

U.S. POLICY IN POST-SADDAM IRAQ

LESSONS FROM THE BRITISH EXPERIENCE

Edited by
Michael Eisenstadt and
Eric Mathewson

THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY

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Cover inset photograph of Faysal ibn Husayn with his delegates and advisors at the Versailles peace conference in 1919 © Bettmann/Corbis. Behind him in the picture are (left to right) his private secretary and fellow delegate Rustum Haydar; Brigadier General Nuri al-Sa'id of Baghdad; Captain Rosario Pisani of France; Colonel T. E. Lawrence "of Arabia"; and Hassan Kadri (man in back row is unidentified). Cover image of American flag © Royalty-Free/Corbis. Cover design by Alicia Gansz.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
The British Legacy <i>Peter Sluglett</i>	3
Pitfalls of Instant Democracy <i>Ofra Bengio</i>	15
Iraqi National Integration under the British <i>Abbas Kelidar</i>	27
The Challenge of Nation Building in Iraq <i>Judith Yaphe</i>	38
Rebuilding Iraq: Assessing the British Military Occupation <i>Eric Mathewson</i>	52
Conclusion: Lessons for U.S. Policymakers <i>Michael Eisenstadt</i>	67
Appendix: Significant Dates in the British Iraq Experience	81

INTRODUCTION

In launching Operation Iraqi Freedom, the United States embarks on a major undertaking, one that may well involve the creation of a new Iraqi government and a significant, long-term commitment of resources and personnel. This endeavor bears similarities to the British experience in Iraq during the first half of the twentieth century. Beginning with a military occupation during World War I, Britain built a new Iraqi state and attempted to shape its development over the next several decades, establishing a constitutional monarchy that was ostensibly democratic yet fundamentally structured to serve British interests.

Clearly, much has changed in the period since the British era of Iraqi history. Nevertheless, Britain's experience shares certain striking parallels with U.S. involvement in Iraq. U.S. policymakers and planners can benefit from examining the context and dynamics of that experience, analyzing the dilemmas of foreign intervention and other issues faced by Britain as it laid the foundations for the modern Iraqi state.

The chapters that follow offer a detailed assessment of the British experience, addressing the various political, historical, cultural, economic, and military factors that both characterized and determined the outcome of Britain's involvement in Iraq. Along the way, the authors highlight numerous challenges that the United States may have to confront during its own intervention in Iraq, such as balancing traditional U.S. interests in regional stability with Washington's newly articulated commitment to democratic transformation; maximizing postwar administrative effectiveness in Iraq while minimizing the U.S. military presence; decentralizing Iraqi political power and governance; creating a broad-based postwar government that incorporates representatives of all major ethnic and religious groups; avoiding actions that might promote the retribalization of Iraqi society; reorganizing the Iraqi military and reeducating the Iraqi

2 • MICHAEL EISENSTADT AND ERIC MATHEWSON

officer corps; redefining the relationship between the Iraqi military and government; and addressing Iraqi concerns regarding key regional issues, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the war on terrorism.

Hopefully, this volume will serve as a useful reference, providing insights into Iraq's past that may help in laying a solid foundation for the country's future.

Michael Eisenstadt and Eric Mathewson

THE BRITISH LEGACY

On November 6, 1914, a week after the Ottoman Empire had entered World War I on the side of the Central Powers, Indian Expeditionary Force D landed at Fao in the southernmost province of Ottoman Iraq. Its subsequent occupation and de facto annexation of the area consolidated Britain's connection with a region in which it had long been economically dominant. The force marched swiftly northward, at first meeting little resistance; the euphoria this created encouraged those in charge in Delhi and London to contemplate an immediate dash for Baghdad. But the troops were poorly supplied and, at least initially, badly led; they were checked by a Turkish rally at Kut in early 1916.

By March 1917, however, reinforcements from Britain and the transfer of military command to London enabled the British to capture Baghdad. In November 1918, a few days after the end of the war, the city of Mosul was occupied, and the surrounding province fell into British hands. The campaign had been extremely costly, with 92,501 British casualties (including 51,385 wounded) and approximately twice that number of losses on the Ottoman side.

Over the course of the war, Britain, France, Italy, and Russia had entered into a series of agreements under which Anatolia and the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire were to be divided among the Allies. With a number of important modifications, these agreements formed the basis of a peace settlement in the Middle East under which France was assigned the areas that became Lebanon and Syria, while Britain was assigned the areas that became Iraq, Transjordan, and Palestine.

Yet, the entry of the United States into the war in April 1917 had introduced a new and somewhat unnerving political element

into the Allies' calculations. In the words of a senior member of the British India Office late in 1917, "We must at least consider the possibility of a peace which will not give us the absolute political control of Mesopotamia that we should like to have." Early the next year, President Woodrow Wilson stated his war aims in his famous Fourteen Points speech, which promised "absolutely unmolested autonomous development" to any territories that might be "liberated" from Ottoman rule.

Although its precise form took some time to materialize, the eventual result of this sea change in the international climate was the mandates system, under which the newly founded League of Nations assigned territories to one or another great power on a temporary basis. The system was designed as a means of preparing the territories concerned for independence within a finite, if imprecisely defined, period. Colonization, annexation, or imperial incorporation were thus ruled firmly off-limits.

E PLURIBUS IRAQ?

On the Iraqi side, it is difficult to gauge what those who had been "liberated" from Ottoman rule would have proposed had they been given any say in planning their own future. Not since the heyday of the Abbasid Empire had there been an entity corresponding to the Iraqi state that was created at the end of the war. Iraq had never been a unitary territory, as opposed to, for example, Greater Syria or Egypt or Morocco, all of which had been identified as such for several centuries. In economic and other terms, Mosul and its surroundings looked toward Aleppo; the Kurdish areas were and always had been anarchic; Baghdad and central Iraq looked toward Iran; and Basra looked toward India and the Persian Gulf. Previously, Baghdad and Basra had at times formed a single administrative unit ruled from Baghdad by the Ottomans; but as a totality, the provinces that constituted Iraq sat rather awkwardly together. Indeed, in the original versions of some of the World War I Anglo-French agreements (e.g., the Sykes-Picot Agreement), Mosul had been assigned to the French, that is, it was seen as part of Syria rather than as part of Mesopotamia. It was not conceded to Britain until November 1918, during Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau's visit to London.

Most of those who resided in the three former Ottoman provinces that made up the new Iraqi state had been brought up to consider the Ottoman state as a given, a structure to be tolerated and endured rather than overthrown. That same attitude prevailed, *mutatis mutandis*, in much of the rest of the Ottoman Empire, where “Arab nationalism” was a far weaker and much more incoherent sentiment than later generations of “Arab nationalists” would have their fellow countrymen (and the rest of the world) believe. Although some Iraqi officers, particularly graduates of military colleges in Baghdad and Istanbul, had been involved in more or less secret societies that had struggled against the despotism of the Ottoman sultan Abd al-Hamid II, at least some of their goals had been achieved during the Young Turk Revolution of 1908–09, which ended in his overthrow. Similarly, many Iraqi Shi‘i intellectuals and religious figures had been influenced by the constitutional movement in Iran, itself strongly affected by the more politically active leadership emerging in the Shi‘i Holy Cities in Iraq during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Because of the general Shi‘i distrust of secular authority, most Iraqi Shi‘is had little enthusiasm for the Ottoman sultan-caliph in Istanbul but nevertheless heeded, insofar as they were able, his World War I appeals to fight the infidels who were threatening the structures of the Ottoman state. Hence, discussing Iraqi nationalist sentiment in this context is somewhat anachronistic.

The disposition of the Iraqi Kurds is a case in point. Although the Kurdish areas in what are now Iraq and Turkey were nominally included in the Ottoman Empire, the Ottomans never actually administered the region directly; instead, they often exercised control through powerful local intermediaries (as was the case in many of the tribal areas of southern Iraq). In the 1920s, however, government was suddenly thrust upon the region with a vengeance, and the Kurds were placed under the jurisdiction of the nascent Arab regime in Baghdad. Until around 1922 or 1923, the Iraqi Kurds had been told that they would be given a separate state under direct British rule (i.e., with British officials in executive positions, as in British India) rather than be made part of an Arab Iraq. As was often the case in colonial settings, however, the new government in Baghdad found it impossible to devolve power, claiming that doing so would be a dero-

gation of the independent status to which it aspired. Although the British swore to the League of Nations in the late 1920s that they would ensure the protection of Iraqi minorities, it was fairly obvious that these promises would not be worth the paper on which they were written after Iraq became independent in 1932.

Due to these and other factors, several Kurdish revolts erupted between 1929 and 1932. The Iraqi Kurdish problem was also compounded by the fairly repressive tactics that Iranian ruler Reza Shah used against Iranian Kurds in the 1930s, as well as by the even more repressive approach of Turkish president Kemal Atatürk, who claimed that only Turks should reside in Turkey.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF BRITISH ADMINISTRATION

On the British side, “economy” quickly became the mandatory power’s mantra, especially after the 1920 Iraqi national uprising (*thawra ‘ishrin*) against British rule. Like the other mandate territories, Iraq had to be administered as inexpensively as possible without compromising Britain’s objectives, which were, in order of importance: access to the oil of the Mosul province; strategic considerations vis-à-vis Britain’s Indian holdings; and, somewhat later, the security of the empire’s air route. Securing the oil was accomplished by ensuring that the area in which most of the oil fields were located became part of the new Iraqi state; one by-product of this was that earlier promises of some form of Kurdish autonomy were rapidly forgotten. The defense and internal security of Iraq were to be provided by a combination of the Iraqi army, the Royal Air Force (RAF)—at the time a new branch of the British military eager to define a viable role for itself in peacetime—and various local forces, principally the Assyrian Levies recruited from the minority Christians who had arrived in Iraq as refugees during World War I.

In 1920–21, Britain spent £32 million on the defense of Iraq; by 1926–27 the figure had dropped to £4 million, and by 1930–31 to £480,000. In October 1921, seventeen battalions of the British and Indian armies were stationed in Iraq; by 1930, there were no British army units at all (apart from British military advisors involved in training the Iraqi army). In their place were four squadrons of the RAF. Although attempts were made to paper over British military tactics (notably in a series of evasive answers to questions in Parlia-

ment), the RAF was regularly employed to bomb or otherwise punish reluctant or indigent tribes, mostly in southern Iraq, whose crime was not to have paid the taxes they owed to the Iraqi government. Perhaps the most serious long-term consequence of the ready availability of air control was that it gradually turned into a substitute for administration; with such powers at its disposal, the Iraqi government was not encouraged to develop less violent methods of extending its authority.

Britain strenuously resisted the introduction of military conscription on the not-unreasonable grounds that it would cause great discontent among the Kurds in the north and in the Shi'i tribal countryside in the south. Thus, conscription was not introduced until 1934, a year after the Iraqi army had distinguished itself by massacring the unarmed dependents of Assyrian Levies in the village of Simel. Although conscription was not entirely responsible for the major 1935 uprising by the southern tribes, it was certainly a contributing factor.

The creation of the Iraqi army in many ways paralleled the constitutional arrangements that had been applied to the new state. With hindsight, both the state and its military contained deep-seated elements of instability that gradually worked their way to the surface. The army was officially instituted in January 1921 and increased in size over the course of the mandate from 3,500 to 12,000 men. Initially, it was little more than a glorified gendarmerie acting as an occasional adjunct to the RAF, a fact which the Iraqi government knew and resented. Over time, it evolved into another instrument of Sunni Arab dominance, in the same way the constitution and other political structures did. Even though Shi'is constituted at least 60 percent of the population, the army did not commission a single Shi'i officer until the early 1940s, while each Iraqi cabinet included only one or two Shi'i ministers.

Indeed, both by accident and design, the ensemble of political and military institutions that the British created effectively gave most of the authority in the state to the Sunni Arab elite. Britain made the classic colonial move of selecting as rulers a small and generally unrepresentative group, which ensured that these rulers would be dependent on the colonial power. The Iraqi elite was composed of the former Ottoman landowning aristocracy (from both the religious

and civil-service sectors) and former Ottoman army officers, the most influential of whom had fought in the Great Arab Revolt against the Turks during World War I, alongside Faysal ibn Husayn (who became the first king of Iraq in 1921) and his British associates.

In a sense, Sunni dominance can also be regarded as a natural consequence of the Ottoman legacy. The Ottoman state was a Sunni institution. Even with the great expansion that had taken place in the Ottoman bureaucracy since the mid-nineteenth century, the government had primarily employed Sunnis, together with some members of various non-Muslim communities. Similarly, the educational facilities that the state provided were rarely if ever patronized by the Shi'i community, which had its own schools. In general, religious Shi'is tended to view the state, whether the Ottoman Empire or Qajar Iran, as a sort of necessary evil; for this and other reasons, they were not inclined to press for bureaucratic, educational, or military employment.

British administrative policy also confirmed, if not extended, the power of tribal shaykhs in the new Iraq. Tribal leaders had become increasingly powerful after the Ottoman land law of 1858 was first applied in Iraq during the 1870s. This law enabled shaykhs to register traditional tribal lands in their own names. Whereas previously they had existed as firsts among equals whose legitimacy as leaders derived from the acclaim and acceptance of their tribesmen, the land law encouraged them to acquire tribal lands as their personal property. Hence, a free cultivating peasantry, some partly nomadic, became serfs, tied to the land as sharecroppers under awful conditions. Given that the British and their Iraqi partners in government did not have the means or energy to extend administration to the whole country, they officially designated "government chiefs" to administer tribal areas, in return for which the shaykhs themselves paid virtually no taxes, extorting all the money instead from the wretched sharecroppers.

FAYSAL AND AFTER

Despite these divisions, a certain degree of equilibrium was maintained among Iraqi social groups for the duration of the mandate, partly because of Britain's supervisory role and partly because of the personality of Faysal ibn Husayn, son of the Sharif of Mecca and Britain's choice as the first ruler of Iraq. Faysal had been picked to

play a certain role in the formation of a new state; to a certain extent he did Britain's bidding, but to a certain extent he did not. By the time of his death in 1933, he had piloted the country to a measure of independence.

Faysal remains something of an enigmatic figure. One of the great what-ifs of modern Middle Eastern history centers around the course that Iraq might have taken if Faysal had been alive during the 1950s (he died at the relatively young age of fifty; his father died at seventy-nine, while his brother was seventy-one when he was assassinated in 1951). Faysal was vital in the creation of Iraqi identity; he was a genuine war hero whose reputation derived from both the Great Arab Revolt and from his exploits in Syria. In addition, his descent from the Prophet Muhammad gave him a certain cachet in the eyes of the Shi'is.

Faysal's successors were fashioned from much coarser clay: his son Ghazi (who ruled from 1933 to 1939) was a lightweight, while his nephew, the regent Abd al-Ilah (the de facto power behind the throne from 1939 to 1958), was widely hated for his slavish obedience to Britain. His more innocent grandson Faysal II (the official ruler from 1939 to 1958) was so tarred with his uncle's brush that neither of them stood much of a chance against the revolutionaries who came to kill them in July 1958.

Hence, after Faysal's death, Iraqi politics degenerated into a series of unseemly struggles for power. In October 1936, Iraq had the dubious distinction of hosting the Middle East's first military coup, and the eight Iraqi governments that were formed over the next five years were largely dependent on the favor of a tightly knit group of army officers known as the Golden Square.

In spite of occasional claims to radicalism, however, Iraqi prime ministers were generally careful not to fall out with the British prior to 1941. Yet, in April of that year, in the midst of World War II, Rashid Ali al-Gailani's government refused to honor previous treaty commitments to Britain, precipitating a second British occupation that lasted until the end of the war.

In 1948, Britain attempted to extend the 1930 Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, which had ended the mandate yet stipulated that British military forces could remain in Iraq for twenty-five years thereafter. This attempt had to be abandoned, however, due to the immense public

anger it aroused. Nevertheless, RAF bases in Iraq were not evacuated until after the revolution of July 1958.

NATIONALISM VERSUS IMPERIALISM?

Most present-day accounts of Iraq during the 1930s and 1940s depict a struggle between various kinds of so-called Arab nationalism and a more or less determined, if officially disguised, British imperialism. In fact, such accounts are exaggerated or wrong on both fronts.

Arab nationalism is often quoted as the principal Iraqi credo of the 1930s. As in the case of Ba'athism a generation later, it is difficult to believe that a doctrine so irrelevant to the concerns of most Iraqis would have had much of an echo beyond the Sunni Arab community. Some isolated individuals raved absurdly, such as Sami Shawkat, who in his 1939 book *Hadbihi Abdafuna* (These are our aims) wrote: "We want war. We should shed our blood for the sake of Arabism and the Arabs. We should die for our national cause. We should be imbued with military spirit." Such sentiments must have had little appeal beyond a few pro-Nazi sympathizers at the Muthanna Club and certain members of the Iraqi officer corps. Indeed, all of the leading Arab nationalists were Sunnis (except, perhaps, the Shi'i official Fadhil al-Jamali, Iraq's first representative at the United Nations, whose tenacious belief in the appropriateness of Arab nationalism was heavily influenced by John Dewey's theories of national education, which al-Jamali had acquired while at Columbia Teachers' College in New York). In seeking legitimacy for their own ideology, the Ba'ath often claimed to be the spiritual heirs of the pan-Arabists of the 1930s, somehow overlooking the fact that pan-Arabism was almost by definition of no interest to either Shi'is or Kurds.

Regarding British imperialism, there is no doubt that Britain's strategic and oil interests in Iraq were predicated on the existence of a friendly government in Baghdad. British Petroleum and the Anglo-Dutch entity Royal Dutch Shell controlled the majority of the Iraq Petroleum Company's shares, a situation that lasted until the Iraqis nationalized the company in 1972. Moreover, Iraq was a vital link in the chain of imperial defense between Britain and India.

Yet, Iraq had become independent of Britain in 1932 precisely because the latter had no desire to rule directly so long as its interests

were preserved. Britain was not overly concerned with the day-to-day details of governance in Iraq provided the various Anglo-Iraqi agreements were upheld and the oil continued to flow. Iraq was a sort of “veiled protectorate”; although only a handful of British officials remained in the country following independence, Iraq was still part of the “sterling area,” linked to Britain by longstanding economic ties and a series of military accords. Even so, this arrangement was much more offensive to the Iraqi public than the mandate had been; the demonstrations that occurred during the 1920s pale in comparison to the riots and uprisings of the 1940s and 1950s.

IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. INTERVENTION

It is important to analyze these aspects of the “British legacy” at a time when Iraqis are likely bracing themselves for another round of reconstruction and when meetings are being held in the United States to consider various “morning after” scenarios. In this context, Britain’s legacy consists of the political and military arrangements created under the mandate, some of whose consequences are still evident today. Those who seek to depose Saddam Husayn and reconstruct Iraq should examine certain fundamental issues before they undertake the daunting task of “forging a nation”; as Neal Ascherson, historian of twentieth-century Europe, once remarked, “All nations are forgeries, more or less.”

First, in determining how to create a peaceful and democratic Iraq, analysts and policymakers should give most of their received perceptions of Iraqi society a decent burial. For example, so-called tribes and tribal leaders have largely been reinvented by Saddam as a means of exercising social control; they have little influence on the ground and thus need not be taken seriously outside of Kurdistan. At the same time, the Kurds must be assured that they will continue to enjoy as much autonomy within Iraq as they currently do. Some sort of federal structure for the Kurdish area—promised by Britain in the early 1920s and then swiftly forgotten—is necessary. The Turks will not be especially happy with such arrangements, but they will have to accept them, if for no other reason than such a move would boost their chances of accession to the European Union.

Another persistent misconception that should be discarded is the notion that the Shi‘is are simply waiting for an opportunity to secede

from Iraq—a notion that was used to justify U.S. inaction during the uprisings in the south following the 1991 Gulf War. Iraqi Shi'is are Arabs who have, for the most part, little connection with the Islamic Republic of Iran and even less desire to be part of an Islamic Republic of Iraq. There are exceptions, of course, but the overwhelming majority of Shi'is know that their future lies within a secular and democratic Iraqi state in which the rule of law prevails and in which parliaments and cabinets reflect regional, ethnic, and sectarian interests.

Indeed, the resentment felt by Shi'is toward the power imbalance that has been in place since the foundation of the Iraqi state is not primarily religious in nature. From the 1930s to the 1950s, when the appeal of Islam was undergoing a general eclipse, the influence of the Iraqi Holy Cities also began to wane. It was replaced by the Iraqi Communist Party (representing the have-nots), which many Shi'is and Kurds joined. This secular authority was not itself eclipsed until the persecution and massacres of the 1960s and 1970s, at which point clerical voices (some of whom were personalities of considerable weight, especially Muhsin al-Hakim and Baqir al-Sadr) began to make themselves heard and heeded again. The same is true—even with their respective differences—of the Sunnis, who have never tried to impose any sort of religious agenda as part of their political programs. Most Shi'is, and most Sunnis outside the charmed circle of power, simply want to end the era of dictatorship by a single man and his extended family and clan; this sentiment has little to do with religion.

Those seeking change in Iraq must also convince all Iraqi constituencies that they have a genuine stake in the country's future. Over the past few decades, the regime has forced a great deal of internal displacement as a means of either depopulating areas whose inhabitants it did not trust (e.g., the southern marshlands) or creating artificial majorities or minorities in different parts of the country. The displaced will need to be asked whether they wish to return to the areas from which they were forcibly removed.

As far as the Iraqi military is concerned, a massive amount of dismissal and retraining will be required. The armed forces must first be placed squarely under an international regime; Iraqi civilian con-

trol should be established only gradually. Over the past five decades, the greatest threat to the stability of Iraq has always come from small cliques (sometimes army officers, sometimes civilians) that take control of the military (or of a paramilitary force such as the Republican Guard) and use it against various elements of the population for their own ends. Hence, most of the population will not accept any “easy” post-Saddam solutions (e.g., interim governments that include or are led by retired, dismissed, or “neutral” army officers who have a measure of persuasive power); such arrangements would come across as preservation of the status quo.

Finally, a truth and reconciliation commission, a war crimes tribunal, or both will be absolutely essential if the regime’s victims are to achieve closure.

CONCLUSION

Of course, not all the deficiencies of Iraqi society can be traced back to the circumstances and institutions of the British mandate. Other, more heterogeneous societies have emerged from colonialism without subsequently enduring the abominations that the people of Iraq have suffered since the 1960s.

For example, the immense wealth that Iraq derived from oil in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s proved to be a double-edged sword. Although it produced a fair degree of prosperity, it also enabled the regime to entrench itself and to act independently of the rest of society, primarily by using its monopoly of the means of coercion in order to expel, repress, and murder those elements that protested or otherwise tried to move against it. Moreover, Baghdad acquired the means to manufacture weapons of mass destruction and wage chemical and biological warfare because the United States and most of the rest of the international community supported these activities during the 1980s, while Iraq was busy neutralizing Iran.

Nevertheless, the political and military institutions imposed by the British, together with the various structures that implicitly excluded most of the population from power and participation, will need fundamental review if Iraq is to emerge from the pariah status with which Saddam Husayn and his cronies have so richly endowed it. The task is obviously daunting, but an even more ambitious en-

terprise has been accomplished in the past with a fair measure of success: the reconstruction of Germany and Japan after World War II. To those who protest that there is no democratic tradition in Iraq, it should be pointed out that neither democracy (in which a government agrees to become the opposition when the electorate so wishes) nor the application of a legal system by an independent judiciary had flourished in Germany or Japan prior to the war. Indeed, both of those experiments show that the imposition of democracy and the rule of law are highly sought after and also widely accepted by those who have long been denied them.

PITFALLS OF INSTANT DEMOCRACY

Analyzing the political situation in Iraq four years after the termination of Britain's League of Nations mandate in 1932, American author Henry Foster wrote enthusiastically about the "efficacy of the League's tutelary scheme," asserting that "the mandatory system under British liberal administration and world scrutiny has perfected and democratized the design and process." Foster also described the political system that had developed in Iraq under the mandate as "the first democratic society in the two rivers country."¹ Ironically, though, the first military coup in the Arab world took place in Iraq in October 1936, the very same year that Foster's claims were published.

What went wrong in postmandate Iraq? Were the British to blame for the collapse of the democratic system that they had purportedly introduced to Iraq and labored upon for years? Were the institutions that they had designed mere facades of Western democracy? Or was Iraqi society itself unwilling or insufficiently mature to uphold such values? Those who would bring democracy to a post-Saddam Iraq must address such questions, analyzing the root causes for the British failure and determining whether these problems could be tackled under worse conditions.

After all, it was Britain's idea to bring democracy to the new state that it had established after World War I. Although the British did not call their enterprise *mission civilisatrice*, as the French did, they were nevertheless motivated by lofty ideals of their own. Indeed, one of the principal causes of Britain's failure was the inherent clash between ideals and interests, vision and reality, with the latter usually having the upper hand.

In April 1917, two and a half years after beginning their campaign in Mesopotamia, the British entered Baghdad. Shortly thereafter, Lt. Gen. Sir Frederick Stanley Maude, the commander of the British forces, issued a proclamation stating that they had come as liberators, not as conquerors, and that they did not intend to impose “alien institutions” on the Iraqis: “The people of Baghdad shall flourish and enjoy their wealth and substance under institutions which are in consonance with their sacred laws and racial ideas.” After describing “twenty-six generations” of suffering under “strange tyrants,” the proclamation stated that Britain’s desire was to see the “Arab race . . . rise again to greatness and renown amongst the peoples of the earth.”²

Initially, the residents of Baghdad received their liberators with enthusiasm, but such sentiments evaporated quickly, leading to the “Great Iraqi Revolution” against the British in June 1920, shortly after the announcement of the League of Nations mandate. Although the announcement served as a trigger for the revolt, the deeper causes of Iraqi discontent were best summarized by a statement in a contemporary British newspaper article regarding Britain’s pre-1920 presence: “The Arabs have less liberty than they had under the Turks and they pay three times as much in taxes.”³

THE KING, THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY, AND THE CONSTITUTION

The traumatic experience of the 1920 revolt moved the British to seek a formula that would reconcile their interests in continuing to control Iraq with their promises of democratic governance for Iraqis. Their first step was to establish Faysal ibn Husayn as the new country’s ruler. Faysal’s father, Sharif Husayn ibn Ali, was considered by many to be a British puppet. Moreover, Faysal himself was not a native of Iraqi lands, unlike Sayyid Talib, the interior minister of the first Iraqi cabinet and, ostensibly, a more appropriate candidate for the throne. Despite these facts, the British expelled Talib from Iraq, and the Iraqi cabinet unanimously declared Faysal king in July 1921, “provided that his Highness’ government shall be a constitutional, representative and democratic government [*hukuma dusturiyya, niyabiyya, dimuqratiyya*], limited by law.”⁴

Not content with the cabinet’s consensual decision, the British then moved to magnify the semblance of representative rule by hold-

ing a referendum, the results of which indicated approximately 97 percent support for Faysal's ascension.⁵ Many described the referendum as a farce; as one British official explained in the House of Commons, "[W]e arranged [the results] and hope that it is all for the best, but for God's sake let us drop this sham of democratic government for orientals by themselves."⁶

The next step on the twisted path to democracy was the election of a constituent assembly, which was to carry out three main tasks: (1) ratify the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty signed by the Iraqi cabinet in October 1922; (2) draft a constitution; and (3) enact the Electoral Law.⁷ The assembly elections themselves—which took two years to finalize because of strong antimandate and antitreaty opposition, especially among the Shi'is and their Ulama—represented another negative model of democracy. Anxious to see the treaty ratified, the British did everything possible to break the opposition and facilitate the election of yes-men. In August 1922, taking advantage of the king's illness, British high commissioner Sir Percy Cox assumed formal authority in Iraq and moved quickly to quash the opposition movement by arresting and deporting its leaders, suppressing its parties and press, and ordering an aerial bombardment of the antimandate shaykhs and their tribes.⁸ On September 11, 1923, Kinahan Cornwallis, the British advisor to (and the real power behind) the Iraqi Ministry of Interior, asked the British administrative inspectors in all Iraqi *liwa* (provinces) to telegraph him the names of candidates who they and the Iraqi provincial governors felt would vote for the treaty.⁹ On February 8, 1924, after considering the names, Cornwallis sent each provincial inspector and governor a list of proposed candidates for the 100-member constituent assembly.

In addition, the Iraqi newspaper *al-Istiqlal* maintained that rigging and other abuses took place during the elections themselves. For example, in the Shi'i district of Kazimayn, a Christian (Abd al-Jabbar al-Khayyat) and a Jew (Menahim Daniel) received more votes than the popular Shi'i leader Ja'far Abu al-Timman.¹⁰ Overall, seventy-four of the ninety-eight "proposed" candidates were elected to the assembly, leaving no doubt that the existing Iraqi government—and, behind it, the British—had interfered with the process.

Despite the fact that most of the delegates were believed to be supporters of British policy, the constituent assembly exhibited strong

opposition to the ratification of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty when it met on March 24, 1924. A quorum of only 69 out of 100 delegates participated in the meeting; of these, only 37 voted for the treaty, and only after Cox threatened to dissolve the assembly and issue orders to occupy the assembly building and its surroundings.¹¹

The assembly's second main task was ratification of the constitution, which one British member of an Iraqi court of first instance described as "a gift from the West."¹² Indeed, the constitution was drafted not by Iraqis but by a committee of three British advisors in the Iraqi Ministry of Justice who began working on it as early as autumn 1921, basing many of its terms on the existing constitutions of various other states, including Turkey, Persia, Australia, New Zealand, and Belgium.¹³ King Faysal I accepted this draft but referred it to a committee of three Iraqis: Rustum Haydar, his secretary; Naji al-Suwaydi, the minister of justice; and Sasun Hiskayl, the minister of finance. Interestingly, the committee's main objection to the first draft was that it allotted too much power to the crown. In fact, this argument became such a major point of contention that the colonial office, which had the last say on the constitution, was forced to settle the issue.

Ostensibly, the colonial office intervened in favor of the Iraqi people, but in reality, its decisions suited British interests. The Iraqi constitution that entered into force in March 1925 had all the trappings of a progressive, Western, liberal system of law.¹⁴ In practice, however, the document was ill suited to serving Iraqis' interests or representing their will; its purpose was to facilitate British rule through King Faysal I. At a time when constitutional monarchies around the world were reducing the power of the king, the Iraqi monarch was given overwhelming powers. Thus, the Iraqi parliament, ostensibly the supreme legislative power, could not perform any of its functions without the consent of the king. For example, no parliamentary law could pass without his approval. In addition, Article 26 stated that the king "opens parliament, adjourns, prorogues or dissolves it" and that he "shall have the right of issuing ordinances . . . having the force of Law,"¹⁵ including ordinances pertaining to treaty obligations. Moreover, governmental ministers were responsible to the king, not to the parliament, even though they had to be members of the legislature.

Overall, the constitution's empowerment of the king belied its claim that sovereignty "resides in the people." The Iraqis have called the mandate period "the abnormal situation" (*al-Wad' al-Shadhhdh*), and the first constitution certainly reflected that characterization.

IRAQI 'DEMOCRACY' IN ACTION

According to the Electoral Law enacted in 1924, the Iraqi parliament was to consist of two houses: the Senate (*majlis al-A'yan*) and the Chamber of Deputies (*majlis al-nuwwab*). The king appointed the senators, while the Chamber of Deputies was to be an elected, representative body based on a ratio of one deputy for every 20,000 inhabitants, each serving a term of four years.¹⁶ (The right of suffrage was not universal, however; women were not entitled to vote.) Parliamentary elections were especially cumbersome and prone to executive interference because they involved a two-step, indirect process, much like that seen in the constituent assembly elections; primary electors chose secondary electors, who then assembled in their district headquarters and voted for deputies.¹⁷

The defects of the constitution and the Electoral Law were magnified immensely in real political life, turning Iraqi democracy into a mere facade, if not a farce. For example, Nuri al-Sa'id, one of the leading Iraqi politicians between 1920 and 1958, questioned whether it was possible for "a person, whatever his status in and his services for the country, [to] become a member of parliament unless the government nominates him." He even challenged those who doubted this speculation to resign from parliament and see whether they could get reelected if they were not included on the government's list.¹⁸ In a case in point that verged on the absurd, one man learned of his election to the Chamber of Deputies from a friend who had heard it on the radio:

'Are you kidding?' I said. But then I learned that I was elected a deputy for Ammara *liwa* without my knowledge. In fact, I had not approached anyone nor had I proposed my candidacy. In this way, I slept at night and got up in the morning becoming a deputy for Ammara *liwa*.¹⁹

The Iraqi poet al-Jawahiri had a similar experience. "I became overnight a deputy by order," he joked.²⁰

Another defect of nascent Iraqi democracy was the government's policy of exclusion or unfair representation for certain individuals or groups. The most glaring example was that of the Shi'is, who were under-represented in both the cabinet (a policy fostered by the British) and the parliament. Although Shi'is constituted nearly 55 percent of the population, their average representation in parliament ranged between 27 and 35 percent. In fact, Sunnis were often nominated as deputies in Shi'i areas. In one parliamentary session, for example, the purely Shi'i province of al-Kut was represented entirely by Sunni deputies. Similarly, Baghdad province once sent to parliament nine Sunni deputies, two Jews, one Christian, and no Shi'is. Diyala province fared even worse; it was never represented by a Shi'i deputy, even though two-thirds of its residents were Shi'is.²¹ In effect, then, the Shi'is were denied the only nonviolent mechanism by which they could change the balance of power in their favor.

The government also used more direct methods of preventing unwanted constituencies from participating in the parliament, such as sending opposition members to prison and forging election results. Kamil al-Chadirchi, head of the National Democratic Party, argued that these and other oppressive measures turned Iraq into a "police state" under parliamentary and constitutional guise.²²

The bankruptcy of the Iraqi democratic system was further illustrated by the fact that the parliament did not cast a single no-confidence vote against the cabinet during its entire existence, whereas prime ministers frequently asked the king to dissolve the parliament. Indeed, prime ministers so dominated the legislative branch that each session of parliament was identified by the name of the premier at the time (e.g., "Hikmat Sulayman's session"). In a 1941 report, the British expressed deep frustration with parliamentary life in Iraq, arguing that none of the deputies understood the meaning of their job; that none of the senators were chosen based on their political, social, or administrative experience; that none of the parliamentary elections had truly represented the will of the Iraqi people; and that parliament had become a plaything for politicians and military leaders.²³

Overall, the composition of the early Iraqi parliaments was a product of jockeying and co-optation rather than democratic elections. For example, the British continued to insist on substantial tribal representation in the legislature, and Iraqi deputies readily agreed to

this measure because they feared the tribal forces (*quwwat 'asha'iriyya*) and the weapons that they had accumulated.²⁴ Moreover, one administration gave parliamentary positions to almost all the country's journalists in order to forestall criticism from these quarters. Still another parliament—that of Hikmat Sulayman, which reached power following the first coup in 1936—was filled with military men and officials with leftist tendencies.²⁵

IN CAME THE GENERALS

The shortcomings of the Iraqi democratic system were both a symptom and a cause of some fifteen military coups (some successful) that overwhelmed the country from 1936 to 1968. The reasons for the emergence of the army as the arbiter of Iraq's fate were manifold, encompassing various social, political, ideological, and military factors.

During the mandate and the monarchy, the officers who had participated in the Great Arab Revolt with Faysal constituted the backbone of the Iraqi elite.²⁶ These officers viewed themselves as both the ruling elite and as “the intelligentsia in uniforms” who would cure the malaise of Iraqi society and politics.

The four years between independence in 1932 and the first coup in 1936 were crucial in catapulting the military to center stage. The army became the symbol of Iraqi patriotism by crushing various so-called “revolts” by Assyrians, Kurds, and Shi'is during this period, thus acquiring the legitimacy needed to involve itself in other political issues. For example, Gen. Bakr Sidqi, who engineered the first coup, was welcomed as a hero in Baghdad after carrying out massacres of Assyrians in 1933. The army's ascendancy was also attributable to the fact that it was the most organized and regimented body in the country. Consequently, at a time when Iraq's weak political parties were fading, the army was able to double its power within four years.²⁷ This expansion was facilitated by the lifting of the British veto on national conscription following the end of the mandate.

