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## **British Presence in the Middle East:**

### **Emancipation or Colonization**

*Case study: Iraq 1918-1958.*

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*Salah Eddine MEHIDEB.*

*This work is dedicated to my dear parents,  
beloved brothers and sisters,  
and my best friends.*

**Abstract:** After the First World War, the geopolitics of the world and mainly the Middle East area witnessed many changes. The major colonial powers wanted to control the former territories of the Ottoman Empire within their empires; however, the American President, Wilson refused to accept further colonialism after the war. He concluded that the major cause of the war was the competition between the European powers to dominate the world. Therefore it was the Mandatory System, which replaced the formal colonialism in the world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

This paper aims to highlight some aspects of the British Mandatory Policy in the Middle East, through Iraq as case study, and answer the question regarding the nature of British presence in the Middle East, was it for the purpose of emancipation or colonization?

**Résumé:** Après la Première Guerre Mondiale, la géopolitique du monde et principalement au Moyen-Orient témoin de nombreux changements. Les grandes puissances coloniales voulurent contrôler les anciens territoires de l'Empire Ottoman au sein de leurs empires, toutefois, le président Américain Wilson rejette le colonialisme après la guerre; concluant que la principale cause de la guerre était la compétition entre les puissances européennes pour dominer le monde. Par conséquent, le système de mandat, a remplacé le colonialisme formel dans le monde dans le 20<sup>ème</sup> siècle.

Ce mémoire vise à mettre en lumière certains aspects de la politique des Mandats Britannique au Moyen-Orient, avec l'Irak comme cas d'étude, et de répondre à la question concernant la nature de la présence britannique dans le Moyen-Orient, entre émancipation et colonisation.

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## Introduction

Western imperialism in the Middle East following the First World War took another shape apart from direct colonization. Britain, after occupying Iraq during WWI, began to find that this country was not only important as a defense area but also vital for other interests. After WWI, British foreign policy was damaged by financial and military weakness; as a result, British policy-makers were obliged to devise a form of control that would include the Middle East territories in the Empire.

Therefore, between 1914 and 1932, the British government created the modern state of Iraq from the combination of the three provinces of Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul in a shape which would be acceptable on the international stage and for the indigenous populations. The new states' creation after WWI was influenced by the liberal views of the U.S. President Wilson. He was attempting to reestablish international order in a way to comply with the American political and economic dominance.

At the heart of President Wilson project was the Mandate system, which intended to establish worldwide ideal of the independent states, with relatively open markets and politically independent governments. The creation of the Iraqi state represented a break with traditional territorial imperialism and hinted the beginning of the end of British imperialist dominance. In Iraq under the Mandate system, the political power remained with the British high commissioners and advisors, despite the fact that Mandate system was intended to grant political authority the to the

institutions of the new Iraqi state and the Iraqi politicians under the supervision of Britain and the League of Nations .

However, British presence in the Middle East did not last very long. The Second World War represented the turning point in the international relations, with the decline of European imperialist powers and the emergence of the United States and the Soviet Union as major players at the world stage. The collapse of British imperialism in the Middle East came after three major events, the military coup of 1952 led by Gamal Abdel Nasser which ended Egypt's British-influenced monarchy, the Suez Crisis in 1956 which led to the decline of British dominance in the canal and Egypt, and the third of greater importance is the Iraqi Revolution of 1958 under the leadership of Brigadier Abd al Karim Qasim which brought to end the Hashemite monarchical rule and declared Iraq a republic state.

Therefore, this paper aims to demonstrate some aspects of British policy in the Middle East through Iraq as a case study. It intends to demonstrate the reasons of British occupation after the First World War and what followed it as the British Civil Administration and the subsequent revolt of 1920. Also, it aims to show the birth of the mandate system and the transitions in British policy in Iraq from direct administration to mandatory and further to alliance. Finally, it tries to display the Anglo-Iraqi relations after 1932 through the most significant events, reoccupation during the WWII, the Baghdad Pact of 1955, and the revolution of 1958.

The work is divided into three main chapters; each one is concerned with a specific period of the Iraqi historical evolution towards independence until the fall of Hashemite monarchy in 1958.

The first chapter deals with the pre-mandate period. It is divided into two parts. The first includes a general preview about the social structure of Iraq under Ottoman rule. Also, it highlights some aspects of Ottoman rule in the three provinces, and the evolution of Istanbul policies aiming to restore of Ottoman authority in its territories and the reforms which intended to reestablish firm control. In addition to that, it deals with western interests in the area and Iraq before the war. The second part is devoted to the British military occupation of the provinces during the WWI. As well as, it deals with results of the disintegration of ottoman territories during the war, the rise of Arab Nationalism and the Arab Revolt.

The second chapter is divided into three parts that is concerned with the historical evolution of British policies in Iraq post-war period until Iraqi independence in 1932. it deals with some shifts of British strategies during that period, the establishment of Civil Administration, and the birth of Mandate of League of Nations, the subsequent population's dissatisfaction and the Iraqi Revolt. Also, it deals with Cairo Conference of 1921 and the establishment of Hashemite monarchy. The final part is dedicated to the Anglo-Iraqi treaties which represented the shifts of British policies from direct control to formal alliance.

The last chapter is dedicated to the British relations with independent Iraq, and it is divided into three parts, the Second World War and the consequential British reoccupation in 1941 after the refusal of Iraqi government to declare war on the

Germans and denial of British interference, the Baghdad Pact in 1955 and its importance for Britain as a defensive device against the growing influence of the Soviet Union in the Middle East. Finally, the last part deals with the revolution of 1958 which represents the end of British imperialism in Iraq and the replacement of monarchical rule with the republic regime.

The conclusion of this work aims to show the nature of British presence in the Middle East, particularly Iraq, also it tries to reveal the intention behind the establishment of nation states in the Middle East, and answer the crucial question concerning the mandate system, whether it was for the purpose of colonizing the ex-Ottoman territories or emancipating the indigenous inhabitants from the subordination to Ottoman Empire.

My choice of this topic, the British presence in the Middle East afterward WWI, came after long thinking about the importance of British foreign policy and its influence on the world political stage. Britain, in addition to France, was the major imperial power during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, in the twentieth century, after two world wars, the British supremacy started to collapse and the mandatory system in the Middle East represented the turning point of British imperialism in the world. The importance of this topic is demonstrated also in the fact that the period between WWI and WWII represents the dawn of Arab nation states creation and the subsequent political and historical evolution even nowadays is the result of the role of major players in the world particularly Britain and France.

The methodology of this work is basically historical because of the nature of the topic as a study of the political evolution of Iraq. In order to demonstrate the British

policies development in Iraq I organized this work chronologically starting with WWI towards independence and until the revolution of 1958 in the form of chapters include causes and consequences of major historical events that display the political evolution of Iraq.

The bibliography of this work consists mainly of updated e-books about the historical and political evolution of Iraq, e-books about British foreign policy and imperialism, particularly in Iraq and the Middle East. Also I relied in this work on online articles concerning the British mandate and Anglo-Iraqi treaties.

## **Chapter I:**

### **Iraq before the British Mandate**

The country that is today Iraq, consisted in 1914 of the three Ottoman provinces of Basra, Baghdad and Mosul. Under the late Ottoman rule, they were detached from the tight control of Istanbul and enjoyed some local autonomy

During the Ottoman rule, European powers were interested in traveling and exploring the Middle East, also they were interested in trade and spying in the area, the most active were the British who considered Iraq as a link between Egypt and India, their intention increased after the discovery of oil by the first decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The British conquest of these territories began in the war between Great Britain and Turkey late 1914, when the Indian Expeditionary Force 'D' settled on the southern area, and then went on to attack Basra which fell without great efforts. The British advance into central Iraq was delayed for a time by their defeat at Kut. This defeat led to a total reform of the British force, resulted the appointment of General Maude as Commander -in-Chief. Baghdad fell to the British in March 1917 and the occupation of the rest of Iraq was completed soon after in 1918.

Before the British mandate, the three provinces that consist Iraq passed through long period of Ottoman rule and what followed of European interests and British occupation during WWI.

