this disagreement was that Carter wanted to continue with prewar precedent that the finds would be split between the government and the dig’s sponsors. While the Egyptian Government, seeking legitimacy in the country’s ancient past, sought to retain the entirety of the finds to serve as the centrepiece of the new Egyptian Museum.⁵⁵² In the end the Egyptian Government won the dispute and kept all of the finds, not only this, but the British Government had shown little support for Carter in his dispute, signalling a major shift in the landscape of Middle Eastern archaeology.⁵⁵³ Egypt had been one of the main focuses for Western archaeologists in the Middle East for decades, but its newfound independence had clearly changed the way that archaeology would work in the future. Crucially, Egypt was not the only newly independent state in the Middle East looking for legitimacy in ancient artifacts. The ‘provisionally independent’ mandates, of course, had much

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., 6.

⁵⁵¹ Goode, *Negotiating for the Past*, 5.

⁵⁵² Donald M. Reid, *Contesting Antiquity in Egypt: Archaeologies, Museums, and the Struggle for Identities from World War I to Nasser* (Cairo and New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2015), 52.

⁵⁵³ Goode, *Negotiating for the Past*, 80.

less political capacity than did Egypt in the early 1920s. But the passions that feuds between foreign archaeologists and local populations could inspire showed that the days of large-scale antiquities exports from the region were drawing to a close.

While many Americans were concerned about these developments, the State Department was less active on this point. In 1922, for example, a message to Secretary of State Hughes from Charles E. Allen, the American consul in Damascus, said ‘I assume that it is a matter of secondary importance to the United States whether such treasures are housed in France or in Syria.’⁵⁵⁴ He went on to note that ‘the French are showing more and more to get everything, particularly things of present or prospective value, into their own hands.’⁵⁵⁵ The State Department’s priority then was not to worry about where artifacts were being housed, but instead to keep the door open for archaeologists to conduct excavations, and ensure equal access for Americans, just as they were doing for oil companies in Iraq. The disputes were centred on monopolisation and equality, it seems not to have greatly concerned the State Department what the conditions for archaeology were, so long as they were applied equally to American and European archaeologists. This meant that there was very little correspondence on the place of local populations, whether physically as labourers and experts, or at more political levels. Rather the goal was to get American archaeologists onto dig sites and into museums to ensure that the mandatory powers would not exclude Americans from the production of archaeological knowledge in the Middle Eastern mandates.

Between 1920 and 1923, as Syria’s legal status remained unsettled, the State Department feared that French authorities would exploit their provisional control to claim not only archaeological treasures, but all valuable resources. In the correspondence between the

⁵⁵⁴ NARA, Archives 2, RG 59, M722, roll 16, Records of the Dept of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Asia 1910-1929, doc. 890D.927/1, “Archeological Excavations by the French in the State of Damascus,” March 12, 1922, p. 2

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.

consulate in Damascus and the State Department in Washington, Consul Delegate Charles Allen made an implicit connection between archaeological excavations and prospecting for petroleum. He noted that while he was not aware of any Americans being refused permission to excavate, or of any having requesting it, he says that he was:

‘informed in the matter of prospecting for minerals and oils the French authorities have taken the position that no permission for such prospecting can be granted until the separation of Syria from Turkey is officially covered by a ratified treaty. I have no doubt that their attitude toward archaeological excavations by others than Frenchmen would be the same if the question presented itself.’⁵⁵⁶

This conflation of French policies reflects American priorities in Syria, these were the two resources that American officials were interested in securing access to in the region, and officials believed that French policies on oil and archaeology were necessarily similar. This highlights the State Department view of archaeological excavation as essentially analogous to oil or mineral prospecting, and the French use of the unsettled legal situation to gain control of these two resources was clearly worrying.

In 1924, after the Treaty of Lausanne had clarified the legal situation, the United States and France signed a treaty defining the American position in Syria, just as they did with all other mandated territories. The treaty reconfirmed the stipulations of the mandate in terms of obligations of France towards the United States. In relation to the field of archaeology it included a clause prohibiting French or mandatory authorities from excluding the ‘scholars of any nation without good ground.’⁵⁵⁷ What was notably absent from the treaty was any mention of the rights of export or ownership of antiquities. The agreement offered guarantees of fairness and equality in archaeological endeavours, but it was left to the French mandatory authorities

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., doc. 890D.927/2, “Archeological Excavations by the French in the State of Damascus,” April 1, 1922, 2-3.

⁵⁵⁷ FRUS, 1924, vol. 1, Treaty Series No. 695, “Convention between the United States of America and France, Signed at Paris, April 4, 1924,” Article 14.

to enact relevant laws. The State Department clearly was more concerned with equality and access than it was with the particulars of laws around antiquities, despite these not necessarily reflecting the concerns of relevant sections of the American public.

It seems that the State Department was more concerned with the production of archaeological knowledge than with the export of artifacts, this is reflected by lengthy transmissions from the American Consulate in Beirut addressed to the Secretary of State. One such report, written by Professor Harold H. Nelson of the American University in Beirut and forwarded by Consul in Charge Paul Knabenshue, dated to February of 1924, totalled 15 pages of detailed information concerning the historical value of excavations conducted at Jebail (Byblos) in Lebanon. Despite the level of detail included in this report, there was no mention whatsoever of the financial value of the artifacts or the potential for export. Rather the report focuses on how the uncovered information and artifacts corroborate literary accounts of Phoenicia during the third and second millennia B.C. Although some mention was made in the report of specific artifacts, they were only mentioned when they provided context for some piece of information, such as a mention on page 11 of a ‘silver ewer and basin’ speculated to be of Aegean origin, as well as many objects detailed as being of Egyptian origin. In his preface to the report the American Consul in Charge remarked that following discoveries at Jebail he had: ‘request[ed] Professor Harold H. Nelson, of the American University, to visit ... and to prepare, for transmission to the Department, a report in the matter.’⁵⁵⁸ The Consul clearly thought that the information contained in the report, which it noted was pre-publication, would be valuable to the State Department, presumably to be shared with American experts or institutions that might wish to plan further excavations. This type of transmission indicates much more active State Department involvement in promoting American archaeology in the

⁵⁵⁸ NARA, Archives 2, RG 59, M722, roll 16 Records of the Dept of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Asia 1910-1929, doc. 890d.927/8, “Significance of Recent Archeological Discoveries at Jubail.”

Middle East than before the war. While the transmission of information back to the State Department indicates that this was not limited to the activism of one particular consular official. It seems then that the provision of the Archaeological Open Door under the mandates spurred some action from the State Department in promoting American interest in the areas to which this applied. The Open Door in this context was not just a reactive policy to French attempts at monopolisation, instead, it was a policy set that involved responsiveness to American interests as well as the promotion of such interests. One might surmise that there was a sense that the door could close if nobody was walking through it.

