A photograph of a desert landscape featuring rolling sand dunes in the foreground and middle ground. A body of water, possibly a lake or a reservoir, is visible in the lower half of the image, reflecting the sky. The sky is a clear, light blue. The overall scene is serene and expansive.

The Suez Canal, Disraeli, Chinese Gordon, the Mahdi, and Beginning Distrust of England

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Scramble for Africa

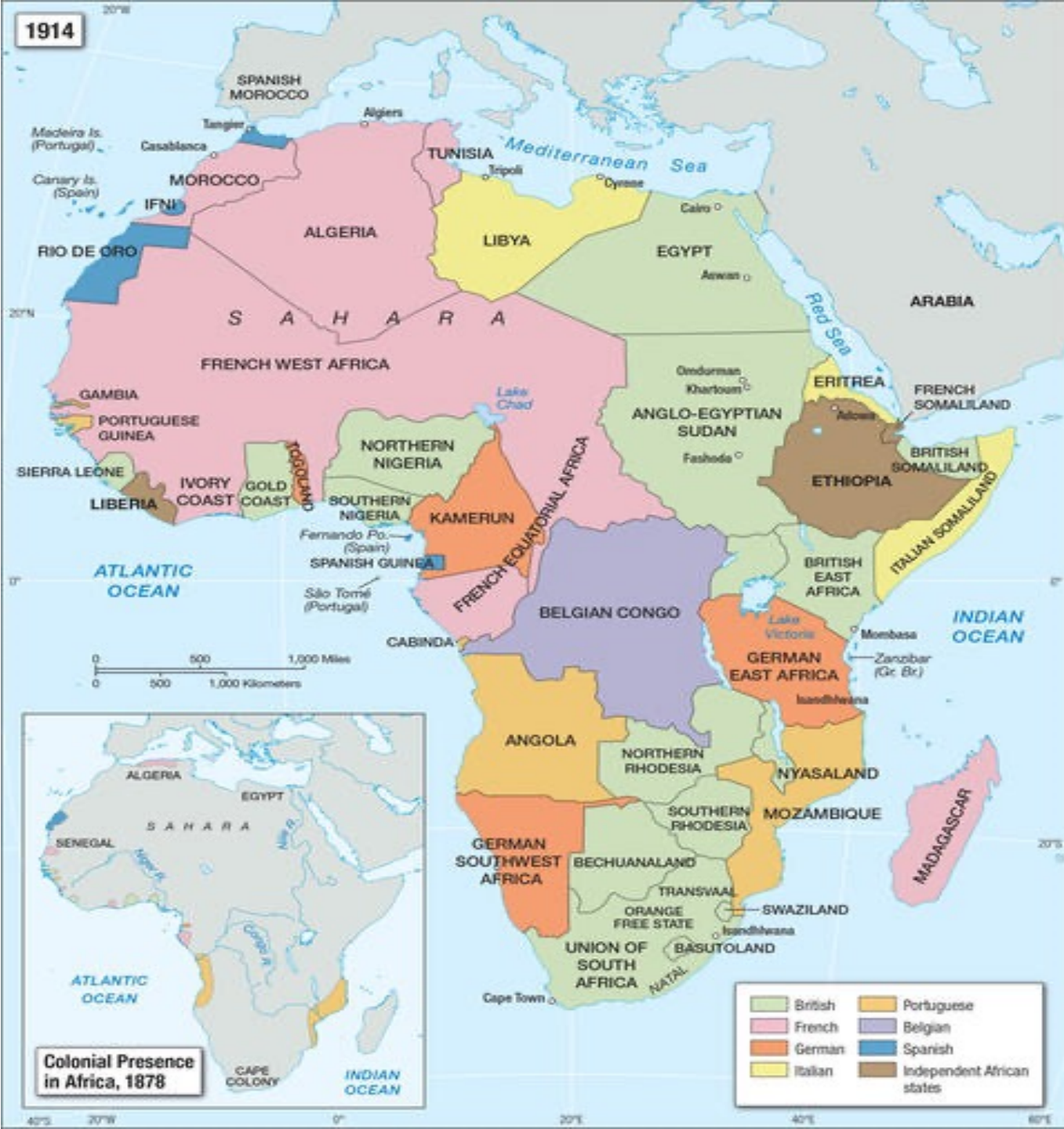
- We talked about the scramble for Africa last week.
- By 1914, the European powers controlled the second-largest continent of 11.73 square miles except Abyssinia (Ethiopia).
- The French had most of the Northwest including Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia, Portuguese Guinea, and French Congo. They also possessed the island of Madagascar in the Indian Ocean and along the southwestern part of the Red Sea, the French Somaliland.
- Spain had coastal bits of Morocco, and the Spanish Guinea in Equatorial Africa.