## **I- Iraq under Ottoman Rule**

Prior to the World War I, the state of Iraq was under the Ottoman rule. The area known now as Iraq was divided into three of Basra in the south, Baghdad in the

centre and Mosul in the north. These provinces enjoyed some form of autonomy. And were the target of growing European interests in the Middle East.

## **A) The Social Structure of Ottoman Iraq**

Previous to British occupation, the provinces of Basra, Baghdad and Mosul were parts of the Ottoman Empire.

The three provinces reflected the geographic, linguistic, and religious diversity of Ottoman Iraq at that period. Most of the inhabitants of Mosul in the north and northeast were Kurds and other non-Arabs. There, Pastures and cultivated fields benefited from the plentiful rainfall and melting winter snows of this largely mountainous region. The people of the plains and deserts of the centre and south were mostly Arabic-speaking. Few Turkish speakers were outside of Baghdad, and some other towns. Outside the towns, social organization and personal allegiances were primarily tribal, with many of the settled cultivators having retained their tribal life. Baghdad, situated near the geographic centre, knew the division between the majority Shi'ite south and the largely Sunnite north. In addition to Muslims, Iraq's non-Muslim communities were modest in size, represented in Sabaeans, Yazidis, Jewish merchants in Baghdad, and Assyrian Christians in Mosul (Sluglett, 1).

Under the Ottoman rule trade increased, the economic and living conditions of the inhabitants improved; and the towns, particularly Baghdad, experienced some growth and new building. However, until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the three provinces were not under tight or direct Ottoman administration. Thus they enjoyed a sort of

autonomy and some areas were beyond the reach of Ottoman authority for extended periods. In his book **Britain in Iraq**, Sluglett states that:

*Until the time of Midhat Pasha, the capable and enlightened governor of Baghdad between 1869 and 1872, even the three main cities, Mosul, Baghdad and Basra were only under the nominal and occasional control of the authorities in Constantinople. The powers of the local representatives of the Porte hardly extended beyond the outer suburbs of the towns in which their garrisons were quartered, and the rural area was composed of a series of largely independent chiefdoms with overlapping, often shifting spheres of control and influence ( 1-2).*

This situation started to change in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. When administrative centralization and reorganization, undertaken by the Ottoman government as part of a comprehensive reform and modernization program known as the *Tanzimat* reforms. This period was characterized by a series of Western-influenced reforms. Between 1839 and 1859, several reformations were introduced, regulations of the army started, new land laws concerning land possession, production and income; new administrative plans was created in order to rule the provinces efficiently. Local governments were reorganized to incorporate minorities, such as Christians, Jews, and other minorities (Fattah 142). In this context, Donald Quataert states in his book

## The Ottoman Empire:

*With the Tanzimat reforms, the old system of differentiation and distinction and of Muslim legal superiority formally disappeared. Equality of status meant equality of obligation and military service for all. The clothing laws disappeared almost entirely and, while the religious courts remained, many of their functions vanished. New courts appeared: so-called mixed courts at first heard commercial, criminal, and then civil cases involving persons of different religious communities. Then, beginning in 1869, secular courts (nizamiye) presided over civil and criminal cases involving Muslim and non-Muslim (178).*

These Reforms which had been influenced by European modernity were applied first to Istanbul and its surrounding regions, later, to both European and Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire. In Iraq, The restoration of direct rule by the Sultan's government started with the army.

The military reforms undertaken extended to Iraq. The Iraqi regiments were reorganized and, together with new troops sent from the capital and soldiers recruited locally as military conscription was applied in various parts of the territories, formed an integrated part of the Ottoman Army. Consequently, many Iraqis had military career that by the end of the 19th century they formed the most numerous group of Arab officers in the Ottoman army. Most of them were Sunnites from modest

families, educated in military schools set up in Baghdad and other provincial cities by the Ottoman government. Some were then admitted to the military academy in Istanbul; among them were Nuri as-Sa'id and Yasin al-Hashimi, who became leading figures in the post-World War I state of Iraq. About the backgrounds of Iraqi officers, D.K. Fieldhouse notes in his book **Western Imperialism in the Middle East**:

*“In common with very many officers in the Ottoman army before 1914, most came from middle- or lower-middle-class backgrounds and had seen a military career via the Istanbul military academy” (78).*

Apart from the military schools and the traditional religious schools, a number of primary and secondary schools were opened by the government and by foreign Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish missionary organizations. Graduates of the schools were expected to enter the provincial bureaucracy, and most did so. Some members of local notable families chose careers in administration, but it was Turkish speakers from Kirkuk and descendants of the Mamluks who were well represented in the bureaucratic ranks. However, the highest administrative posts holders were appointed from Istanbul (Fattah).

As a result of the new military, educational and administrative progress, the communications network was expanded and modernized. Steamships increased on the Tigris and Euphrates, and a company was later formed to provide regular service between Basra and Baghdad. To handle the increasing volume of trade, the port facilities of Basra were developed. In the 1860s telegraph lines linked Baghdad with Istanbul, and in the 1880s the postal system was extended to Iraq. Roads were

improved and new ones were built. Railroad construction, however, was not introduced until the Germans before World War I (Fattah 142).

These developments were of great importance for the European powers which were ambitious to control more natural resources and dominate the promising commercial areas in the three provinces and the Middle East.

## **B) European interests in Iraq before WWI**

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Europeans began to enhance their interests in the area by exploring, spying and trading in Ottoman territories of the Middle East, as well as in navigating its rivers.

Iraq laid on one of the communications routes between India obviously it was of great importance for the East India Company. Iraq also had a significant population and economy; large enough to encourage commercial activities in the region. It was for these reasons that the EIC set up a factory in the port of Basra in 1763. In addition, the gulf offered its deep water port as a practical commercial alternative with access to the Ottoman Empire but lying outside of it. This meant that the EIC did not have to worry so much about the state of Britain's political relations with the Ottoman Empire but could still take advantage of the trade in this part of the world. In this course sluglett argues:

*Britain's connection with Iraq and the Gulf had grown out of its interest in protecting the route to India and trade in the Indian Ocean. Early in the nineteenth century Britain had been concerned to prevent attacks on its shipping from the Gulf coasts, and after a*

*series of naval encounters had entered into treaty relations with the rulers of the principal shaykhdoms of the Arabian Peninsula aimed at the suppression of piracy in return for British protection...The ensuing peace enabled British and Indian merchants to trade freely with both shores of the Gulf and with southern Iraq (2-3).*

Despite the EIC trade growth, however, Britain was not the only European country to take commercial advantage of this part of the Ottoman Empire. Germany was the competitor, not as an imminent threat but growing steadily. In the years just before World War I, the close ties between the governments of the Kaiser in Berlin and the Young Turks in Istanbul were particularly unpleasant to Great Britain. When Germany was awarded a concession to extend its railway line through Anatolia to Baghdad in 1903 and acquired mineral rights to the land on both sides of the proposed route, in addition to the modernization of the Ottoman Army (Sluglett, 3). Therefore, increasing fear of German competition in Iraq and the Persian Gulf evoked strong protests in London, Reeva Spector Simon and Eleanor H. Tejirian state in **The**

### **Creation of Iraq:**

*The German threat became even more menacing with the policies of Kaiser Wilhelm II, which looked to the Ottoman Empire for imperial spoils. The construction of the Berlin to Baghdad railway, along with the sudden appearance of German military advisors in Istanbul, and archaeologists, spies, salesmen, and arms dealers in Arabia, Iraq, and the Gulf 30 led to British reassessments of the situation especially after 1913 (9).*

Another important reason for the increasing western interest in Iraq was oilfields; particularly in South West Persia. According to Baghdad railway concession rights over minerals in the 20 kilometers on the sides of the railway were granted. Even there were not significant discoveries in Iraq, the potential of Northern oilfields was high. The Anglo-Persian Oil Company began production on the Iranian side of the gulf, In South West Persia the oil fields provided considerable quantities of oil since 1907 and there were indications that oil might be found elsewhere in the area (Sluglett,3-4). In 1912 a group representing British, German, and Dutch interests formed the Turkish Petroleum Company which, on the eve of the war, was given a concession to explore for oil in Mosul and Baghdad. Later in 1914, driven by her concern to secure oil supplies for the Royal Navy, Britain worked on getting the majority shareholding in the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (Sluglett, 3-4).