On the whole, relations between the Iraqi army (especially the officers) and the British were very tense. The British attempted to keep the Iraqi military as weak as possible by forbidding general conscription, limiting arms sales to Iraq, and curtailing the sovereignty of the state, particularly through the various Anglo-Iraqi Treaties.

Most antagonizing of all, the British nurtured military units consisting of Assyrians and tribal elements as a kind of rival force to the regular Iraqi army. By actively opposing these units, however, the Iraqi army signaled that it was capable of challenging British interests.²⁸ This stance won the army popularity that the politicians—especially those who cooperated with Britain—had long lost.

The army was also influenced by external factors. For example, the strong political role played by the armed forces in neighboring countries such as Turkey and Iran was not lost on the Iraqis. Moreover, the rise of fascism in Europe served as a model for imitation on the ideological level. The leading proponent of fascist ideology in Iraq was Sami Shawkat, who emphasized the development and use of force (*quwwa*) as a nation's most important activity—as a means of perfecting “the art of death” and turning Iraq into the Prussia of the Arabs.²⁹ The militarization of Iraqi society found expression in, among other things, the formation of the Futuwwa, a youth organization that was trained and indoctrinated along militarist and fascist lines.

Politically speaking, the death of King Faysal I in 1933, the critical first year of independence, left the country without a leading moderate figure to serve as an intermediary between Iraq and Britain, and between contending Iraqi domestic forces. The ascension of King Ghazi—young, inexperienced, and weak, but also ultranationalist and anti-British—further facilitated the military's involvement in politics, particularly because he had close ties with several army leaders. Moreover, some politicians, frustrated by their inability to alter the status quo through elections or parliamentary measures, supported the use of force against the government, either by inciting Shi'i tribes to rebellion or by conspiring with the army.

These and other circumstances led to Iraq's first military coup, in which military officers headed by General Sidqi joined with the leftist reformist group al-Ahali in toppling the government of Prime Minister Yasin al-Hashimi. Even as the coup was taking place, Nuri al-Sa'id approached the British and asked them to stop it. The British rejected the request, saying that it was a domestic Iraqi affair.³⁰ Nevertheless, al-Sa'id continued his efforts to engage them; in one case, he told a British official of the “unconstitutional situation” that had developed in Iraq,

complaining that “as long as Britain has the moral responsibility for bringing development and prosperity to Iraq, it must provide effective support for turning things back to normalcy.”³¹

Yet, the British continued to turn a blind eye to the “abnormal” situation and to the army’s trampling of the most basic tenets of democracy. More coups followed, including one engineered by none other than al-Sa‘id himself. The indifference or aloofness of the British would cost them dearly; in May 1941, a coup engineered by Rashid Ali al-Gailani targeted them directly. Only then, once conditions in Iraq had gotten completely out of hand, did the British deem it legitimate to interfere in the country’s domestic affairs.

The quelling of al-Gailani’s coup was followed by attempts to give new life to democratic institutions in Iraq. An amended constitution was introduced in 1943; three years later, the government proclaimed a new Electoral Law and permitted new parties to form. With a view to cutting the Gordian knot between ambitious politicians and no-less-ambitious generals, the amended constitution called for strengthening the king (and, behind him, the British) as well as empowering the parliament over the cabinet. Neither the politicians nor the generals approved of these measures, however, and the cycle of coups continued even after July 1958, when the king and his family were exterminated, the constitution and the parliament were annulled, and the last vestiges of British control over Iraq were effaced. The series of coups ended only after July 1968, when the Ba‘ath government began to deflect the army’s energies toward external aggression.

LESSONS OF THE PAST, MISTAKES OF THE FUTURE?

The failure of democracy in postmandate Iraq was a product of many different factors. Some of these factors were rooted in British policies and the weak foundation on which they erected Iraqi democracy. Even so, it must be mentioned that, during the mandate years and throughout the period leading up to the 1936 coup, Iraq enjoyed a modicum of representative governance; after the first coup, however, this wisp of democracy disappeared almost completely.³²

The failure was also rooted in the flawed interactions between the British and Iraqis, as well as in Iraqi society’s ill-preparedness for genuine democratic institutions and values. Most Iraqi political par-

ties were weak, and while the British attempted to contain the numerous nationalist and anti-British parties, they did little to encourage liberal parties and tendencies.³³ Although the eventual dissolution of most of these nationalist and anti-British parties was a natural consequence of the mandate's termination, successive Iraqi governments went beyond containment, choosing instead to force opposition elements (e.g., the Iraqi Communist Party; the National Democratic Party) underground. Similarly, media censorship steadily increased in Iraq after the mandate and monarchical eras ended and the Ba'ath assumed power.

At the root of all of these problems lay Iraq's inability to cultivate a middle class that could push for or carry out democratic policies. Inherent socioeconomic problems precluded the development of a strong middle class, and this factor was exacerbated by the British tendency to give more support to tribal shaykhs and feudal lords than to more liberal-minded constituencies. The related problem of Shi'i under-representation in the government was both a cause and a result of such failures. Finally, because democracy was imposed on Iraqis, it came to be identified with the British enemy; many argued that its values ran against the grain of Arab and Muslim norms.

Under the Ba'ath regime—which has been ruling Iraq for more than three decades, almost as long as the monarchy lasted—the structural problems of the past have been magnified, and new problems have been introduced. The middle class has all but disappeared. The army, although depoliticized, still holds the key to the survival of the regime. The Ba'ath Party has monopolized power to such an extent that no other party can function even clandestinely. “Free expression” and “freedom of the press” have become dirty words.

Hence, if the United States chooses to impose its own *mission civilizatrice* on Iraq, it will likely arouse even greater antagonism than the British did during the mandate period, particularly given the ill will generated by years of sanctions. Even if they arrive wearing the mantle of liberators, U.S. forces may well be seen as nothing but conquerors in the long run. In planning for “the first democracy” in the Arab world, Washington should be modest in its goals and realistic in its expectations. Most important, the United States should be respectful of Iraqis' desires, needs, and traditions, and heedful of their disposition toward the U.S. formula of instant democracy.

NOTES

1. Henry A. Foster, *The Making of Modern Iraq* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1936), p. 270.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 60–61.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
4. Abd al-Razzaq al-Hasani, *Tā'rikh al-'Iraq al-Siyasi al-Hadith*, vol. 3 (Sidon, Lebanon: Matba'at al-'Urfan, 1957), p. 9 (translation by author).
5. *Ibid.*; Foster, *The Making of Modern Iraq*, p. 95. The antimandate movement demanded that the king be elected by a constituent assembly, but to no avail.
6. Foster, *The Making of Modern Iraq*, p. 95. Saddam Husayn imitated these electoral methods in referendums carried out in 1995 and 2002, with similar results.
7. Al-Hasani, *Tā'rikh al-'Iraq*, p. 18.
8. M. M. al-Adhami, "The Elections for the Constituent Assembly in Iraq, 1922–4," in *The Integration of Modern Iraq*, ed. Abbas Kelidar (New York: St. Martin's, 1979), pp. 16–17. The British insisted that tribes be permitted to participate in the elections, despite the Iraqi cabinet's opposition to this measure.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 25–26.
11. Abd al-Razzaq al-Hasani, *Al-'Iraq fi zill al-Mu'ahadat* (Sidon, Lebanon: Matba'at al-'Urfan, 1958), pp. 96–101.
12. C. A. Hooper, *The Constitutional Law of Iraq* (Baghdad: MacKenzie and MacKenzie, 1928), p. 15.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16; Majid Khadduri, *Independent Iraq* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 15.
14. For a full text of the constitution, see *British and Foreign State Papers*, vol. 123 (London: British Foreign Office, 1931), pp. 383–402.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Khadduri, *Independent Iraq*, pp. 22–23. Initially, the number of representatives in the Chamber of Deputies was 88; this number was increased to 108 in 1935, 118 in 1943, and 132 in 1950. By law, the Senate was to be one-fourth the size of the Chamber of Deputies.
17. Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1985), p. 39.
18. Al-Hasani, *Tā'rikh al-'Iraq*, p. 234 (translation by author).
19. Hasan al-Alawi, *Al-Shi'a wal-Dawla al-Qawmiyya fi al-'Iraq 1914–1990*, 2nd ed. (n.p., 1990), p. 194 (translation by author).

20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., pp. 194–197.
22. Kamil al-Chadirchi, *Mudhakkirat Kamil al-Chadirchi* (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a lil-Tiba'a wal-Nashr, 1970), pp. 143, 432, 457.
23. Al-Hasani, *Ta'rikh al-'Iraq*, p. 235. The cynic might note that the report was issued only after the Iraqi government refused to implement treaty obligations to Britain.
24. Al-Chadirchi, *Mudhakkirat Kamil*, p. 215.
25. Al-Hasani, *Ta'rikh al-'Iraq*, pp. 249–252. It should be mentioned that the Electoral Law forbade military men to take part in elections.
26. Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 319–361.
27. Paul P. J. Hemphill, “The Formation of the Iraqi Army, 1921–1933,” in *The Integration of Modern Iraq*, ed. Abbas Kelidar (New York: St. Martin's, 1979), p. 97.
28. The Assyrian and tribal units were known as Levies. The regular army treated them quite harshly; in the previously mentioned 1933 massacres, for example, General Sidqi's forces slaughtered the dependents of Assyrian fighters.
29. Sami Shawkat, *Hadhibi Ahdafuna* (Baghdad: n.p., 1939), pp. 3–5.
30. Su'ad Ra'uf Shir Muhammad, *Nuri al-Sa'id wa Dawrubu fi al-Siyasa al-'Iraqiyya 1932–1945* (Baghdad: al-Maktaba al-Wataniyya, 1988), p. 73.
31. Ibid., p. 35 (translation by author).
32. Al-Hasani, *Ta'rikh al-'Iraq*, pp. 144, 256. Even in the wake of the Sidqi coup, the opposition was not entirely silenced. One anecdote may give the flavor of that period. After Sidqi took power, a deputy submitted a proposal for the erection of a statue in Sidqi's honor in the most famous square in Baghdad. Yet, strong opposition in parliament prevented this measure from passing. It is highly unlikely that such an episode could occur today, in Saddam Husayn's parliament.
33. Khadduri, *Independent Iraq*, p. 10.

IRAQI NATIONAL INTEGRATION UNDER THE BRITISH

Winston Churchill once remarked, “The further backward you look, the further forward you can see.” Indeed, a long, critical look into Iraq’s past may make the country’s future somewhat clearer to international decisionmakers as they consider the possible consequences of intervention. Specifically, important parallels can be drawn between the British experience in Iraq during the early twentieth century and what may occur in the wake of the U.S.-led invasion.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MONARCHY

During a 1918 meeting in Damascus, a national congress convened by Iraqi supporters of the Sharifian cause proclaimed Abdullah ibn Husayn the new king of Iraq. Abdullah was the older brother of the Sharifian leader Faysal ibn Husayn, who then controlled Damascus thanks to the “Great Arab Revolt” against the Ottomans, made famous in the West by T. E. Lawrence’s exploits. Two years later, however, Britain’s declared intention to impose a mandatory administration on behalf of the League of Nations provoked a general rebellion by the predominantly Shi’i tribesmen of the middle Euphrates, instigated by divines in Najaf and Karbala and supported by the Sharifian government in Damascus. Although the revolt was put down with considerable force, Britain was anxious to reduce its military and financial commitment and decided to offer the Iraqi throne to Faysal in 1921, who by then had been chased out of Damascus by French forces.

Members of the Sunni Ottoman political families of Baghdad, Mosul, and Basra—the former Ottoman provinces that were combined to form modern Iraq—expressed little interest in the creation

of a new state, preferring to remain subjects of the Ottoman state. Many of them intimated as much to British officials upon being informed that the latter had selected as Iraq's new king a man who had helped lead the "Great Arab Revolt" against the Ottomans. Nevertheless, the British initially cultivated the friendship and support of this Sunni Ottoman establishment when setting up the civil administration of the new Iraqi state, only to sideline them when the Sharifians arrived. The promotion of the Sharifian officers as the new political class served to heighten the anti-British feelings of the Sunni Ottomanists, creating the political undercurrents that would later surface to destroy any semblance of civil politics in Iraq.

Despite delegating some responsibility to the Iraqis and their new king, Britain made sure to safeguard its own interests through its mandatory administration of the country. For example, the inclusion of Mosul as an integral part of the new Iraq helped the British secure the province's rich oil resources and maintain a system of communal checks and balances between the three major Iraqi constituencies—Sunnis, Shi'is, and Kurds. Moreover, immediately upon assuming his duties as the first British high commissioner of Iraq in 1920, Sir Percy Cox embarked on a policy of integrating the country's heterogeneous and mutually hostile communities into a unified polity. He began by terminating the hated military government that had ruled since the defeat of the Ottomans in World War I. Rather than emphasizing coercion, Cox turned to the politics of accommodation and co-option, establishing a civil administration by appointing an Iraqi Council of State to perform the functions of government. This council was made up of leading notables from each Iraqi constituency, including the old and prosperous Jewish community of Baghdad. Initially, only one of the council's ministers was Shi'i. When the Shi'is complained about their under-representation, however, Cox immediately rectified the oversight by appointing several Shi'i ministers without portfolio.

Meanwhile, King Faysal I arrived in Iraq in 1921 having been somewhat chastened by his experience of negotiating with the Western allies and watching the Arab Kingdom of Syria fall to pieces after barely two years. Hence, he was all too conscious of the danger of fragmentary politics and quite willing to cooperate with the various measures introduced by both the mandatory power and the national

government in order to unify the country. Iraq was to have all the symbols of statehood: a constitutional monarchy, parliamentary government, a national army, a centralized system of education, and common school curricula to instill political loyalty and national allegiance into a new generation of Iraqis. Regulations were promulgated governing religious minorities and their parliamentary representation, and a national ideology was formulated that would appeal to all Iraqis irrespective of their ethnic, religious, or social background. Nothing was left to chance in the quest to transform Iraq into a homogeneous and cohesive nation.

In pursuit of this goal, Faysal had to manipulate all the levers of influence and patronage in order to steer a clear course through the divergent and hostile currents sweeping the domestic politics of the new state. Perhaps most important, he had to reconcile the clamor for complete independence with the binding strategic requirements of the mandatory arrangement.

Faysal's style of politics was an adaptation of a familiar Ottoman practice wherein the notables of various communities served not so much as brokers of political power but as intermediaries between the state and their own constituents. Under his rule, cabinet formation became a fine art of constructing national coalitions. Faysal followed Sir Percy Cox's pattern when forming the first Arab Council, in which all Iraqi constituencies were represented, including religious minorities. A prominent Jew remained the king's minister of finance for several years, followed by a Christian, both serving as gestures of reassurance to Iraqi minorities. Indeed, communal representation fostering social equilibrium between various constituencies became a salient feature of the distribution of government posts.

Yet, co-option personalized the politics of representation in Iraq. Reciprocal arrangements between Baghdad politicians and communal and tribal patriarchs led to constantly shifting alliances between rivals, to the detriment of national integration and political compromise. The outcome was endemic instability that often instigated a forceful response.

THE MONARCHY'S DIVISIVE POLICIES

Although the monarchy implemented some inclusive policies, it also pursued two objectives that caused greater segmentation in an al-

ready deeply divided society: the propagation of a pan-Arabist national ideology and the creation of a conscripted national army.

Faysal and his Sharifian officers had long been imbued with the ideology of pan-Arabism, and they remained its foremost advocates once in Iraq. For the Shi'is, Kurds, and other non-Arab and non-Muslim communities, the introduction of such ideas was seen as a means of ensuring Sharifian hegemony over the Iraqi political process. Pan-Arabism took for granted that the language, religion, and historical experience shared by Arabic-speaking peoples constituted the essential qualities of nationhood. This ideology sought to extract individual Arabs from the traditional social milieu wherein familial, communal, tribal, and other primordial loyalties took precedence over national allegiance and identity.

The pan-Arabists' reading of Muslim history alienated the Shi'i heartland by emphasizing the Umayyad dynasty (661–750) as the epitome of Arab national genius. The Shi'is perceived the Umayyads as usurpers responsible for the killing of Shi'i imams. Hence, they strongly objected to the government's invocation of the dynasty, seeing it as a means of validating Sunni political hegemony. The Arab emphasis of the nation's political discourse alienated the Kurds as well.

In many ways, Arab nationalism ill served the new Iraq. It failed in its drive to remake Arabs via a process of individual "immersion" in Arab political culture, as called for by Sati al-Husri, the ideology's spiritual father and Iraq's first minister of education. Nevertheless, these notions influenced the attitudes of a whole generation of Arab political leaders. Arab nationalist prescriptions granted various Iraqi politicians license to speak on behalf of the Arab nation and to manipulate cross-border loyalties. This resulted in the alienation of many communities and the disenfranchising of a sizeable swathe of society that did not necessarily subscribe to the national ideology. The Shi'is, Kurds, and religious minorities felt particularly aggrieved because such ideas impugned their status as full citizens of the new state.

The creation of a conscripted national army was similarly divisive. The army was seen by some as an essential feature of nation building, a significant symbol of national sovereignty, and a vital instrument for the maintenance of internal and external security. Military service was considered not just a duty, but a means of schooling citizens in national

allegiance. The army was to be the nation's melting pot, creating a degree of homogeneity among a diversity of identities. In reality, however, it became the government's principal instrument of repression, deployed repeatedly to pacify the Shi'is, Kurds, and Assyrians alike.

Initially, Iraq had no organized military force or chain of command upon which to build. Britain regarded the Assyrian Levies—about 4,000 strong and commanded by British officers—as the standing army of Iraq. This force was deployed in expeditions against Shi'i tribal insurgencies in 1920 and, later, against the Kurds. The Iraqis considered it an auxiliary British force and therefore alien to the country. Given their background as Ottoman-trained soldiers, the Sharifian officers wanted to establish a force of their own while avoiding reliance on Britain.

