Chapter Two

The Mandate System, the End of Imperialism, and the Birth of the Iraqi State

The award from the League of Nations of the Mandate for Iraq to Great Britain in 1920 was the result of far-reaching changes to the international system. One of the most public expressions of the end of Britain's predominant role in the world was the creation of the Mandate system placed at the heart of the League of Nations. The Mandates marked the beginning of the end of a world order organized by European imperialism—by territorial annexation and domination based on notions of cultural and racial superiority.

The decline of British hegemony and free trade imperialism had transformative global effects. The United States under Woodrow Wilson, drawn into the war against its better judgement, set about planning to impose economic and political stability on the post-war world. But U.S. international liberalism had distinct and potentially far-reaching differences from the ideology which had organized the pre-war world. An indication of future policy was the U.S. Secretary of State's 1899 declaration of policy towards China. In place of spheres of interest and colonial annexation there was now to be the "open door."[1] America's growing economic superiority was to be championed by open export markets across the globe. The logical corollary of such a position was the delegitimation of the colonial state. If markets were to be open, if consumers across the world were to be allowed freedom of choice, then there was little room for colonial notions of tutelage and protected markets. This argument gained ideological coherence when Wilson began to counter Lenin's internationalist appeals to the working class with propaganda aimed at extolling the freedoms and prosperity to be achieved by self-determining nations.[2]

The retreat of America into isolationism after Wilson's death and the incapacity of the Soviet Union due to civil war and famine meant that the international system of the period appears chaotic and structureless. This appearance, while partially accurate, masks longer term trends that became manifest only in 1945.[3]

The universalizing ideologies of both Wilson and Lenin, combined with America's propagation of unrestricted markets, meant that European powers found it impossible to justify the annexation of territory they had acquired by the end of the war. The new ideological centrality of specifically collective structures (nationally, culturally, or economically defined) for delivering order meant that territorial states in the non-European world now became central to organizing the international sphere. Wilson's attempts to institutionalize a U.S.-led post-war world extended to replacing colonial annexation with the self-determination of nations. Although Wilson's international presence was short-lived, his philosophy represented the alignment of powerful forces which could not be ignored as a result of his death or America's retreat into political isolationism.

Woodrow Wilson's philosophy can sometimes appear as an unstable combination of personal arrogance and general ignorance of European and international history.[4] His philosophy was still very much in flux as the First World War began. Nevertheless he was able to capitalize on the shock produced across Europe by the devastation of the war. He combined moral assurance with a liberal idealism influential amongst U.S. intellectuals and industrialists at the beginning of the twentieth century. The result was a political platform that temporarily managed to harness the two dominant impulses of U.S. foreign policy, a desire for both political isolationism and economic expansionism.[5] Wilson capitalized on the historical aversion of the United States to territorial imperialism and suspicion of European politics by playing to a sense of the superiority of the American system of government and its suitability for the rest of the world.[6]

This anti-imperialism manifested itself in Wilson's backing for the "open door" policy of free and equal access to markets around the world. This policy had been pursued by Wilson himself in Latin America before the outbreak of war. States were intimidated by the US's superior military force into reshaping their economic systems. Primarily they had to guarantee private property rights and underwrite business contracts.[7] The free trade and open seas at the heart of Wilson's fourteen-point manifesto appealed to aspiring nations while securing America's position as the dominant world economic power.

Wilson's approach to open markets and self-determination was to be married with the projection of the then current belief in institutional management onto the international sphere. The rise of the philosophy of

state interventionism in Europe was matched by Wilson's demand for collective management at the international level. Strong global governance driven by disinterested technical knowledge could be deployed to solve international as well as national instabilities.[8] Wilson's managerial approach caught the popular zeitgeist in Europe. With the old ideological approaches so thoroughly discredited, the apparent fresh idealism and confident interventionism of the U.S. president mobilized British public opinion.[9]

The universal unit of the state became the definitive way the international system was to be grasped and ordered. Imperialism, with its empire-building and policy of annexation, gradually became unacceptable. The idea of the self-determining state in the developing world, a novelty at the beginning of this period, became dominant by the mid-1930s. In London the reduction in Britain's material power had effects on the institutional structures of the state. The foreign policy-making power of the Government of India decreased as the Middle East department in the Colonial Office was set up in London to centralize decision-making.[10] Internationally, the League of Nations was left to function without U.S. support and faced increasing uncertainty in the international system without a hegemonic state to oversee good order. But the League and the notion of international arbitration, even without U.S. backing, still exerted a powerful influence on British foreign policy.[11]

Both international and domestic change during the period 1914 to 1932 was rapid. As it became apparent that a radical shift in policy was required, British officialdom became divided. During the war three distinct centers of Middle East policy-making emerged: Cairo, Delhi, and London. Each exercised competing influence on policy in Iraq.[12] It was Delhi that proved unable to adjust to managing the Middle East. For those in Delhi, cut off from the post-war European turmoil and insulated from the effects of Wilson's liberal rhetoric, the adjustment needed for this nascent new world order came much more slowly than elsewhere.[13] This inability to escape the constraints of the old imperialist model was heavily present in the Indian Political Service which "tended to approach administrative problems along the lines which they had been taught in India".[14]

Pitted against this static view were those in the cabinet and civil service who saw the need for quick and decisive changes. Sir Arthur Hirtzel, head of the Political Office at the India Office in London, continuously wrote

to Baghdad between 1919 and 1920 urging that real and tangible power be given to Arab politicians. This view was strengthened publicly by T.E. Lawrence writing to *The Times* during the summer and autumn of 1920. He pointed out that British civil authorities in Iraq were abusing the autonomy they had built up during the war and were now blocking any change in policy. Those in Baghdad contested every suggestion of real self-government sent them from home. A proclamation about autonomy was hastily drafted and published in Baghdad in an attempt to forestall a more liberal statement in preparation in London.[15]

It was the acting Civil Commissioner, A. T. Wilson, who came to personify the "Indian" view. Wilson, who joined the Indian Political Service as soon as he graduated from Sandhurst, refused to acknowledge that the rise of colonial nationalisms and American liberalism was forcing the British to change their foreign policy. With the tribal uprising in Iraq that began in the summer of 1920, Wilson presented London with two stark alternatives: to hold Mesopotamia by force or leave. Hubert Young, the Secretary of Curzon's Middle East Committee, highlights the extent of Wilson's misjudgment.

> He makes no mention of the third alternative, which is, and has been, the policy of His Majesty's Government, namely to remain in Mesopotamia with the good will of the people. The reason for this is not far to seek. It is because he knows that we cannot obtain the good will of the people without instituting a predominantly Arab government, and this I am perfectly certain Colonel Wilson will use every effort to prevent.[16]

The removal of A.T. Wilson reasserted London's control over the situation. The revolt, or *thawra*, along the lower Euphrates started in Rumaithah on July 2, 1920. Now grown in Iraqi political mythology to become the founding act of the nation, its origins probably lay in anger at the military imposition of efficient tax gathering. At its height at the end of August it had spread to the upper Euphrates and the area surrounding Baghdad.[17] British forces, faced with as many as 131,000 men, took until February 1921 to regain full control of the country at a cost of £40 million and many British casualties. The extent and ferocity of the revolt combined with the realization of the long-term effects of the post-

war settlement, marked a decisive shift in the attitudes and perceptions structuring British government discussions and colonial officials' actions.[18]

The evolution of British policy, under the pressure of both international and domestic developments can be divided into four interconnected stages. From the beginning of the war until 1918, the consensus of British official opinion held that Basra, the most strategic and economically important area of Iraq, would be annexed after the war. By 1919, with the rise of American power and President Wilson's liberalism, it became increasingly obvious that annexation was not an option. This understanding evolved in conjunction with the construction of the League of Nations and negotiations on the terms of the Mandates. Officials based in London were the first to recognize the impossibility of annexation while those in India only grudgingly came to accept the new reality. Those in Baghdad, foremost among them A.T. Wilson, cut off by geography and experience, did not gauge the nature and extent of international change and were loath to accept new policy constraints.[19] It was not until the revolt of 1920 that the extent of the shift in international affairs became apparent to all.

