



The McMahon Factor

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Sir Henry McMahon was an English Military Officer, with a distinguished service career in the British Armed Forces and several decorations for his valor on the battlefield. However, he was also an administrator for the British East India Company in the Region of India and the Middle East.

Inadvertently, Sir Henry McMahon, is also responsible for some of the most globally volatile situations in Asia and the Middle East, making the world less than safe. This is due to two defining moments in his careers in the span of two years.

The Shimla Convention 1914

Historical Background to the Convention

In the year 1914, the world was facing the First Great War, that brought down the Ottoman and Hapsburg Empire while substantially weakening the grip of the Romanov Dynasty that would be wiped out in 1917, because of the Russian Revolution. The British, were on the winning side of the first World War, they were the largest colonial government at the time. The most powerful part of their colony was the Indian subcontinent and the region of China. China was increasingly becoming a threat to the British colonial powers in the region due to the Anglo-Chinese confrontation that has nicknamed the "Opium Wars" lasting between 1839-1862, that still had resonance in the 1910s. Further, the British forces led by Sir Francis Younghusband entered Tibet in 1904 and made a treaty with the Tibetans. Between the years of 1906-07, the Chinese sought Suzerainty over the entire region of Tibet. At the fall of the Qing Dynasty, the Tibetan Government declared all Chinese Nationals on Tibetan Soil as Persona Non Grata, in 1913. However, it was not recognized by The Republic of China. In this background, primary tenants of the Shimla Convention called on the agreeing parties to abide by the following Tenets:

The Basic Tenets

According to the Shimla Convention of 1914, the State of Tibet was to be divided into two parts Inner Tibet and Outer Tibet. The Principles of this division were the formation of the Government according to the convention, the region of Outer Tibet (roughly the region U Tsang and Western Kham would remain in the hands of the Tibetan Government under Chinese suzerainty. The term 'Suzerainty' here implied under the greater authority of China. But China would not interfere in the administration of the region, in terms of domestic politics or foreign relations.

On the other hand, "Inner Tibet" roughly, the region corresponding to Amado and Eastern Kham, would be directly under the administration of the Chinese Government. The Agreement was inked on the 27th of April 1914, but China immediately took an adverse stand towards the document. A second slightly updated version of the Convention was signed on the 3rd of July 1914. This document however, was instantly rebuked by the Plenipotentiaries then attached China and Tibet. This was not the first time that the work of Sir Henry McMahon, had faced criticism, in 1907, the British Government rejected the terms of the Shimla Convention stating that they were in direct conflict with the already existent Anglo-Russian Convention. However, the Anglo-Russian convention was dropped in 1921, the Shimla Convention was then formalized in the year 1938.

Geographically speaking, the McMahon Line, is a demarcation that divides the region of Tibet and the North East of India. It however, has always been in the realm of doubt, politics and military tactics since 1962, as both India and China attempt to establish their dominance in the region of Asia and South Asia. These skirmishes, led to the Indo-China War of 1962.

1962: India's China War

The primary cause of the Sino-India war of 1962 was a dispute over the McMahon Line. According to the updated map that had been released at the time, the McMahon Line was seen to transverse certain regions of the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). In October of 1962, a heavy deployment of Chinese troops was seen at the Indian border that resulted in an increased military presence on the Indian side of the International border. This, led to a 14-day massacre in the Himalayan Region.

This event has been commemorated in popular culture, recounting the tale of Major Shaitan Singh and the brave men he led into Battle from the 13th Kumaon Unit, after the killing of their superior officer in the immortal voice Lata Mangeshkar and the words of an unsung Kavi Pradeep. The battle of Rezang La, has often been the legendary war of Thermopylae, due to the adverse conditions experienced by the troops in Battle.

Aftermath for Tibet

Tibet was the seat of the Dalai Lama, the individual considered to be the Bodhisattva (A Bodhisattva refers to an Incarnation of the Buddha according to the Tipitaka's and Jataka Tales). He is a religious leader who is the leader of Tibet, who also holds temporal power over the people of Tibet, who consider him a sacred being.