Ultimately, Iraq became of great Importance for Britain; it lies in the route to her favourite colony of India, in addition to the Royal Navy when declared the abandonment of coal powered ships in favour of oil powered ones. Oil became a vital commodity. Taken together; by the outbreak of the First World War, the British were already extremely worried about the strategic future of this part of the world. When war did break out, the British were due to conduct a campaign to defend their vital interests.

## II- Iraq during the First World War

During WWI, Iraq was an important battlefield for Britain in order to defeat the ottomans from within and protect the oilfields in Persia. However, the occupation led to further consequences in the area, the rise of Arab voices claiming autonomy and self-determination.

### A) British occupation of Iraq

World War I saw the emergence of two military alliances, one comprising Britain, France, and Belgium; the other, Germany, Austria and the Turks. When the Ottomans formally declared themselves allied to the Germans, the British planned a campaign against the Ottomans starting in Basra. The consensus of opinion amongst British politicians and diplomats was that Basra, as the most strategic and economically valuable area of Iraq, would be annexed to the Empire to provide a safe trade route towards India and to assure the oil supplies for the Royal Navy, also The War Office, Admiralty, Foreign Office and Colonial Office put in consideration the Iraq's oil potential in the near future (Tareq, 1).

The British started to move towards Basra province in October 1914. When Indian Expeditionary Force "D" occupied Basra on November 22, 1914, the British troops secured the access routes to the Abadan oilfields in southwest Persia (in which the Anglo- Persian Oil Company had the majority of shares). Arguing that, D.K. Fieldhouse states:

*For them [the British] Arabia was primarily a route to India and the east that had to be kept open against Ottoman and German threats*

*[...] By 1914 there was one other primary concern: the British navy had for some years been converting its ships from coal to oil, and the oil of southern Persia and the refinery at Abadan on the Gulf were British controlled and seen as critical for the war effort. The result was that the first significant British action against the Ottomans was the occupation of Basra with an expeditionary force from India in November 1914 (48).*

After occupying Basra without any considerable resistance from the Ottoman and Arab troops, the British forces advanced towards Baghdad. Therefore, The British War Office, India Office, and Foreign Office gave advice to their general command to continue and capture Baghdad. However, the Ottomans reinforced themselves with regular army units and soon had the exhausted British forces besieged in Kut, the Ottomans surrounded and defeated the British forces under Major General Charles V. F. Townsend. Then, The British surrendered unconditionally to the Ottomans on 29<sup>th</sup> April 1916 after a siege lasting 140 days, after suffering from diseases and starvation (Fattah, 156-157).

However, this defeat provoked a complete reorganization and reinforcement of the British forces, with the appointment of General Sir Frederick S. Maude as Commander -in-Chief. Through his strategy and planning, he succeeded in capturing Baghdad, declaring the British forces as a “liberating” army on March 11, 1917 (Fattah, 157). Daniel Silverware quoting general Maude after entering Baghdad inviting the inhabitants:

*through your Nobles and Elders and Representatives, to participate in the management of your civil affairs in collaboration with the Political Representatives of Great Britain who accompany the British Army so that you may unite with your kinsmen in the North, East, South and West in realizing the aspirations of your race (6).*

The occupation of the rest of central Iraq was accomplished soon after. Northern Iraq (Mosul) was captured by the end of 1918, when the Ottomans moved from their strongholds in northern Iraq according to the armistice signed at the end of October 1918. As a result of The Great War, nearly all Iraqi territories were under British control, despite the fact that Mosul status as part of Iraq was settled later in 1924. Eventually, Iraq was due to experience another type of administration under British rule (Sluglett, 4).

Besides the military occupation, Iraq witnessed as the other Arab territories the rise of nationalist movement aiming independence and self-rule after the collapse of Ottoman Empire.

## **B) Arab Nationalists and Arab Revolt**

Arab nationalism had made little impact upon Iraq before World War I. In Syria, Arab nationalist and nationalist organizations appeared after the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. In Iraq, however, there was opposition to Ottoman rule and claims for more autonomy, although some Iraqi Arab officers in the Ottoman army joined the secret Al 'Ahd society, which called for independence for the provinces.

The “Young Turks” revolution in July 1908 aimed to force the king Abdulhamid II to take progressive decisions in order to modernize the political system similar to the western style. They were inspired by the political ideals in Europe and attracted by the industrial upheavals of Britain, yet remaining committed to their Islamic religion and Ottoman heritage, they wanted to reform the whole imperial system from inside, attempting to promote the empire into a constitutional parliamentary system, resembling the British model. The idea of Turkish nationalism in order of multinational empire was the backbone of the “Young Turks” movement (Kamrava, 27). About the nature of the “Young Turks” movement Hala Fattah states that:

*[The] Young Turk period saw a revival of a pan-Turkish ideal that minimized Arab contributions to the empire. The Young Turks’ program was a European-influenced reform movement against the autocratic rule of Sultan Abdulhamid II begun in the late 19th century and that culminated with the Revolution of 1908, which centered on restoring the constitution and involved nationalist army officers (156).*

Consequently people in the empire territories of Syria, Iraq, and Hijaz were not pleased with this new administration, which they hoped would give more autonomy to them, since it was concerned with Turkish nationalism at the expense of the identities of the provinces (Simon & Tejrjian 39-40). However, they did not support or oppose the new regime, but they stood neutral. Yet, just a small elite of

intellectuals, merchants, land owners and Arab officers wanted to change the situations and oppose the new plans of Istanbul. The British and French were in favour of this independence movement and secretly agreed to provide money, arms and training for the Arabs to overcome the Ottoman troops in the provinces.

Therefore, Hussein Ibn Ali (1855–1931), the "Sharif" of Mecca, who descent from the Prophet's family, had a certain amount of reputation throughout the Hijaz, started looking for British help during 1914. An agreement was concluded after a several letters and communications between Sharif Hussein in Mecca, and the British High Commissioner in the newly declared protectorate of Egypt, Sir Henry McMahon with the contribution of British military adviser T. E. Lawrence. The common goal between the two figures was to end the Ottoman control of the area. For the British to protect their strategic possessions, India, and Egypt whose importance was increased after the opening of the Suez Canal, and Sharif Hussein to establish of an independent Arab state, comprising an Arab territories . This common view of the future of the Arab territories resulted the British promises of independence and emancipation and the recognition of sharif Hussein as the ultimate Arab figure (Kamrava, 39).

Declaring himself the ruler of the newly independent Hijaz , sharif Hussein started his revolt on June 5, 1916,backed mostly by Iraqi-born Ottoman officers who had fled from the army to join him. He became the symbol of anti-Ottoman resistance in 1916. Eventually, the end of the Ottoman rule had begun, and so, it seemed that the Arabs would gain their independence. More important ,the revolt's actual

consequences were the future geopolitics of the Middle East, in September 1918, as British forces marched toward Damascus, one of Hussein's sons, Faisal, declared himself the ruler of Syria and established of a short-lived dynasty(Kamrava, 40).(The French troops ejected him late July 1920, after they were granted Syria and Lebanon).

However, despite the agreement between the Arab nationalists and Britain, the Sykes-Picot Agreement between France and Britain of October 1916 came to divide the Middle East to spheres of influence between the European powers, particularly Britain and France. About the partition kamrava says:

*Greater Syria, which included southwestern Turkey in the north and Lebanon in the west, along with parts of northern Iraq, was to become the sphere of influence of France. Britain was to gain control over Iraq, the Arabian peninsula, and Transjordan. Palestine was subject to an international regime. To ensure their support for the Allied cause, Italy was promised southern Anatolia, and Russia was to obtain control over Istanbul, the strategically important Bosphorus Straits, and parts of eastern Anatolia (40).*

Consequently, the Sykes-Picot agreement threatened the previous alliance between the Arab nationalists and the British. Moreover, after the Balfour Declaration on November 2, 1917 (as a letter from the British foreign secretary, Arthur James Balfour, to a leading Zionist, Lord Rothschild promised the

establishment of a National Home for the Jewish People in Palestine) the situation in the Middle East seemed to be undermined very soon (Kamrava, 42), and the western interests in the area could be in menace. Thus, late 1918, Britain and France agreed on the "liberation" of the territories that had been part of the Ottoman Empire including the establishment of new states in Syria and Iraq. About the new regime of these states, D. K. Fieldhouse notes:

*“The Anglo-French Declaration of 8 November 1918 [...] promised ‘national governments as administrators deriving their authority from the initiative and free choice of the indigenous populations’ in ex-Ottoman territories.”* (83)

To conclude, the aims of France and Great Britain in the Middle East were to control the former Ottoman territories after the WWI, dispel German ambitions in the area and "liberate" the peoples who have been for long under the Ottoman rule.