Growing nationalism amongst the urban populations of Iraq became the major influence driving British policy after 1920. The organization of mass protest against the Mandate in Iraq, and the resentment of the term itself by the urban educated classes, meant that from 1923 onwards the British had to further redefine their policy. This involved a move away from Mandated control, since that was associated with direct long-term rule, however constrained. For 1923–1927 the approach of the authorities in Baghdad and their masters in London can best be described as advisory. Iraq was to become independent sooner than anyone had predicted. The British role was to ensure that the state be constructed as efficiently as possible. The contradictions inherent in this policy — driven by conflicting pressures internationally within Britain and in Iraq — meant that by 1927 there was one more final shift. The idea of creating a legitimate, stable state with the ability to rule efficiently over its population was dropped altogether. Britain's primary policy goal from 1927 onward was to unburden itself of its international responsibilities towards Iraq as quickly as possible. Reports to the League of Nations Mandate Committee were intentionally falsified. Those in Iraq complaining about the

sham of central government rule were silenced or ignored. Britain decided to construct a "quasi-state," one which bore the appearance of a *de jure* national polity but whose institutions were in fact a facade built in order to allow Britain to disengage.[20]

From Annexation to Mandate, 1914 to 1923

The occupation of Basra in November 1914, indicated its strategic and economic value to the British Empire. In the political climate of the war's early years, the idea that, once taken, Basra would be handed back to the Turks or to its indigenous inhabitants seemed ludicrous to those involved in the execution of the military operation. "In those early days I naturally assumed, with everyone else out there, that Mesopotamia would be annexed to the British Empire, the only doubt being whether it would come under India or not."[21] Although at this stage there was no explicit confirmation of this policy from the Government of India, the size and nature of the civil administration being set up behind the advancing British troops gave the impression of the permanence of the British presence.[22] The country was organized along Indian lines with political districts run by British officers who reported back to the central administration.[23]

The capture of Baghdad in March 1917 after a long and costly campaign led to a formally codified policy on Iraq. The ambitious nature of this policy, the certainty with which it was stated and the ideology which justified it all sprang from the discourse of imperialism that had structured British foreign policy for the major part of the nineteenth century. Such coherence and confidence in policy towards Iraq would not be evident again until 1929.

In March 1917 the British government decided that Basra *Vilayet* was to be permanently retained under British rule and Baghdad should be run as an Arab state with British support.[24] This policy was further defined in May 1917 when a committee of the imperial war cabinet reported on British war aims. The report drawn up by George Curzon and accepted by the cabinet argued for the retention of both Palestine and Mesopotamia after the war.[25] A.T. Wilson noted a similar approach being expressed by British administrators while on sick leave in India in

October 1915. The idea in "official circles" was to "Indianize" Iraq by "planting military colonies such as exist in Punjab" with Basra at least becoming a dependency of India. "My imagination envisaged some form of protectorate, which might develop further along into a fully-fledged Arab State with 'Dominion status' under the British Crown."[26]

Imperial ideology justified this annexation in both strategic and civilisational terms. Imperial ideology considered "the peoples of the East" to be in no way ready for self-government. Curzon, in discussing moves towards Indian democracy in 1917, thought it would lead to "a narrow oligarchy of clever lawyers." The process should be evolutionary and slow enough to last "for hundreds of years."[27] This view was echoed by A.T. Wilson, who argued that Iraq had "no competent" authority to which to hand over power. To allow self-determination would be to sow the "seeds of decay and dissolution," an "anarchic" step.[28] These views are replicated in the correspondence of Gertrude Bell. Bell was one of the most remarkable figures of her age. In 1888 she became the first women to gain a first in Modern History from Oxford. Before the war she was an accomplished mountaineer and explorer prior to joining the Colonial Office. As the Oriental Secretary to the High Commissioner, she rose to become a key figure in the creation of the Iraqi state. In her voluminous writings she reproduces the views of her society, portraying the Iraqi population as mute and passive, favoring, when articulate at all, benign British rule. If the "vociferous minority" who called for independence were heeded then it would all end in "universal anarchy and bloodshed."[29]

The Birth of the Mandate in Europe

By the beginning of 1918 the shift in the structures constraining the British state had become apparent to those guiding policy from London. In reacting to and attempting to shape these new realities diplomats and politicians added momentum to the dynamics already at work. On January 5, 1918 Lloyd George gave a speech calling for Mesopotamia, along with other non-Turkish areas of the Ottoman Empire, to be recognized as having "their separate national conditions."[30] Lloyd George, in announcing British war aims and encouraging Arab nationalist hopes, was careful to avoid using the potentially costly and destabilizing words

"self-determination."[31] The main object of Lloyd George's concern, and the "evil star" overshadowing British discussions on the Middle East, was US president Woodrow Wilson, and his aims for restructuring post-war international relations.[32]

In January 1917 Wilson began rallying support in the Senate for a more active role for the U.S. in world politics at the end of the war. In speaking out against the balance of power system he argued that a just and secure peace could be built only when all nations were equal. "No peace can, or ought to, last which does not recognize and accept the principle that governments derive all their just powers from the consent of the governed, and no right anywhere exists to hand peoples about from sovereignty to sovereignty as if they were property."[33] It was clear that the new economic and military power of America combined with Wilson's determined liberalism could revolutionize the way Europe treated the non-European world. George Lewis Beer, a member of an inquiry team assigned by the President to advise him on post-war problems, attempted to codify Wilson's rhetoric and apply it to the pressing problem of the non-Turkish parts of the Ottoman Empire.[34] Beer, by employing the term "Mandate," attempted to strike a balance between the interest-driven role of European colonialism and the needs of "backward peoples."[35] "Backward peoples," he argued, should be subject to "outside political control" and "foreign capital to reorganize their stagnant economic systems." It made sense to Beer that the power and capital should be supplied by the state with the largest direct interest in a given area. But, crucially, this relationship must be administered through an "international mandate embodied in a deed of trust" to protect both the native population and the interests of other foreign powers.[36]

It was the firmly asserted necessity for compromise between the interests of the great powers and the rights and needs of non-European peoples that dominated Wilson's fourteen-point speech delivered to Congress on January 8, 1918.[37] Wilson's balancing act between liberal idealism and great-power politics did nothing to lessen the impact of the speech on the foreign-policy-making élite in London. The combined effects of Lloyd George's and Wilson's pronouncements on those in the India Office as they scrambled to accommodate and limit the impact of this apparently new approach is best summed up by Mark Sykes:

> If America had not come into the war, if the Russian revolution had not taken place, if the idea of no annexation had not taken root, if the world spirit of this time was the world spirit of 1887, there would be no reason why we should take any steps to consolidate our position against a peace conference, it would be good enough. . . . [But now] . . . imperialism, annexation, military triumph, prestige, White man's burdens, have been expunged from the popular political vocabulary, consequently Protectorates, spheres of interest or influence, annexations, bases etc., have to be consigned to the Diplomatic lumber-room.[38]

The effects of Wilson's rhetoric on policy towards Iraq first become visible in March 1918. In the spring of 1918, Sir Percy Cox, the Civil Commissioner in Baghdad, was brought to London to help revise policy in the light of changing circumstances. Cox was one of the most experienced colonial civil servants of his generation and came to be the chief troubleshooter for the British government in the Middle East during these turbulent years. The Political Department of the India Office framed the discussions in terms of "the great change that has taken place in the general political situation during the past year." Any claim to control Iraq would be judged by a skeptical world community and hence would have to be justified on stronger grounds than the "rights of conquest." Suddenly the nature of Iraqi society became central to the discussion. Who were these people who would now be given the right to self-determination?[39]

Cox's response to the India Office deliberations reveals the difference in perception on the part of those whose access to world opinion was filtered through the concerns of Delhi and not London. Although acknowledging the "potent influence" of President Wilson, Cox's thoughts were still structured by the twin goals of the annexation of Basra and the construction of a "veiled protectorate over the Baghdad *Vilayet*."[40] But Cox, recognizing the new spirit of the age, was also concerned with whom in Iraq could be encouraged to take a pro-British line and so help justify British intentions.

The debates in London from 1918 until the convening of the peace conference in Paris in January 1919 remained contradictory and inconclusive. Britain's future role in Iraq shifts from the annexation of Basra to the question of how to retain a guiding influence over the country and

justify this tutelary oversight to the world. The question of British presence in Iraq was finally resolved in Paris.