At the outbreak of the 1962, the takeover of Tibet by the Chinese, the Dalai Lama was advised to leave Tibet, there are a number of stories attached to his departure from Tibet, one of the most popular ones is that his departure was protected by heavy cloud over and the Chinese were misled away from his path, this cloud cover also guided him towards India and away from Bhutan.

Bhutan, however, has also not been unscathed by the McMahon Line conflict, it lies as a 'buffer zone' between China and India, and shares a closer relationship with India, due to various infrastructural activities in the area. The issue has escalated a number of times, the most recent escalation being the Doklam Crisis.

China-India Border: Eastern Sector

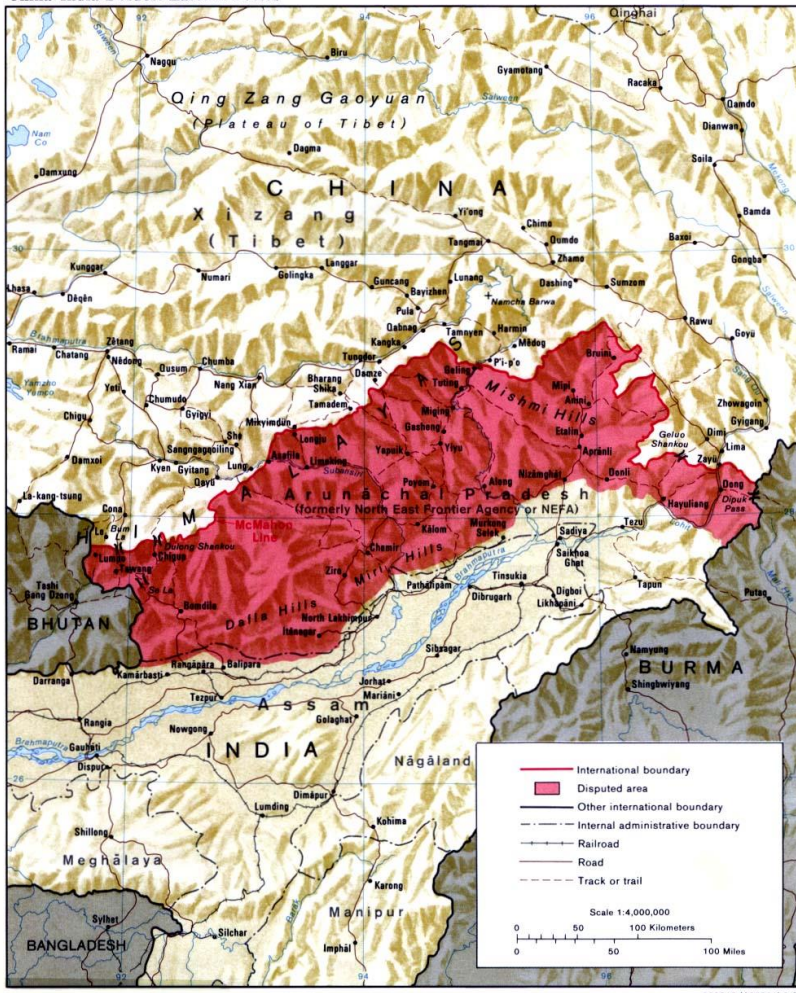


Figure 1.1: The Disputed McMahon Line

The McMahon-Hussein Correspondence

Historical Context of the McMahon-Hussein Correspondence

The McMahon-Hussein correspondence is arguably the most relevant document when dealing with the complex history and coexistence of diverse ethnicities in the Middle East in the Post- War Period of the First World

The correspondence is a corpus of 24 long letters exchanged between British Administrator Sir Henry McMahon and Hussein Ibn Ali, the Emir of Mecca, the Birth place of the Islam, the Prophet Muhammad and the direction of prayer for all Muslims. This correspondence was exchanged over a one year period between 1915-1916.