However important knowledge production may have been in 1924, in 1926-27 Paul Knabenshue, the same Consul in Charge in Beirut, had a much more concrete archaeological issue on his hands. He reported to the State Department on January 29, 1927, that Dr. E. A. Speiser of the American School of Oriental Research in Baghdad had requested consular assistance in gaining a permit to survey an area in Syria adjacent to the Iraq border. The request was duly supported by a letter he sent to the French High Commission. The request for this American to survey the region had been denied by French authorities on January 22, on the grounds that the Antiquities Department already planned to conduct research in that region. Immediately following the statement of facts Knabenshue proceeded to quote Article 14 of the mandate agreement that assured ‘equality of treatment in the matter of excavations and archaeological research’, noting that: ‘there is nothing in the terms of the Mandate or in the antiquities law since drawn up ... which gives to the Antiquities Department of the High Commission priority in the matter of archaeological research.’⁵⁵⁹ The direct invocation of the mandate here is indicative of its perceived value in the State Department down to the consular level, and hints at how Knabenshue thought it might be employed to solve the problem he had

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., doc. 890d.927/11, “Concessions for Archaeological Research in Syria.”

discovered. The communication continued that although in this specific case Knabenshue felt that the Antiquities Department had already planned to conduct a survey: ‘it would seem that the situation gives rise to a subtle means of securing a monopoly of archaeological research work in Syria to the French through the Antiquities Department.’⁵⁶⁰ He went on to say that he believed this was the only example of a request by an American refused by the High Commission, but noted that as far as he knew, the only archaeological research that had been conducted in Syria since the war had been done through the Antiquities Department. The perception at the Consulate in Beirut seems to have been that the French had been actively monopolising archaeological research in Syria through the Antiquities Department, and that this disadvantaged American archaeologists. This was just the sort of monopolisation that had been feared before the mandate was implemented, and that the provisions of the system were intended to prevent.

In response to the Knabenshue’s report, Assistant Secretary of State Leland Harrison wrote to the American School in Baghdad:

‘As you are no doubt aware, this Government has consistently stood for the application of an Open Door policy in mandate territories, not only in the limited field of commercial and economic endeavor but also in the larger sense of providing equal opportunity for all ... in matters of archaeological exploration and research.’⁵⁶¹

One could not have hoped for a clearer expression of the archaeological Open Door from the State Department. Not only had the Consul in Beirut directly quoted the mandate as protecting against archaeological monopolisation in Syria, the Assistant Secretary of State was highlighting that this was part of the Open Door for which the US Government stood not only in Syria, but in all mandated territories. This was the same principle being used to gain access

⁵⁶⁰ Knabenshue was careful to note that the personnel of the Antiquities Department was entirely French. Ibid.

⁵⁶¹ Harrison also includes that the practice of professions and industries, the granting of concessions, and the maintenance of educational and philanthropic policies as falling under this larger sense of the Open Door. Ibid., “In reply refer to NE 890 D.927/11,” March 1, 1927.

to oil in Iraq at roughly the same time. As it happened, the desire of Dr. Speiser to undertake these excavations had grown out of a joint expedition made by the American School in Baghdad and the Department of Antiquities of Iraq near Kirkuk in 1925.⁵⁶² In the field of archaeology the Mandate for Syria was an asset to both France and the United States, for the French it gave them a great deal of control over the territory and allowed French archaeologists access to sites through the Antiquities Department. For the United States the limiting factors of the mandate preventing archaeological monopolisation ensured that at least some access would be granted to American archaeologists and provided the State Department with a legally binding agreement that could be used in disputes.

The value of the mandate was not lost on the American School either, in a letter from the school's secretary, George A. Barton, to the Secretary of State it was noted that the 'the question ... as to whether our School would ever be permitted to do archaeological work in Syria is a matter of great importance to us.'⁵⁶³ This was after he detailed the names of prominent experts that would ensure the excavation would 'be of a thoroughly scientific character,' meaning that Barton appreciated the value of the mandate as a tool that the State Department could wield to get his school permission to work in Syria. It is not entirely apparent from the State Department records exactly what happened next. However, it is clear that the State Department either directly or through the consular service interacted with the French authorities, as a letter dated to February 9 from the French High Commission authorised Dr. Speiser to conduct his work in Syria as desired.⁵⁶⁴ It is notable that this authorisation was

⁵⁶² Ibid., doc. 890d.927/11, "In reply refer to NE 890 D.927/13."

⁵⁶³ Ibid., "In reply refer to NE 890 D.927/12."

⁵⁶⁴ It is possible that such records can be found in the consular records from Beirut (RG 84) however any interactions that took place directly between the consulate and French authorities are missing from the State Department (RG 59) records consulted in this research. Ibid., "In reply refer to NE 890 D.927/14."

received from the High Commission, in the words of the Consul in Beirut, ‘without reference to its previous refusal.’⁵⁶⁵

In my research, neither French nor American consular records were consulted in detail, forcing me to speculate what exactly was communicated to the French authorities during early February of 1927. However, the correspondence between the Consul in Beirut, the Assistant Secretary of State in Washington, and the American School in Baghdad makes one point clear. All parties saw the mandate as the most effective tool for persuading the French authorities to authorise Dr. Speiser’s archaeological work in Syria. Not only was the mandate an effective tool in this specific instance, the use of the mandate in this manner fit into the larger Open Door policy advocated by the State Department, as expressly stated by the Assistant Secretary of State. Here we can see the value of the Mandatory Open Door in facilitating non-economic pursuits well beyond the bounds of the policy’s original application. The Archaeological Open Door operated as a subset of the Mandatory Open Door in the Middle East, enabling the State Department to facilitate access for Americans in territories under European hegemony, while preserving flexibility to overlook violations elsewhere.

Mandates and Imperial Preference: Palestine’s Citrus Industry

Unlike oil or artifacts, citrus fruits were not a resource locked away in the Middle Eastern mandates’ soil, rather they were a global commodity produced wherever climate permitted. Palestine became a major exporter of citrus fruits, mainly oranges, over the course of the mandate period, with total exports climbing from less than one million cases in 1921 to over 15 million in 1939.⁵⁶⁶ The citrus industry had existed in Palestine long before the First World War and well into the mandate period it was essentially a shared industry between Jewish

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁶ Netta Cohen, *New under the Sun: Early Zionist Encounters with the Climate in Palestine*. 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2024), 144.

and Arab farmers.⁵⁶⁷ However the Zionist enterprises interested in advancing citriculture followed different models than their Arab counterparts, adopting technologies such as deep-well drilling for irrigation, and different species of orange trees that required extensive capital. Notably, the Zionist farmers explicitly sought to imitate the model of California where large amounts of capital had facilitated extensive irrigation projects that had propelled the state into an important agricultural position.⁵⁶⁸ American ideological or technological influence is beyond the scope of this section, but it is worth noting that not only was the citrus industry in Palestine growing rapidly, aimed at exports to Britain, the model being pursued was based on ideas imported from the United States.