The debates in Paris highlighted the clash between Wilson's liberal conception of how international relations should be conducted and more blatant imperialistic views. They also revealed a schism in the British Empire's delegation. This division has been characterized as an argument between London and the white dominions. London-based politicians led by Lloyd George realized that the increase in economic and military power of the United States and a change in the ideological atmosphere brought on by the rise of colonial nationalisms meant that imperialism now had to be justified in humanitarian terms.[41] South African and Australian delegations wanted to create their own sub-imperial systems by annexation. Cut off from direct contact with events in Europe these delegations did not grasp the extent to which international relations had changed.

Jan Smuts, a prominent member of the British Empire delegation, was able to produce a compromise between these two positions. Smuts, unlike his fellow delegates from the British white dominions, was aware that annexation was ideologically out of the question. It was his reformulation of G. L. Beer's Mandate ideal that allowed the British dominions and Wilson each to gain what they wanted. Smuts like Beer saw the Mandate system as the successor to Empire, but one that had to be more explicitly codified and administered according to internationally accepted principles. Mandates in the Middle East would help states emerge from the wreckage of Ottoman control and prepare them for independence. Smuts however drew a stark distinction between those states and the colonies "inhabited by barbarians".[42] This conceptual division formed the basis of compromise. States were to be placed in one of three categories (A, B or C) depending on their level of development.[43]

Smuts's compromise bought off arch-imperialist sentiment with the "C" Mandates of Africa. But his compromise also changed the basis on which the new territories gained during the First World War could be governed. The placing of Edmund Burke's notion of sacred trust at the core of the compromise shifted the rationale of global power. The prerogatives of the state holding the Mandate were now clearly and institutionally delimited. The Permanent Mandates Commission oversaw the

execution of the Mandate and exercised an independent authority that those running the nascent Iraqi state took very seriously.[44] For Wilson this shift was of paramount importance. He argued that world opinion had changed and that if the Paris Peace Conference accepted annexation, "the League of Nations would be discredited from the beginning."[45]

For colonial administrators running the Mandated territories of the Middle East the decision in Paris caused great concern. They were faced with an international regime that forced them to publicly devolve real power to the population. A vocal group of urban-based political activists demanded that they do just that and quickly. The officials charged with carrying out this policy, schooled primarily within an imperialist universe, found it very difficult to do so. Some managed with varying degrees of success. Others failed.

"Long-established and hitherto almost unchallenged assumptions of British imperial policy had (post Wilson's fourteen points) to be reconciled completely with a new set of requirements. In Iraq, it was necessary to adapt the existing administrative machinery, derived from Indian models, to a new and less direct form of control, which was at first unfamiliar and unpalatable to those called upon to operate it."[46]

Once those at the head of the British state realized that the Mandate had replaced annexation as the means to maintain British influence in Iraq, they faced the problem of working out the practical ramifications on the ground. The pursuit of British interests was now constrained by the League's Permanent Mandates Commission. In Britain itself the government had to contend with the deep unpopularity of continued involvement in Iraq. Both these constraints on British policy were compounded by the growth of unfavorable Iraqi public opinion. The notion of self-determination and the ideological power of nationalism meant that a segment of Iraqi society was demanding the right to represent the nation. The state institutions that emerged and evolved under the Mandate reflected all these pressures.

All came to bear on one man, A. T. Wilson. Acting Civil Commissioner in Iraq between September 1918 and June 1920, Wilson and the administration he ran were tasked with the responsibility of carrying out the decisive shift in the British government's administration of conquered territories in the Middle East. Wilson, ideologically unable to accept the new situation, set about the task of governing Iraq as if nationalism,

Woodrow Wilson and the League did not exist. Britain, he argued, could not maintain its position in Iraq "by conciliating extremists" and that, "regardless of the League of Nations," Britain should "go very slowly with constitutional and democratic institutions, the application of which to Eastern countries had been attempted of late years with so small a degree of success."[47]

Wilson's policy largely ignored urban and nationalist feeling. He believed it was unrepresentative. Britain must not be "diverted by a handful of amateur politicians in Baghdad," he declared. A conscious decision was taken not to acknowledge demonstrations of public opinion that clashed with his views.[48] When asked by the British government to ascertain popular political sentiment, he made sure that only views echoing his own on the best way forward were heard in London. [49]

Wilson could accurately claim during 1918 that his repeated requests for guidance from Delhi and London had gone unanswered. But as policy towards Iraq became more coherent, Wilson was drawn into increasing conflict with his masters in London. [50] Although there was some sympathy for Wilson's assertion that good governance, efficiency and law and order would directly suffer with the establishment of an Arab-staffed administration, the fact that he could not understand the new realities led Curzon to comment that "The whole bent of Colonel Wilson's mind was wrong, and the presence at the head of the Administration of a man whose ideas were wrong was not in my opinion practicable." [51]

By the summer of 1920 Wilson had become a useful scapegoat for the uprising that swept the country, and he was unceremoniously removed when Percy Cox finally returned from Iran. [52]

After detailed discussions with members of the British cabinet in London, Cox arrived in Iraq to take up the role of High Commissioner in October of 1920. [53] His task was to tailor Britain's role in Iraq to adhere to new international norms and conform with the pressing need to bring expenditure in line with Britain's weakened strategic and economic position. [54] In the wake of a destructive and costly tribal uprising, Cox had to find a way of forming a governing structure that would publicly devolve power to the population while codifying Britain's position under the Mandate regime. Britain's actions and policy in Iraq now had to be open to international scrutiny.

British policy planners divided Britain's medium- to long-term aims in Iraq between realizing national interests and "fulfilling international obligations." The tension between meeting these two aims controlled the evolution of state building in Iraq and shaped it in distinct ways. Economic and strategic interests ranged from preventing hostile powers from dominating the head of the Persian Gulf and maintaining Baghdad as a key link in the imperial air route to India to the protection of the Persian oil fields. But because policy makers recognized the novelty of the international situation, they were also intent upon being "regarded as the closest friend of the Arab people." "International obligations" meant that interests had to be furthered in new and varied ways. A note prepared for the Cabinet by the Middle East Department of the Colonial Office stated that Britain's

> whole course of action has deeply committed us to the creation and support of an independent Arab State in the whole area [of Iraq], and to the rendering of such advice and assistance as may be required to enable such a state to pass through the initial difficulties of its existence . . . We have committed ourselves to the support of a particular form of government, viz., that of a constitutional monarchy under King Faisal. . . . We have undertaken, under the auspices of the League of Nations and in the eyes of the world, to do our best to make this regime a success.[55]

As High Commissioner Cox was charged with executing policy designed to realize this bundle of conflicting objectives. He quickly set about speedily implementing the measures that had been despised by A.T. Wilson.[56] Within eighteen days of reaching Baghdad Cox had formed a cabinet of urban notables. Ten months later Iraq had a king, approved by what was represented as a popular referendum.

The institutional and legal basis of the new state was constructed around the twin pillars of cabinet and king. The conflicting pressures placed upon Cox were revealed in the fluctuating freedom he, as British representative, had at any given moment, in relation to the joint actions of ministers and the king. The power that the ministers wielded after 1920 was likewise tempered by their British advisers. For the Mandate to be seen to be working, the relationship between advisers and ministers had to be consensual. The adviser could not overrule the minister, the

individual in whom the power of self-determination finally rested. Under this arrangement the High Commissioner, through his day-to-day interactions with the king and cabinet, became the only point of official British control over the new Iraqi government. [57] As it turned out, this relationship was not legally codified under the Mandate itself because of the latter's unpopularity amongst Baghdadis, but it was spelled out by formal treaty between the Iraqi and British governments.