In pursuit of those intentions, France and Great Britain agree to further and assist in the establishment of indigenous Governments and administrations in Syria and Iraq. The new expected rulers were who have already sided with the Allies during the war. The Hashemites, therefore, already had established a short-lived monarchy in Syria, when Faisal Ibn Hussein, declared himself the monarch. But, soon after, the French troops captured Damascus on July 25, 1920, and defeated Faisal's armed forces.

However, the overthrown King, whose rule had lasted only few months, had not been ejected for long time. In 1920, the British brought back Faisal to rule,

but this time in Iraq, where, after a plebiscite, which had been criticized of being biased, he was proclaimed king of Iraq in 1921. Meanwhile, His brother Abdullah Ibn Hussein was convinced by Winston Churchill, the British colonial secretary, to accept provisional rule over the newly declared Emirate of Transjordan. Consequently, the Hashemites were in control of three states, Sharif Hussein in the Hijaz and his two sons, Abdullah in Jordan, and Faisal in Iraq (Kamrava, 42).

Nevertheless, the British move to secure Faisal as the new King of Iraq, was not because he was an Arab nationalist who might please the Arab people. Thus, the ultimate objective was securing his role as a foreigner in Iraq so he would need to heavily rely on the British as advisors, allies, and mentors, in addition to reward him and the former Ottoman officers backed him during the great war period. Evenmore, the British concluded after the end of the WWI that they needed to institute a more legitimate form of government if they wanted to avoid any revolting movement. It was thought that the Hashemite ruler Faysal might provide adequate legitimacy to allow the British to sustain their control over Iraq. Therefore, in the following years after the appointment of Faysal as a King, Britain exerts several sorts of control in Iraq, starting with the Civil Administration and after followed the mandate system which transformed into alliance treaties before independence (Sluglett, 43-44).

**Chapter II:**  
**British Rule in Iraq**

After the war, the future of the three occupied territories of Iraq was the subject of much discussion. Initially, Britain established a Civil Administration but the people of Iraq were looking forward to independence. However, the announcement in April 1920 from the peace conference at San Remo that a mandate over Iraq would be offered to Great Britain put an end to these hopes of immediate independence for Iraq, and an armed insurrection against British rule broke out in July 1920. Soon after, in 1921 the British selected a king for the new state and negotiated to replace the mandate with a treaty of alliance.

### **I-British Direct Rule after WWI**

By the end the war, the occupied territories of Iraq were of great importance for the British interests in the Middle East. However, the new situation after the war evoked the discussion about the future of Iraqi people and the British promises of independence and self determination to them during the war.

#### **A) Britain's False Promises and Consequences**

Following the end of First World War, the British forces were in control of the most important Iraqi provinces, and British administration in Baghdad had to decide on their future. The Ottoman Empire had collapsed, leaving the former provinces in indeterminate status, and the two major colonial powers, Britain and France aimed to add them to their empires; however, the Arab were strongly disenchanted with any sort of colonialism because they had been promised independence (Fieldhouse, 82-83).

However, for different reasons, Britain did not simply withdraw from Iraq and let the people of the three provinces decide what sort of rule they want. Firstly, it viewed the country as a vital link from Egypt to India, and by facilitating trade, travel, and mail deliveries, British political leaders believed that a future air route would help to attach the extensively separated parts of their empire together. They also believed that the air route had considerable military potential, and in any crisis it would enable Britain quickly to reinforce its troops in the area. Thus, Iraq represented an important defensive and strategic piece against the ambitions of European powers (Siverfarb, 3).

In addition to the need of developing and protecting the air route, the British government remained in Iraq because it wanted to have military forces near the large British owned oilfields in southwestern Iran and the vital oil refinery at Abadan, Persia. During the war the oil supplies had significantly assisted Britain's military success, and the future potential of this vital commodity was undeniable for the British leaders. Accordingly, they feared that if they withdrew from Iraq, Russia would increase its influence in Iran and eventually threaten these oilfields. Aside from the Persian oil, the oil potential in Iraq were high, although the first extraction of this oil came later in 1927, Britain decided to remain in Iraq and control this rich area (Siverfarb, 3-4).

To end with, the British government stayed in Iraq in order to compensate the huge costs of the military operations during the WWI. At that period, nearly 900,000 British and Indian troops had fought in Iraq. With nearly 100,000 of casualties, fighting on this front had also cost the British treasury £200,000,000. So,

after the war it would be complicated for the British government to give good reason for these losses and sacrifices if it simply withdrew from Iraq (Siverfarb, 4-5). Therefore, soon after the war, Britain established a Civil Administration in order to control the ex-Ottoman territories of Basra, Baghdad and Mosul, and add them informally to the British Empire.

### **B) The British Civil Administration in Iraq after WWI**

Despite British military triumphs, the political future of Iraq was ambiguous. After the war, Britain debated both its broad policy in Iraq and the specific type of administration to establish. Therefore, two schools of thought influenced policymakers in London, the first, advocated by the Colonial Office, stressed a policy of direct control to protect British interests in the Persian Gulf and India. Assessing British policy from India, this school was called the "Indian school". The other school, hoping to persuade Arab nationalists, advised indirect control. In Iraq itself, British authorities were divided on the issue. Some, under the influence of Sir Arnold Wilson, the acting Civil High Commissioner, advocated direct control; others, worried by growing local disappointment with British presence, advised indirect control and suggested the establishment of an indigenous regime under British supervision. As a result, Britain established an administration based on its Indian model. Arguing this choice, Judith S. Yaphe notes in **The Creation of Iraq**:

*The India Office...sought to model Iraq on Britain's imperial style of rule in India. They were guided by the nineteenth century's*

*philosophy of the “white man’s burden.” They believed in direct British rule and distrusted the “natives” capacity for self-rule (22).*

The occupied areas of Basra and Baghdad provinces were combined under one civil commissioner in September 1918 (Mosul was granted to Iraq by League of Nations later in 1925). Administrative centers were established in the main towns of the provinces. Also, political officers were located in charge of districts; they were for the most part, young and inexperienced in either military or civil administration. Many were former military officers demobilized in 1918, and knew few things about Iraq, concerning languages, law codes, culture, or traditions. Nevertheless, they controlled justice, worked to settle issues between people, and attempted to calm down tribe disturbances. Moreover, they worked on irrigation and flood control projects, evaluated compensation for war damages, provided supplies for the British troops and secured communication lines in the provinces (Simon & Tejjirian, 24).

However, although Britain had promised to create an indigenous Arab state under British assistance according to the Anglo-French declaration of 1918, it prolonged direct rule of the provinces through India Office policies and measures. It eliminated elected municipal councils which had been established by the Ottomans and replaced them with the local notables on whom they trust to preserve order. Initially, Justice was based on Indian and Turkish civil law codes and administered by the district political officer in tribal courts. Later, Turkish courts and laws replaced the Anglo- Indian civil code. Tribal sheikhs granted the settlement of tribal issues and the collection of taxes on behalf of the government. The Indian rupee was the official

currency and the taxation code was Turkish. Police constables were from Aden and India, in addition to local soldiers and tribes levies, and local police recruits were from the district (Simon & Tejirian, 24).

Obviously, the Civil Administration embodied the annexation of the former ottoman territories into the British Empire. Nevertheless, the international circumstances after the war led to a new orientation in the British policy in Iraq, from annexation to mandate.