Citrus fruits were Mandate Palestine's most important export. Between 1927 and 1935 citrus' share of total export values from the territory grew from 43 per cent to 84 per cent.⁵⁶⁹ Most of Palestine's citrus exports went to Britain during the Interwar Period, as of 1927 approximately 78 per cent of orange exports from the territory went to the UK.⁵⁷⁰ Palestine's share of the British orange market grew steadily over the period, in 1931 it accounted for just 12 per cent but by 1938 it had reached 37 per cent of British orange imports.⁵⁷¹ For comparison, in 1934 Palestine accounted for 20 per cent of British orange imports, the remainder consisted of roughly 50 per cent from Spain, 12 per cent each from Brazil and South Africa (including

⁵⁶⁷ Mustafa Kabahā and Nahum Karlinsky, *The Lost Orchard: The Palestinian-Arab Citrus Industry, 1850-1950*, 1st ed. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2021), 46.

⁵⁶⁸ Cohen, *New under the Sun*, 145-146; Nahum Karlinsky, *California Dreaming: Ideology, Society, and Technology in the Citrus Industry of Palestine, 1890-1939*, 1st ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 111-112.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 5; In 1932 the American Chargé in Britain believed that oranges alone 'form[ed] 90 per cent of the Palestine exports to this country...' and that this was the reason for the extension of imperial preference to the territory. See FRUS, 1932, vol. 2, doc. 641.67n3/4, "The Chargé in Great Britain (Atherton) to the Secretary of State, London, August 3, 1932 – 4 p.m., Received August 3 – 12:05 p.m."

⁵⁷⁰ NARA, Archives 2, RG 59, M353, roll 88, doc. 867N.9111/51, "Review of the Palestine Press," p. 12.

⁵⁷¹ Roza I. M. El-Eini, "Trade Agreements and the Continuation of Tariff Protection Policy in Mandate Palestine in the 1930s" *Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 1 (1998): 164-191, p. 183.

Southern Rhodesia), and 5 per cent from the United States.⁵⁷² While the US accounted for only about 5 per cent of oranges imported into the UK, in 1935 approximately 25 per cent of grapefruits in Britain came from the United States as compared with approximately 43 per cent from Palestine.⁵⁷³ As these statistics suggest, the United States was itself a citrus exporter, and therefore not interested in Palestine's citrus for import. Rather, American officials were concerned with the tariff treatment of citrus fruits as a major export from the mandate, and whether this was in line with the stipulations of mandatory status. This consideration fell almost entirely on the interpretation of the commercial equality provisions baked into the mandate, just like the dispute over Iraq's oil.

This section follows a dispute between the US Government and British authorities over the legality of extending a series of favourable trade conditions to mandate Palestine known as 'Imperial Preference' in the 1930s. This dispute occurred in two distinct phases, the first in the latter half of 1932, and the second as part of larger negotiations resulting in a new trade agreement between the United States and the United Kingdom in 1938. It argues that the State Department effectively wielded mandatory status to prevent the extension of Imperial Preference to Palestine in the first phase of the dispute and thereby attempt to shield American exporters' share of the British citrus market. It further shows that the department wielded the system as a whole to this end by leveraging the applicability of these trade preferences in other mandated areas to protest against its extension to Palestine. In the second phase of the dispute, the US Government again leveraged mandatory status to keep Palestine's citrus produce outside of the formal bounds of Imperial Preference, but did agree to 'give sympathetic

⁵⁷² The remaining balance came from Australia (~1 per cent) and 'other countries' (~1.5 per cent). See TNA, CO 852/32/2, "Department of Scientific and Industrial Research Report on the Storage of Jaffa Oranges by R. G. Tomkins," I.

⁵⁷³ TNA, CO 852/180/1, "Monthly Imports of Grapefruit in 1935 and 1936 showing countries whence consigned." In 1936 the US accounted for approximately 18 per cent of British imports, and Palestine approximately 37 per cent.

consideration' for particular exports from the territory, as new information had made it clear that citrus exports from the territory presented minimal competition to American exports. The animus for these disputes is difficult to discern, but it seems the State Department chose to engage on this question as it presented an opportunity to challenge Imperial Preference on the basis of international law. It fit into a larger set of challenges over trade in Anglo-American relations during the 1930s. The mandates system, as a subsystem of international law, offered an opportunity to challenge British trade policies while also sharpening the power of the mandate as a tool that could be employed in other territories.

The citrus industry in Mandatory Palestine has attracted a good deal of scholarly attention, though mostly from the perspective of the territory's history and the intercommunal tensions that arose there during the mandate period.⁵⁷⁴ However there have been mentions of the role of Imperial Preference in Mandatory Palestine, most notably by Roza I. M. El-Eini, whose assessments of agricultural, tariff, and protection policies on all goods in Palestine, including Imperial Preference in relation to citrus, are important for this section.⁵⁷⁵ Nahum Karlinsky also mentions the Open Door as an obstacle that the leaders of the citrus industry fought against. He notes the authorities refused to change their policy as it 'would reopen all the articles of the Mandate to rediscussion'⁵⁷⁶ He does not, however, mention that it was the United States Government that kept the door open in Palestine when Imperial Preference was applied. The larger historical subject of Imperial Preference includes extensive discussions on the role of the United States, but leaves the small matter of Palestine's citrus exports on the margins, if it is mentioned at all.⁵⁷⁷ This section inserts what was an economically minor issue

⁵⁷⁴ Kabahā and Karlinsky, *The Lost Orchard*; Cohen, *New under the Sun*; Karlinsky, *California Dreaming*.

⁵⁷⁵ El-Eini, "Trade Agreements and the Continuation of Tariff Protection Policy in Mandate Palestine in the 1930s"; Roza I. M. El-Eini, "The Implementation of British Agricultural Policy in Palestine in the 1930s," *Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 1 (1998): 164-191.

⁵⁷⁶ Karlinsky, *California Dreaming*, 182.

⁵⁷⁷ Ian Drummond, *Imperial Economic Policy 1917-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974); Clavin and Dungy, "Trade, Law, and the Global Order of 1919."

of American officials' efforts to prevent the extension of preferential treatment to exports from Palestine into the larger story of American uses of the mandates system. This was also connected to broader American efforts to influence British trade policies and to prevent Imperial Preference from disadvantaging American exporters. This section shows that although citrus lacked the strategic importance of oil or the cultural cache of archaeology, it proved an important point in the interpretation of the meaning of mandates. This was particularly true in the application of the commercial equality and Open-Door provisions of the mandates system.