Scramble for Africa

- The Germans had Cameroon, Southwest Africa (Namibia, now), East Africa, south of Kenya.
- Libya fell to the Italians. They failed to take Abyssinia in 1896 but had Eritrea to its north along the Red Sea, and Italian Somaliland in the Indian Ocean.
- The British controlled the areas west of the Red Sea including Egypt, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, Uganda, and Kenya, and from the Union of South Africa rose north to Rhodesia, with the German East Africa (Tanzania) inserted between their possessions of Uganda and Kenya in the north and Northern Rhodesia to their south.

Scramble for Africa

- The British also had their share of West Africa, in Nigeria and Ghana.
- The oldest colonial power in Africa, Portugal had the strategic slave trade locations of Angola on the southern Atlantic coast and Mozambique on the Indian Ocean.
- Congo Free State (Congo-Kinshasa) was a personal possession of King Leopold II of Belgium, (r. 1865-1909), until 1908 when it became a Belgian colony.



Why Return to the Scramble

- We talked about Egypt last week. Today, we will look at a few pieces of this puzzle because they help us understand the Imperial thinking about their colonial possessions.
- We will discuss a British commercial and strategic interest, the Suez Canal, two imperial figures, Disraeli and Chinese Gordon, one symbol of resistance to Imperialism, Muhammad Ahmad (Mahdi), and try to understand what trust or distrust of an imperial power means to these historical times.



CYPRUS

SYRIA

ISRAEL

IRAQ

□ Port Said

Suez Canal

JORDAN

Gulf of Suez

Gulf of Aqaba

EGYPT

SAUDI ARABIA

Red
Sea

The Suez Connection

- Egyptian labor built the Suez Canal, completed in 1869, laying down thousands of lives during its construction.
- Egypt wanted to project a pro-Western image on the Suez inauguration. The Khedive invited the Emperor of Austria, the Empress Eugene, the wife of Napoleon III of France, and the Crown Prince of Prussia as well as writers such as Emile Zola and Henrik Ibsen. Simultaneously with the Canal, the Khedive inaugurated an opera house with a performance of Verdi's Rigoletto.

The Suez Canal

- European bankers financed the construction of port facilities, railroads, and telegraph lines in Egypt.
- They also granted high-interest loans to Egypt's government in 1869 when Ferdinand de Lesseps completed the Suez Canal, the vital link from the Mediterranean Sea through Egypt to the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean.

The British

- The British desired control over the canal because it was the gateway to India as well.
- In 1875, Great Britain rescued the financially distressed Egyptian government and purchased the Egyptian ruler, the Khedive's controlling portion of the canal stock.
- Four years later, France and Britain seized Egypt's treasury to secure their investments.

The British

- In 1881, the army under Ahmad Urabi mutinied but failed to make a lasting impact because by 1882 the British were in control, beginning with the devastating bombing of Alexandria. They did not leave until 1956.
- The Khedive remained in office but after 1882 Britain held most of the real power. By then, 3000 ships a year passed through the Suez Canal.

Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881)

- Disraeli was the Tory Prime Minister of Britain, in 1868 and from 1874 to 1880.
- He was of Italian-Jewish descent but was baptized in 1817 and had an Anglican upbringing since the age of 12. This conversion allowed him to become an MP in 1837. The British Parliament excluded Jews until 1858.
- Disraeli, typical of Imperial figures, traveled for sixteen months in the Mediterranean and the Middle Eastern countries beginning in 1830. He was a strong advocate for the empire and particularly emphasized possession of India.