The Council of Ministers, as the first Iraqi institution set up under the Mandate, reflected the tensions in Britain's approach between the need to give autonomy to the population of Iraq and the desire to retain control. On November 30, 1920, Cox issued the edict that all officers and departments that had made up the British Civil Administration "will now come directly under the orders of the Council of State."[58] The Council had real if mediated executive power and in one of its first decisions re-divided the country's administrative districts along Ottoman lines. This "was the most obvious indication to the public that an Iraq Government was now a reality."[59]

Constraints placed on the decision-making powers of the Council of Ministers were vested in the High Commissioner. When the Council of Ministers was formed, Cox declared himself to have the "supreme authority" as the representative of the British Government over any executive decisions made.[60] But as the ministers set about taking control of their ministries and running the country, the High Commissioner's power was in turn constrained by the growth and actions of state institutions. [61] This meant that, as the relationship between the new Iraqi government and the High Commissioner was codified, the final sanction left to the High Commissioner was the right to "insist upon the king sending the bill or resolution back to the cabinet for reconsideration." [62] The High Commissioner more generally relied on sending letters to the Council's meetings recommending that certain issues be discussed or rethought.[63]

Informally, the growth of the Iraqi state and its exercise of power relied heavily on the role of the British advisers during the first few years of the Mandate. At first "Advisor" was the term applied to every British officer whose job was transferred from the British Civil Administration to the new Iraqi state. At every level from the Council of Ministers down to the Political and Assistant Political Officers spread out across Iraq, advisers

went from exercising executive control to assisting Iraqi office holders: *Mutasarrifs* and *Qa'immaqams*. As time went on, budget cuts and troop demobilisations meant that the numbers of British officers attached to the Iraqi state declined sharply.[64]

As the Iraqi state grew, a limited number of key British personnel became the advisers to the ministers. The intention was to place British executive direction at the very heart of each ministry. Nevertheless, as with the formal status of the High Commissioner himself, advisors' official roles were codified in surprisingly limited ways. Legally the ministers were "requested" by the High Commissioner to take the views of their adviser "into careful consideration." If a difference of opinion arose between the two men, the minister was again asked to "call the Adviser into consultation." If this failed to produce consensus, the matter was referred to a full meeting of the Council of Ministers for discussion. But the unofficial role of the adviser was in 1920 to be the eyes and ears of the High Commissioner's staff in the institutions of the new state.[65] All information concerning the Iraqi government emanating from the High Commissioner's staff, the British Government and Army would be funneled to the ministries through the relevant adviser. Ministers were directed to discuss all courses of action with the advisers before they made decisions. Advisers were required to attend and take part in Council meetings although they could not vote.[66]

The second pillar of the Iraqi state and a further means of establishing Iraqi autonomy was the king, both as institution and central political actor. With finances under scrutiny and the rapid reduction of British personnel, the king was seen as the pivotal point of control for the High Commissioner.[67] The king was also supposed to rally the population behind the new state.[68] For the League of Nations, Faisal was a charismatic Arab head of state who had been at the Paris Peace Conference and could credibly present himself to the Iraqi people and the world as a nationalist hero.

Cox and the High Commission staff in Baghdad clearly regarded the king as an instrument. [69] The two local candidates before Faisal arrived in Iraq were discounted on the grounds that they would not appeal to the population as a whole.[70] Faisal, with no constituency of his own, appeared open to British manipulation.[71] It was hoped that he would appeal to

moderate nationalist opinion and build a coalition against radicals calling for complete British withdrawal.

The conflict between the British government's attempt to retain as much power as possible and counter pressures from both Iraqi society and the international community to establish Iraq as an autonomous, sovereign state erupted almost immediately. During August 1921, in the run up to the vote in favor of his kingship and his inauguration, Faisal held a series of discussions with Cox to finalize the former's role. Faisal readily agreed to British supervision of finance and foreign relations but refused to accept that Cox would be the "ultimate power" in Iraq.[72] As with the provisions spelling out the authority of the Council of Ministers, Cox had to compromise and hope that the "cordiality of cooperation between the Amir and the High Commissioner" would suffice to keep relations working in the way Britain wanted. Cox realized that the king would be perceived as a puppet if this measure was insisted on. It was a sign of the constrained nature of British power that, because "[we] have no intention of re-conquering Iraq," the final sanction could only be the threat that Cox would resign and British troops would withdraw to Basra.[73] Churchill agreed with Cox that everything should be done to "strengthen him [the king] in the eyes of the people." Churchill had to go to the League of Nations and ask for its approval for the measure withdrawing "ultimate power" from the High Commissioner. He did so on the basis that Iraq had "advanced so far towards being able to stand alone.'[74]

The hope that Faisal would reign and not rule and that ties of cordiality would be enough to ensure cooperation soon proved naive. Faisal, aware of his dependence upon British arms and resources, set about trying to maximize his autonomy in a manner that was bound to bring him into direct conflict with the High Commissioner and the British government. After less than eight months Faisal was threatened by Cox with what had been seen as the final sanction, the threat of British evacuation.[75] This had little effect. Churchill and the staff of the High Commission reacted with anger and bewilderment as the limits of their power to dictate terms became apparent.[76]

Faisal's campaign for greater power was fought on three fronts. He attempted to influence the Council of Ministers to pass anti-Mandate legislation; he then established a power base in Hillah and Nassiriyah by

appointing loyalists to government posts and attempting to undermine tribal shaikhs he believed to be pro-British; finally, it appears he let his name be used on Pan-Arab anti-British letters emanating from his palace.[77] The campaign brought the tribes of Baghdad *Vilayet* and the Euphrates to "the verge of rebellion" and drove the *naqib*'s cabinet to resign.[78] When confronted by Cox and asked to explain both the unrest and his role in it, he answered that a tribal uprising was likely but it was to be blamed on "the uncertainty of policy and the lack of definition of responsibility as between himself and His Excellency in matters of internal administration.'[79]

With relations between the High Commissioner and Faisal resting on a supposed commonality of interests, Cox had very little formal power to bring to bear on the king. The abandonment of Iraq was frequently discussed by the High Commissioner, the Colonial Secretary and the cabinet, but it was apparent to Churchill, Cox and indeed Faisal that the success or failure of British policy in the Middle East rested on the ability to deliver a quiescent Iraq. [80] When Cox confronted Faisal and demanded that he authorize the arrest of nationalist agitators, Faisal refused.[81] Cox, capitalizing on Faisal's incapacity due to sudden illness and the absence of the Council of Ministers, suspended the fledgling institutions he had spent two years nurturing. He arrested the agitators, closed down two newspapers and banned two political parties.

In the wake of these events Cox attempted to redefine Faisal's power by placing the exercise of royal power within the confines of the constitution and reinforcing the role of the High Commissioner as the chief adviser to the king.[82] Succeeding High Commissioners found that their relationship with the Palace was never stable or satisfactory. Britain's postwar strategic and economic weakness, the rise of nationalism and the ideology of self-determination meant that power had to be devolved to Iraqi-staffed institutions. The commitment to the League of Nations and the scrutiny of the Mandates Commission meant that the High Commissioner's role was exercised within international constraints and open to public interrogation. The well-organized nationalist movement inside Iraq escalated demands for greater autonomy from Britain. Faisal realized both the power and the weakness of his position. From 1921 until 1932 he continually sought to build a power base within the state and society that would give him autonomy from the nascent political élite as well as the British who had been responsible for his accession.

The speed with which Britain's role in Iraq changed from 1920 to 1922 is highlighted by the rapid shift in its legal basis. The Mandate system itself was agreed in Paris on 30 January 1919. Britain publicly accepted the Mandate for Iraq at the San Remo Conference in April 1920 announced in Baghdad on May 5. By June 1921 Cox had informed Churchill that the Mandate was "out of date" and could not be applied to Iraq.[83] The Mandate was formally replaced by a treaty of alliance and signed on October 10, 1922.

The reason for the swift transformation from Mandate to treaty was two-fold. First, the very term "Mandate" was a target for widespread resentment in Baghdad from May 1920 onwards. For the British the term was linked to the disinterested, sacred trust at the heart of Woodrow Wilson's vision of the League.[84] But the Iraqis translated the term into Arabic to suggest the sovereign rule of Britain over Iraq.[85] The abrogation of the Mandate became a key demand of the growing nationalist movement but also of the *naqib* and the king. The power of the nationalists in Baghdad drove Britain to sign a treaty with Iraq instead of attempting to administer the country under the terms of the Mandate. During the war and its immediate aftermath the British saw the nationalist movement as a positive tool to deploy against the Ottoman Empire and then as a way of unifying Iraq's disparate population.[86] But as the movement grew in power and its demands increasingly constrained the ability of the British to act, they increasingly perceived it as irrational and dangerous.