One cannot be sure exactly what information State Department officials had. However, if they had something of the information that was available to Congress in 1932 it would have been perfectly logical to conclude that Palestine and the United States were in direct competition for market share in British citrus markets.⁵⁷⁸ Such a conclusion can also be gleaned from a mention of this type of thinking by the American Minister in Norway in October 1934, in which he reported that: 'The Norwegian citrus fruit market is largely controlled by exporters in Palestine and in Spain. Only a small quantity of California and Florida grape fruit and oranges is imported, after the Jaffa and Spanish crops are exhausted.'⁵⁷⁹ As we will see, the State Department did not frame its objection to Imperial Preference for Palestine on the basis of competition, but rather on principled terms related to the mandates system. However, the combination of the annual reports prepared for Congress and comments regarding competition in Norway suggest a clear motive. At least part of what the State Department sought to achieve

⁵⁷⁸ It might be assumed that the State Department had a similar level of information as was available to Congress at the time, for which they would have relied on USDA's annual 'Yearbook of Agriculture.' The volume for 1932 contained detailed information regarding the global citrus industry, listing the largest importers and exporters for the preceding years. It noted that since the mid-1920s the United Kingdom had been by far the largest importer of oranges, and that for exports Palestine and the United States had shifted between third and fourth places after Spain and Italy. The section of the yearbook concerning citrus fruits is on pages 706-710, these specific statistics are on page 709. See Milton S. Eisenhower and Arthur P. Chew, eds. United States Department of Agriculture, *Yearbook of Agriculture, 1932* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1932).

⁵⁷⁹ FRUS, 1934, vol. 2, doc. 611.5731/102, "The Minister in Norway (Philip) to the Secretary of State, Oslo, October 23, 1934, Received November 7." This is a very long report covering a range of topics, this specific quote is found approximately 10 pages into the report under the heading 'Apples and Pears'.

by insisting on this interpretation of the commercial equality provisions was to preserve the American share in British citrus markets against competition from Mandatory Palestine.

Phase One: 1932

Beer had anticipated that mandatory powers might seek to thwart the commercial equality provisions of the mandates by extending preferential treatment to goods originating in mandated territories. In his diary he recorded that in discussions of the ‘B’ mandates in London between July 7-13, 1919:

‘One of my articles forbidding preferential treatment of goods from the mandated area in the mandatory’s country and also prohibiting shipping subsidies for the purpose of fostering trade between the mandatory and mandated territory probably went a bit too far. At the very moment when I was putting it forward the British Government introduced a clause in the Finance Bill allowing it to extend preferential treatment to goods coming from the mandated areas, i.e. under British mandate. ... The matter is widely misunderstood and may lead to trouble.’⁵⁸⁰

Palestine was not, of course, a ‘B’ mandate, and the provisions for commercial equality were not secured there until some years after the Peace Conference had ended and Beer had passed away. His prescience took some time before it became manifest, Britain did not construct a comprehensive form of Imperial Preference until the Great Depression, with the main discussions of its extension, including to Palestine, taking place in 1932.⁵⁸¹ Imperial Preference as a form of reciprocal preferential treatment of goods traded within the British Empire was a contentious issue both in Britain and between Britain and the United States. William Hughes,

⁵⁸⁰ LOC, Diary of George Louis Beer, 132-133.

⁵⁸¹ It has been pointed out that legal provisions for imperial preference were created in both British and international trade law in 1919, however the comprehensive system of Imperial Preference came into being following the 1932 Ottawa Imperial Conference. see Clavin and Dungy, “Trade, Law, and the Global Order of 1919,” 557, 568. However, the Secretary of State worried in a message to the President about what imperial preference might mean for their relations with the Dominions, chiefly Canada, a few months before Black Tuesday on June 8 1929, indicating that the State Department was not taken entirely by surprise in 1932. See FRUS, 1929, vol. 1, doc. 611.003/1916, “The Secretary of State to President Hoover, Washington, June 8, 1929”; FRUS, 1932 vol. 2, “Representations to the British Government Against Proposal to Grant a Preference to Palestinian Produce Imported into the United Kingdom,” doc. 641.67n3/2, “The British Ambassador (Lindsay) to the Secretary of State, Washington, 15 July, 1932.”

Wilson's main rival in constructing the mandates system in Paris, had been instrumental in pressing the Foreign Office to concede to American proposals for equality of trade in 1919 in a manner that left room for Imperial Preference.⁵⁸² The binding stipulation within the League Covenant (Article 23 E) left enough room that over a decade later at the Ottawa Conference of 1932, Britain and the Dominions were able to construct the system of Imperial Preference without fearing a direct violation of the Covenant. The system of Imperial Preference instituted following the Ottawa Conference in July and August of 1932 applied preferential tariff treatment to all territories within the British Empire, leaving US exports to Britain and the Dominions at a disadvantage. This was a tremendous issue for the United States, as American exports fell off quite sharply during the Hoover administration, and Imperial Preference threatened to undermine the integrity of Most Favoured Nation status that the US had secured with Great Britain since 1815.⁵⁸³

In a document prepared in the Colonial Office in November 1932, entitled 'Imperial Preference, Extension to Mandated Territories' the author remarked that: 'No one has ever expressed the smallest doubt about "B" Mandated Territories, and it is interesting to remember that the first reference to the Law Officers on the subject was in respect of Palestine.'⁵⁸⁴ Of course, Beer had commented on the issue, and attached to that Colonial Office report was a memorandum prepared by the Secretary of State for the Colonies that remarked that:

'The question of extending the system of Imperial Preference to Mandated Territories was first considered in connection with the Finance Act, 1919, at a meeting of the War Cabinet held on 14th May, 1919. It was further considered at a subsequent meeting on 8th July, 1919, when the Chancellor of the Exchequer was authorised to insert in the Finance Act a clause to extend the system of Imperial Preference to any countries which in future might come under British protection, or in respect of which a Mandate of the League of Nations is exercised by the Government of any part of His Majesty's Dominions.'⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸² Clavin and Dungy, "Trade, Law, and the Global Order of 1919," 567.

⁵⁸³ Cullinane and Goodall, *The Open Door Era*, 92-93.

⁵⁸⁴ It is not clear who exactly authored this particular section. TNA, CO 323/1205/40, "Imperial Preference, Extension to Mandated Territories."

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, C.P. 380 (32), "Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies," p. 1.

Palestine was explicitly considered in this memorandum as well, as the Law Officer had concluded: ‘that the extension of Imperial preference to Palestine would be a breach of the most-favoured-nation clauses of British Commercial Treaties, as the Covenant ... and the other relative international documents, do constitute Palestine a foreign or third nation ...’⁵⁸⁶ This coincides with Beer’s diary entry relating to ‘B’ mandates and it was probably these developments that he worried ‘may lead to trouble.’⁵⁸⁷

Imperial Preference was a popular idea in Palestine itself, particularly among orange growers. As noted in a report from American officials in Jerusalem dated to March 8, 1932, the orange growers ‘hoped that if Palestine is included under the Imperial Preference clauses affecting imports into England, it will be better able to compete with Spain in the orange trade.’⁵⁸⁸ At that time Spain provided 56 per cent of oranges imported into Britain, Palestine provided 17 per cent, and the United States less than 6 per cent.⁵⁸⁹ The United States, therefore, probably did not figure heavily in the minds of Palestinian orange growers in their considerations of how to increase market share in Britain. However, the British Government had to consider the United States as it sought to extend this preference, as the two countries had a very deep trading relationship as well as financial ties, and the US had a proven track record of asserting economic rights in mandated territories.