The Basic Tenets

These letters outlined a plan that essentially traded Arab freedom from British control in exchange for support against the Ottoman Empire. In 1917, the Balfour Declaration secretly concluded between England and the Arab Leader from the Hashemite line of descent. However, it was found the terms laid down in the Hussein-McMahon correspondence were in direct contradiction to the Sykes-Picot Agreement between Britain, France and Palestine

According to the Sykes-Picot Agreement of May 1916, the regions of Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine were divided into regions that were to be administered by the French, the British and the Russians, these regions were known as mandates. This region was seen to be economically beneficial to the Western Powers as it controlled important trade routes from and to India, the Suez Canal and the region of Aleppo.

The provisions of the Sykes-Picot Agreement were:

- 1) Russia acquired the Armenian regions in the Erzurum region, along with Kurdish majority regions of the South East
- 2) France acquired the regions of Syria and Lebanon as well as many hinterlands in the region.
- 3) Britain acquired many regions in southern Mesopotamia, Baghdad, Haifa and Akko
- 4) Between the French and The British, they acquired a majority of the Arab Confederacy.
- 5) Alexandretta remained a free port.
- 6) Palestine because of the religious sites should remain under an international regime.

Aftermath of the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence

The region of the Hajj was provided with Autonomy under the Administration of the then Emir of Mecca. This also led to the rise of Arab-Literature and the rise of Pan-Arabic Nationalism. Further, the border reorganization by the Western powers along with the installation of less autonomous administrators, the region was under the scrutiny of the United Nations. They, established a specialized Agency in order to resolve the conflicts in the region.

United Nations Special Commission on Palestine (UNSCOP)

In 1947-1948, the United Nations established the Special Commission on Palestine, that was mandated to resolve the issue of border demarcation in the Middle East and replace it with a modern map of the Middle East, that was mutually accepted and not disputed for legitimacy. According to Resolution 181 (II) of the United Nations General Assembly :

"1. The Mandate for Palestine shall terminate as soon as possible but in any case not later than 1 August 1948.

2. The armed forces of the mandatory Power shall be progressively withdrawn from Palestine, the withdrawal to be completed as soon as possible but in any case not later than 1 August 1948.

The mandatory Power shall advise the Commission, as far in advance as possible, of its intention to terminate the Mandate and to evacuate each area.

The mandatory Power shall use its best endeavours to ensure that an area situated in the territory of the Jewish State, including a seaport and hinterland adequate to provide facilities for a substantial immigration, shall be evacuated at the earliest possible date and in any event not later than 1 February 1948.

3. *Independent Arab and Jewish States and the Special International Regime for the City of Jerusalem, set forth in part III of this plan, shall come into existence in Palestine two months after the evacuation of the armed forces of the mandatory Power has been completed but in any case not later than 1 October 1948. The boundaries of the Arab State, the Jewish State, and the City of Jerusalem shall be as described in parts II and III below.*

4. *The period between the adoption by the General Assembly of its recommendation on the question of Palestine and the establishment of the independence of the Arab and Jewish States shall be a transitional period."*

This commission, however, failed in its endeavor to demarcate the borders of the Middle East, due to internal disagreement of the Western Powers and the ensuing debate about legality of their demands under international law.

Resurgence of Pan Arabic Identity: The Jasmine Revolution

The Concept of Pan Arabic identity, was popularized by Nasser Abdel Nasser, the leader of Egypt. It led to the short lived United Arab Republic during the 1960s. The Jasmine Revolution, commonly known as the Arab Springs Movement was started in Tunisia in 2010, it demanded democratic self determination and other civil liberties in the region of the Middle East. Other than these two movements, the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence along with the failed UNSCOP mission has led to two Gulf Wars and continuous unrest regarding the Eastern Bank, Golan Heights and statehood of Palestine.



Figure 2: The Disputed Sykes-Picot Distribution of the Middle Eastsssss

Conclusion

“ War makes Rattling History, but peace makes boring reading”

This saying allegedly attributed to Thomas Hardy, can in a few words encapsulate the long arduous legacy of Sir Henry McMahon, in other words, his legacy is primarily a roll call of some of the bloodiest and longest running conflicts in the history of International relations.