Despite British wariness, two Iraqi officers—Ja'far al-Askari and his brother-in-law, Nuri al-Sa'id, the first minister of defense and chief of staff, respectively—were permitted to create an Iraqi army in 1921. Britain and Iraq agreed that parity should be maintained between the new national army and the Levies, allowing the mandatory power to keep what it regarded as a native force while giving the national government an army under its own command. This arrangement would have dire consequences for Iraqis, particularly after the country achieved independence in 1932.

When the national army was first established, recruitment was on a voluntary basis; conscription was not introduced until after independence. Even so, the public response to military service was mixed from the start. The Shi'i tribesmen had no tradition of military service, and both they and the Kurds feared possible conscription. In contrast, recruitment was brisk in the traditional Sunni Arab tribal areas around Mosul and west of Baghdad. Moreover, the Sharifian officers, encouraged by political patrons who had become the ruling elite of the new Iraq, formed the nucleus of the army's command structure, reinforced by graduates from the military college founded in 1921.

As a result, Sunni tribesmen and Sharifian officers came to dominate the hierarchy of the army, essentially ending the prospects that the military would become a tool for national integration. Under the mandate, the British gave tribal shaykhs wide-ranging powers over their communities, an arrangement that led the younger, educated,

and more disgruntled elements among the tribes to seek avenues of escape from the limitations imposed by their shaykhs. For Sunni Arab tribesmen in particular, the army became a refuge. It housed, fed, educated, and trained them, giving them a sense of their importance while imbuing them with its values regarding power and authority—values that many of them would later carry with them into civilian life. Consequently, a military-civilian symbiosis emerged in Iraq, eventually dominating the political process.

COMMUNAL TENSIONS ACCOMPANYING INDEPENDENCE

Preceded as it was by the establishment of a new army and the propagation of a nationalist ideology, Iraq's declaration of independence from Britain in 1932 opened the floodgates to widespread and sustained communal tensions and violence. Practically all of the country's non-Sunni Arab communities asked the departing mandatory power for some guarantees regarding their future safety and welfare.

Britain's post-1932 role was hardly conducive to government protection of vulnerable communities, however. British advice to those groups that felt threatened (e.g., Kurds, Turkmens, Jews, Christians, Assyrians) was to submit to the authority of their newly independent state, coping as best they could with prevailing circumstances. The only safeguard was an exhortation from the League of Nations that the Iraqi regime should respect minority rights. Britain made clear to all minorities looking for protection that it intended to absolve itself of responsibility for Iraqi domestic politics.

The first victims of postindependence violence were neither the disgruntled Shi'i nor the recalcitrant Kurds, but rather the Assyrians, thousands of whom were massacred at the hands of the Iraqi army in 1933. Although British officials frequently meddled in Iraqi affairs for their own benefit, they apparently did not feel compelled to interfere when their intervention was actually warranted.

As for the Shi'i community, it had split into three incompatible groups well before independence: the religious guides (or Mujtahids), the tribal shaykhs, and the small but highly significant urban intelligentsia. The interests of these three constituencies converged from time to time but were not identical.

For example, the Shi'i divines had long been equivocal about the new Iraqi state. Although many of them were inclined to cooperate

with King Faysal I, they refused to accept the mandate because it meant that his administration would be under the influence of a non-Muslim power. They went as far as pronouncing that allegiance to Faysal was conditional and that his acceptance of both the mandate and the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty meant that the people of Iraq were no longer bound to him. For his part, Faysal attempted to manipulate the religious and nationalist opposition in order to achieve complete autonomy for Iraq, but to no avail.

The British distrusted, even loathed, most of the Shi'i divines. It was anathema for Britain to deal with the turbaned people of Najaf and Karbala, mainly because of their adamant opposition to continued British influence in Iraq. This attitude turned the Shi'i community as a whole against British machinations and discouraged young educated Shi'is from enrolling in government service or, later, the army. By 1936, however, the divines had reverted to a quiescent stance wherein the problems of the temporal world were none of their concern. Meanwhile, the Shi'i tribes, especially those of the middle Euphrates region, were pacified following repeated military operations against them.

Having risen in a failed rebellion in 1920, the Shi'is sought to influence the construction of independent Iraq in their favor. They failed in that pursuit as well, however. Members of the Shi'i intelligentsia sought avenues into political office but were mostly rebuffed, often on fatuous grounds (e.g., many candidates were rejected because they had not held Ottoman nationality prior to the establishment of the Iraqi state or because they were not of Arab extraction, even though their families had lived on Iraqi soil for hundreds of years). Their Iraqi identity impugned, they gravitated toward radical nationalist and left-wing organizations. The alienation of the Shi'i intelligentsia led Shi'i divines to actively reengage in politics, creating an uneasy alliance between Mujtahids and secularly inclined urban Shi'is based primarily on shared anti-British sentiment.

The Kurdish attitude toward the state of Iraq was as equivocal as that of the Shi'is, but it developed differently. In 1919 the Kurdish districts of Iraq were accorded special administration under tribal shaykhs. British officials intended to govern the tribal areas of Iraq as they had done in the Indian subcontinent: with shaykhs appointed as administrators under a single head. Encouraged by their de facto

autonomous government, the vast majority of Kurds did not vote in the nationwide plebiscite that confirmed Faysal as king. Similarly, only a handful of selected Kurdish leaders actively participated in the deliberations that led to the creation of the Iraqi state.

Under this policy, Kurdish Shaykh Mahmud Barzanji was appointed governor of Sulaymaniyah province by British officials in 1919. Barzanji aspired to rule all of Iraqi Kurdistan, however, and he quickly became the focus of Kurdish nationalist agitation as well as intertribal envy and rivalry. Both Iraqi and British authorities resolved to suppress this movement immediately for fear of Kemalist and Bolshevik involvement; as a result, Barzanji was apprehended in 1919.

When the Kurds failed to secure an independent nation of their own, the demand for autonomy within the state of Iraq became their battle cry. Upon ratification of the 1930 Anglo-Iraqi Treaty and termination of the British mandate, Iraq joined the League of Nations, which, as mentioned previously, stipulated that the Kurds and other minorities be granted cultural rights and security. The new Iraqi government failed to meet this requirement, however, sparking another failed Kurdish rebellion in 1930, led by Barzanji, who had previously been permitted to return to Kurdistan after pledging to cease his rebellious activities. Upon his defeat, remnants of his forces joined those of the redoubtable Barzani brothers—Ahmad and Mulla Mustafa—in a general Kurdish revolt in 1933. Although this revolt was put down as well, the Barzanis remained defiant, emerging as potent opposition figures in later decades.

AFTER FAYSAL

Because Faysal did not live long enough to institutionalize the Iraqi system of government, it lacked the firm foundation needed to withstand the disruptions that followed independence. Soon after his death in 1933, the integrative process he had fostered was undermined by sectional interests, which encouraged a revival of primordial loyalties and shattered the consensus and balance that he had so delicately nurtured. Iraqi politics became irrevocably fractional and fractious, while the government itself became a mere facade that failed to meet the people's needs. Cabinet formation became an exercise in forming unstable coalitions, and parliamentary representation became synonymous with government appointment and administrative

patronage; most of those chosen for government service were clients of the new order who were rewarded for their pliancy rather than for any influence they might hold over local constituencies.

Indeed, after Faysal, the institutional framework of the pluralist system—its legislative and executive branches, its electoral systems, its political parties, its press—were managed by a handful of power-hungry politicians who were scarcely familiar with democratic processes. This ruling caste ignored the essential demands of nation building, focusing instead on consolidating power and jockeying for position via corrupt and often murderous practices. Their search for power and influence guided their external relations as well, leading them to exploit various causes in the wider Arab world, including the Palestine question.

Although Iraqi society was exceedingly heterogeneous, the country's rulers—particularly after Faysal—were a homogeneous group belonging to the Sunni Arab minority. Ottoman traditions prevailed in Iraqi politics, as power remained confined to Sunni constituencies that were bound together by family and tribal loyalties, making them indifferent to the wishes of the overwhelming majority of the population. This situation was perhaps best described by Lionel Smith, the British advisor to the ministry of education in Baghdad from 1923 until 1931:

I do not suppose there is in the whole of history another example of a state with a representative government of a modern type, in which the only people who count are two or three hundred at the most. It is in fact a close oligarchy, but without the administrative experience, the education and the tradition of public service, without which as far as I can remember no oligarchies have governed successfully. This in fact is an oligarchy of mostly unscrupulous adventurers, without the rudiments of true patriotism, whose object is to make what they can as quickly as they can out of the richest of resources of supply—the state.¹

Another consequence of Faysal's death was the reemergence of the division between the Sunni Ottoman political establishment and the Sharifians, who were regarded as upstarts and British pawns. This division came to the fore in the 1930s, contributing to the destruction of civil politics in Iraq and to the string of six coup d'états that occurred between 1936 and 1941.

Interestingly, the first military coup in 1936 was led not by the Ottomanist elite but by an Iraqi nationalist alliance of Shi'i, Kurdish, and Turkmen leaders who rejected the pan-Arabist school represented by Sharifian politicians. The coup also marked the emergence of ideological and secular political organizations such as the Iraqi Communist Party, the left-wing al-Ahali group, and the radical pan-Arab nationalist Muthanna Club, the forerunner of the Ba'ath Party.

Other coups soon followed, ultimately leading to the 1941 pro-Nazi revolt of Rashid Ali al-Gailani, which resulted in a *farhud* (pogrom) that traumatized the Baghdad Jewry. In general, the post-Faysal trend toward authoritarian and personal rule created an endemic paradox: the dominance of the ruling caste led to the alienation of other constituencies, which in turn eroded the legitimacy and authority of the state. Hence, by 1941, Iraq had come full circle—in response to the al-Gailani coup, the British instituted a second military occupation of Baghdad.

LESSONS FOR THE UNITED STATES

Even after Iraq attained complete independence in 1932, the British continued to exercise considerable influence, assuming dominant advisory roles in most portions of the government. This feature of the new state's politics led many Iraqi commentators to dub it "the peculiar situation," a label most evident in the various glaring and absurd contradictions that characterized the country:

- theoretical sovereignty with strings attached (in the form of unequal treaties with Britain);
- territorial integrity that was questioned by friends and neighbors such as Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, all of whom made territorial claims on Iraq;
- a nationalist ideology that was externally irredentist yet internally divisive;
- ministers who were given administrative responsibilities yet placed under the watchful eyes of foreign advisors;
- a port and a railway system administered but not owned by Iraqis;
- privileges for foreigners in Iraq but none for Iraqis abroad; and
- most important, an oil industry that Iraqis neither owned nor controlled.

This situation contributed in no small measure to the anti-British and anti-Western sentiments shared by most Iraqis. The potential parallels to the aftermath of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq are only too obvious. The best way for the United States to avoid re-creating this “peculiar situation” would be to limit the duration of its military presence in postwar Iraq.

Moreover, as mentioned previously, the promotion of Sharifians and their recruits as the new political class in Iraq during the 1920s simply heightened the hostility that the establishment Ottomanists felt toward the British, eventually destroying the trappings of civil society that the British had sought to create there. A similar pattern could emerge if the United States is confronted with the task of helping to create a new Iraqi administration. As the restoration of Iraq’s civil society unfolds, Washington must help Iraqis strike an appropriate balance within the Iraqi opposition-in-exile, on the one hand, and between the exiled and those who chose to remain in Saddam Husayn’s Iraq, on the other. A free and internationally supervised constituent assembly election will help to clarify the level of popular support for contending factions. In any case, the United States should allow the Iraqi people to choose their own rulers, which will help to prevent rivals from waging destructive bids for political dominance and the spoils of office.

In general, the institutionalization of Iraqi politics under British administration was a dismal failure, with repercussions that have persisted up to the present and that will affect any future attempt at restructuring the Iraqi political system. The lessons are clear: if democratization is to succeed in Iraq, the country will need to adopt a new politics of inclusion and establish safeguards for the protection of minorities and individual liberties.

NOTE

1. E.C. Hodgkin, “Lionel Smith on Education in Iraq,” in *Middle Eastern Studies* 19, no. 2 (1983), p. 254.

THE CHALLENGE OF NATION BUILDING IN IRAQ

The Western military force had been poised to attack for months. It entered Basra, captured the city and its oil fields, then began the long sweep up the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers toward Baghdad. The march was difficult, with the troops encountering heat, disease, and opposition from recalcitrant tribes and local militias armed with modern weapons. The paramount shaykhs of the middle Euphrates tribes declared their support for the government in Baghdad, while senior Muslim clerics—Sunni and Shi'i alike—issued *fatwas* (decrees) authorizing revolt against the foreign invaders. In the north, Kurdish factions threatened revolt if their demands for autonomy were not met. Meanwhile, squabbling among Iraqi exiles—politicians, clerics, and generals—hindered their ability to cooperate, and antiwar and anti-imperialist movements at home prevented the Western government from announcing a clear policy. What was the objective of the war—oil, regime change, or providing guidance and protection to Iraqis while they learned the intricacies and values of democratic governance?

This was the British experience in Iraq between 1914 and 1918. Hopefully, the United States has learned from its own past mistakes in the conduct of war. Even so, the British faced still greater challenges upon taking control of Iraq more than eighty years ago, and U.S. policymakers can draw several lessons from Britain's nation building experiences. Political and social conditions may have been more primitive at the time, and oil was yet to become the source of national treasure. Nevertheless, the present-day Iraqi reaction to military defeat and occupation by a foreign power could be similar to that witnessed in the early twentieth century.

IRAQ BEFORE AND DURING WORLD WAR I

When Britain's Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force entered Basra in 1914, Iraq did not exist as a state. The provinces that formed modern Iraq were part of the Ottoman Empire and had been ruled both well and badly by the Turks and their Sunni Arab cohorts for several hundred years. The population of 3 million was roughly 50 percent Shi'i Arab, 20 percent Sunni Arab, 20 percent Kurdish (mostly Sunni, some Shi'i, a few Jewish), and 10 percent "other" (Jewish, Catholic, Assyrian, Chaldean, Turkmen, Yazidi, and Sabaeen).

Iraqi Arabs were the last of the multinational groups that composed the Ottoman Empire to abandon it. Comfortable under the aegis of Islamic governance, Iraq's urban and tribal power barons focused their attention on issues such as land tenure and water rights; any political ambitions they may have had before World War I were directed toward forming an autonomous entity within the Ottoman Empire. Separatism as a political goal emerged as a result of the chauvinistic racial policies of the Young Turks, not because of repressive Ottoman policies.

By 1916 the Sunni Arab political elites who had been educated in the Ottoman army were either defecting to Husayn ibn Ali (the Sharif of Mecca and leader of the Great Arab Revolt against the Turks) or thinking about accepting the British. In contrast, Arab and Kurdish tribal leaders and Shi'i clerics, secure in their isolation, were considering autonomy under the Turks or outright independence. The southern tribes in particular had a common sense of Arab identity, shared traditions and customs, and links to the great clans and confederations that had originated in Arabia and spread throughout the region. Arab nationalism was particularly strong in Najaf and Karbala, where students and scholars encouraged the teaching of Arab civilization and culture.

Meanwhile, British forces had occupied Fao and Basra in southern Iraq in October 1914 in order to keep non-British influences (primarily Russian and German) out of the region and to protect British oil interests in Iran, communication lines to India, and the status quo in the Persian Gulf. Despite a humiliating defeat at Kut and a forced retreat in 1916, British forces took Baghdad in 1917 and Kirkuk and Mosul in 1918, ending a long and bloody campaign.

POLICY DIFFERENCES AMONG THE BRITISH

In general, the British had little knowledge of Iraqi culture and politics prior to 1914, and few Englishmen were familiar with the region's language, traditions, or internal conflicts. British military commanders and civil servants from the India Office were drawn to Iraq by a combination of strategic necessity and the lure of political success and economic wealth. During the war, however, secret agreements with Husayn ibn Ali (recognizing the Arabs' right to an independent state) and the French (the infamous Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, which divided the Middle East into British and French spheres of influence) ensured that Britain would be the dominant power in the postwar Persian Gulf.

Although Iraqi society at the time was characterized by isolation, political turmoil, tribal unrest, social chaos, and economic uncertainty, Britain's own foreign policy establishment was in disarray as well. Whitehall had no policy for the Arab parts of the Ottoman Empire. The British foreign and defense policymaking establishments—the War Office, the Foreign Office, and the India Office—differed in both outlook and mission, and responsibility for defining and implementing British policy toward Iraq was divided among several disparate centers. The India Office supervised both military operations and policy during the first two years of the war, after which the War Office assumed control of military activities and the Foreign Office took over policy. Civil administration remained the responsibility of the India Office, however. The Arab Bureau, part of the intelligence division of the Foreign Office, tried to coordinate policy on Iraq through its advisors to the civil administrator, but they were viewed with hostility by the India Office. All four of these entities urged different priorities and policies, issuing proclamations that were unclear and contradictory. Nevertheless, their promises were accepted by many Arab and Iraqi nationalists who were eager to have their hopes and ambitions confirmed.

The policy debates in Whitehall were framed by two questions: Would the acquisition of new territory make Britain stronger or weaker? Should allowances be made for the repeated Muslim contention that Islam had a political as well as religious role? The Foreign Office and the Arab Bureau advocated the creation of an Arab caliphate and state in Arabia under indirect British control, to include

southern Iraq, Mecca, and Medina. This faction, which had the support of Prime Minister David Lloyd George, was labeled the Hashemite School because of its support for the claims of the Sharif of Mecca. In contrast, the India Office viewed Iraq as a means of meeting the needs of India and its Muslims. Under its plan, India would absorb Iraq in order to protect imperial interests and extend them into Arabia, while Abd al-Aziz ibn-Sa'ud of Najd—the wahhabi tribal leader who would ultimately rout the Sharif, conquer most of the peninsula, and create the modern state of Saudi Arabia—was viewed as the Arab ruler most fit to lead and be led. Although the Foreign Office and Arab Bureau ultimately won the debate by installing an unemployed Hashemite prince as the first king of Iraq, the India Office succeeded in shaping governmental and social controls that would last until 1958, when a revolution toppled the monarchy and ousted the British.