The Suez Connection

- As Prime Minister, Disraeli claimed success when he bought the Egyptian Khedive (ruler), Ismail Pasha's slightly less than half of the Suez Canal Company's shares. The Parliamentary approval was slow in coming so he used a loan from the Rothschild family to hold the shares until the bargain was conformed.
- With his emphasis on India, Suez was a crucial passageway. He also won parliament's approval in 1876 to confer on Queen Victoria the title empress of India. His concern for India also defined his policy toward the Ottoman Empire favoring their control of the straits and confining possible Russian maritime advances to the Black Sea.

The Suez Connection

- Egypt was not alone in borrowing easily available money from European creditors based on poor estimates of future income. Many countries dipped into these pots of money aimed at funding what historian James L. Gelvin termed as Defensive Developmentalism.
- The Ottoman Empire, Iran, and Tunisia also took excessive loans and accepted rigorous revenue-sharing arrangements when they failed to pay back.

Mahdi

- Mahdi became a symbol of resistance to Imperialism. His name was Muhammad Ahmad. Historian Albert Hourani believes that his followers regarded him as Mahdi, desirous of restoring Islamic justice to society.
- Mahdi's struggle was essentially against his northern neighbor, Egypt.
- Sudan is ancient Nubia. Since the dawn of civilization, these two neighbors have had a relationship of amity and hostility.

Nubia in Africa

- Nubia was a corridor between Africa and Egypt and interacted with both cultures.
- During the Middle and New Kingdoms, Egypt expanded into Nubia to control its mineral resources including gold.
- Between 3100 BCE and 350 CE, Nubia developed a complex political organization, social stratification, metallurgy, monumental buildings, and writing.
- After some five centuries of Egyptian domination, Nubians repulsed them in 1200 BCE.
- Between 712-660 BCE Nubians ruled Egypt as the Twenty-fifth dynasty.

Nubia

- Nubia remained a Christian civilization for 1000 years using Greek liturgy and Churches built along Coptic and Byzantine fashion.
- Aksum had annexed it in the fourth century. Aksum continues to be a Christian-majority state.
- Islam prevailed there only from 1300 onwards.
- The Ottoman rulers of Egypt had expanded into Sudan but by 1884 the Egyptian rule faced the Mahdi rebellion, and then ended.

Mahdi—Chinese Gordon

- The British had decided to extend their control over the south coinciding with the rise of Mahdi.
- Besides Sudan's strategic importance west of the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, the British might have apprehended other European powers taking over as part of Scramble for Africa.
- General Gordon was Chinese Gordon because his vast engagement with the Imperial expansion had seen him in action in China during the Second Opium War (1856-60) and Taiping Rebellion (1850-64) besides Crimea.

Chinese Gordon

- Gordon had served in Sudan as Governor General for the Egyptian Khedive and was proud of eliminating the local slave trade there. He left in 1880.
- Four years later, Mahdi forces trounced an Egyptian-British force, and the British government sent Gordon to evacuate the Egyptian-British civilians and the soldiers. He traveled to Khartoum to oversee the withdrawal of the Egyptian military and the civilian population in response to the rise of an Islamic movement of Mahdi.

Mahdi-Gordon

- After the Mahdists had inflicted several crushing defeats against the Egyptian forces, Gordon became trapped and overrun by Mahdist troops.
- The British sent a relief expedition to rescue Gordon. However, by the time the expedition had arrived, Mahdist troops had murdered and decapitated Gordon – apparently in direct contravention of Ahmad's orders.
- The Gordon Relief Mission of 1885 is an essential context to Kitchener's campaign of 1898 that we will discuss in a minute.

Mahdi

- Gordon's end was a blow to British prestige. There was a demand to avenge Gordon, whom many glorified as a Christian hero.
- Mahdi also died in 1885 and Khalifa Abdallahi Muhammad took over as leader of the Mahdia.
- In 1896, responding to an Italian request, Lord Cromer, consul general of Egypt, deployed Lord Kitchener to avenge Gordon's death. One of Kitchener's battle cries was 'remember Gordon' during the combat.
- Omdurman on 2 September 1898 was the culminating battle of this campaign.