The extension of imperial preference to Palestine, specifically to Palestinian produce was first brought to the attention of Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson by the British

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁸⁷ LOC, Diary of George Louis Beer, 132-133.

⁵⁸⁸ NARA, Archives 2, RG 59, M1037, roll 16, Records of the Dept of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Palestine 1930-44, doc. 867n.9111/74, document does not have clear title, page is headed with the caption “II. Economic: No Levy on Oranges.”

⁵⁸⁹ El-Eini, “Trade Agreements and the Continuation of Tariff Protection Policy in Mandate Palestine in the 1930s,” p. 183. The source listed here does not include the US as its own entry, leading to the assumption that American sources were included in the ‘other’ that totalled 6 per cent of imports. Based on the figures from 1934 cited above, where the US provided 5 per cent of imports, it is likely that the United States constituted a majority of this 6 per cent.

Ambassador in Washington, Ronald Lindsay, in July of 1932. Lindsay inquired about American objections to this extension, noting that the British Government did not consider it to mean that the US would be able to claim that the benefits of Imperial Preference be extended to American goods. He did carefully note that ‘it is of course not proposed that the Government of Palestine should grant a preference to British produce imported into Palestine.’⁵⁹⁰

As it turned out in the response from Stimson on August 27, the United States Government agreed with the Law Officers that Palestine constituted a foreign country in the meaning of its trade treaty with Britain. This meant that in the State Department’s view, the implementation of Imperial Preference for Palestine was either a violation of the commercial equality provisions of the mandate agreement, or it was a violation of the most favoured nation clause of the 1815 treaty between Britain and the United States.⁵⁹¹ The US view that the mandate for Palestine was a foreign country, that was not a constituent part of the British Empire, and therefore could not be included within the fold of Imperial Preference, prevailed in other citrus-exporting countries, most notably Italy, Spain, and Brazil.⁵⁹² But the State Department took it further than did other citrus-exporters: the US Government added in the same message on August 27 that not only did it consider the extension of Imperial Preference to Palestine a violation of the mandate, it also considered that this practice was not allowed for

⁵⁹⁰ FRUS, 1932 vol. 2, “Representations to the British Government Against Proposal to Grant a Preference to Palestinian Produce Imported into the United Kingdom,” doc. 641.67n3/2, “The British Ambassador (Lindsay) to the Secretary of State, Washington, 15 July, 1932.”

⁵⁹¹ The second article of this treaty grants American exports to British territories in Europe Most Favoured Nation status, meaning that no foreign goods can be admitted to Britain on terms more favourable than those offered to US goods. FRUS, 1932 vol. 2, doc. 641.67n3/5, “The British Chargé (Osborne) to the Secretary of State, Washington, August 6, 1932,” and doc. 641.67n3/11, “The Secretary of State to the British Chargé (Osborne), Washington, August 27, 1932.”

⁵⁹² Of the governments contacted by British authorities all but France took this position, which the American Chargé in France concluded was because the French government wished to keep open the possibility of extending preferential treatment to Syria in the future. FRUS, 1932, vol. 2, doc. 641.67n3/16, “The Ambassador in Brazil (Morgan) to the Secretary of State, Rio de Janeiro, September 20, 1932, Received October 8.” Brazil’s position was slightly more nuanced, the Brazilian government’s position was that it would not object to the inclusion of Palestine within the system of imperial preference ‘provided that preference is not extended to oranges to the detriment of Brazil’s export trade in that fruit.’ TNA, CAB 24/233/31, “Imperial Preference for Palestine,” p. 1.

‘B’ mandates.⁵⁹³ The distinction between the American message and those of other major orange exporters is revealing about the State Department’s approach to the mandates system generally. While other governments adopted a similar view of ‘A’ mandates as foreign countries insofar as it suited their interest in protecting market share, none but the United States sought to leverage the entirety of the system in pursuit of this aim. This was part of a trend of referencing African mandates when disputes arose over commercial equality provisions in the Middle East whereby the State Department employed the mandates system *in toto* as a global mechanism to address discreet regional problems. Despite personnel and policy changes that had taken place since the 1920s, this set of policies and practices relating to the mandates had remained remarkably consistent right up to the end of the post-Wilson Republican administrations.

This strategy was effective. In November 1932 the British Cabinet met to reconsider their position in light of American protests, they concluded that:

‘in the event of the United States Government following up the view they have advanced in the Palestine correspondence that His Majesty’s Government are not entitled to grant preference to Mandated Territories other than Palestine, and more particularly territories like Tanganyika, under a “B” Mandate. The Cabinet agreed (a) To adopt the view of the Cabinet Committee that the proposal to extend Imperial Preference to Palestine must be abandoned ...’⁵⁹⁴

Two things about this are important. First is that it was explicitly in the event of the American, not Spanish or Italian, government continuing to press the issue, indicating the greater influence of the United States in negotiations with Britain. Secondly, American officials raising the issue of ‘B’ mandates in Africa seems to have had the desired effect of widening the issue to have larger implications for Britain. This was by now part of a proven US strategy of raising

⁵⁹³ FRUS, 1932 vol. 2, doc. 641.67n3/5, “The British Chargé (Osborne) to the Secretary of State, Washington, August 6, 1932”; doc. 641.67n3/11, “The Secretary of State to the British Chargé (Osborne), Washington, August 27, 1932.”

⁵⁹⁴ TNA, CO 323/1205/40, “Imperial Preference, Extension to Mandated Territories,” Cabinet 58 (32) “Extract from Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street on Wednesday, November 2nd, 1932 at 11 a.m.,” 1.

the African mandates, especially Tanganyika, in questions concerning the Middle Eastern mandates, as they had referenced purported British favouritism in the territory in discussions over the San Remo Oil Agreement about a decade earlier.⁵⁹⁵

In a memorandum a few days later, the Secretary of State for the Colonies reported that the Law Officers had considered the issue and concluded that: ‘the extension of Imperial preference to Palestine would be a breach of the most-favoured-national clauses of British Commercial Treaties, as the Covenant of the League of Nations, and other relative international documents, do constitute Palestine a foreign or third nation within the meaning of the Treaties.’⁵⁹⁶ However, ‘the Cabinet decided that it was unnecessary and inadvisable to obtain a fresh Opinion’ from the legal experts regarding the ‘B’ mandates. Seemingly indicating that the Cabinet intended to retain the previous position that it was legal to extend imperial preference to ‘B’ mandates, and that it did not want to revisit the issue in light of American protests.⁵⁹⁷ This is a clear indication that the British Government, in this case Ramsay MacDonald’s National Government, appreciated that the US had only raised the issue of ‘B’ mandates because of its utility as a negotiating tool over Palestine’s citrus exports. A position that was vindicated by the seeming lack of further communications on the subject once the matter was dropped.