## **II- The Mandate System and Iraqis' Reaction**

From the beginning of the war until 1918, the general consensus was that the ex-Ottoman territories would be seized under the British Empire. Controversially, the conduct of British policy under international and domestic pressures took another orientation by 1919, with the rise of US power and Woodrow Wilson's liberalism; it became evident that annexation was no more an option. This idea became clearer after the construction of the League of Nations and the negotiations about terms of the mandates.

### **A) The Mandate of the League of Nations**

The US President Woodrow Wilson aimed to redefine the post-war international relations. Unambiguously, President Wilson's liberal views backed by the increasing economic and military power of the United States, wanted to reform the European attitude toward the rest of the world. Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen

Points which he proclaimed before the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 focused on the right of self-determination for the ex-German and ex-Ottoman territories; also he considered imperialism an immoral practice. Concerning British policy in the Middle East, Point 5 declared: *“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 claims of the government whose title is to be determined.”* Point 12 particularly said about Iraq, *“The Turkish portions of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development.”* Consequently, the British leaders were obliged to adjust their strategy in Iraq (Fattah, 157).

The idea of a mandate system had been originally suggested by George Louis Beer (an adviser to President Wilson) and Jan Smuts (South African Minister of Defense). As a result, the mandates system was established at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. There, US President Wilson, rejected annexation of ex-German and ex-Ottoman territories by France and Britain, and insisted instead on the territories to become mandated territories controlled under the “tutelage” of victorious powers “on behalf of the League of Nations” until they were able to stand by themselves. Therefore, the mandates system became part of the Covenant of the League of Nations (Van Ginneken, 129).

President Wilson set three categories of mandates from the beginning. A-mandates: Territories that already had achieved a certain level of development (Palestine, Syria, and Iraq). Thus, A-mandates could be granted some form of autonomy. B-mandates required firm control and C-mandates had no self-governing rights. The conditions for mandatory rule were written in mandate texts. Which included, clauses on self-rule, slave trade, forced labor, economic equality for League member states (except in C-mandates), and military recruitment. Moreover, each mandatory power had to submit an annual report, which was studied by the Permanent Mandates Commission (Van Ginneken, 129-130). Commenting on President Wilson strategy, Peter J. Yearwood states in **Guarantee of Peace**:

*Wilson, seeing in imperialism a major cause of war, preferred to internationalize the former German colonies or to award mandates under the league to small and presumably disinterested powers. To meet this, it was decided to accept the mandatory principle for the German colonies in tropical Africa and for the territories detached from the Ottoman Empire (96),*

However, France and Britain would not accept to lose their predominance in the Middle East for the advantage of other countries. Evenmore, British politicians were worried about post-war US predominance, Dodge notes:

*London-based politicians led by Lloyd George realized that the increase in economic and military power of the United States and a change in the ideological atmosphere brought on by the rise of*

*colonial nationalisms meant that imperialism now had to be justified in humanitarian terms (14).*

Therefore, this issue was settled at San Remo Conference of April 1920 when the A-mandates Iraq, Palestine, and Syria were allocated to Britain and France.

At San Remo the Allies settled many issues. They agreed to advocate to the recently established League of Nations that Britain takes Iraq and Palestine as mandates and France takes Lebanon and Syria. The French negotiated over Palestine but later they accepted the British claim. Also, the allies settled The Mosul oil subject: France was granted 25 percent of the crude oil, while Britain would control permanently the concession-holder, the Turkish Petroleum Company (later renamed Iraq Petroleum Company). Afterwards, the boundary commission finalized the borders map of British and French mandates (Fieldhouse, 61-62).

Consequently, the San Remo conference outcomes confirmed the extent of the political deception Britain and France had made when the League of Nations declared them in charge for governing the ex-Ottoman territories. The Arabs were convinced that this was a veiled colonialism and imperialism with a different name. Evenmore, they felt betrayed because they were promised self determination during WWI.

Iraq (an old name for southern Mesopotamia, signifying the cliff or shore of a great river) then became officially a British mandate, carved out of the three former

Ottoman provinces. There was immediate resentment amongst Iraq's inhabitants at what they saw a clear deception, and in 1920 a strong revolt spread through the country.

### **B) The Iraqi Revolt of 1920**

When news of the mandate reached Iraq in late May 1920, the discontent with the mandatory system turned into general outrage. Arrests and police action against a number of political groups followed. This in turn led many Arabs into series of street demonstrations and strikes that soon descended into an outright revolt. Evenmore, when a group of Iraqi leaders demanded independence, Wilson described them as a “handful of ungrateful politicians”. Consequently, Nationalist political activity was stepped up, represented in Jamiyat an-Nahda al-Islamiya (the League of Islamic Awakening), a Sunni- Shiis coalition named The Harasal-Istiqlal (Guardians of Independence), and al-Jamiya al-Wataniya al-Islamiya (the Muslim National League), these organizations included most of the Iraqi people ranks. Shii *mujtahids* (clergy) of the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala motivated the tribes of the mid- and Lower Euphrates with a fatwa (legal opinion), particularly Grand Ayatollah Mirza Muhammad Taqi Shirazi. The revolt lasted for three months, and the British restored order with difficulty, with the assistance of Royal Air Force bombers (Fattah, 160).

The 1920 revolt had been very costly to the British in both casualties and money (about £40 million). Britain was under domestic pressure to devise a method that would provide the maximum control over Iraq at the least cost. So, The British replaced the military regime with a provisional council, led by the elderly shaykh Abdul-Rahman al-

Gailani, the head of the *ashraf* and assisted by British advisers. The new administration provided a channel of communication between the British and the population. Not surprisingly, the provisional government was aided by the large number of the Sunni ex-Ottoman officers. Therefore, the provisional council was composed chiefly of Sunni Arabs, while the Shiis were underrepresented (Fattah, 161).

The British occupation of Iraq was preceded by promises of emancipation and self-determinism which motivated the Iraqi nationalist spirit. When the British General, Sir Stanley Maud proclaimed in 1917, "*Our armies have not come into your cities and lands as conquerors, or enemies, but as liberators,*" his speech indicated an independent state potential brings together the three ex-Ottoman provinces. This possibility was reinforced with the British-French declaration of 1918 which stated that the reason behind fighting the Ottomans was principally "*to liberate the Arab peoples from the Turkish yoke*" (Dawisha, 76-77). Dawisha concludes in **Iraq**:

*The reluctance of the British administrators in Iraq to act on these promises and translate them into real policy became one of the causes of the "1920 Revolution," which [...] received widespread support from, the Sunni population in Baghdad and other parts of Iraq (77).*

Although the revolt was suppressed and the British reestablished order, it urges Britain to act in order to satisfy both domestic public opinion wanted her to get out of Iraq and Iraqi nationalists who were demanding independence. Consequently, in

1921, at the Cairo Conference the issue was outwardly settled by importing a king and replacing the mandate with a treaty of alliance.

### **III- Creation of Iraqi Monarchy and Anglo-Iraqi Relations**

The debate over the selection of the king of Iraq was finalized late 1920. Soon after, during the discussions at the Cairo Conference in March 1921, under the leadership of the Colonial Secretary, Winston Churchill, Faysal ibn Husayn was appointed as the king of the Monarchy of Iraq.

#### **A) The Cairo Conference of 1921**

The newly Iraqi state king selection had been made in December 1920, states Fieldhouse, it took place when Faysal was unofficially offered the throne in London. He refused at first, arguing that the priority is for his older brother Abdullah. Abdullah had been support by the foreign secretary Lord Curzon (90), but this suggestion was rejected by India Office (Sluglett, 36). Therefore, Faysal was chosen on the basis of his status as an Arab nationalist, his collaboration with the British during the Arab Revolt, and his political experience throughout his participation in Paris Peace Conference, also, the fact that he is a foreigner in Iraq would make him totally rely on British advisors. However, the difficulty was that the Hashemites had no link with Iraq (Fieldhouse, 90), despite of the great respect for the descendents of The Prophet.