ESTABLISHING THE RULE OF LAW AND LAW BY RULES

Even before the end of World War I, British military and civil administrators had established mechanisms by which they would exercise control over the Iraqi state-in-waiting. The tone was set by the administrators dispatched to Iraq from the India Office. Guided by the nineteenth-century philosophy of the “white man’s burden,” they sought to duplicate the imperial style of administration established in India. These men pushed for direct rule, arguing that the Arab “natives” were inherently inferior and unable to rule wisely or justly. One such administrator described “Arab propensities for brutal murder and theft” but expressed his optimism that “if conditions could be moulded aright men would grow good to fit them.”¹ Because of these attitudes, the British administrators opposed the appointment of Arabs to positions of responsibility, instead choosing young, often inexperienced military officers to “advise” local leaders.

On March 19, 1917, Lt. Gen. Sir Frederick Stanley Maude, then-commander of the British forces in Iraq, issued a proclamation to the people of Baghdad promising that the British had not come as “Conquerors or enemies but as Liberators.”² He invited the nobles, elders, and representatives of the Baghdad province to collaborate with British political representatives in the management of the territory’s civil affairs. The proclamation reflected the romantic vision of the For-

eign Office rather than the more control-minded vision of the India Office. Even Maude objected to its contents, believing that it would only encourage Arab nationalism and confuse the locals regarding British intentions.

Following Maude's death in November 1917, his successor, Sir William Marshall, was given the singular mission of persuading Arab tribes to harass the Ottoman enemy wherever possible. After the war, Britain's policy regarding the role of the Iraqi people would become more candid: a memorandum issued by the Foreign Office in November 1920 promised "to recognize and support the independence of the inhabitants, and to advise and assist them to establish what may appear to be the most suitable forms of government, on the understanding they seek advice and guidance of Great Britain only."³

Iraq remained under British military rule following the war, with administrative duties transferred to the chief political officer of the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force, Sir Percy Cox. As civil administrator, Cox was responsible for establishing political relations with the Iraqis and setting up the machinery of government. At first, Cox reported to the General Officer Commanding the British forces, who was responsible for both civil and military government in the occupied territories. In 1917 the Civil Administration was reorganized and Cox was named civil commissioner, reporting directly to London. In 1918 Cox was named high commissioner for Persia, while Sir Arnold Wilson became acting civil commissioner for Iraq.

Wilson believed that the Arabs were incapable of self-rule, that a tutorial and imperial approach was appropriate for Iraq, and that Iraqis should be incorporated into a government created and largely controlled by the British. Such beliefs gradually laid the groundwork for mistrust and rebellion. Under Wilson, Britain installed an administration for the Iraqi provinces based on the Indian model. In September 1918, the occupied Basra and Baghdad provinces were combined under one civil commissioner. Administrative centers were established in major towns, and political officers were placed in charge of districts. These officers administered justice, maintained law and order, settled disputes between town and tribe, and attempted to pacify quarrelsome tribes. They also recruited labor for irrigation and flood-control projects, collected supplies for the military, determined compensation for war damages, and protected communication lines.

Yet, many of these officers were inexperienced in either military or civil administration, having been only recently demobilized from active service in the war. Hence, they knew little of Iraq or its languages, law codes, and customs.

Although Britain had promised to create an indigenous Arab government under British "guidance," it continued to administer the provinces directly, according to India Office policies and procedures. After the British abolished the elected municipal councils that had been established by the Ottomans, the new political officers worked directly through local notables on whom they relied to maintain order. The justice system was initially based on Indian and Ottoman civil law codes and administered by the political officers in tribal courts. The taxation code was Ottoman, and the Indian rupee served as the official currency. The political officers also relied on civil police constables recruited from Aden and India, as well as native soldiers, tribal levies, and local police recruited from Arab tribes. Tribal levies also served as escorts, messengers, jailers, and soldiers.

Although tribal leaders could find some satisfaction with their role in the new system, the law as supervised by the British Civil Administration soon came to represent an inflexible and foreign system of control. Moreover, the number of British officers serving in the "temporary" Iraqi government grew at Arab expense. In 1917, 59 British officers served in the civil administration; by 1920, their number had grown to 1,022 (one for every 3,000 Iraqis), with Arabs holding less than 4 percent of the senior positions. Even after the establishment of an Iraqi government under the League of Nations mandate, 569 British advisors remained in the country's civil administration.

TRIBAL POLICY

The Turks had pursued a divide-and-rule policy toward the region's tribes, dealing with individual tribesmen and subgroups rather than with shaykhs or powerful confederations. This policy weakened the traditional power and prestige of tribal leaders and instigated intra- and intertribal rivalries, all of which played to the benefit of the Turks.

Britain reversed this decline of tribal authority, partly as a means of containing the growth of power among Ottoman-educated and more nationalist-minded urban Arabs. British policy was aimed at

restoring the power and prestige of a select group of shaykhs who were considered to be “natural” leaders; these shaykhs were officially accorded legitimate status after they submitted to British authority and agreed to work for the Civil Administration. In July 1918, the British announced the Tribal Civil and Criminal Disputes Regulation, based on the Government of India Act, which gave political officers the authority to convene a tribal council (*majlis*) in order to settle disputes according to tribal custom. Those shaykhs endorsed by the British authorities were empowered to settle all disputes with and between members of their tribes and to collect taxes on behalf of the government. Each shaykh was also responsible for maintaining peace within his tribe, arresting wrongdoers, protecting lines of communication, and, during the war, cutting off supplies to the Turks. In return, they received arms, agricultural loans, subsidies, relief from taxes, and the support of prestigious British political advisors.

Most important, the British cemented the feudal nature of the Ottoman land tenure policy by giving certain shaykhs (along with prominent townsmen) owner’s rights to the lands tended by their communities. Consequently, shaykhs became virtual landlords, while most tribesmen became impoverished serfs tied to their shaykh by financial debts rather than communal bonds.

Hence, one major effect of British tribal policy was to weaken relations between shaykh and tribe. Rather than being bound by tribal obligation, shaykhs came under British protection. By restoring shaykhs to semifeudal positions of power, the British believed that they could decrease the high costs of administration and maintain stability more effectively. In reality, once endowed with new power and motivated by enhanced self-interest, the shaykhs reverted to authoritarianism and became increasingly alienated from their traditional power base.

Britain’s tribal policy also had a devastating long-term impact on Iraq’s political development. It minimized interaction between town and tribe and solidified the divisions between these constituencies by officially sanctioning tribal customs. Indeed, from 1918 to 1958, two distinct systems of law were used in Iraq: one for towns and another for tribes. Only the presence of the British military kept the two sectors together.

OCCUPATION AND REVOLT

The British authorities encountered increasing local resistance from several directions soon after World War I. Unrest emerged in Najaf and Karbala when a group of Sunni Arab military officers and officials who had served under the Ottomans joined various notables, clerics, and tribal shaykhs in vowing to defend Islam against Britain and to oppose tighter British administrative control. The 1919 murder of a British officer in Najaf led to swift retaliation in the form of arrests, executions, and a blockade of the city. Similarly, prominent Shi'i clerics and civilians began forming groups that sought independence and opposed British occupation. Some Sunni and Shi'i Arab groups even formed links; although they may have disagreed over their desired form of government and leadership (secular monarchy versus Islamic state; king versus sultan), many of their members had lost jobs and status and been marginalized by the imposition of direct British rule.

Beginning in 1919, Sir Arnold Wilson introduced a series of measures aimed at consolidating British control over Iraq. At the same time, he commissioned a survey that polled prominent Iraqis on their preferences regarding the Iraqi government and constitution. Their responses seemed to indicate support for a state composed of three provinces under Arab rule, but with no consensus on the type of government or ruler.

Even as Wilson exaggerated the degree of popular acquiescence to British control, others in the Foreign Office concluded that Arab nationalism was developing unstoppable momentum in Iraq. For example, Oriental Secretary to the High Commissioner Gertrude Bell thought that the British should work with the nationalists (most of whom were urban Sunnis) to modernize the country and end what she viewed as the reactionary and obscurantist influence of the Shi'i clerics and their tribal followers. She advocated Arab self-rule under British tutelage.

The Iraqis were confused by such divisions among the British. For this and other reasons, many of them rejected the 1919 Paris Peace Conference recommendation that Iraq be placed under a League of Nations mandate. The idea that Iraq could only gradually become an independent nation under the tutelage of a foreign power was

met with contempt; the mandate was seen as an ominous and patronizing proposal. In Karbala, Ayatollah Muhammad Taqi Shirazi, a leading Shi'i cleric, issued a *fatwa* declaring that service in the British administration was unlawful. In May 1920, Shi'i clerics and tribal shaykhs from the middle Euphrates region joined with Sunni nationalists in holding mass meetings at Sunni and Shi'i mosques in Baghdad, calling for cooperation in the name of Iraqi independence. Wilson refused to meet with these men unless a larger number of his own preselected Baghdad notables were present. He opposed any compromise that would enhance the power and prestige of Shi'i clerics or extend their authority to areas from which they had traditionally been excluded (e.g., government and military service).

In June 1920, the British Civil Administration announced that elections would be held for a constituent assembly, and a newly returned exile—Sayyid Talib al-Naqib, who supported the returning Ottoman-trained military officers—was selected to create the necessary electoral machinery. Prominent Iraqis were divided on the proper response to this measure, disagreeing on what would best serve Iraq's (and their own) interests. Some Sunni notables and Shi'i tribal shaykhs looked to the British to secure their existing privileges. They agreed to support Britain so long as they were guaranteed the same privileges they had held under the Turks. Others, fearing loss of autonomy, land tenure, and increased taxation, rejected any form of colonial tutelage.

That same month, Iraqi Arab oppositionists launched an armed revolt. Senior Sunni and Shi'i clerics began a brief period of unprecedented cooperation by issuing a *fatwa* authorizing rebellion. The British responded with preemptive arrests of tribal shaykhs, but the revolt spread. By late July, the rebels controlled the middle Euphrates region and districts around Baghdad. Sensing weakness in the central authority in Baghdad due to the Arab revolt, the Kurds rose up in the north, though without any coordination with the insurgent Arabs.⁴

The rebellions failed, but the events of 1920 played an important role in creating an Iraqi national mythology and shaping future British policy toward Iraq. The revolts themselves lasted three months, swept over one-third of the country, and cost Britain 400 lives and £40 million. For Iraqis, they became a symbol of nationalist pride

and opposition to colonial domination. For the British, the nine months of continuous military operations were a financial and material burden at a time when domestic sentiment was growing against foreign military adventures and when many countries were implementing defense economies. Consequently, London decided to reduce its military force in Iraq as quickly as possible following the revolts. The British felt that the most economical strategy from a political and military perspective was to use air power and local levies for internal security while creating a pliable government that would accept and implement British “advice.”

BRITAIN FORMS THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT

In October 1920, Sir Percy Cox, the newly appointed high commissioner for Iraq, ended military rule, formulated a constitution in consultation with Iraqi elites, and established a provisional government with an Arab president and Council of State. He selected as president Abd al-Rahman al-Gailani, an aging leader of Baghdad’s Sunni community whose sole qualifications were his religious position (as the Naqib of Baghdad), his family background, and his lack of political experience, which left Cox to exercise real authority. Similarly, most council members were drawn from the traditional upper classes (e.g., religious leaders, landowners, tribal shaykhs) and could be depended upon to support the British.

The new cabinet included representatives from all three provinces, mostly prominent Sunni Arabs, along with several Christians, a handful of Shi‘is, and a Jew. Municipal councils were restored as well, though like each ministry, they were given British advisors. Shi‘is were noticeably absent from most government offices, partly because of their lack of administrative experience, partly because of prevailing anti-Shi‘i attitudes among Sunni Arab notables in Baghdad, but mostly because of British wariness of Shi‘i clericalism. In other words, the prewar order was reestablished—Ottoman-educated Sunni Arabs and Arabized Kurds under foreign patronage dominated Iraq once again. Even Iraq’s new national army was led by 600 Ottoman-trained army officers, most from Sunni Arab families.

In choosing the ruler of Iraq, Britain settled upon the third son of the Sharif of Mecca, Faysal ibn Husayn, whom the French had rejected as king of “their” Syria. Because of his history of coopera-

tion with the British, they assumed that they could manipulate him. Although he had virtually impeccable Arab nationalist and Muslim credentials (as a leader of the Great Arab Revolt against the Turks and a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad), he was regarded as an interloper by many Iraqis. As an Arab, he lacked Kurdish support; as a Sunni, he lacked Shi'i support; and as a Hashemite from Arabia, he was rejected by many old Sunni noble families. Yet, he had the loyalty of Iraqis who had served in the Ottoman military and defected to the Great Arab Revolt. Moreover, he was a known quantity to British and Arab observers, with no ties to any Iraqi region or political faction.

Under Cox's direction, King Faysal I was "elected" by unanimous resolution on July 11, 1921, in the Council of State. His government pledged to be constitutional, representative, democratic, and limited by the rule of law. A plebiscite managed by the British gave Faysal 96 percent of the popular vote—Kurds and pro-Turkish elements who opposed Arab rule did not vote, nor did Shi'is who wanted a theocratic government.

Not surprisingly, such British oversight did not have the anticipated positive impact. In fact, the new arrangements had serious shortcomings in several critical areas.

Education. Reacting against his British advisor, Iraqi education minister Sati al-Husri stressed the Arabization of the educational system. For example, he ensured that textbooks emphasized secular and progressive themes, Arab nationalism, and patriotism rather than the sectarian and ethnic separatism fostered by the British and favored by Kurds and Shi'is.

Army. The Iraqi army was established in 1921 with the stipulation that it would be given responsibility for internal and external security within four years. Britain provided assistance and advisors and threatened Iraq with sanctions if it ignored the counsel of these advisors. The lower ranks of the army were recruited from tribal elements, often Shi'i, but the officer corps consisted entirely of Ottoman-trained officers, most of whom were Sunni Arab, some of whom were Kurdish.

Debt. The 1922 Anglo-Iraqi Treaty stipulated that the king had to heed British advice on fiscal policy so long as Iraq was in debt to Britain. It also required Iraqis to help pay for British administrative expenses, including the costs associated with the numerous British

advisors and inspectors stationed throughout the country. If the Iraqis defaulted or refused to cooperate, the British could apply military sanctions. All of these measures contributed to Iraq's economic dependence on Britain.

Constitution. The 1924 Iraqi constitution was another colonial diktat. Initially, it was intended to empower the Iraqi king while giving the British high commissioner sufficient executive power to govern effectively, uphold the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, and provide political representation for various elements of the population. Yet, negotiations floundered on the powers accorded to the king (whom the British hoped to make their instrument) and to parliament (which the Iraqi nationalists hoped to control). Although parliament was given the power to dissolve the cabinet, the king's prerogatives included confirming all laws and issuing ordinances to fulfill treaty obligations without parliamentary approval. Moreover, ministers were responsible to the king, not to parliament; they had to be members of one of its two chambers. Although the constitution remained in force for more than thirty years, made the king a symbol of Iraqi unity, and brought various political and social groups into government for the first time, it failed to take root because Iraqis were never given real governmental responsibility; consequently, many of them regarded it as an instrument of foreign control.

THE LEGACY

Years of British occupation and manipulation resulted in the emergence of nationalist groups and set the stage for a disturbing pattern of military revolts, political repression, ethnic cleansing, and civil unrest. The 1920s saw the rise of nationalist opposition (Arab and Iraqi) to foreign occupation, unfair treaties, imposed constitutions, and political and military institutions that consolidated foreign control rather than Iraqi autonomy. This fervor shaped an entire generation of Sunni Arab military officers, among them Khayrallah Talfah, Saddam Husayn's influential uncle.

The nationalist opposition only grew following the unpopular 1930 version of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty. The revised treaty promised Iraq independence and League of Nations membership. The two countries also pledged mutual help in time of war and close consultation in foreign affairs, while Britain was granted leases on two

airbases that were to be guarded by Iraqi forces at British expense. Yet, nationalists opposed the treaty's twenty-five-year duration and the continued British military presence on Iraqi soil.

Despite this opposition, the treaty was ratified, leading to official independence in 1932. Once free from direct British rule, however, the Iraqi government began to use the growing national army as an instrument of control and oppression. Subsequently, the Iraqi military became the first in the Middle East to establish a tradition of interfering in politics and carrying out genocidal operations against various minority groups.

As nation builders, the British created an impressive array of institutions: a monarchy, a parliament, a Western-style constitution, a civil service, and an army. Yet, their principal objective was establishing a government that would protect their interests at the least possible cost to the British taxpayer. Toward this end, they designed "a structure that was less a system of government than a means of control," that is, "[t]he British created an imposing institutional facade, but put down few roots."⁵

In a meeting with his military commanders in February 2003, Saddam drew several comparisons between the Iraq that the British confronted in 1920 and the Iraq that the United States would face in 2003:

We hope that the British would tell the Americans about their experience in Iraq in 1920. The British occupiers had cannons and advanced weapons compared to what the Iraqis possessed at the time. The Iraqis were poor. They fought the British army with axes and shovels. . . . The Iraqis defended their country and forced the occupation army to meet the Iraqis' demands for national rule. However, the colonization continued, as you know. . . . The Iraqis imposed their will at the time [of British occupation], although they had no central leadership. They had local leadership. It was the tribes, figures, and intellectuals who called for forming resistance. The resistance then imposed its will on the occupier. Now, praise be to God, we have a state, leaders, chain of command, armies, organized people, and capabilities. True, our capabilities are not like those of the Americans and the British, but there is superiority in other aspects. They are superior in the technological and electronic fields, but we are superior in other fields.⁶

Such rhetoric highlights the degree to which the experience of British occupation remains alive in the contemporary Iraqi political imagination.

NOTES

1. Sir Arnold T. Wilson, *Loyalties: Mesopotamia, 1914–1917* (London: Oxford University, 1930), p. 207.
2. The full text of the proclamation is available in Philip Willard Ireland, *Iraq: A Study in Political Development* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), pp. 457–458.
3. Great Britain, Foreign Office, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919–1939*, 1st ser., vol. 13, ed. J. P. T. Bury (London: HMSO, 1963), p. 400.
4. This pattern of revolt would be replicated following the Gulf War in 1991, when separate Shi'i and Kurdish uprisings broke out in southern and northern Iraq, respectively.
5. Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1985), p. 29.
6. "Saddam Meets with Al-Quds Army Commanders, Officers," remarks broadcast in Arabic by Baghdad Iraqi Satellite Channel Television, February 3, 2003, translated and transcribed by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service.