The second reason for sudden legal transformation of the relations between Iraq and Britain was the speed at which the state and its polity developed in the first two years of the Mandate. Both in London and Baghdad there seems to have been surprise at the short time it took to create the new state and the alacrity with which the urban population adapted to it:

> Having set up our independent or quasi-independent state, we were bound to deal with it on terms of greater equality, and less from the point of view of a guardian towards its ward, than was originally contemplated. This being the case, the conclusion of a treaty seemed from every standpoint to be the most satisfactory way of regulating relations on the spot.[87]

The conflict between the High Commissioner and the king, which reached its peak in August 1922, was partly driven by the king and the *naqib*'s discontent with the treaty. For them the treaty did not remove the Mandate. It simply replaced it.[88] The tensions between control and devolution at the core of the British approach to Iraq were highlighted by the August crisis. Cox's response to anti-treaty feeling was to suspend government, ban nationalist newspapers and deport the leaders of the agitation against the treaty. It was only with the more active and vocal nationalist opinion cowed that conditions existed in which the king, the *naqib* and the Council of Ministers could be persuaded to accept the treaty. By his actions, however, the High Commissioner threatened to alienate the very people to whom power was to be devolved and to undermine the institutions that were supposed to assure the viability of Iraqi sovereignty.

A. (*over his narghileh*): Men say that a certain Mullah has prophesied the immediate coming of the Mahdi.
B. (*grumpily*): What good would will that be? Christ will come too and he'll be the Adviser.[89]

The twenty-year treaty that Cox had risked so much to impose was transformed in March 1923 by a protocol which limited Britain's formal involvement in Iraq to just four years. The catalyst for this abrupt change had to do with events in the wider Middle East and with developments in domestic British politics.

In September 1922, just as the Council of Ministers and the king in Iraq had been browbeaten into accepting the treaty, the coalition government led by Lloyd George faced the reality of Britain's weakening post-war power. Lloyd George's policy of supporting Greece against Turkey was being undermined by a resurgence in Turkish military power. In September British forces were surrounded by the Turkish army in the neutral zone of Chanak on the eastern side of the Dardanelles. The Prime Minister's and the Colonial Secretary's "impulsive and bellicose" handling of the crisis isolated the government domestically and internationally.[90] As a renewed conflict with Turkey looked increasingly possible, Italy and France withdrew their troops from the neutral zone, not wishing to be drawn into another costly military campaign. Churchill, in announcing (without consultation) that the Empire

would supply the troops needed, also alienated the white dominions and damaged imperial unity.[91]

British domestic reaction to the Chanak crisis had far-reaching effects on Iraqi-British relations. In spite of the coalition government's oft-repeated calls for a reduction of overseas spending, foreign and military commitments abroad were still accounting for £300 million out of an estimated government budget for 1922 of under £1000 million.[92] Bonar Law's critique of Lloyd George and the general imperial overreach, "we cannot alone act as the policeman of the world," well reflected public sentiment.[93] These general concerns about Britain's role overseas came together during the election campaign of November 1922 around the issue of Iraq. Law and the Conservative election campaign promised "tranquillity and freedom from adventures and commitments." [94] A vocal coalition, including the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express* and a number of prospective MPs, managed to place the call for the evacuation of Iraq "bag and baggage" at the center of the election campaign.[95] Law, reacting to this concern, expressed the wish

> that we had never gone there . . . [and pledged that] . . . at the earliest possible moment consistent with statesmanship and honor . . . [the next government will] . . . reduce our commitments in Mesopotamia.[96]

Bonar Law, the victorious Prime Minister of the new Conservative government, was obliged to rethink Britain's role in Iraq and the wider Middle East.[97] The constraints placed upon him were both ideological and material. He was faced with a Parliament where "the overwhelming opinion . . . was against remaining in Mesopotamia indefinitely."[98] After the Chanak crisis Lloyd George's handling of foreign policy was widely viewed as reckless and counter-productive. The dividends of peace were still awaited by a long-suffering British public. The threat of another war rallied public opinion against the jingoistic rhetoric of the coalition government. Law was in part elected to reduce Britain's role overseas that were considered too risky or too peripheral to justify the burden on the already hard-pressed British tax payer.[99]

In December 1922, soon after having been elected, Law set up a cabinet committee to assess what was to be done with Iraq. Given the role

that Iraq had played in the election and the general hostility of the House of Commons, it was not surprising that "during the early months of the Bonar Law ministry, the possible final evacuation of Iraq was seriously considered.'[100] Sir Percy Cox was recalled to London to testify before the committee. His testimony proved pivotal.[101] Cox set out to persuade the committee and with it the cabinet, that British policy in Iraq was working, would bear dividends great enough to justify its continuance, and that, if prematurely curtailed, the result would be disastrous. He claimed that the majority of Iraqis welcomed the British role and that withdrawal would lead inevitably to anarchy, a rise in Russian influence and ultimately the return of the Turks. If Britain turned its back on Iraq, he argued, the negative effects would be felt across the entire Muslim world.[102]

Cox was only partially successful. The demands for a "bag and baggage" evacuation of Iraq were avoided, but in the wake of the Chanak crisis the clamor for a speedy reduction in Britain's commitment to Iraq proved to have greater influence on the cabinet than Cox's eloquence.[103] He returned to Baghdad with a draft protocol which reduced the treaty of Alliance to a period of four years after a peace treaty had been signed with Turkey.

The conclusions reached by the cabinet committee on Iraq in 1923 marked the decisive shift in British policy. The treaty that Cox had worked so hard to impose on King Faisal and the Council of Ministers a few months earlier was effectively discarded. The Mandate ideal was dropped in favor of Britain exercising an advisory role, strictly limited by the time and money that could be expended on it. The Secretary of State for the Colonies summed up the approach:

> it may be taken as certain that His Majesty's Government has no intention of retaining mandatory responsibilities in respect to Iraq for a longer period than is absolutely necessary in order to secure the admission of the country to the League of Nations. It is not anticipated that this period will in any case exceed four years from the date of the ratification of peace with Turkey.[104]

From 1923 onwards, those making policy in London and implementing it in Baghdad faced the dilemma of conflicting objectives. How to retain influence with increasingly independent Iraqi politicians and civil

servants while pursuing the medium- to long-term goals of the British state to disengage seemed to pose an insoluble conundrum. Overshadowing all decision-making was the unpopularity of the policy amongst the British press and Parliament. The dangers to British prestige of a British government being forced to sever its links with Iraq could be forestalled only by a steady reduction in the cost and manpower expended there. Economy and a drive towards higher Iraqi tax revenues came to dominate all official deliberations.

How was the British state to minimize its role in Iraq "while fulfilling its international obligations"? For those in the Colonial Office the only way to achieve this was to build a self-sustaining state as quickly as possible and convince the League of Nations that the duties awarded to Britain in 1920 had been discharged. Under these stringent conditions the long-term goal of a pliant Iraq safely within a British sphere of influence could be realized only by ties of mutual interest and common outlook between those who built the state and those who ran it after independence. The general goal was summarized in the letter of instruction given to Sir Henry Dobbs, the man chosen to replace Sir Percy Cox as High Commissioner for Iraq in 1923. Dobbs, trained in the Indian Civil Service, was sent to Iraq during the First World War. He went on to be the longest serving High Commissioner and became the dominant figure in the British attempt to build a sovereign but compliant Iraqi state:

> The basic principle underlying the relations between the two Governments is co-operation towards a common end, namely the progressive establishment of an independent Government of Iraq, friendly to and bound by gratitude and obligation to His Britannic Majesty's Government.[105]

From 1923 until 1926 the persistent problem faced by Sir Henry Dobbs and his staff in Baghdad was how to make use of their two main conduits of influence, the king and the Council of Ministers, without undermining the Iraqi government's credibility with the population.[106] Relations between Dobbs and King Faisal were critical. In 1923 the reduction of the Anglo-Iraq treaty to a period of four years and the appointment of Dobbs as High Commissioner marked a conscious decision to loosen the regulatory oversight by the High Commissioner over the king. Sir Henry

Dobbs, like Cox before him, questioned the king's character, his methods and ultimately his loyalty, but accepted that the fortunes of the Iraqi state rested to a large degree on his success or failure.[107] The king, argued Dobbs,

> has to keep his eye constantly fixed on possible developments after our departure and to guard above all against the allegation that he is a puppet king, propped up by our bayonets, who is willing to sacrifice the true interests of the country in order to keep in our good graces. He can hope to strike roots in the soil only by an attitude of independence and we must therefore look with indulgence upon any opposition on his part to our wishes, when those wishes run counter to popular clamor.[108]

To this end, during the first year of his appointment, Dobbs continually argued that Faisal and his government should be given more autonomy and that the financial strictures imposed from London were having a counter-productive effect on Britain's policy goals in Iraq.[109] It is indicative that by 1926 Colonial Office officials in London were sympathetic to Faisal's complaint that Dobbs himself was interfering too much in the running of government. In order to curb this, the expansion of Dobbs's staff was blocked and "the gradual "diplomatization" of the High Commissioner" was initiated as a policy objective.[110]

The change in the nature of Iraqi-British relations can be measured by the decrease in the number of British advisers in the employ of the Iraqi government.[111] Political debate in Baghdad between 1922 and 1927 centered around the inherent nonsequiter of executive Iraqi autonomy and sanctioned British advisory authority. [112] In fact, the power and role of the British advisers changed dramatically during this period.