In March 1921 The Cairo Conference was held, presided by the Colonial Secretary, Winston Churchill in order to settle Middle Eastern affairs. Faysal was

nominated to the throne with the provision that a plebiscite to be held to confirm the nomination. Sir Percy Cox, The high commissioner for Iraq, was responsible for carrying out the plebiscite. The Council of State set up by Cox shortly before the Cairo Conference passed a resolution on July 11, 1921, declaring Faysal king of Iraq, promising that his Government shall be constitutional, democratic, representative, and restricted by the law. Then the plebiscite confirmed this proclamation with 96 percent of the votes. Yet Kurds, Shi'is and pro-Turkish people did not vote. Soon after, Faysal was formally crowned king on August 23, 1921 (Simon & Tejirian, 33).

In addition to the selection of the king, the Cairo conference decided that the Kurds in Mosul to stay in semi-autonomous status for the time being. Also, the conference decided to trim down the military costs and to prepare for the withdrawal of armed forces (Fieldhouse, 90).

The main concern of any colonial power is to preserve her interests without heavy costs. Accordingly, after the revolt, Britain was worried about her benefits more than imposing a direct colonial authority in Iraq. Therefore, the perfect solution was to establish a subordinate local regime which would appear sovereign but would acknowledge the British authority and accept restriction on its power. As a result, this government would calm down the resentful inhabitants, and maintain the British benefits. Concluding that, Judith S. Yaphe states:

*As state builders, the British created an impressive array of institutions a monarchy, a parliament, a Western-style constitution, a civil service, and an army. They established a government that*

*would protect British interests at the least possible cost to the British taxpayer (33).*

Eventually, after imposing a king and creating a government, the British would bargain to protect their interests. Then, oil reserves exploitation, trade routes safety, air bases allowance and all benefits under the mandate system might be protected by a treaty with the newly Iraqi government. Consequently, these aims were formally realized in 1922, 1926 and 1930 treaties.

### **B) The Anglo-Iraqi treaties**

After the establishment of the monarchical regime, Sir Percy Cox, the high commissioner, realized that the mandate system was unlikely to gain widespread Iraqi approval. Therefore, Cox suggested that the mandate might be made more acceptable if its terms were to be ratified in a treaty between Britain and Iraq. This was the origin of the treaty of 1922 and the subsequent treaties in 1926 and 1930.

Initially, Britain was in a good position to secure her interests since it had supreme authority under the mandate, therefore, Faysal might agree easily on terms of a treaty. But it took much time for negotiating, states Sluglett in the *Anglo-Iraqi Treaties*, while the British wanted to secure their predominance, Faysal tried not to appear subservient to British interests. Thus, the treaty of 1922 covered many subjects, framing a constitution, number and duties of British officials in Iraq, Iraqi diplomatic representation abroad, British supervision of the judicial system, and agreements concerning the financial and military measures between the two states.

Iraq was also responsible for defense against any external assault; meanwhile, British imperial interests in and around Iraq had to be protected (Sluglett).

Sluglett follows, the changes brought in the treaty were in the form while the essence of the mandate terms remained. Eventually, Britain would oblige the Iraqi government to accept the terms. There was mass refusal, the treaty was extensively detested, and the opposition was so outraged to the point that its leaders had been arrested. Ultimately, the prime minister was forced to sign the treaty, on behalf of king Faisal who had taken ill with appendicitis a few days before he sign it. Then, in 1923, a protocol to the treaty was bargained, reducing its operative period from twenty years to four years after the signature of the peace treaty with Turkey (the Lausanne Treaty). Even though, in June 1924, British claim of ratification of the 1922 treaty was faced obstacles by the Chamber of Deputies, and was approved only by 37 of total 59 votes (Sluglett).

In 1926, negotiations about another treaty began. It included guaranteeing means of local administration and rights of Kurds and other minorities in the north. This treaty prolonged the effect of the 1922 treaty for twenty-five years, unless Iraq was admitted to the League of Nations before the end of that period. However, this time the opposition was not that strong, because the main purpose was to take account of the new conditions with the "final" settlement of the Turco-Iraqi frontier (Sluglett).

The next years of the mandate were characterized with the Iraqi cooperation with Britain. During the reconsideration of the treaty in 1927, a suggested that Iraq should be admitted to league membership in 1928; negotiations lasted until

September 1929 when British accepted to give support for Iraqi independence in 1932 (Sluglett).

Therefore, because there was no great disagreement, The Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930 was completed more quickly than the treaties of 1922 and 1926. The new treaty included conditions about the priority to be given to the British representative, the employment of a British military mission, and the employment of British officials. the treaty declared that the King of Iraq is responsible for the preservation of internal order, While Britain was obliged to help and protect Iraq in case of external assault. Air bases were to be rented freely for the British Royal Air Force. This treaty, valid for 25 years, was to come into effect after Iraq joined the League of Nations. On October 3, 1932, Iraq was admitted to the League of Nations as an independent state (Sluglett).

To conclude, from 1918 until the Iraqi independence and entry to League of Nations in 1932, the British policy had various forms and took many orientations in order to protect its interests in Iraq. It started by direct rule after WWI, with the Civil Administration, but the hostilities during the Iraqi revolt and its high costs obliged Britain to change strategy. Thereafter, the British political leaders wanted to appoint a collaborating monarch who can satisfy the Iraqi inhabitants and guarantee the vital interests in Iraq. Moreover, the British claimed to make the mandate period friendlier when they persuaded Faysal to agree on treaties between the two countries. Eventually, Britain established in Iraq a state on the western style, constitutional and representative; however this state functioned as a façade for the British leaders who

continued to rule the country indirectly after independence with the assistance of their allies within the Iraqi regime.

Therefore, this fact about Anglo-Iraqi relations was revealed in the following years after Iraqi independence and entry to the League of Nations, the crisis of WWII, the refusal of Iraqi government to declare war on Germany, and the following reoccupation in 1941. Also, British attitude towards Iraq as an important defensive territory was reinforced by the Baghdad pact which meant to be a strong regional alliance in front of Soviet increasing influence on the Middle East. Nevertheless, the British dominance on Iraq was brought to an end when the revolution of 1958 overthrew the monarchy and established a republic regime.

## **Chapter III:**

### **Independent Iraq and British Interference**

On October 3, 1932, according to the alliance treaty of 1930, Iraq became an independent state and gained admittance to the League of Nations. As a result to that, Britain's formal mandatory responsibilities came to an end. On September 8, 1933, King Faisal dies of a heart attack and he was succeeded by his son Ghazi, followed by the period of the regency (1939–58, during which Prince Abdulillah ruled as Regent for Faisal II). Therefore, from 1932 onwards, Iraq saw some important developments, including the dominance of many figures in power, particularly, the repetitively Prime Minister Nuri al-Said, who was close friend of King Faisal I and the main agent of Britain Iraqi until his murder in 1958. At the same time, there was increasing Iraqi army influence, controlled by ex-Sharifian generals who dominate the military and political scene (Fattah 142).

However, disagreements between civilian leaders and military generals produced shakable political scene, which resulted many coups d'état, firstly in 1936, when replaced the prime minister but leaves the monarchy in place, and in 1941 which witnessed the British reoccupation of Iraq, and the third, and most significant in 1958 which put an end to pro-British rule era (Al Jazeera).

### **I-World War II and British Reoccupation of Iraq**

General Nuri, author of the 1930 treaty, was prime minister when World War II began. Being the loyal ally of the British, he assumed that the Anglo-Iraqi alliance was the best guarantee for Iraqi security. When World War II broke out, the British

put pressure on al-Said to break political relations with Germany, to imprison all Germans, and to assist Britain as it was agreed under the terms of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty. Accordingly, the government declared Iraq nonbelligerent and severed diplomatic relations with Germany. When Italy entered the war, however, Nuri, minister of foreign affairs in Rashid Ali al-Gaylani's Cabinet, was unable to convince the Cabinet to break off diplomatic relations with Italy. Under the influence of Arab nationalists, public opinion in Iraq changed totally after France's collapse, becoming more opposed to Britain, because other Arab countries remained under foreign control. Arab nationalists urged Iraqi leaders to free Syria and Palestine and realize unity among Arab countries.