REBUILDING IRAQ: ASSESSING THE BRITISH MILITARY OCCUPATION

If the United States undertakes long-term military involvement in Iraq, it will likely face challenges similar to those that characterized the British military experience in Iraq during the first half of the twentieth century. After helping to defeat the Ottomans during World War I, Britain's Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force was thrust into the role of administering the territories it had occupied. During the first several years of what became a lengthy stay, three key factors emerged that are essential to predicting what might lie ahead for the United States: (1) the large-scale Iraqi revolt against British direct rule in 1920; (2) the use of the Royal Air Force (RAF) to carry out a policy of "air control" during the indirect rule of the British mandate period; and (3) the construction of an "independent" Iraqi military during the 1920s. Understanding these factors could help U.S. war planners avoid Britain's mistakes and embrace its successes.

THE BRITISH MILITARY CAMPAIGN IN IRAQ

Britain was no stranger to Mesopotamia at the beginning of World War I. With Ottoman acquiescence, the British had long maintained an official presence in the Persian Gulf port of Basra in support of their commercial and geopolitical interests. In fact, "on the eve of the First World War [British] interests controlled over two-thirds of the growing volume of imports and roughly half of the exports that passed through Basra."¹ Once war broke out and the Turks became less accommodating, Britain deployed troops to the area. Although these

forces were ostensibly in Mesopotamia to protect British interests in India and the valuable oil fields of southern Persia, they ultimately moved north toward Baghdad in a campaign of conquest. By 1917 the British Indian Army had captured Baghdad from the Turks.

Concurrent with this successful military campaign in Iraq, the British-backed “Great Arab Revolt” in neighboring Syria was also making headway. Led by Faysal ibn Husayn—the strategically adept son of the Sharif of Mecca and future king of Iraq—a mixed army of Bedouins and Arab nationalist, ex-Ottoman soldiers fought alongside the Allies and captured Damascus. Their efforts culminated in the short-lived Arab Kingdom of Syria, in which Faysal was amir until the French ejected him in 1920.

Britain’s postwar plans for Iraq were established by the de Bunsen Middle East Policy Committee, set up in 1915 by Prime Minister Herbert Asquith. The leading force on the committee was Sir Mark Sykes, an ambitious, Ottoman-smart workaholic representing Lord Kitchner, the minister of war. The committee established that Britain’s primary regional interest was to keep landlines open to India. Sykes was integral in shaping the committee’s subsequent recommendation to the British government that the most effective way of attaining this objective was through the creation of a “semi-autonomous” Iraq—self-governing but within the British sphere of political and military influence.

Lt. Gen. Sir Frederick Stanley Maude, the leader of the British expedition in Iraq and the region’s military governor, also attempted to spell out Britain’s intentions toward this newly “liberated” territory. Upon entering Baghdad, he made a series of proclamations to the people that are best characterized by the following excerpt:

Our military operations have as their object the defeat of the enemy and the driving of him from these territories. In order to complete this task I am charged with absolute and supreme control of all regions in which British Forces operate, but our Armies have not come into your Cities and Lands as Conquerors, or enemies, but as Liberators. . . . It is the wish, not only of my King and his peoples, but is also the wish of the Great Nations with whom he is in alliance, that you should prosper, even as in the past, when your lands were fertile, when your ancestors gave to the world literature, science and art and Baghdad was one of the wonders of the world.²

In January 1918, President Woodrow Wilson, confident in the support of millions of Americans newly committed to winning the war, put forth the U.S. view of the postwar world. Wilson's Fourteen Points were seen by the other Allies as exceedingly idealistic and generous regarding the treatment of the vanquished Central Powers. In his twelfth point, Wilson even went so far as to assure the people of the former Ottoman-controlled territories that they would be given "an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development." Although the Allies did not like the Fourteen Points, they were in dire need of U.S. support and hence accepted the U.S. vision.

By the end of October 1918, an armistice with Turkey had been signed, and World War I ended on November 11. While the dust settled worldwide, the British and French jointly declared that their policy would be to "assist in the establishment of native government in the liberated [ex-Ottoman] area." Although Sir Arnold Wilson, acting civil commissioner in Mesopotamia from 1918 to 1920, suggested that this declaration was not to be "taken literally," the residents of what would soon become the state of Iraq likely regarded it in precisely that manner.³

Winning the war in Mesopotamia had cost Britain nearly 100,000 casualties and £200 million and left it with the weighty task of filling the political and economic vacuum left behind by the defeated Turks. Whether they liked it or not, the British would be unable to extricate themselves from the responsibilities involved in occupying the region.

MILITARY OCCUPATION LEADS TO REVOLT

Even as it pounded away at the retreating Turkish forces, the British Indian Army found itself doing double duty as a civil government. Combat capability was the priority, however, and all resources within the newly occupied territories were subordinated to this end. According to one American observer who entered Baghdad with British forces in March 1917, "[T]he British meant to show the native population that there would be no trouble in the city while they were running it. Every man on the street had his rifle and bayonet."⁴ Indeed, all British troops were required to be armed at all times as a means of ensuring law and order. This practice may have contributed to the local population's surprisingly quiet and orderly

reaction to the occupation. Yet, as Philip Willard Ireland suggested in 1937,

[t]he fact that the military regime was accepted as long as it was without protest may be attributed to a variety of factors. Prompt payment for all supplies, cash rent for billets and land, although not invariably nor always in strict proportion to prevailing rates, non-interference with such religious or local customs as did not hamper military or administrative policy, and the marked increase in general economic prosperity did much to mitigate its rigours. While the attitude of the army as a whole was distinctly hostile to the native population, not without good reason, yet there was a genuine and general desire on the part of all responsible officers to be just and fair in all their dealings with the native population. The untiring efforts of Sir Percy Cox and his assistants in establishing personal relations at the same time that subsidies and remissions of taxations were distributed among the sheikhs and local dignitaries, won many of the notables to benevolent neutrality. The high integrity and efficiency of the new administration, once it had got into its stride, as contrasted with the former Turkish administration, did even more to create a general feeling of confidence and belief that the coming of Great Britain was for good rather than for evil.⁵

Following the armistice, Mesopotamia remained in a state of political limbo under direct British military governance. The brief period of relative peace that followed the establishment of British control soon began to fray, largely because the military paid little attention to the needs and wants of the Iraqi people. For expediency, the British turned to the tried and true policies and bureaucracy of their civil administration in India, resulting in an Iraqi occupation that was always efficient but sometimes brutal.

Before his death in 1919, Sykes warned that Britain should not use these “black and white” policies in Mesopotamia. Ignoring his advice, British military officers became increasingly involved in all aspects of Iraqi civil administration and daily life. They empowered and enriched both tribal leaders and the bureaucratically and politically experienced Sunni Arab minority at the expense of Iraq’s other ethnic and religious constituencies. They also fell into the trap of accepting the Iraqis’ “age-long general habituation to low standards, insecurity and antipathy to government.”⁶ Moreover, the British some-

times used Iraqis for forced labor and failed to provide ample nutritional and medical care to the impoverished populace.

These problems were compounded over time because British occupation did little to convince the Iraqi people that they could look forward to independence. Given Maude's message of "liberation," President Wilson's call for "autonomous development," and Anglo-French assurances of self-governance, both the general population of Iraq and the educated, ambitious political elite expected immediate independence after the war. The character of the occupation frustrated these expectations, however, and resentment toward the British grew, fed by constant cultural and religious friction.

Troubles began to emerge all across Iraq in 1919. In the northern province of Mosul, Turkish manipulation and tribal power plays that had begun during the war led to increased Kurdish unrest, which the British quelled at the cost of 137 British and Indian lives. In the central and southern provinces, Arab nationalism, religious fervor, and tribal frictions were on the rise, although not yet violently obvious.

Although British forces in Mesopotamia numbered more than 270,000 in 1918, barely half that number remained a year later. Less than 35,000 of these remainders had been combatants; in contrast, the number of British soldiers serving in civil government or "advisory" positions in Iraq had increased from less than 100 to more than 1,000. British and Indian military personnel found themselves stretched thin across a vast country, either singly or in small garrisons, with

nerves on edge as vague rumors, constant unrest, and repeated killings took their toll. In the summer of 1919 three young British captains were murdered in Kurdistan. The Government of India sent out an experienced official to take their place in October 1919; a month later he, too, was killed.⁷

In June 1920, an estimated 130,000 Iraqis launched a major nationwide revolt. Arab nationalist ex-Sharifian forces began moving into northwestern Iraq from their bases in Syria. Tribal uprisings occurred all along the Tigris and Euphrates, fired by religious passion, anger over higher taxes, and resentment of perceived judicial wrongs. Prolonged siege warfare erupted in some areas, and pitched battles were fought with hundreds of casualties on both sides. Assassinations of isolated British political officers became commonplace. In response, reinforcements from the British Indian Army were rushed in, but it

was not until February 1921, after months of difficult combat, that the revolt was considered over.

Putting down the uprising had cost the British Indian Army 2,000 casualties, and commanding general Sir Aylmer Haldane swore to severely punish the rebels. Ultimately, however, he took a more enlightened, less emotional approach, granting amnesty to most of those who had participated in the rebellion while placing on trial known leaders or those who had committed egregious crimes against British lives or property.

Soon after—and, to some extent, because of—the revolt, the British initiated indirect rule. An Iraqi government was formed under King Faysal I, and the terms of the League of Nations mandate for Iraq, which had been determined at the San Remo Conference of 1920, were finally put into effect in 1922.

AIR CONTROL

Following World War I, the Royal Air Force was looking for a purpose; it had only 25 squadrons, down from 188 at the end of the war. Sir Hugh Trenchard, chief of the air staff, pointed out to Winston Churchill that “one great advantage of aircraft in the class of warfare approximating to police work, is their power of acting at once.”⁸ He explained that, by relying on the enhanced firepower and mobility of aircraft instead of large land forces, Britain could reduce the costs, in men and matériel, of its mandatory responsibilities in the Middle East. Keenly aware of Britain’s social and economic exhaustion following the horrific experience of World War I, Churchill decided to adopt Trenchard’s “air control” strategy.

At the Cairo Conference of 1921, Churchill proposed to remove nearly all land forces from Iraq, slashing the annual military budget for operations in the region from £25 million to just £4 million. According to him,

through the use of airplanes instead of land troops, Iraq could be controlled at less expense and in a more efficient manner. Furthermore, the same air bases used in Iraq could provide a strategic link to India. Since the British Army would be replaced by both the Royal Air Force and an Arab army, and since they would have armoured cars and an effective Intelligence system, British interests would still be secure.⁹

By October 1922, Britain began to implement Churchill's plan. Much to the dismay of the British army, Air Vice Marshal John Salmond of the RAF was appointed overall British military commander in Iraq. Eight RAF squadrons composed of various World War I aircraft were deployed to four different airbases across the country. The squadrons were accompanied by RAF armored car companies and a British-led force of around 2,000 Iraqi Levies, most of whom were Assyrian. Additionally, nine British and Indian infantry battalions remained in country, although they would be withdrawn within a few years.

Although the 1920 revolt had ended, the RAF faced military challenges immediately upon arriving in Iraq. The northern province of Mosul seemed to be a magnet for political unrest. The Turks, who still disputed ownership of the province, actually occupied a number of districts until they were discouraged by a small but effective RAF bombing campaign. A more enduring problem arose when most of the Kurdish tribes rebelled under the leadership of Shaykh Mahmud Barzanji, the British-appointed district governor of Sulaymaniyah and self-proclaimed king of Kurdistan.

The nearly half-million Kurds wanted their own independent state, but most had been willing to settle for freedom from the Turks and protection from the Arabs in the immediate aftermath of the war. The majority of Kurdish tribal leaders, from whom Barzanji emerged as arguably the strongest, petitioned the British for inclusion in a unified, British-governed Iraq in order to ensure such protection. Yet, they continued to hope for a peaceful transition into Kurdish statehood, which was not in the cards. The result was a series of general Kurdish uprisings across northern Iraq throughout the 1920s.

British military strategy against the Kurds included coordinated air and ground strikes. Direct attacks were employed whenever the enemy massed together; in 1923, for example, forty-two aircraft conducted a two-day bombing campaign against concentrated Kurdish tribal forces. More often than not, however, the RAF conducted a campaign of "interference" in order to avoid killing noncombatants. This tactic was commonly referred to by pilots as "proscription," a strategy that involved

keeping the tribesmen off their farmland [in order] to touch their pockets. . . . When a tribe was known to have misbehaved—by

shooting some political agent, or whatever—we were sent [to] fly over their rural area with orders to attack anything that moved. . . . They could stop this at any moment by coming in and agreeing to behave and pay the fines exacted by the government. If that didn't work, stage two was that we would be asked to go and knock down a house or a village. . . . We would drop leaflets first to warn them.¹⁰

One particularly noteworthy example of proscription occurred in 1922, when Barzanji refused a British request to turn himself in. The RAF first dropped bombs in an unpopulated area close to his home as a warning. When he still did not respond, the RAF destroyed his home and attacked his followers. This strategy was also employed against the Turks during their frequent forays into the Mosul province, until a treaty was signed in 1926 ceding the area to mandatory Iraq. As with the Kurds, the RAF usually dropped leaflets on Turkish garrisons and outposts before attacking them.

By 1925 the results of the RAF's efforts were clear:

[A]lthough occasional fighting continued both in the north and in the south of Iraq, . . . the policy of air control had succeeded. Not only that, but it had proved to be highly cost-effective. From a peak of military spending of over twenty million pounds in 1921–22, the cost had now fallen to less than 3.4 million pounds a year. One result of this outcome was that the Royal Air Force retained responsibility for the internal and external security of Iraq until the end of the League of Nations' mandate in October 1932.¹¹

Although the Iraqis may not have completely agreed with this assessment, they probably would have acknowledged that the RAF played an important role in supporting the operations of the newly organized and “independent” Iraqi army.

Britain's air control policy was nothing short of revolutionary. New tactics and procedures were developed and documented (e.g., aerial resupply, airlift, aerial counterinsurgency operations), while integrated RAF armored car companies and infantry forces proved that effective operational coordination between air and ground units was viable, especially when led by airmen. Moreover, air control contributed to the success of Britain's indirect mandate rule by limiting the military's presence in Iraq while still accomplishing British objectives. The handful of British bases meant that intrusion into Iraqi

culture was minimized; the cost in men, matériel, and money was drastically lowered; and British public support was secured for the long term.

AN 'INDEPENDENT' IRAQI ARMY

The British wanted an Iraqi army that would act as a kind of paramilitary force capable of augmenting the RAF in the maintenance of internal security. They also expected it to evolve into a force capable of standing on its own; in fact, this was a precondition for ending the mandate. To this end, the British convinced (some say forced) the Iraqi government to sign a series of military treaties beginning in 1922 that institutionalized British influence on the development and role of the Iraqi military.

Initially, the British were wary of allowing the Iraqi army to become too independent or powerful, fearing a possible military coup against the monarchy. They were also concerned that an immature Iraqi army might be defeated by rebellious tribes armed with some of the estimated 100,000 rifles floating around the country, thus damaging the credibility of both King Faysal I's regime and what most Arabs considered its British masters. Perhaps most important, the British did not want to incur additional costs—the Iraqi military had to operate within the bounds of the Iraqi budget, without any aid from British coffers, and a large force would have been too expensive.

The Iraqis had a different take on their military and its future. The nascent Iraqi government wanted “a strong army both as a symbol and defender of national integrity, and as a bulwark for their own authority.”¹² The friction caused by these disparate motives, along with other contextual factors, would prove to be one of the key destabilizing forces in Iraq following independence.

Almost all of the roughly 600 officers who led the Iraqi army during the 1920s and constituted its core in later years had trained and served in the Ottoman army. Many of these men had surrendered or were captured by the British during World War I, then joined the Sharifian forces and fought alongside their former British antagonists. While away from Iraq, they “came into contact with the sources of the Arab Movement, [and] they were to imbibe and to

pass on . . . an intensity of Arab Nationalism hitherto unknown in Iraq.”¹³ In addition, the majority of these men, along with their successors who had been too young to take part in the war, shared a similar social background, namely, Sunni Arab; middle or lower class; educated; and ready to replace the moneyed, established Ottoman elite. To fully appreciate the impact these men had on the governments of Iraq, consider that “nine of the fourteen premiers between 1922 and 1932 were ex-Ottoman officers, . . . as were thirty-two of fifty-six possible Cabinet Ministers.”¹⁴

Although most Iraqi military officers initially accepted British power as a necessary evil, resentment of British condescension gradually spread. Iraqi soldiers “had their own professional perspective which saw Britain restricting the growth of the army and displaying little confidence in its capabilities.”¹⁵ Slowly but surely, nationalism began to take hold of the Iraqi officer corps, fostered in the very military schools and curricula that the British had established. One high-ranking officer summed up this attitude: “[H]e was a Muslim, and Islam was opposed to infidel rule; he was an Arab, and Arabism rejected foreign armies on Arab soil; he was a soldier, and soldiers were not to be guided by foreigners.”¹⁶

Yet, no matter how much King Faysal I, his government, or his military leaders pushed for a larger and more capable military, the British never acquiesced—such a force simply was not in their interest. From the very beginning of the mandate, the Iraqi government wanted to reinstate conscription, which had been practiced under the Ottomans. The regime hoped to draft a force of 15,000–20,000 troops in order to nurture national unity and strength without incurring the cost of an all-volunteer force of such proportions. Despite twelve years of Iraqi lobbying, the British kept the military’s strength at 5,000–8,000 until just before independence, when it grew to roughly 11,000. The British never allowed any erosion in the Iraqi government’s dependence on them for security, because “only by safeguarding the interests of the Iraq Government could Britain ensure the continuation of her own position in the country.”¹⁷

Many of the British officers serving in Iraq saw themselves as part of a greater mission: to bring peace, stability, and even civilization to what they perceived as an oppressed country. Hence, they

focused on shaping the Iraqi military in their own image. Even so, some of the Iraqi military officers of the time suggested that the British were self-serving and stereotypically imperial in their approach. Moreover, when confronted with growing nationalistic resentment and lack of appreciation from their Iraqi counterparts, many British officers became resentful themselves, until both corps were acting out in miniature a contest with national consequences.