The first phase of the issue concluded in January 1934, when a member of staff from the American embassy in London informally inquired about the matter. To which the Foreign Office replied that ‘nothing more had been done.’ The American record indicates that: ‘Although the Embassy Officer endeavored to obtain an expansion of this laconic Foreign Office reply, he did not succeed in doing so. The inference is, therefore, that following the

⁵⁹⁵ *Correspondence between His Majesty’s Government and the United States Ambassador Respecting Economic Rights in Mandated Territories*, (London: Printed and Pub. by H.M. Stationery Office, 1921), 4.

⁵⁹⁶ TNA, CO 323/1205/40, “Imperial Preference, Extension to Mandated Territories,” “Imperial Preference and Mandated Territories, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies,” p. 3.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, “Extract from Conclusions of Meeting of Cabinet (60 (32)) Held on Wednesday, November 9th, 1932.”

representations made by foreign missions in London on this question the Foreign Office did not proceed with its proposal.⁵⁹⁸ American protests against the extension of imperial preference to Palestine had clearly succeeded, in part by engaging the opinions of other governments, but also by going a step further and leveraging American rights in other mandated areas to pressure British officials into backing down. British officials probably reasoned that it was not worth entering into a larger diplomatic spat over Palestine's citrus exports given American officials' responses and the global economic depression. This was, as in Iraq, a case of the State Department employing the commercial equality provisions of the mandates system in pursuit of a concrete economic interest, in this case broadening the meaning of the Open Door and threatening to implicate other mandated territories in the matter.

Phase Two

The dispute arose again as part of a larger set of negotiations that had been ongoing between the United States and Britain since the election of Franklin Roosevelt over a new Anglo-American commercial treaty. During the latter part of these negotiations in 1937-1938, the issue of Imperial Preference for Palestine resurfaced. This was of course only a very minor facet of the treaty negotiations, and one conducted in a very different international climate than had prevailed in 1932, but it reveals a great deal about how the US and Britain related to another in respect of the mandates system in the prelude to the Second World War. New market insights about citrus in the late 1930s revealed that US and Palestine exports did not directly compete on the British market, which seems not to have been known when the issue was considered in 1932. These negotiations are not considered in great detail here, but a representative sample of what had changed between 1932 and 1938 is included to demonstrate that in light of new

⁵⁹⁸ FRUS, 1932, vol. 2, doc. 641.67n3/18, "The Ambassador in Spain (Laughlin) to the Secretary of State, Madrid, October 28, 1932, Received November 11."

circumstances the State Department was willing to assent, in effect, to Imperial Preference for Palestine but was unwilling to concede on principle even as the mandates system was unravelling.

The most important new information that came to light in the late 1930s related to the actual level of competition between American and Palestinian produce in the British market. In both Britain and the United States detailed agricultural studies were conducted. On the American side, a report on Palestine's citrus industry was published in December 1938 – though its basic assertions may well have been known earlier – and on the British side a series of reports from various agencies came into the possession of the Colonial and Foreign offices concerning Palestine's citrus industry throughout the latter half of the 1930s.

Of course, the motives for these studies were somewhat different. British authorities were more directly invested in the industry and faced a wider array of concerns, particularly regarding storage and shipment. In a 1934 report by the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research that found its way into Colonial Office files, one finds a table revealing that while Palestine and the United States both exported oranges to Britain, their seasons were almost entirely opposite.⁵⁹⁹ In 1938 American authorities concluded that 'So far, Jaffa oranges have not competed directly with American oranges in the British market, since the latter arrive mainly during the 6-month period May to October.'⁶⁰⁰ Palestine's oranges on the other hand reached Britain between December and May, and its grapefruits between October and May, meaning that 'Except for early and late shipments, grapefruit from the United States does not meet any competition from the Palestine product.'⁶⁰¹ While the USDA report postdated negotiations with Britain, the Colonial Office had prepared detailed tables in May 1938

⁵⁹⁹ TNA, CO 852/32/2, "Department of Scientific and Industrial Research Report on the Storage of Jaffa Oranges by R. G. Tomkins," p. 1.

⁶⁰⁰ William N. Hazen, *The Citrus Industry of Palestine* (Washington, DC: United States Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, December 1938), 57.

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 58, 77-78

outlining the same information relating to the monthly distribution of orange and grapefruit imports into Britain. It had transmitted these tables internally with the express purpose of trying to formulate a strategy to obtain ‘from the United States a recognition of our right to give preference to Palestine.’⁶⁰²

The issue had by then clearly become one of principle, and British officials evidently felt that what was needed was to convince the State Department that Imperial Preference for Palestine would not threaten the American citrus industry. But more than this, British authorities understood that in order to secure American recognition of Imperial Preference, Britain would need to ensure that all other countries concerned would consent. To this end, discussions were carried out in July 1938 ‘asking the Americans to agree in advance to give their consent to a preference for Palestine if all other countries agreed.’⁶⁰³ The British interpretation of American resistance to preference was reflected in a message from the British Ambassador to the United States, Sir Ronald Lindsay, who doubted: ‘whether the Americans will agree even to this as they are afraid of saying anything which might enable Florida fruit growers to contend that American consent had been promised in advance.’⁶⁰⁴ British negotiators seemed convinced that even armed with their statistics proving that Palestinian and American produce did not compete directly in British markets, that American officials would find themselves caught up in trying to use the mandates to protect American market share.

By August 1938 it seems to have been agreed that an exchange of notes concerning the extension of imperial preference to Palestine and Transjordan added to the main trade agreement would suffice, though the exact wording of the note was a subject of much equivocation.⁶⁰⁵ This exchange would also cover the extension of Imperial Preference to ‘B’

⁶⁰² TNA, CO 852/180/1, “Urgent message dated 14th May, 1938 addressed to C. N. Stirling Esq.”

⁶⁰³ Ibid., “Decypher. Sir R. Lindsay (Washington), 10th July, 1938, No 91.”

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid., this file contains detailed correspondence on the phrasing and details of these discussions, mostly focused on the wording of the exchange of notes.

and 'C' mandates. The latter two were essentially lumped together in the final exchange as being allowed under the umbrella of Imperial Preference. While the United States agreed to: 'give sympathetic consideration to any requests addressed to it for consent to the granting of preferential tariff treatment to particular articles of Palestine or Trans-Jordan origin.'⁶⁰⁶

The second phase of negotiations over Imperial Preference for Palestine were much less acrimonious than the first and had a very different outcome. The second phase illustrates that at least in the interpretation of British officials, the recalcitrance of the State Department originated from a desire to protect Florida orange-growers, and that once both sides had statistics demonstrating that US and Palestinian citrus fruits were not directly competing the issue subsided. Despite the seeming simplicity of this result, the second phase also showed just how powerful the mandates system was as a tool of American foreign policy. The first phase had shown that the mandates system could be leveraged by American officials to prevent the extension of Imperial Preference to Palestine – or indeed any other mandate – by questioning its application to other mandated areas. While the second phase showed that the US Government was willing to compromise on the point where American interests were not threatened. However it was not willing to agree in principle to the extension of Imperial Preference because it had proven to be such a useful tool in dealing with mandated territories.