Mahdi

- Omdurman showed, above all, like the Boer Wars, how human capacity to kill had phenomenally increased since the Industrial Revolution.
- We have no idea of the First World War yet but it will manifest how this destructive capability pursued, and continues, a relentlessly upward path.
- Winston Churchill was an officer participating in the 1898 battle of Omdurman in the Sudan. He described the effects of the machine gun on natives in [*The River War*](#), a book that he wrote about it based on his personal experiences. He said, “It was not a battle but an execution... the bodies were... spread evenly over acres and acres.”
- In the final battle, 11,000 of the Khalifa’s army were killed and 16,000 wounded – although the number of actual fatalities would have been significantly higher owing to the neglect and killing of the wounded. In contrast, Anglo-Egyptian forces lost just 48 men and 382 were wounded.

Mahdi-Kitchener

- Kitchener was in a vengeful mode, so he bombed Mahdi's tomb. Churchill described in *The River War* that his tomb had been for more than ten years the most sacred place and holy thing that the people of the Soudan knew. The British army decided to destroy it as its presence was a conspicuous memorial to his victory over Gordon.
- Kitchener explained to the Queen why Mahdi's body was dug up, and his skull removed. Churchill recorded that his limbs and trunk were thrown into the Nile.
- The British had avenged Gordon's death and symbolically 'killed' the Mahdi in a mirror image of the treatment of Gordon's corpse. They had also sent an unmistakably firm signal to all those who wanted to resist.

The Trust

- The British built an empire on the financial and technical strength of joint stock companies which funded and secured colonial expansion in exchange for monopolies on trading opportunities. As their network expanded, the British Navy offered protection and the British agents secured the trading routes. The Suez was one example.
- The British administrators, in the meantime, crafted theories and justifications for the imperial enterprise.
- Disraeli, for example, was a novelist as well. Besides several other aspects of his life, his novel [Tancred](#) reflected his long travel of sixteen months through the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

The Trust

- This is how Disraeli describes Asia on page 178 of *Tancred*, published in 1847, “... Asia has been overrun by Turks and Tatars. For nearly 500 years the true oriental mind has been enthralled. Arabia alone has remained free and faithful to the divine tradition. From its bosom we shall go forth and sweep away the mouldering remnants of the Tataric system; And then, when the east has resumed its indigenous intelligence, when angels and prophets again mingled with humanity, the sacred quarter of the globe will recover its primeval and divine supremacy; It will act upon the modern empires, and the faint-hearted faith of Europe, which is but the shadow of a shade, will become as vigorous as befits men who are in sustained communication with the Creator.”

The Trust

Lord Cromer (Evelyn Baring), the Governor General of Egypt for a quarter century, and an old colonial hand, wrote in a 1908 essay:

“To be more explicit, what is meant when it is said that the commercial spirit should be under some control is this -- that in dealing with Indians, or Egyptians, or Shilluks, or Zulus, the first question is to consider what these people, who are all nationally speaking, more or less in statu pupillari, themselves think is best in their own interest, although this is a point which deserves serious consideration. But it is essential that each special issue should be decided mainly with reference to what, by the light of Western knowledge and experience tempered by local consideration, we conscientiously think is best for the subject, race, without reference to any real or supposed advantage which may accrue to England as a nation, or – as is more frequently the case -- to the special interests represented by someone or more influential classes of Englishmen.

The Trust

Lord Cromer (Evelyn Baring), contd.

If the British nation as a whole persistently bears this principle in mind, and insists sternly on its application, though we can never create a patriotism akin to that based on the affinity of race or community of language, we may perhaps foster some sort of cosmopolitan allegiance grounded on the respect always accorded to superior talents and unselfish conduct, and on the gratitude derived both from favors conferred and from those to come. There may then at all events be some hope that the Egyptian will hesitate before he throws his lot with any future Urabi.....Even the Central African savage may eventually learn to chant a hymn in honor of Astraea Redux, as represented by the British official who denies him gin but gives him justice. More than this, commerce will gain.

The Trust-Distrust-Relationships

- Profiteering and domination drove colonialism. The colonized people experienced consequences of this adventure in their daily lives whether they dug canals, built railway or telegraph lines, extracted minerals, and natural resources for the masters, produced agricultural commodities the factories and consumers in the Mother Countries needed, bought their manufactured goods out of their meager incomes, faced Maxim guns, or coped with the sustained humiliation that a superior race inflicted on them, physically and intellectually.
- Violent, oppressive, exploitative, and degrading, but it was a relationship; a long series of complex interactions, that changed the geopolitical, social, and economic ecosystems of the colonized people forever.

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Questions/Comments

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