When King Faysal I died in 1933, his legacy of princely dignity and shrewd compromise went largely ignored by his uninspired son, Ghazi. Political instability resulted, and the country degenerated into a frenzied game of musical governments. In 1936 the Iraqi army carried out the Middle East's first military coup d'état. Thereafter, army officers became increasingly involved in Iraqi politics, whether inspired by pan-Arabic nationalist fervor, by Mustafa Kemal's nation-building accomplishments in Turkey, or by a desire to feather their own nests. King Ghazi and his administration simply stood aside as the nascent Iraqi democratic process was corrupted and broken. The leaders of the militarily incompetent Iraqi army had finally found something that they could do well, without British help. They became the gatekeepers to power; although they were relatively uninterested in the day-to-day governance of the country, nothing of significance was decided without their approval.

Three coups later, with Ghazi dead in a 1939 car accident and his cousin acting as regent for his orphaned five-year-old son, the world went to war once again. The regent and his government were essentially pro-British, but the army leadership felt that the country should side with the Axis powers. Hence, Britain was initially rebuffed when it called on the Iraqi government to honor the 1930 Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, which stipulated, among other things, the free movement of British troops through Iraqi territory. When pushed in 1941 to adhere to the terms of the treaty, the Iraqi government collapsed once again; a military coup deposed the regent and his cabinet and established the pro-Nazi Government of National Defense.

The British had a lot more to worry about in 1941 than diplomatic sparring, so they proceeded with their troop movements across Iraq. This led to a small military contest initiated by Iraqi leaders looking to assert their sovereignty and curry favor with Britain's en-

emies. Although well equipped, the Iraqi army quickly disintegrated under the RAF's creative use of air power. The vastly outnumbered and outgunned British force was made up of obsolete training aircraft, obsolete armored cars, and only a couple thousand Assyrian Levies, but it was nevertheless able to reinstate the rightful Iraqi government.

Subsequently, Britain was forced to reoccupy Iraq for the duration of World War II, in part because of its own shortsighted policies regarding the Iraqi military. For years, the British had controlled almost every aspect of the Iraqi army, but immediately after independence, the Iraqis found themselves almost completely on their own. Ironically enough, the British system of military education may have contributed to Iraqi resentment of foreign domination, given its encouragement of nationalism and military elitism as a means of inculcating a spirit of patriotic service among Iraqi officers and cadets. The British also introduced and helped maintain "a system of officer selection that allowed individuals with [anti-British] backgrounds and dispositions to attain positions from which they could continually threaten, and finally topple, the British-Hashemite regime."¹⁸ In general, Britain seemed to ignore the flourishing of such sentiments in the Iraqi military; once Iraq achieved independence, the British seemed to consider their work there completed and no longer central to their national interests.

POINTS TO PONDER

Britain's nation-building efforts in early-twentieth-century Iraq are often described in pejorative tones or simply ignored. This is surprising considering the many contextual similarities between Iraq then and now. When the British occupied Iraq during World War I, they had no imperial designs on Mesopotamia, save preserving their regional interests. Moreover, discounting technological advances, the British Indian Army was virtually as modern in its general makeup as the U.S. military is today. That army was thrust into the political and civil void left behind by the defeated Turks, and "[w]hile the extension of the campaign to Baghdad and the future of the country were being discussed in official circles, the practical problem of the administration of the occupied areas was forced upon those in command of the Expeditionary Force."¹⁹ Indeed, the British military was left in

complete command for almost five years after the war, until the League of Nations mandate began in 1922. The direct-rule policies that it adopted during this interim period were largely responsible for sparking the revolt of 1920, which resulted in thousands of British casualties.

Similarly, the British concept of “air control” was not far removed from what it is today. The RAF’s tactics in Iraq were revolutionary, and they proved extremely effective when combined operationally with highly mobile land forces under a unified RAF command. Although early-twentieth-century command and control, target acquisition, and weapons technologies were not adequate in the face of a revolt on the scale of 1920, they were more than sufficient to cope with subsequent, more localized unrest. In addition, air control significantly cut Britain’s overall costs and military presence in Iraq, thereby minimizing the negative social and political impact of occupation both at home and in Iraq.

Finally, the military’s continued role as an arbiter of power in Iraq should be given careful consideration in the development of policy toward a new Iraq. Under the mandate, Britain built an Iraqi army and controlled almost every aspect of its growth, resisting all major Iraqi attempts to develop it independently. Both sides agreed that the military would play a significant role in postmandate Iraq, but sadly, they never really discussed what this role would be. The result was an ambitious and resentfully nationalist Iraqi military. Before independent Iraq was a decade old, repeated military coups had undermined the hopes for democracy, and Britain was forced to reoccupy the country in order to quash a challenge to its vital interests.

Britain’s “splendid isolation” ended with its involvement in Iraq. For perhaps the first time in history, a major world power willingly attempted to transform a territory it had occupied into a sovereign state based on democratic principles. Successful or not, this effort was “executed in the British fashion with that air of dull routine which deprives most English revolutions of their glamour.”²⁰ Moreover, the British military’s policies were essential ingredients in shaping Iraq’s future, for better and for worse. Hence, it would behoove the U.S. military to consider the British experience.

NOTES

1. Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 32.
2. The full text of the proclamation is available in Philip Willard Ireland, *Iraq: A Study in Political Development* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), pp. 457–458.
3. Sir Arnold T. Wilson, *Mesopotamia, 1917–1920: A Clash of Loyalties* (London: Oxford University Press, 1931).
4. Arthur T. Clark, *To Baghdad with the British* (New York: Appleton, 1918), p. 211.
5. Ireland, *Iraq*, pp. 76–77. Sir Percy Cox was the civil commissioner until 1918, the first high commissioner during the mandate, and one of the central figures in the shaping of modern Iraq.
6. Stephen Hemsley Longrigg and Frank Stoakes, *Iraq* (New York: Praeger, 1958), p. 90.
7. David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Owl Books, 1989), p. 451.
8. Philip Guedalla, *Middle East 1940–1942: A Study in Air Power* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1944), pp. 54–55. Although Churchill had recently been appointed British colonial secretary, he retained his position as air minister.
9. Janet Wallach, *Desert Queen: The Extraordinary Life of Gertrude Bell—Adventurer, Adviser to Kings, Ally of Lawrence of Arabia* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), p. 299.
10. According to a pilot quoted in Max Arthur, *There Shall Be Wings* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1993), p. 31.
11. Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Armitage, *The Royal Air Force* (London: Cassell Military, 1998), p. 37.
12. Paul P. J. Hemphill, “The Formation of the Iraqi Army, 1921–33,” in *The Integration of Modern Iraq*, ed. Abbas Kelidar (New York: St. Martin’s, 1979), p. 90.
13. Walid M. S. Hamdi, “Rashid Ali Al-Gailani and the Nationalist Movement in Iraq 1939–1941” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Birmingham, London, 1987), p. 106.
14. Hemphill, “The Formation of the Iraqi Army,” pp. 91–92.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
17. Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq, 1914–1932* (London: Ithaca Press, 1976), p. 269.

18. Mark Heller, "Politics and the Military in Iraq and Jordan, 1920–1958: The British Influence," *Armed Forces and Society* 4, no. 1 (November 1977), pp. 85–86.
19. Ireland, *Iraq*, p. 74.
20. Guedalla, *Middle East 1940–1942*, p. 56.

CONCLUSION: LESSONS FOR U.S. POLICYMAKERS

In the planning stages of the U.S.-led war against Saddam Husayn's regime, policymakers and military planners studied the post-World War II occupation of Germany and Japan for lessons relevant to the reconstruction and transformation of Iraq. Although it is natural for Americans to draw on their own national experience for guidance and inspiration, there is merit in studying the British experience in Iraq as well. In addition to the numerous intriguing parallels between the British and American cases, the Iraqis are likely to view U.S. actions through the lens of their country's experience during the British era. Hence, it is vital that U.S. policymakers and military planners develop some sense of the history that preceded the current U.S. involvement in Iraq and that could shape its outcome.

BRITISH GOALS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The British era in Iraq lasted more than four decades, from 1914 to 1958. Britain's involvement in the country's affairs was most intense during World War I and the subsequent League of Nations mandate period, though its influence endured even after Iraq achieved independence in 1932. The British era ended with the 1958 coup that toppled the monarchy and forced the final departure of British advisors.

Britain's primary goal in Iraq was stability, which was necessary in order to secure British lines of communication with India; protect British interests in the potentially lucrative oil fields of Iran and Iraq; and preserve the political structures that underpinned the Iraqi monarchy, the main conduit of British influence. Yet, stability often proved

elusive. Iraq experienced a major anti-British revolt in 1920; tribal and nationalist uprisings in Kurdistan in 1919–20, 1923–24, 1931–32, and 1935–36; and Shi'i tribal rebellions in 1935–36. Moreover, several coups followed independence, including a 1941 takeover by pro-Nazi elements that resulted in reoccupation by British forces. Nevertheless, Britain managed to secure its interests in Iraq for nearly half a century, though ultimately at great cost to its long-term position there.

British influence in Iraq never extended far beyond a small circle that included the king, various tribal leaders, and a number of pro-British politicians and military officers. Yet, Britain's impact on Iraq can still be felt today.¹ On one hand, the British introduced constitutional government and established the rudiments of a modern administration, economy, and infrastructure. Moreover, during the 1920s, the British military—particularly the Royal Air Force—may have played a key role in holding Iraq together until it achieved independence.²

On the other hand, British policies and actions contributed to some of the more problematic features of Iraqi politics, including the consolidation of minority (Sunni Arab) rule; the establishment of a strong central government that stifled Kurdish and Shi'i aspirations; and the involvement of the military in repression and domestic politics. These outcomes can be attributed in part to Britain's creation of a system of control rather than of governance—a system in which maintaining stability was more important than promoting democracy.³

U.S. OBJECTIVES

The United States has adopted a far more ambitious agenda than that pursued by the British nearly a century ago. The political transformation of Iraq and the region lie at the heart of the Bush administration's approach. After ridding the country of Saddam's regime, U.S. officials have pledged to seek a stable, unified Iraq that is at peace with its neighbors; free of weapons of mass destruction and ties to terrorism; and led by a broad-based, representative government that is on the path to democracy.⁴ The U.S. agenda also includes leveraging regime change in Iraq to pressure and deter Iran and Syria; to serve as a hedge against instability in Saudi Arabia; to establish conditions conducive to the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict; and to encourage political reform throughout a region much in need of change.

In undertaking this mission, the United States would do well to study the British experience. The British agenda was relatively modest, and major changes have occurred in Iraq, the region, and the world since then. Nevertheless, the British era offers relevant insights into the dynamics of Iraqi politics, the logic of foreign intervention, and the links between regional and domestic politics in the Middle East.

IRAQI NATIONALISM

Historical Background. Initially, British forces invading Mesopotamia during World War I were greeted with indifference by much of the Iraqi populace. Arab nationalism had not yet taken root in the Ottoman provinces of Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul; and the British pacified the population by improving economic conditions, paying off influential urban notables and tribal shaykhs, and governing with greater integrity and efficiency than had the Turks.⁵

Iraqi attitudes changed dramatically after the war, however. British policies alienated many tribesmen and less prominent shaykhs and threatened the socioeconomic status of the Shi‘i clerics of Najaf and Karbala.⁶ Moreover, Britain showed no sign of leaving; in April 1920, it was assigned a League of Nations mandate over Iraq. Many Iraqis saw this extension of British rule as a betrayal of wartime promises of independence.

The consequent suspicion and hostility reached a peak in June 1920, when demonstrations were held in Baghdad and anti-British violence erupted in Shi‘i tribal areas of the middle and lower Euphrates regions. Britain did not completely quell the uprising until four months later, at the cost of 450 British killed and 1,250 wounded; Iraqi losses numbered some 8,450 killed or wounded.⁷

The 1920 revolt marked a turning point in British policy toward Iraq. A manifestation of both religious and incipient nationalist feeling against the British presence, the uprising demonstrated that direct rule was economically and politically unsustainable, and that an indigenous administration was needed to prepare the country for independence. The heavy costs of the revolt also influenced the ongoing debate in Britain regarding the empire’s overseas commitments. The result was a dramatic reduction in the British military presence in Iraq.

Lessons Learned. Most Iraqis would welcome regime change, but few would take kindly to a large, open-ended U.S. presence. Iraqi nationalism remains a potent force, and the United States must be prepared for a wary, if not hostile, reception from the many Iraqis who are bitter about past U.S. “betrayals” (most notably, Washington’s failure to support the post–Gulf War uprising in 1991), about the impact of sanctions on their country, and about U.S. policy toward Israel and the Palestinians. Iraqis may also harbor fears about U.S. intentions, with some believing that Washington aims to control Iraq’s oil and others (particularly Sunni Arabs) concerned about U.S. plans to bring democracy to the country.

To demonstrate goodwill and mitigate Iraqi mistrust, the United States should pursue the following objectives as soon as is feasible:

- initiate humanitarian assistance and reconstruction;
- minimize the U.S. military footprint;
- involve Iraqis in governance;
- show that Iraq’s oil is being used to benefit Iraqis; and
- leave Iraq once U.S. goals are met.

The main challenge for the United States will be remaining in Iraq long enough to achieve significant and lasting benefits without overstaying its welcome by stoking anti-American sentiment. In practical terms, this means that U.S. objectives should be realistic and attainable within a relatively short timeframe—perhaps twelve to eighteen months, though preparations should be made to stay longer if conditions permit.

LOOSENING THE GRIP OF THE IRAQI STATE

Historical Background. During World War I, Britain made Baghdad the seat of its civil administration in Iraq, unifying three former Ottoman provinces that had not previously formed a coherent political or socioeconomic unit. The monarchy reinforced this tendency toward centralization, believing that only a strong government and a powerful military could hold the country’s diverse population together.

The largely Sunni Arab ruling elite also looked to Arab nationalism as a means of unifying Iraqis under a single ideology and forging a new national identity. The Kurds and Shi’is, however, saw these efforts as the elite’s attempt to impose its hegemony, resulting in fre-

quent bouts of unrest in the largely Kurdish north and Shi'i south. Indeed, these centralizing policies paved the way for the authoritarian military regimes that controlled Iraq after 1958 and for the totalitarian rule of the civilian Ba'ath after 1968.

Lessons Learned. The United States will need to encourage the decentralization of political power in post-Saddam Iraq in order to prevent a return to authoritarian rule. From the outset, U.S. military and civil officials should bolster the surviving administrative machinery in the various provinces of Iraq (after purging them of regime loyalists) in order to reduce the influence of Baghdad; create the political space necessary for the emergence of local participatory government; and, perhaps, lay the groundwork for a federal political structure in a new Iraq.

FROM MINORITY RULE TO POWER SHARING

Historical Background. When the British set out to create an indigenous government in Iraq following the 1920 revolt, they leaned heavily on the largely Sunni Arab elite that had administered the country under Ottoman rule. The British believed that only this group had the necessary skills and experience to run the country.⁸ They also believed that tribal Kurds and Shi'is would resist the creation of a strong central government, given the Kurdish rebellion of 1919 and the major role that Shi'i clerics and tribes had played in the 1920 revolt.

Although Britain's interests may have been well served by a minority-led government dependent on British support for its survival, minority rule turned out to be a recipe for instability and conflict between the central government and the Kurds and Shi'is.

Under the monarchy, the government functioned as a "close oligarchy" of 200–300 individuals, mainly urban notables, military officers, and tribal shaykhs.⁹ Most were urban Sunni Arabs, with a few Kurds, Shi'is, Christians, and Jews playing bit parts (although Shi'is and Jews played dominant roles in certain sectors of the economy). The overwhelming majority of Iraqis were thus effectively shut out of politics, establishing a pattern of exclusion that survives to this day.

Lessons Learned. To break the nexus between minority rule on the one hand and instability and repression on the other, the United

States should help Iraqis create a broad-based post-Saddam government that incorporates representatives of all major ethnic and religious groups, upholds the principles of participation and power sharing, and safeguards minority rights. Although such a reconfiguration in the balance of power would solve some of Iraq's problems, it would also create new challenges for the United States.

For instance, Washington will need to reassure Sunni Arabs that the removal of Tikritis (i.e., individuals from Saddam Husayn's hometown) and their allies from the government and military will not presage the disenfranchisement of the entire Sunni community. Even as the United States purges regime loyalists from the post-Saddam administration, it should cultivate and support those Sunnis who do not have strong ties to the old regime.

At the same time, Washington must help the Shi'is make tangible progress toward achieving political influence commensurate with their demographic weight, lest they become alienated from the post-Saddam government and receptive to the entreaties of extremist groups or Tehran. Similarly, the Kurds must be persuaded to participate in the new central government in order to bolster the regime's legitimacy and avoid creating the impression that Kurdish autonomy within Iraq will be a stepping stone to a separate Kurdish state. Finally, the United States must identify and cultivate a new generation of moderate leaders (both secular and religious) who are willing to play by democratic rules.

'OUTSIDERS,' 'INSIDERS,' AND THE CHALLENGE OF NEW LEADERSHIP

Historical Background. One of Britain's main challenges was finding an individual of sufficient stature and widespread appeal to serve as head of the new Iraqi state. At the Cairo Conference in March 1921, the British opted to install a foreigner—Faysal ibn Husayn, son of the Sharif of Mecca—on the throne of Iraq. Faysal's emergence as the candidate of choice was due to several factors:

- Britain's desire to repay his family's wartime service and compensate him for the loss of his Arab Kingdom of Syria at the hands of the French in July 1920;
- his reputation as a genuine Arab war hero;

- his status as an “outsider” who was not associated with any Iraqi faction or region;
- his standing among the former Ottoman military officers and officials who had served with him in Damascus and who would soon form the backbone of the new administration in Iraq; and
- his status as a *sayyid* (descendant of the Prophet Muhammad), which made him acceptable to some Shi’is.¹⁰

Although dependent on the British for survival, King Faysal I challenged them on key issues (e.g., by pushing for Iraqi independence and military conscription) out of personal conviction as well as political expediency. His less-adroit successors made similar efforts to distance themselves from their foreign patrons. Nevertheless, the royal family’s British connection earned them the enmity of many Iraqis and ultimately sealed their fate.