Conclusion

The Middle East was at the centre of American policies towards the mandates system, and the commercial equality and Open Door provisions of the system were the core of its utility to the State Department. In each mandated territory in the Middle East, the State Department managed to use the provisions of the 'A' mandates to gain access to resources and to ensure

⁶⁰⁶ *Trade Agreement between the United Kingdom and the United States of America (with Schedules and Exchanges of Notes) Washington, November 17, 1938. (Ratifications Exchanged at London on November 24, 1939)* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1940), pp. 111-112.

some version of equality that seemed amenable to American interests, even if this equality did not extend beyond the United States. When Beer had begun to suggest the idea of mandates in 1918, it was a mechanism to sort out the problems of Iraq. As he continued to navigate the problems of the Middle East, in discussions that led to the implementation of mandates, he realised the ambiguity around trade agreements was likely to spell trouble in the future. Beer did not live to see any of the disputes over the Middle Eastern mandates, having passed away in 1920 before the mandates took effect in the Middle East. The system he helped devise proved a powerful tool in the arsenal of State Department officials working to ensure that American citizens and companies received a fair share of what the Interwar Middle East had to offer.

Oil, oranges, and antiquities ended up being the central points of contention between the United States and the mandatory powers in the Middle East. These were of course quite different issues to the ones that arose in Africa and the Pacific, but as the frequent invocation of other mandated territories shows, the State Department was keenly aware of the interconnections that the shared status as mandates implied for these territories. The State Department had a very broad definition of what the Open Door comprised when it came to American interests. It could encompass commercial and scientific explorations, and it also extended to trade regimes on other continents if they presented a threat to American interests. But this conception of the Open Door had its limits, the commercial equality for which the State Department fought in the 1920s and 1930s was equality for Americans, not for the League or the world. A pattern of selective enforcement of the stipulations of the mandates system defined the American approach to mandated territories around the world, and the Middle East was the shining example of the utility of commercial equality provisions in protecting American interests in mandates.

The Middle East was where the principled approach to the African mandates could be made practically useful for the United States, and where the compromises that Wilson had

made with the British Dominions in the Pacific had their payoff. American officials were deeply, though selectively, interested in the Interwar Middle East, and used the mandates system to pursue diverse interests in the region as they emerged.

Conclusion

Between 1918 and 1939 the United States showed great interest in mandated territories around the world, seeking to ensure that the Mandatory Open Door designed in Paris was protected. In so doing, it helped to shape the meaning of this novel territorial status to better serve US interests, varied as they were, across all mandated territories. This process both restructured and helped to create global systems of governance, economics, and international law, in addition to shaping regional and imperial dynamics across Africa, the Pacific, and the Middle East. By examining the mandates from the perspective of American officials, this thesis has shown that US engagement with the mandates system extended beyond the formal structures of the League of Nations. The recovery of US agency in the League system – of which it was nevertheless not a member – connected the mandates to larger patterns of American engagement with the Global South across the first half of the twentieth century. American engagement with the mandates, including the foundational role of the United States' delegation in creating the system in 1919, served to mould international norms surrounding colonialism to better suit American interests. The most important mechanism by which American officials reshaped colonial governance in the mandates was through the extension of Open Door concepts, originating in late nineteenth century American foreign policy, to the mandates in a unique form, here termed the Mandatory Open Door. This thesis demonstrates how American officials, through the Mandatory Open Door, incorporated flexible yet potent tools into international agreements. This enabled the United States to assert commercial rights, project soft power, and influence the administration of colonial territories from a position outside the League.

The Mandatory Open Door offers a new window into the broader track of American influence on imperialism and on colonised regions over the course of the twentieth century.

Looking across from the original articulation of the Open Door in 1899, one can see how the meaning and scope of this once-obscure policy expanded through its application to the mandates system. This expansion was, as we have seen, a product of American diplomacy, as the United States Government insisted that it be observed not only in matters of trade, but in the broader governance of mandated territories. However, the importance of the Mandatory Open Door did not end with the dissolution of the League of Nations, rather its scope was expanded once again at the insistence of American negotiators following the Second World War, being transformed into a key component of the United Nations Trusteeships. Approximately 26 years after the mandates idea was first agreed upon in Paris on January 30, 1919, it was reiterated into a new form in San Francisco in the Spring of 1945, carrying forward the ‘sacred trust’ first embodied in the League Covenant, and reaffirming it in the United Nations Charter, which stands to this day. The value of the Mandatory Open Door to the framers of this new international constitution was clear. It was carried forward even more explicitly in Chapter XII, article 76 b., as an obligation on any state administering a UN Trust Territory ‘to ensure equal treatment in social, economic, and commercial matters for all Members of the United Nations and their nationals...’⁶⁰⁷ The continuity between the mandates and the trusteeships is well-known, and has been widely commented on by authors such as H. Duncan Hall and Ramenda Chowdhuri.⁶⁰⁸ Far less attention has been paid, however, to the economic continuities between these analogous territorial formations, in particular as they reflect American influence. Of course, the world looked very different in 1945, and the UN trusteeships fit into a much more globally engaged US foreign policy. But it is worth noting

⁶⁰⁷ United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, Chapter XII, “International Trusteeship System,” 1945. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/chapter-12>.

⁶⁰⁸ H. Duncan Hall, and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Division of International Law, *Mandates, Dependencies and Trusteeship* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1948); Ramenda Nath Chowdhuri, *International Mandates and Trusteeship Systems: A Comparative Study*, (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1955).

that there were extensive continuities between the worlds of the mandates and the trusteeships, and this study has highlighted a number of areas that show promise for future research on the longer track of American interactions with international oversight.

This project has also suggested that there are numerous legal aspects of American interactions with the mandates system that have been understudied. At the same time, because this is primarily a diplomatic history, the juridical aspects of US involvement have been less pronounced. American involvement in the creation of the mandate system produced important changes to the practice of colonialism among colonial powers, and established new norms and precedents for how colonial territories captured during wars were to be treated. These changes and norms led to the creation of the United Nations Trusteeships system after the Second World War. They also helped to establish the legal basis for decolonisation by acting as precedent for the principle of self-determination, itself a product of American influence at the end of the First World War. There were a number of specific legal cases that called on American precedents, such as in a debate in April 1923 over the nationality of inhabitants of mandated territories, in which the New Zealand representative, Sir James Allen, explicitly cited American policies in the Philippines as models for mandatory administration.⁶⁰⁹ There are many other cases where the exact meanings of the mandates system were debated in legal terms, both within the Permanent Mandates Commission and outside of it. The influence of the United States, both directly as a diplomatic participant, and more indirectly as a colonial model different from European approaches is readily detectable in all cases.