In 1920, under the Mandate, the advisers were to be at the heart of the new state, acting as the eyes and ears of the High Commissioner and, through him, of the Colonial Office. But the job of advising the politicians of an increasingly independent state and simultaneously furthering British interests quickly became impossible. By the end of 1921, Hubert Young, on an extended trip to Iraq, warned that British advisers ran the danger of becoming "more native than the native himself." On returning to London in early 1922, Young noted further discord "between the two

banks of the river," between the British advisers in the Ministries on the east side of the Tigris and the High Commission staff in the residency on the west.[113]

The conflict of interest inherent in the role of adviser claimed its first victim in 1924 with the dismissal of S.H. Slater, the Financial Adviser to the Iraqi government.[114] Colonel Slater had been involved in formulating Britain's policy towards Iraq from the Cairo Conference of 1921 onwards. By 1924 those in the Colonial Office were complaining that he was

> rather inclined to take up a contentious attitude and to assume that it was his business, as the representative of Iraq, to drive the hardest bargain that he could with His Majesty's Government.[115]

Slater later claimed that the position of adviser was "ignominious and odious," regarded with equal suspicion and hostility by both the Iraqi government and the Colonial Office.[116] Dobbs, in seeking a replacement for Slater, highlighted the difficulties of such a job. The Colonial Office recommended R.V. Vernon, its own financial adviser, but Dobbs saw his "previous identification with the Colonial Office point of view as likely to prejudice his chances of success in Iraq.'[117]

Slater's characterization of the perils of the job was borne out when, two years after the Colonial Office insisted on Vernon's appointment, Sir Hugh Trenchard, the Chief of the Air Staff, labeled him a Bolshevik. Trenchard's remark was made as part of a general attack on the Iraqi government's advisers in which he accussed the entire staff of disloyalty.[118]

On 3 January 1923, the Administrative Inspectorate Law was passed by the Council of Ministers changing the legal role of the British advisers. This legislation, passed before Cox was recalled to London in the aftermath of the Chanak crisis, was the product of pressure from the Council to obtain greater independence for the Iraqi personnel of the nascent state.[119] The legislation was presented as a positive codification of the British advisers' role. By changing their name to "inspectors," the law intended to emphasize the advisers' position as the final guarantors of administrative efficiency. But, under the terms of the new legislation, the inspectors, organized under the Ministry of the Interior and managed by the chief adviser to the minister, were to be based in Baghdad. The effect of the legislation was to withdraw British advisers from the

Iraqi hinterland, reducing their numbers and drastically curtailing their influence.[120] The consequence of the legislation was to give greater autonomy to the *mutasarrif*s and *qa'immaqam*'s, the local government officials in Iraq.

The Administrative Inspectorate Law passed by the Council of Ministers, although obstructed by Dobbs, was not ultimately challenged by either the High Commissioner or the Colonial Office. With the change in policy represented by the 1923 protocol, there was a general realization that the new institutions of the Iraqi state, from local administrations to the Council of Ministers and the king, would have to bear the full weight of government much sooner than had been envisaged under the Mandate. For the High Commission staff, this rapid increase in autonomy would lead to a reduction in efficiency, but, as Cox and Dobbs agreed,

> The Iraqi Government must be allowed to make mistakes and learn by them during this probationary period, provided that such mistakes are not of a nature to lead to disaster and that British troops and officers are not forced to be instruments of misgovernment.[121]

In the wake of the Administrative Inspectorate Law and the signing of the Protocol, the Colonial Office sent to Baghdad a draft letter for all British officials in Iraq. The letter was an attempt to set terms of employment for the new era. It was also an attempt to overcome the problem of divided loyalties amongst British staff evident since 1921:

> We have to look forward to a four year period during which it will be essential that we should know at every stage what action the Iraqi Government is proposing to take, in case any question arises of authorizing the High Commissioner to take action under Article IV of the treaty.[122]

Both Cox and Dobbs objected to this, arguing that it was in contradiction to the overall direction and philosophy of the new approach. For Dobbs, the advisory period would work only if "the politically minded part of the Iraq people" were convinced "of the disinterested attitude of Great Britain." The Inspectorate Law "went a long way towards achieving

this end. It made clear that the whole executive of the country has to be in the hands of Iraqi officials." Any attempt to water down that commitment would risk undermining it. This approach was accepted by the Colonial Office, which in 1925 vetoed the Air Ministry's attempt (in the name of greater efficiency) to appoint a British Commander-in-Chief of Iraqi forces. This would, it was argued, "be entirely opposed to our declared policy of disembarrassing ourselves of Iraq as soon as possible."[123]

The contradictions inherent in the British government's approach to Iraq came to a head during the last years of the Mandate from 1926 to 1932. The Mandate system had heralded a transformation of the international system. International relations were increasingly to be ordered through the universal unit of the sovereign state. For the British government, the difficulties this produced in the twenties and thirties (especially regarding its role in the Middle East) were a harbinger of the problems attending the dissolution of its empire after the Second World War. The rapid growth of well-organized and vibrant nationalism in Iraq exacerbated the conflict at the heart of the British policy. As the Mandate for Iraq progressed, Britain tried to be attentive to the Permanent Mandates Commission, which became increasingly assertive in its demands that the state being built be both efficient and liberal.[124] British public opinion, loudly expressed in the media and in Parliament, continued to denounce the extended commitment of resources to Iraq. The Colonial and Foreign Secretaries had the unenviable task of defending expenditure on Iraq in terms of the national interest without appearing to contradict the Mandate ideal too flagrantly.

British commitment to the League, despite the resentment of the British public, had, in turn, to face increasingly vocal Iraqi political opposition. For the Mandate to work, King Faisal and the small coterie of Iraqis who made up the political élite in Baghdad had to be satisfied and willing partners of the High Commissioner and the team of British advisers. The Iraqi political élite, mindful of the need to establish its own legitimacy and also of the promises won from the British in 1923, continually demanded greater autonomy and greater freedom to run the state on their own behalf. Their demands for entry into the League of Nations in 1928 brought relations to a new low. This demand immediately and vio-

lently exposed the clash between Britain's international commitments and its partnership with the Iraqi élite.

The violent and unstable results of Britain's contradictory responsibilities and goals set the pattern for the end of the European Empires. The irresoluble tensions inherent in British nation building produced, by 1932, the quasi-state of Iraq. When Iraq entered the League of Nations it was granted *de jure* independence as a self-determining nation state. But the reality was something quite different. Iraq was a territory inhabited by a diverse and divided population run by a small clique of mainly Sunni politicians who could not control the country without the help of British airplanes. Its government and economy were still financially dependent upon the British Exchequer. The commitments previously given to the League by both Britain and Iraq concerning the inclusion of and comity among the different ethnic and religious communities were discarded to achieve Iraq's formal independence as quickly as possible. The British state, in order to reduce her commitments to Iraq and meet her international obligations while retaining "ties of good will" to the Iraqi political élite, actively colluded to create the impression that Iraq had fulfilled the five conditions set down by the League for statehood. The League's demand that Iraq have a "settled" government and administration capable of operating essential services had in fact been met. But Iraq was nowhere near being able to fulfill the other four criteria of internationally sanctioned sovereignty: that the state be "capable of maintaining its territorial integrity and political independence," that it be "able to maintain the public peace throughout the whole territory," that it have "adequate financial resources to provide regularly for normal Government requirements," and that it have laws that afforded "equal and regular justice to all."[125]

The inevitable crisis arising from these failures was represented by the Mosul dispute and the way it was resolved in 1926. Sovereignty over the Ottoman *Vilayet* of Mosul was claimed by both the Turkish government and the Iraqi state. After the Turkish state had renounced the treaty of Sevres, the Mosul issue became the main stumbling block to a comprehensive peace treaty between Turkey and Britain. The dispute was eventually referred to the League of Nations for settlement and an international commission was sent to the area for three months in 1925. The conclusions of the commission's report (delivered to the League in July 1925 and accepted in July 1926) contained a blueprint outlining the steps

necessary for Iraq's self-determination. More importantly, it exposed the distance between the Mandate ideal and the current real condition of the Iraqi state.