Lessons Learned. The United States should let the Iraqi people choose their own leaders, avoiding the perception that it is imposing its preferred candidates. At the same time, it should not hesitate to help Iraqis form a transitional government or establish new civil society institutions and structures; in fact, U.S. advice on such matters may prove critical. Moreover, “outsider” status should not be an obstacle to high office in a post-Saddam Iraq if the individual in question has ample qualifications, can forge strong ties with well-positioned “insiders,” and can work with Washington without becoming too closely identified with U.S. positions or policies.

THE TRIBAL TEMPTATION

Historical Background. During the period of direct rule, the British sought security and stability in the countryside through alliances with tribal shaykhs. At the time, the tribes were heavily armed and numerous (some three-quarters of the population lived in tribal areas), constituting the most powerful element in Iraqi society. Yet, government-supported shaykhs often abused their newfound authority (e.g., by imposing burdensome taxes on their tribesmen). Hence, although this policy may have ensured short-term stability, it earned the British the enduring hostility of the tribesmen and contributed to the 1920 revolt and subsequent uprisings.

Lessons Learned. The United States might be tempted to strike alliances with congenial tribal shaykhs in order to stabilize the post-war countryside (though it is unclear how much real authority these shaykhs possess). Such alliances may help accomplish short-term security objectives, but they could also jeopardize long-term U.S. goals by undermining the authority of the post-Saddam government and reinforcing values and forms of social organization that are inimical to the emergence of pluralistic, representative government.¹¹

In any event, if the United States seeks alliances with shaykhs, it should impose curbs on their arbitrary exercise of authority and facilitate the formation of institutions whose membership cuts across tribal boundaries. Such measures may help prevent the retribalization of Iraqi society, a trend that has been encouraged by Saddam Husayn.

BUILDING DEMOCRACY

Historical Background. During the mandate period, Britain created the trappings of democratic government in Iraq, with a king, a council of ministers, and a parliament whose roles were defined by a constitution. In practice, however, this system primarily served the narrow interests of the British, the king, and the small circle of men who dominated Iraqi politics prior to and after independence.

Due to the absence of strong governmental institutions, politics during the monarchy were highly personalized. King Faysal I often played a role in the formation and dissolution of governments, impinging on the prerogatives of parliament and exceeding the broad powers granted to him by the constitution. Both the crown and the British sought to influence the outcome of parliamentary elections in order to secure positions for their preferred candidates. Moreover, many of those who served in parliament did so out of a desire for personal gain, not out of a commitment to public service.

Eventually, democracy came to be discredited in the eyes of many Iraqis because of political corruption, British meddling, and the government's failure to respond to their needs. During the reign of Faysal's son and immediate successor, King Ghazi, military coups became the primary means by which governments were changed, setting the stage for the eventual overthrow of the monarchy in 1958.

Lessons Learned. After three decades of totalitarian Ba'ath rule, the Iraqi people may be ready to take the first steps toward establish-

ing a functioning democracy. The British experience offers a number of relevant lessons:

- Although the United States can help Iraqis create a transitional administration and establish democratic structures and institutions, it must avoid the appearance of meddling in Iraqi politics. If democracy is to take root, it must be built primarily by Iraqis, in response to specific Iraqi conditions and needs.
- The establishment of democratic structures alone is insufficient to produce democratic processes or outcomes. The Iraqis must also create civil society institutions and strengthen basic freedoms, which are essential preconditions for building democracy. In addition, they must devote significant effort toward preventing corruption by fostering transparency, accountability, and the rule of law.
- The military could pose the greatest long-term threat to democracy in Iraq. In this context, the depoliticization of the officer corps may be Saddam's sole positive legacy; failure to preserve this accomplishment or obtain the military's commitment to uphold and defend a new Iraqi constitution could doom attempts to build a functioning democracy in Iraq.

GETTING THE MILITARY OUT OF INTERNAL SECURITY ... AND KEEPING IT OUT OF POLITICS

Historical Background. Following the 1920 revolt, Britain dramatically curtailed its military presence in Iraq as part of a larger effort to cut expenses and scale down its overseas commitments. Responsibility for internal security was handed to the Royal Air Force and the Iraqi Levies (a British-led force of approximately 4,000 soldiers, most of whom were Assyrian).¹²

The British insisted that the Iraqi army be kept small so that it would not threaten their position in Iraq. For its part, the Iraqi government wanted a strong army with which to impose its will on recalcitrant Kurds and Shi'is, strengthen its hand vis-à-vis Britain, and bolster the process of nation building. This issue was a major point of contention for Britain and Iraq throughout the mandate period.¹³ Between 1921 and 1932, the army grew from 3,500 to 11,500 troops, but it was still smaller than many Iraqi officers and

politicians would have liked.¹⁴ Following independence, the army nearly quadrupled in size, expanding to 43,000 troops by 1941.¹⁵ This growth occurred at a time when Britain's ability (and, perhaps, its inclination) to influence the selection and training of new Iraqi officers was greatly diminished.¹⁶

The premature death of King Faysal I in 1933 and the ascension of his inexperienced and politically inept son opened the field to civilian politicians who sought to turn the armed forces into an instrument of control and a weapon against political rivals. The military soon became engaged in repressing minorities and the regime's tribal opponents, beginning with the massacre of Assyrians in 1933 and the quashing of Kurdish and Shi'i tribal uprisings in 1935–36.

Such measures exacerbated tensions in Iraqi society and confirmed the perception shared by many Kurds and Shi'is that the military was an instrument of Sunni Arab domination. At the same time, the officers who led these military actions became heroes in the eyes of certain Iraqis. With the added encouragement of civilian politicians, the officer corps came to view itself as a legitimate political actor. This set the stage for the series of coups that plagued Iraq between 1936 and 1941.

Lessons Learned. In order to ensure a stable, peaceful post-Saddam Iraq, several constraints will need to be placed on the Iraqi military. These include:

- barring the military from all internal security responsibilities;
- creating an apolitical, professional officer corps;
- placing legal curbs on political recruitment and ideological indoctrination within the military; and
- erecting normative and constitutional barriers to military intervention in politics.

Moreover, the United States must avoid using Iraqi military units that defect or surrender as a stabilization force in the aftermath of regime change. Such a step could alienate the Iraqi people, who might see it as presaging a return to authoritarian rule and a betrayal of U.S. promises of democracy. It could also create the impression that internal security is an appropriate mission for the Iraqi military. Therefore, coalition or other international forces should be used to ensure both internal and external security until a reformed

Iraqi police force and a reconstituted military can assume their respective missions.

The United States must also confront the challenge of reeducating Iraq's officer corps and reorganizing the military. Because such measures are crucial to the stability and survival of a post-Saddam government, they should be undertaken sooner rather than later, while the United States has maximum leverage, even if they create resentment among some Iraqis.

THE IMPACT OF REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Historical Background. Even in the 1920s and 1930s—long before the advent of satellite television and the internet—regional and international developments had a significant impact on Iraqi attitudes toward British policy. Britain's wartime promises to the Arabs, President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, and the formation of the League of Nations all raised Iraqi expectations of independence, making direct British rule over Iraq unsustainable. Moreover, Britain's support for a Jewish national home in Palestine, its unsuccessful attempts to manage the conflict between Arabs and Zionists, and—in particular—the outbreak of the 1936–39 Arab revolt in Palestine stoked anti-British sentiment in Iraq and complicated Anglo-Iraqi relations.

Lessons Learned. Postwar Iraqi attitudes toward the United States will be affected by developments elsewhere in the region. Growing anti-Americanism, U.S. policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the U.S.-led war on terrorism may be particularly influential. For example, continuing Israeli-Palestinian violence could offset any goodwill generated by U.S. humanitarian assistance and reconstruction in Iraq. Hence, Washington must show those in the region that it is making an effort to address and resolve the conflict. Moreover, al-Qaeda terrorist attacks against U.S. interests elsewhere could embolden Iraqis who oppose the U.S. presence in their country. And should the United States target Hizballah in a future phase of the war on terror, factions of the Iraqi Shi'i Dawa Party with longstanding ties to the Lebanon-based organization might respond by targeting U.S. personnel or interests in Iraq.

THE LIMITS OF POWER AND THE DANGERS OF OVERREACH

The British experience in Iraq serves as a cautionary tale for U.S. policymakers. World War I left the British public weary, government coffers drained, and faith in Britain's imperial mission undermined. Although the public was in no mood for costly new commitments in the Middle East, many British officials nevertheless believed that they would be able to

re-shape the region in line with European political interests, ideas, and ideals. . . . [T]he British government had arrived at a compromise with British society, by the terms of which Britain could assert her mastery in the Middle East so long as she could do so at little cost. To British officials who underestimated the difficulties Britain would encounter in governing the region—who, indeed, had no conception of the magnitude of what they had undertaken—that meant Britain was in the Middle East to stay. In retrospect, however, it was an early indication that Britain was likely to leave.¹⁷

The United States might encounter similar problems in translating vision into reality. Already, ill portents abound regarding the prospects for the Bush administration's agenda in Iraq. The U.S. economy is faltering, the depth of domestic support for intervention is uncertain, and international opposition is strong. New phases in the war on terror and renewed proliferation concerns in Iran and North Korea loom on the horizon, while a lack of bipartisan support raises questions about the sustainability of the administration's plans in Iraq should the intervention bog down or the next election change the occupant of the White House. Such problems could make it difficult to maintain the focus required to sustain a major, long-term commitment to the reconstruction and transformation of Iraq.

Iraqis and other Middle Easterners continue to live with the legacy of decisions made by Britain eighty years ago. Similarly, decisions currently being made in Washington could affect the peoples of the region for decades to come. The stakes are high, the challenges in Iraq are formidable, and the domestic, regional, and international environment is inhospitable. As U.S. policymakers navigate the challenges ahead, one can only hope that they will be guided by wisdom, insight—and a solid grasp of history.

NOTES

1. See chapter 1.
2. Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 24–25.
3. See chapters 2 and 4.
4. President George W. Bush, speech before the American Enterprise Institute, Washington, D.C., February 26, 2003 (transcript available online at www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/02/20030226-11.html); Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Douglas J. Feith, testimony given during *The Future of Iraq: Hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, 108th Cong., 1st sess., February 11, 2003 (transcript available online at www.defenselink.mil/policy/speech/feb_11_03.html); Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Mark Grossman, testimony given during *The Future of Iraq: Hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, 108th Cong., 1st sess., February 11, 2003; National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, interview, *Face the Nation*, Columbia Broadcasting System, February 9, 2002.
5. Philip Willard Ireland, *Iraq: A Study in Political Development* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), pp. 75–77.
6. Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 66–72.
7. Ireland, *Iraq*, p. 273.
8. Charles Tripp, “Iraq: The Imperial Precedent,” *Le Monde Diplomatique* (Paris), January 2003.
9. See chapter 3.
10. Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 48–49.
11. In Afghanistan, the United States has continued to work closely with warlords accused of past (and ongoing) human rights abuses and wartime excesses. In the words of Lt. Gen. Dan McNeill, the senior U.S. officer in country, such cooperation is justified because “they are providing a degree of security and stability out and away from Kabul.” David Zucchino, “General Values Alliance with Afghan Warlords,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 4, 2002. This approach holds obvious appeal for military officers who, when confronted with the bewildering complexities of an alien society’s politics, prefer the apparent simplicity of dealing with a single individual standing atop a hierarchical organization that seems much like their own. (This analogy fails to capture the complexities and nonhierarchical nature of Arab tribal politics, though.) On the tension between tribalism and democracy in contemporary Afghanistan, see Abbas Jalbani, “A Return to Tribalism?” *Dawn*, September 12, 2002.

12. *Iraq and the Persian Gulf* (London: Naval Intelligence Division, the Admiralty, 1944), p. 295; Mohammad A. Tarbush, *The Role of the Military in Politics: A Case Study of Iraq to 1941* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1982), p. 76.
13. See chapter 5.
14. Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq: 1914–1932* (London: Ithaca Press, 1976), p. 260.
15. Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, p. 78.
16. As a result of this rapid expansion, large numbers of lower–middle-class Iraqis became officers, among them the men who would overthrow the monarchy in 1958 and transform Iraqi politics over the subsequent decade. Hence, the military expansion that had been intended to strengthen the monarchy ultimately led to its undoing. Mark Heller, “Politics and the Military in Iraq and Jordan, 1920–1958,” *Armed Forces and Society* 4, no. 1 (November 1977), pp. 83–85; Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (New York: I. B. Taurus, 1987), pp. 36–37.
17. David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Avon Books, 1989), pp. 561–562.

SIGNIFICANT DATES IN THE BRITISH IRAQ EXPERIENCE

November 6, 1914—The British Indian Expeditionary Force lands near Basra to protect oil fields in Persia. By November 22, Basra province is secured.

March 11, 1917—The British Indian Army, under the command of Lt. Gen. Sir Frederick Stanley Maude, captures Baghdad from Ottoman forces.

November 2, 1917—British foreign secretary Arthur James Balfour sends a letter (later dubbed the Balfour Declaration) to Lord Rothschild, president of the British Zionist Federation, expressing the government's support for a Jewish national home in Palestine. Such support will later contribute to anti-British sentiment among increasingly nationalistic Iraqis during the late 1930s.

October 31, 1918—The Armistice of Mudros officially ends hostilities between British and Ottoman forces in Mesopotamia. On November 7, however, the British occupy the city of Mosul and establish the northern border of the Mosul province as the armistice line. This line eventually becomes the northern border of modern Iraq following a June 5, 1926, treaty between Britain, Turkey, and Iraq.

November 11, 1918—World War I ends.

June 1919—The first Kurdish revolt against the British is suppressed through a combined air and land campaign. Subsequent Kurdish bids for independence in 1923–24 and 1931 are quickly suppressed as well.

April 1920—At the San Remo Conference, the League of Nations allocates mandates over Middle Eastern territories, giving Britain the task of preparing Iraq for independence.

June 1920—Sparked by the announcement of the mandate, the “Great Iraqi Revolution” is launched against the British, marked by unprecedented cooperation between Iraqi Sunnis and Shi’is. The revolt is completely suppressed by December, at great cost to both the British and the Iraqis.

October 26, 1920—A provisional Iraqi government is formed under the universally respected Naqib of Baghdad, Abd al-Rahman al-Gailani. Minister of Defense Ja’far al-Askari, an ex-Ottoman, ex-Sharifian general, begins to form a national army.

January 6, 1921—The Iraqi army is officially established.

March 1921—At the Cairo Conference, Faysal ibn Husayn is chosen as the first king of Iraq, and the British agree to gradual disengagement while retaining influence through treaties and the use of “air control.”

August 23, 1921—Coronation of King Faysal I.

October 10, 1922—The Iraqi government signs the first Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, formally accepting Britain as the mandatory power but limiting its tenure to four years. In 1926, however, the League of Nations stipulates a twenty-five-year mandatory period. Subsequent Anglo-Iraqi Treaties (1924, 1927, and 1930) seek to reduce British responsibility while maintaining influence.

March 1925—The first Iraqi constitution enters into force.

October 15, 1927—Iraq’s first substantial oil well is established north of Kirkuk. The discovery of oil in Iraq is not a surprise—the British-owned Turkish Petroleum Company and the Ottoman government had begun negotiations for oil concessions before World War I. Oil also played an important role in both the 1920 San Remo Conference and the 1926 Anglo-Turkish-Iraqi treaty. Iraq’s first oil pipeline was completed in 1934, after which oil became one of the country’s major exports.

October 1932—The mandate ends as Iraq achieves independence and gains entry into the League of Nations.

August 1933—The Iraqi army, led by General Bakr Sidqi, ruthlessly puts down an Assyrian bid for autonomy. Given the Assyrians' traditionally close military association with the British, the massacre dramatically increases both Sidqi's popularity and that of the army.

September 7, 1933—King Faysal I dies in Geneva and is succeeded by his son, Ghazi.

January 1934—The Conscription Law is passed, sparking tribal uprisings throughout the country, including the Kurdish north; the uprisings continue through 1936.

October 1936—General Bakr Sidqi leads a military coup (the first in the Middle East) against the Iraqi government, firmly establishing the army as the arbiter of power in Iraq.

April 3, 1939—King Ghazi dies in an automobile accident and is succeeded by his son, Faysal II. Because King Faysal II is only three years old at the time of his ascension, a regent is appointed—Prince Abd al-Ilah, a moderate and capable politician who sees Britain as the guarantor of the Hashemite dynasty.

September 1939—World War II begins.

April 1941—A coup led by Rashid Ali al-Gailani replaces the regent with a pro-Axis government. Open conflict with the British erupts when the new government rejects the 1930 Anglo-Iraqi Treaty and threatens the British airbase at Habbaniyya. The British quickly defeat the Iraqi forces, reoccupy the country, and reinstate the regent; the occupation continues until the end of World War II, with the pro-British Iraqi government cracking down on any opposition.

May 1945—World War II ends in Europe.

October 1945—The Iraqi military defeats a confederation of Kurdish tribes after a hard-fought campaign for Kurdish independence, reviving the army's popularity and political power.

January 15, 1948—A new Anglo-Iraqi Treaty is signed in Portsmouth promising the eventual withdrawal of all British forces from Iraq. The treaty sparks massive Iraqi demonstrations, however, because it proposes to extend British influence over Iraq for another twenty-five years.

May 1948—The Portsmouth Treaty is renounced against the backdrop of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, in which more than 20,000 Iraqi soldiers fight. The British presence in Iraq is formally ended with the signing of the February 1955 Baghdad Pact, although some limited political, economic, and military influence is retained.

July 14, 1958—A military coup overthrows the monarchy, dissolves the parliament, and effaces the last vestiges of British influence.