Although this thesis has only highlighted the legal aspects of American influence on the mandates tangentially, it has recovered the key mechanisms of US influence into mandates diplomatically, and demonstrated how diplomatic efforts influenced the international legal

⁶⁰⁹ “Sixth Meeting (Public), held at Geneva on Friday, April 20th, 1923, at 10.30 a.m.” *League of Nations Official Journal* vol. 4, no. 6 (June 1923): 567-572, p. 569.

frameworks of the mandates. The legal structures of the mandates were, of course, shaped by the diplomatic interactions that led to their creation. This underscores the fact that the mandates system cannot be fully comprehended without acknowledging the significant role played by the United States. It influenced the system not as a bystander, but as an active architect of economic and legal norms that shaped global governance. Through instruments like the Mandatory Open Door, American officials embedded flexible yet powerful tools into international agreements, allowing the United States to exert influence and protect American influence using League structures without the need for membership.

The thesis represents a significant intervention into the mandates literature by offering a critical re-examination of the dominant scholarly approach exemplified by Susan Pedersen's works, which primarily view the mandates as a feature of the League or through the eyes of the mandatory powers. It also responds to the call laid out by Sean Andrew Wempe in the 2019 *AHR Reflections: One Hundred Years of Mandates*, noting that what he described as 'quasi-open-door style colonialism' was a product of American engagement with the mandates.⁶¹⁰ My work shows that by understanding the economic, diplomatic, and legal functions of the mandates through American engagement from beyond the confines of Geneva, one can see that this form of contingent territorial status was created and upheld within the League of Nations, in part, by external forces.

The United States Government did not, as this thesis has shown, have a coordinated mandates policy. Rather the mandates, particularly through the Mandatory Open Door, proved a useful and evolving tool in the State Department's arsenal in pursuing various priorities throughout the Interwar Period. This included accessing petroleum in Iraq, monitoring the building of fortifications in Micronesia, and pressing forward the international civilising

⁶¹⁰ Wempe, "A League to Preserve Empires: Understanding the Mandates System and Avenues for Further Scholarly Inquiry."

mission in Africa. The most important element of this tool was the Open-Door feature, itself an introduction from American foreign policy whose meanings and geographic scope were significantly broadened by its incorporation into the mandates, and thereby into international law. The existing literature on American imperialism and trade policy tends to consider the mandates only tangentially. Though many scholars have commented on the influence of American officials in helping to create international law after the First World War, such as Benjamin Coates and Robert E. Hannigan. But the mandates are more than a footnote to the larger story of international law, rather they were an important vehicle that transported American precedents into international law and institutions. This is of course most visible in the creation of the UN Trusteeships following the Second World War, but one can see continuities with the approaches taken by organisations such as the International Monetary Fund to fostering development in the Global South. One example from 1998 was when Michel Camdessus, Managing Director of the IMF, spoke to the U.N. Social and Economic Council and remarked that: ‘An assurance of broad-based, nondiscriminatory access to individual country markets would be a shot in the arm for confidence in the developing countries and could play a key role in improving the climate for foreign direct investment in them.’⁶¹¹ The use of open economic policies to spur development in areas of the Global South, sometimes including former mandates, thus remained a cornerstone of economic and political thinking until the very end of the twentieth century.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of this thesis, is the concept of the Mandatory Open Door. This was mainly a set of economic policies derived from American practices in China and the Caribbean. The first facet of these provisions was often termed commercial

⁶¹¹ Michel Camdessus, “Bolstering Market Access of Developing Countries in a Globalized World – Address by Michel Camdessus,” International Monetary Fund, July 6, 1998, <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2015/09/28/04/53/sp070698>.

equality, in which US officials worked to ensure that American nationals and corporations received equal treatment to that received by those of the mandatory power. In this context it can be understood as a colonial equivalent to Most Favoured Nation clauses found in many trade agreements, whereby Americans were guaranteed the same rights as Europeans in a colonial region without having to grant any reciprocal benefits. As we have seen in the final chapter, the Mandatory Open Door was the key tool in facilitating American entry into the Iraq oil monopoly, all the while actively excluding European oil companies from American oilfields. The other important economic stipulation of the mandates forming an integral part of the Mandatory Open Door were anti-monopolisation provisions. These limited the ability of mandatory powers to establish or facilitate monopolies in mandated territories, which mostly meant preventing the establishment of resource-monopolies for lucrative exports such as petroleum products. As we saw in the second chapter, the State Department was willing to ignore these provisions when they felt that American interests were unharmed by non-adherence. This was most prominently visible in the phosphate monopoly established in Nauru.

There were non-economic aspects of the Mandatory Open Door, though they were, in most cases, secondary to the economic implications of the policy. Most prominent were the set of provisions enabling access to mandates for civilians from League member states and the US, including missionaries, scientists, and archaeologists. By using the stipulations ensuring this type of access the State Department was able to receive reliable reports from a variety of mandated territories regarding adherence to other provisions, as well as to gain access to important areas of knowledge production such as archaeological excavations in the Middle East and anthropological investigations in New Guinea. The latter provisions of the Mandatory Open Door were generally less important to the Interwar State Department than the economic provisions. However, they still formed part of a coherent American policy of using the legal

strictures of the mandates system to gain access to colonial regions under the control of European empires far beyond what could be demanded in non-mandated territories.

These restrictions were incorporated into the individual mandate agreements conferred by the League of Nations onto each mandatory state. These were then reconfirmed by treaties between the mandatory powers and the United States, providing the State Department with legal guarantees protecting American rights in mandated territories. The US Government was able to protect its right without joining the League by incorporating the restrictions into binding agreements, both in the emergent body of international public law and through direct bilateral agreements. Thereby ensuring that the mandates system shaped binding legal precedent within the League framework.

The most important feature of the Mandatory Open Door was that it was a very flexible set of policies. The precise meanings of the term were never defined either by State Department officials or by their diplomatic counterparts in other countries. Rather, it was a very malleable concept that allowed the State Department to press for American participation in a variety of enterprises in mandated territories without being bound to uphold notions of equality beyond what suited American interests in each circumstance. The State Department also used the special rights conveyed by the Open Door in mandates to press American interests further afield. It leveraged willingness to ignore European violations of the Mandatory Open Door in the interest of more important agreements in other areas.

This thesis has shown that American involvement in the mandates was neither incidental nor marginal; rather, it served as a vehicle for extending American economic principles, diplomatic leverage, and legal precedents into a transforming imperial landscape. In doing so, the United States helped to lay the groundwork for mid-century international institutions like the United Nations Trusteeship System and for the codification of new global norms surrounding sovereignty, self-determination, and access. Future studies that further

examine the legal and institutional continuities between the mandates and subsequent international systems will deepen our understanding of the mandates not as an isolated episode of Interwar governance, but as a pivotal arena in the evolution of modern international order shaped significantly by American power.

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