Rashid Ali was allied to members of the Golden Square in the army. Therefore, he sided with the Arab nationalists. Also, many leading army officers sided with Arab nationalists and encouraged Rashid Ali to detach Iraq from the British alliance. During 1940 and 1941, Iraqi officers were reluctant to cooperate with Britain. Consequently, the British decided to send reinforcements to Iraq because they believed they had the justification to land troops in Iraq. Rashid Ali, allowed the landing of a small British force in 1940, but later, he refused further British requests for reinforcements. However, British forces entered Iraq from the Persian Gulf in April and May 1941, and an armed conflict with Iraqi forces followed. The war lasted short period and by the end of May the Iraqi army surrendered.. Soon after, the regent and al-Said returned to Baghdad. Also, In 1942, al- Said's government declared war on the Axis, three of the four army officers who most represented the Golden Square

faced charged and were executed, although, Rashid Ali and some of his allies escaped from the country (Fattah, 177).

The return of the regent and moderate leaders through British intervention had far-reaching consequences. Britain was given what it demanded: the use of transportation and communication facilities and a declaration of war on the Axis Powers in January 1942. Rashid Ali's supporters were dismissed from the service, and some were interned for the duration of the war.

However, in the late 1940s the Iraqi opposition became adequately organized to oppose continued British control and influence. In 1946 and 1947, the British government expressed their interest in extending the 1930 treaty under the pretext of revising it. On the Iraqi side, the negotiations were led by Nuri al-Sa'id and the regent, Abd al-Ilah, but in fact carried out by the Shi'ite Prime Minister, Salih Jabr. Jabr and his allies spent the period from late December 1947 to half of January 1948 in Britain drafting a new Anglo-Iraqi treaty. Eventually, the text which was released in January seemed to be almost the same with the treaty of 1930 and was rejected by the Iraqi people. Evermore, the regent was forced to denounce it, because it would result another long period of British veiled control (Sluglett).

Ultimately, Anglo-Iraqi relations continued to be managed by the treaty of 1930 until 1955, when it was reinforced by The Baghdad Pact which enhanced the British dominance in the Middle East.

## **II- The Baghdad Pact 1955**

Despite the evident contradictions between Britain's desire to play a predominant role in Middle East politics and Nasser's determination to secure Arab autonomy, an Anglo- Egyptian agreement was completed in October 1954 after nine years of intermittent but fraught negotiations. For long periods the British had insisted on maintaining a military presence inside the Canal Zone. However, the final agreement included stipulations for a full military withdrawal from the Suez base. From a strategic perspective Egypt was becoming less important to the British as the Chiefs of Staff moved away from the so-called 'outer ring' strategy which focussed on Egypt towards an inner ring strategy designed to contain the Soviet Union on its frontiers and which centred on the so-called Northern Tier states Iraq and Turkey. The signing of the treaty therefore appeared to augur well for Anglo-Egyptian relations by removing one of the key sources of tension between the two countries.<sup>8</sup> Such auguries were misleading: the British vision of the Arab world's future was in dramatic contrast to the prescriptions of Arab nationalism. Rather than diffusing tension, the increasing significance of the alliance with Iraq to Britain's new Northern Tier strategy implicated them in the ongoing and increasingly bitter rivalry between Baghdad and Cairo (Mawby, 27).

In 1954, Nuri al-Said, visited Turkey and discussed an alliance between the two countries. Therefore, In February 1955 a defense pact between Turkey and Iraq was concluded. The reactions of the Britain and Egypt echoed the opposition between British imperialism and Arab nationalism. Faysal I, the grandfather of the Iraqi King, Faysal II, had been proclaimed a king 25 years earlier by Winston Churchill. Turkey

was the only Middle Eastern power in the North Atlantic Treaty membership. The alliance between these two pro-British states provided British leaders with an occasion to restore British interests. Thus, In April they joined with Pakistan and Britain to form the Baghdad Pact. The Pact offered more influence for Britain in the region at a time when direct colonialism was unlikely. Consequently, the British encouraged Iran and Jordan to join the Pact (Mawby, 27-28). About the importance of the pact for Britain, says John Darwin:

*The growing importance of the 'Northern Tier' states (Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Pakistan) as the main barrier to a Soviet advance had helped to devalue the Canal base and ease the pangs of the British withdrawal. It made the British now eager to build up Iraq as the main Arab component of a new Middle Eastern alliance, and to attach as many Arab states as they could to what became known as the 'Baghdad Pact' of which they themselves would also be members. This would be the new platform of their Middle Eastern position: an Arab 'bloc' of which the 'Hashemite' kingdoms of Iraq and Jordan and the Syrian Republic (domination of Syria was an old Hashemite aim) would be the core members (599).*

Therefore, with the new alliance the Baghdad Pact provided, Britain's position would be more secure, stable and her share of the oil industry (much of it located in northern Iraq) in the region would be greater than the Western powers, except of the growing role of Soviet Union in the area. Then Britain would be the regional guardian

of western interests, and her bloc in the Middle East would prevent further communist extension in the area. Hence, Samira Haj States:

*“The Baghdad Pact was in many ways the response of Western governments and their allies in the region to the rising threat of nationalist movements and rising Soviet influence in the region”*(107).

However, the supremacy of Britain in Iraq had collapsed soon after the Baghdad Pact, when a military coup under the leadership of Brigadier General Abdul Karim Qasim overthrew the monarchy and set up the Republic of Iraq in 1958.

### **III-The Revolution of 1958**

The Hashimite monarchy was overthrown on July 14, 1958, in a swift, predawn coup executed by officers of the Nineteenth Brigade under the leadership of Brigadier Abd al Karim Qasim and Colonel Abd as Salaam Arif. The coup was triggered when King Hussein, fearing that an anti-Western revolt in Lebanon might spread to Jordan, requested Iraqi assistance. Instead of moving toward Jordan, however, Colonel Arif led a battalion into Baghdad and immediately proclaimed a new republic and the end of the old regime. The July 14 Revolution met virtually no opposition and proclamations of the revolution brought crowds of people into the streets of Baghdad cheering for the deaths of Iraq's two "strong men," Nuri as Said and Abd al Ilah. King Faisal II and Abd al Ilah were executed, as were many others in the royal family. Nuri as Said also was killed after attempting to escape disguised as a

veiled woman. In the ensuing mob demonstrations against the old order, angry crowds severely damaged the British embassy. <sup>1</sup>

Put in its historical context, the July 14 Revolution was the culmination of a series of uprisings and coup attempts that began with the 1936 Bakr Sidqi coup and included the 1941 Rashid Ali military movement, the 1948 Wathbah Uprising, and the 1952 and 1956 protests. The revolution radically altered Iraq's social structure, destroying the power of the landed shaykhs and the absentee landlords while enhancing the position of the urban workers, the peasants, and the middle class. In altering the old power structure, however, the revolution revived long-suppressed sectarian, tribal, and ethnic conflicts. The strongest of these conflicts were those between Kurds and Arabs and between Sunnis and Shias. <sup>2</sup>

Despite material progress, the monarchy failed to win public support and, in particular, the confidence of the younger generation. Before the revolution, Iraq lacked an enlightened leadership capable of achieving progress and inspiring public confidence. The new generation offered such leadership, but the older leaders resisted and embarked on an unpopular foreign policy, including an alliance with Britain through participation in the Baghdad Pact and opposition to the establishment of the United Arab Republic (U.A.R.).

The failure of younger civilians to obtain power aroused the concern of some young military officers who, required by military discipline to take no part in politics,

1, 2 are taken from: [www.globalsecurity.org](http://www.globalsecurity.org): 'Iraqi Revolution and Coups'.

called themselves the Free Officers and began to organize in small groups and to lay down revolutionary plans. The number of Free Officers was relatively small, but there was a considerably larger number of sympathizers. The officers worked in cells, and the identity of the participants was kept secret. Only the Central Organization, which supplied leadership of the movement, was known to all the Free Officers. The Central Organization was composed of 14 officers, headed by 'Abd al-Karim Qasim, who held the highest military rank.