The commission's report recognized the "undeniable" progress made by the Iraqi government since the end of the First World War in security, public health and education. Nevertheless the report went on to say that even though the Iraqis running the state had "the best intentions," their "political experience is necessarily small." Overall, the commissioners found the situation "unstable," with the turbulent tribes and the tensions between Sunni and Shia, Arab and Kurd putting the very existence of the state at risk if the link with Britain were to be broken in four years, as had been agreed under the terms of the 1923 protocol.[126] The commission went on to conclude that, for the League to agree to ceding Mosul to Iraq, the Mandate relationship would have to be extended for "something like a generation in order to allow for the consolidation and development of the new state." This meant that Iraq and Britain would have to conclude a new treaty extending Mandatory role for twenty-five years.[127]

The British government's initial response attempted to square the circle of its commitments and interest. The Colonial Secretary, Leopold Amery, in order to secure the oil-rich area of Mosul for Iraq, immediately agreed to the Committee's conclusions and committed both Iraq and Britain to signing a new treaty to facilitate them.[128] But this commitment carried the caveat that the relationship could be terminated at an earlier date if, in the opinion of the League of Nations Council, Iraq qualified for admission to membership of the League.[129] So, although a new twenty-five-year Anglo-Iraqi treaty was signed in January 1926, it had as one of its clauses a provision for reviewing Iraq's case for joining the League and thus abrogating the mandatory relationship.[130] By the time of the first of these reviews, a mere eleven months after the new treaty was signed, the High Commissioner and key individuals within the Colonial Office in London were arguing that Britain should back Iraq's demands for entry in 1928.[131]

The reasons given by Sir Henry Dobbs for the indecent haste of this apparent *volte face* go to the heart of Anglo-Iraqi relations. Dobbs recognized that by putting Iraq forward for membership of the League in 1928 the British could be accused by the League itself and by other states of acting in bad faith. But weighed against this was the goodwill of the Iraqi

political élite. For Dobbs this was by far the greatest concern. If this goodwill were lost,

> I am convinced that the whole political atmosphere would change and that Great Britain would soon experience in Iraq the same dreary disillusionment which she has had to bear in India and Egypt. . . . In no long time the students would be striking and parading, the king and his ministers suspicious and intriguing against us, the lawyers, as in the anti-treaty agitation of 1924, plotting assassination, and the Iraqi troops, the only forces left to guard our aerodromes, wavering. We should then have either to evacuate altogether or to bring back our troops and govern, whether with or without an Arab facade, a sullen people. We should have to abandon the hope expressed in the official letter addressed to all British Advisers that "The basic principle underlying the relations between the two Governments is co-operation towards a common end, namely the establishment of an independent Government in Iraq, friendly to and bound by gratitude and obligation to His Britannic Majesty's Government."[132]

Dobbs had identified the central imperative of Britain's policy in Iraq. The rhetoric of self-determination, combined with the pressing need for the economies to be gained by disengagement, meant that Britain had to devolve power to the Iraqi political élite. This élite might have been, as Dobbs suggested, unrepresentative of the country as a whole, but its "power for mischief" foreclosed any alternative policy of trying to foster "the solid classes' power of tranquillity" given such policy's uncertain chances of success, its costs, and the time it would inevitably take to achieve. The League's own vision of international order combined the ethic of self-determination with a strong commitment to the development of a sustainable and liberal state. Britain had come to accept the former, but, as the final years of the Mandate played out, it became convinced that it could not afford to devote the time and resources needed to obtain the latter. In the event, British employment of lethal, high-tech western military technology in the form of the newly-invented warplane became the only means of managing the violence created on the ground by the British Government's predicament.

The High Commissioner's analysis was quickly rejected as overly melodramatic by a Colonial Office dominated by the arch-imperialist Leo Amery. Instead Faisal was offered the sop of a renegotiated treaty.[133] But Dobbs's pessimistic prognosis proved to be accurate. When the king and the key politicians in Iraq, such men as Nuri Said, and the previously loyal Ja'far Pasha al Askari, realized that Iraq was not to be allowed to enter the League in 1928, they gradually brought the government in Baghdad to a standstill. These key members of the political élite deployed all means at their disposal to pressure the British into granting them control over Iraq's political and military affairs. From 1927 until 1929 politics in Baghdad were paralyzed.[134] Suspicion and anger mounted on both sides. Dobbs increasingly began to doubt the loyalty of the Iraqi army, while Nuri threatened to "pull down the Maude Statue, and turn the RAF out of Hinaidi." [135] In focusing on Maude and Hinaidi, Nuri accurately pointed to the twin concerns of the British. Maude had liberated Baghdad from Ottoman forces in 1917 and had died there of cholera shortly afterwards. For British ideology he represented the progressive nature of the British presence. Hinaidi, on the other hand, was the most important British air base in Iraq. The airplanes based there and the bombs they carried embodied the overwhelming violence the British Government relied upon in the last instance to make its will effective and enforce domestic order on a resentful population. Strategically, London regarded Hinaidi as a key staging point on the air route to India and thus crucial to Britain's global power.

Until 1929 the British government vacillated over what powers they would devolve to Iraqi politicians. The Colonial Office feared that to put Iraq forward for League membership so soon after agreeing to the League's request for a twenty-five-year Mandatory relationship would be seen as "sharp practice" in Geneva. Although progress had been made in state building since 1925, it seemed impossible to argue convincingly that the problems raised by the Commission's report had been dealt with in such a short period of time.[136] The Colonial Office itself thought the institutions of state were not efficient enough to function and protect British interests without continued oversight.[137] The Iraqi army, for example, was regarded as ineffectual and unable to maintain internal order without the support of the RAF. With the dis-

covery of proven oil reserves and the input of large-scale investment to develop them, all British policymakers agreed that Britain could not put strategic and economic interests at risk by a premature loosening of control.[138]

It was recognized by the High Commissioner and the Colonial Office that a "contented Iraq" was essential to the success of Britain's policy. By choosing the king and the cabinet as its tools, the Colonial Office became increasingly dependent on active cooperation:

> The loss of his goodwill and co-operation (to say nothing of his covert hostility) would render our task almost impossible. We cannot, in fact, have a reasonably contented Iraq without a reasonably contented Faisal.[139]

Prolonged antagonism between the British and Iraqi governments would put Britain's position in Iraq, and ultimately her standing with the League of Nations, in jeopardy. International obligations, the weakness of the Iraqi state and Britain's own strategic and economic interests all contributed convincing incentives for preventing greater power from devolving to the Iraqi élite. But as Dobbs had seen, it was nevertheless crucial that some way be found to manage this devolution, otherwise the policy that kept Britain in Iraq ran the danger of unraveling.

As in 1922–23, it was an election and change of government in Britain that proved the decisive and final turning point in Anglo-Iraqi relations under the Mandate. When Leo Amery returned from his fact-finding tour of Iraq in 1925, he realized that if Britain were to build the type of Iraqi state that the League envisioned, while securing what he perceived to be Britain's national interests, a much longer-term commitment than the four years negotiated in 1922–3 was needed. Aware that British public opinion was unwilling to countenance this, he proposed recasting Britain's role in Iraq in terms of national and imperial interests:

> Iraq affords a splendid training ground for the Royal Air Force. Baghdad, so far as one can foresee, is likely to always be a pivotal point in our air communications with the East. In our own interests, quite apart from those of Iraq, we cannot afford to scrap the admirably efficient organization that has been set up. [140]

Unfortunately for Amery the Conservative Government had failed by 1927 to alter the long-running hostility of British public opinion towards maintaining an interest in Iraq. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Viscount Lord Robert Cecil, surveying public opinion in June of that year thought that the "overwhelming sentiment of the electorate at the present time is pacifist in the extreme." He pleaded with his cabinet colleagues that a reduction of "direct responsibilities" in Iraq would be

> a complete answer to those of our critics who allege that we are anxious to have a militarist or adventurous foreign policy. That charge has done us a great deal of harm already and may easily be fatal to our existence at the next election.[141]

Given the stakes of British involvement in Iraq, the cabinet felt this route was unavailable to them. As Cecil had predicted, the conservatives were turned out of office in May 1929.