Of the several plots proposed, that laid down by Qasim and his close collaborator 'Abd as-Salam 'Arif proved the most appropriate. The general staff issued an order to one of the brigades, in which 'Arif served, to proceed to Jordan on July 14, 1958, to reinforce Jordanian forces against threats by Israel. Brigadier Qasim, in command of another brigade, was to protect the brigades going to Jordan. He and 'Arif agreed that as the brigade proceeding to Jordan passed through Baghdad it would capture the city.

On July 14 the revolutionary forces captured the capital, declared the downfall of the monarchy, and proclaimed a republic. The leading members of the royal house, including the king and crown prince, were executed. General Nuri was killed during the disturbances. Therefore, the era of the "Anglophile", anticommunist, anti-Nasser and pro-Western, and the personification of the good Arab whom British policy in Iraq and the Middle East was focused around since the First World War (Mcnamara, 126) had gone. Qasim, head of the revolutionary force, formed a Cabinet, over which he presided, and appointed himself commander of the National Forces. He also assumed the portfolio of defense and appointed 'Arif minister of the interior and

deputy commander of the National Forces. A Council of Sovereignty, composed of three persons, was to act as head of state.

A provisional constitution declared that Iraq formed an integral part "of the Arab nation" and that "Arabs and Kurds are considered partners in this homeland." Iraq was declared a republic and Islam the religion of the state; all executive and legislative powers were entrusted to the Sovereignty Council and the Cabinet. It soon became clear, however, that power rested in Qasim's hands, supported by the army.

The revolution of 1958 brought to an end several years of efforts of nation building that had begun with the initial colonial era followed by a period of independence constrained British influence. Although the attempts, there were many errors from the very beginning. Both the British and the monarchy had chosen to rely on a minority of landowners and ex-military officials to control the state, ignoring the diversity of the Iraqi people. Although King Faisal I had tried to make of Iraq a state representative of its entire people, later governments narrowed their vision of an Iraqi citizen. The issues of Arab nationalism, Iraqi nationalism, and the question of Palestine also added their burden to the legitimacy of the Iraqi state. Meanwhile, utter injustices in political, social, and economic conditions smoothed the way for a revolution performed by reactionary elements among the army. The latter saw that the king, the government and the monarchical system are plainly subjective to Britain; therefore, to get rid of western Imperialism, they had the right to remove this corrupted regime.

However, despite a shared military background, the group of Free Officers that carried out the July 14 Revolution was plagued by internal dissension. Its members

lacked both a coherent ideology and an effective organizational structure. Many of the more senior officers resented having to take orders from Arif, their junior in rank. A power struggle developed between Qasim and Arif over joining the Egyptian-Syrian union. Arif's pro-Nasserite sympathies were supported by the Baath Party, while Qasim found support for his anti-union position in the ranks of the communists. Qasim, the more experienced and higher ranking of the two, eventually emerged victorious. Arif was first dismissed, then brought to trial for treason and condemned to death in January 1959; he was subsequently pardoned in December 1962. <sup>1</sup>

Whereas he implemented many reforms that favored the poor, Qasim was primarily a centrist in outlook, proposing to improve the lot of the poor while not dispossessing the wealthy. In part, his ambiguous policies were a product of his lack of a solid base of support, especially in the military. Unlike the bulk of military officers, Qasim did not come from the Arab Sunni northwestern towns nor did he share their enthusiasm for pan-Arabism: he was of mixed Sunni-Shia parentage from southeastern Iraq. Qasim's ability to remain in power depended, therefore, on a skillful balancing of the communists and the pan-Arabists. For most of his tenure, Qasim sought to counterbalance the growing pan-Arab trend in the military by supporting the communists who controlled the streets. He authorized the formation of a communist-controlled militia, the People's Resistance Force, and he freed all communist prisoners. <sup>2</sup>

Qasim's economic policies reflected his poor origins and his ties with the

1, 2 are taken from: [www.globalsecurity.org](http://www.globalsecurity.org): 'Iraqi Revolution and Coups'.

communists. He permitted trade unions, improved workers' conditions, and implemented land reform aimed at dismantling the old feudal structure of the countryside. Qasim also challenged the existing profit-sharing arrangements with the oil companies. On December 11, 1961, he passed Public Law 80, which dispossessed the IPC of 99.5 percent of its concession area, leaving it to operate only in those areas currently in production. The new arrangement significantly increased oil revenues accruing to the government. Qasim also announced the establishment of an Iraq National Oil Company (INOC) to exploit the new territory. <sup>1</sup>

In March 1959, a group of disgruntled Free Officers, who came from conservative, well-known, Arab Sunni families and who opposed Qasim's increasing links with the communists, attempted a coup. Aware of the planned coup, Qasim had his communist allies mobilize 250,000 of their supporters in Mosul. The ill-planned coup attempt never really materialized and, in its aftermath, the communists massacred nationalists and some well-to-do Mosul families, leaving deep scars that proved to be very slow to heal. <sup>2</sup>

To conclude, the British interference in Iraqi affairs was driven by the unrest of British policy-makers about their interests in the area. By the outbreak of the World War II and the non-collaborating government, Britain feared that the Nazi party might gain the support of Iraqi politician and the sympathy of the people complaining and refusing British indirect control. Also during the negotiation about revision of the 1930 treaty, Britain sought to extend her predominance over Iraq

1, 2 are taken from: [www.globalsecurity.org](http://www.globalsecurity.org): 'Iraqi Revolution and Coups'.

under the old terms of the treaty. Moreover, the Baghdad Pact represented great opportunity to maintain her control not only over Iraq, but the entire region and block the soviet growth toward her former colonies in the east. However, paradoxally, new generations of the military officers from Iraqi army who overthrew the imposed monarchy in Iraq and brought British imperialism in the middle east to an end.

## Conclusion

The Iraqi state was born when the Ottoman Empire was divided following World War I. The boundaries of the state of Iraq had little resemblance to those of the three provinces of Ottoman Iraq. Nor had the name Iraq been attached to those provinces together.

During WWI, Britain and France wanted to destroy the Ottoman Empire from within; therefore, they took advantage of the resentful indigenous populations in the Middle East and promised them emancipation and self-determination. However, their objectives lied under their secret agreements to divide the Middle East into colonies and spheres of influence. After the war, it seemed incompatible with the US President Wilson's liberalism to acknowledge western formal colonies in the world, thus it was the mandatory period and afterwards, the façade regimes.

The Iraqi monarchy (1921–1958) was imposed on Iraq even though the Hashemites had no close relation with Iraq, but it was for the British advantage to crown Faysal, as a foreigner who relied heavily on British advisors and expertise, so the British interests lied in safe hold with him. Offering the throne to Faysal was a reward for his collaboration during WWI and a good move to satisfy the indigenous inhabitants seeing him as a nationalist leader.

Before and after the independence and Iraqi entry to the League of Nations, British policy took another orientation, replacing the mandate with several treaties of alliance. To this point, Britain wanted to assure its political and economic interests

through indirect control and guidance of the Iraqi state. For this reason, the treaties of 1922, 1926 and 1930 were concluded. However, later in 1947, the claims of revising the treaty of 1930 were rejected by the Iraqi government which considered these claims an attempt to prolong British indirect control.

Therefore, and not only the case of Iraq, post-World War I states creation in the Middle East revealed the general reorganization of British and French imperial interests in the area. Hence, States were created not necessarily in response to the national demands of indigenous populations which revolved about independence and self determination, but to satisfy the political and economic interests of the imperial powers represented particularly in the oil industry and the international markets. The resultant artificial states eventually, not only failed in the task of governing, but also with the combination of indigenous identities and interests. Britain created Iraq out of three separated ex-Ottoman provinces which were identified by ethnic and religious differences, these differences characterized only the British rule era but even more the contemporary Iraq which lies under the American occupation since 2003 and witnesses the rebirth of separation attempts in the north (Kurds) and the ethnic crisis between Sunni and Shiites people. Therefore, because the western interests stood still secured, without any significant costs, British presence in the Middle East, taking Iraq as case of study, was veiled colonialism or informal imperialism with no will to offer neither self-governance nor full independence.

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