The general election of May 1929 elected a Labour minority government that was not constrained by the imperial ideology of its predecessor.[142] With a new Colonial Secretary, Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister, the government found it easier to identify the contradictions at the heart of Britain's relations with Iraq and find ways to overcome them. A cabinet committee was set up under J.H. Thomas to scrutinize Britain's colonial expenditure. Its first task was an examination of policy towards Iraq.[143]

The new government in London was now willing to listen to the High Commissioner's advice and shape policy to take account of what was happening in Iraq. During the cabinet deliberations in the summer of 1929, the new High Commissioner, Sir Gilbert Clayton, suggested (as had Sir Henry Dobbs in 1927) that

> voluntary and unsolicited concessions . . . will do much to form those ties of gratitude and obligation with which it is hoped to bind Iraq to Great Britain; whereas, those same concessions, following upon lengthy, and perhaps acrimonious, negotiations, will be apt to produce the contrary effect and to be regarded as the successful result of bargaining with a crafty and unscrupulous opponent.[144]

Passfield, the new Secretary of State for the Colonies, unlike his predecessor, realized the extent to which Britain's influence in Iraq was dependent upon those Iraqi politicians who ran the state.[145] The "prolonged interruption of constitutional government . . . might well lead to disastrous results." So on September 11, 1929 the acting High Commissioner was given authority to tell the Iraqi government that Iraq would be unconditionally put forward to the League for membership in 1932.

The agreement of September 1929 to suspend the 1927 treaty and recommend unconditional entry into the League of Nations in 1932 was a result of the contradictory aims shared by both the Conservative government before 1929 and its Labour successor. Each government operated in an international system radically transformed by the rise of colonial nationalism and the demise of British hegemony. Ideologically, as well as practically, both were committed to building a state in Iraq under the international supervision of the Permanent Mandates Commission. Yet Britain's weakened financial and strategic position during the 1920s meant that this task had to be completed at the lowest possible cost. The heavy constraints upon the British state meant that sovereign power had to be devolved to the political élite of Baghdad — those who, by 1926, were in a position to run things. The short-lived Labour government could oversee this process relatively successfully because its officials were not as committed to the imperial thinking as their predecessors.[146]

The consequences of the September 1929 decision were far-reaching and not immediately recognized by those in the cabinet in London who made it. By unconditionally agreeing to recommend Iraq for League membership in 1932, the government sacrificed one of its professed central goals. The national interest would continue to be furthered, and the resources expended on Iraq would continue to be reduced, but the creation of a "modern" liberal state along the lines laid out in the 1925 League of Nations' Frontier Commission would be scuttled. This was the compromise needed to end the conflict with the Iraqi political élite in Baghdad. The 1929 decision in effect amounted to an announcement that Britain would abrogate its responsibilities under the Mandate and actively collude with her Iraqi partners in building a quasi-state:

> My hope is that, even without our advice, Iraq may now be so well established, that she may be able to rub along in a corrupt, inefficient, oriental sort of way, something better than she was under Turkish rule . . . If this is the result, even though it be not a very splendid one, we shall have built better than we knew.[147]

By unconditionally agreeing to support Iraq's entry into the League of Nations, the British government succumbed to the pressure of its own domestic public opinion as well as the demands of the Iraqi political élite. To bring this policy to a successful conclusion however, the League of Nations Permanent Mandates Commission (PMC) still had to be convinced that Britain had discharged its duties under the Mandate.

Publicly, the Labour Government enjoyed extremely good relations with the League. Following his appointment as Foreign Secretary in 1929, Arthur Henderson became one of the most influential figures in Geneva.[148] British public opinion, weary of war and foreign adventures, enthusiastically backed the new government's role in the League, with its professed commitment to disarmament and the prevention of war.[149] But beneath the gloss of public relations the Labour administration had a similar perception of the League to that of its Conservative predecessors. At best they saw it as a useful addition to diplomacy:

> but very few politicians when in power and almost no permanent officials really believed it to be an efficacious instrument for the settlement of international problems.[150]

Britain's Mandatory obligations were based on Article 22 of the League of Nations Covenant, which stated that a Mandate could be terminated only when a "Community shall be able to stand alone without the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory."[151] When the Labour government decided to back Iraq's entry into the League, their perception of the Permanent Mandates Commission was transformed. The Permanent Mandates Commission had been the personification of Britain's international obligations to Iraq, but, after 1929, it became an obstacle to the government's goal of ridding itself of the costly and potentially unending burden of turning Iraq into a liberal state of international standing.

The development of a strategy to obtain Iraq's membership in the League by reducing the demands of the PMC began as early as February 1927. Henry Dobbs recognized the potential for a conflict of interpretations between the PMC and the British government. To gain entry for Iraq into the League, the British government would have to convince the PMC that Iraq had been brought to "a stage of political, social and economic evolution when it can reasonably be regarded as able to stand alone."[152] Dobbs first set out to limit which parts of the Iraqi state should be subject to the judgement of the PMC. Iraq should, he argued, be judged only on its ability to stand alone administratively, not on its economic or military capability.[153] Under this definition Iraq, although militarily unable to secure internal peace or external defense without British assistance, was administratively comparable to other states already recognized as independent by the League.[154] Secondly, Dobbs argued that the efficiency of the Iraqi state should be compared only to that of the weakest members of the League. In that case:

> Iraq is at least as stable as China, Portugal, Greece or Abyssinia . . . the complete cessation of consultation with Great Britain in foreign affairs and the complete withdrawal of the British Air Force would be very dangerous to the State; but even so it might be no worse than China or Greece.[155]

Dobbs's suggested tactic for tackling the PMC was to radically reinterpret the meaning of Article 22 of the Covenant. For Dobbs, Britain's task had never been to build in Iraq a state comparable to Britain itself or to other Western European states. Instead its function was to construct governmental institutions that could deliver the bare bones of de facto statehood within borders ultimately guaranteed by the international community itself. Implicitly, he was arguing for a two-tier League of Nations. An independent Iraq would be no worse off than any of the weak states in the second tier of membership. To ask for anything more from Britain would be highly unrealistic.

This tactic, first laid out by Dobbs in February 1927, was used to gain entrance for Iraq to the League in 1932. The report detailing the evolution of the Iraqi state demanded by the PMC opens by explicitly stating

Dobbs's thesis. The British government's conception of its mandatory responsibilities had never included the

> attainment of an ideal standard of administrative efficiency and stability as a necessary condition either of the termination of the Mandatory regime or of the admission of Iraq to membership of the League of Nations. Nor has it been their conception that Iraq should from the first be able to challenge comparison with the most highly developed and civilized nations of the modern world.[156]

Testifying before the PMC in June 1931, Sir Francis Humphrys, the High Commissioner, developed this approach at some length. There were two types of state he argued: the "civilized nations of the modern world," and those like Iraq, where "the machinery of government . . . may not run quite so smoothly or so efficiently as in some more advanced and more highly developed State." A comparison between these two types of state was neither fair nor necessary. Both had the right to exist as independent states within the international community. Iraq, therefore, "given the support and inspiration of membership of the League, is now fit to stand alone; it is now capable of self-government, indeed for all practical purposes it is already governing itself."[157] This argument was deployed at the PMC and then at the full Council of the League of Nations. Backed by Britain's own "moral responsibility" and honor, it won Iraq membership in the League.[158]

The League's recognition in October 1932 of Iraq's full *de jure* independence brought to an end Britain's formal mandatory responsibilities. Institutionally, the League of Nations in the early part of the Mandate had acted as a patent restraint on the overt pursuit of British interests and prevented the annexation of Basra. But by the late 1920s, Britain's compliance with the League's requirements had turned into something very different. The type of state the PMC envisioned for Iraq was not the state the British government had the resources or patience to build. In 1932 Iraq could not have defended itself against its neighboring states, nor could it impose order unassisted across the whole of its territory. Ultimately it was dependent on the RAF as the guarantor of its internal and external sovereignty. Internationally, its *de jure* statehood rested not on the achievement of any "standard of civilization" nor on the ability to

hold its own militarily, but only on its recognition as a state by the League. This recognition had been given because of pressure on the British government — from mass public opinion in Britain, from new international norms of self-determination, and from Iraqi nationalism. Recognition had not come about because of the successful creation of a modern liberal state through which a new, more just international order could work to the benefit of all.