Chapter Seven

The Imposition of Order

SOCIAL PERCEPTION AND THE "DESPOTIC" POWER OF AIRPLANES

With regard to military forces, the Royal Air Force . . . is the backbone of the whole organization. If the writ of King Faisal runs effectively through his kingdom, it is entirely due to the British airplanes. It would be idle to affect any doubt on that point. If the airplanes were removed tomorrow, the whole structure would inevitably fall to pieces. Any locally raised forces without assistance from the air could not maintain internal order nor resist external aggression. I do not think that there can be any doubt whatever on that point. Owing to difficulties of transport and communications, ground troops however efficient cannot replace air control. —*Leopold Amery, 1925*[1]

[T]here are only two things to fear—Allah and the *Hakumat al tayarrat* [government by aircraft] —*A tribesman speaking to a Special Services Officer, 1924*[2]

Colonial officials sent to build the Iraqi state under the Mandate had limited coercive and financial resources with which to order society. By the time Britain had been awarded the Mandate, her Empire was in crisis, beset by upheavals and strapped for cash.[3] This meant coercive resources, the use of British and Indian army troops, were from 1920 onwards a sensitive political issue, subject to increasing press and parliamentary hostility in London. After the 1920 revolt, the campaign against British involvement reached such a height that cabinet discussions in London revolved around only two options: either a drastic reduction in the costs of administration or complete withdrawal would be necessary.

Winston Churchill's plan was to stop criticism while continuing Britain's involvement in Iraq. His plan for controlling Iraq hinged on the replacement of costly imperial troops by the newly formed Royal Air Force (RAF). The interaction between the new, technological nature of

state control and the resulting perceptions of state officials revolutionized state-society relations in an unforeseen way.

Anthony Giddens has written that "All types of rule . . . rest upon the institutional mediation of power."[4] Recent social theory views the state as the handmaiden of a powerful modernity. For some theorists the essence of the modern state's power to discipline its population is the move from "wholesale" to "retail."[5] Individuals become specific targets of the state's power. They are inserted into the "micro-physics of power" where the panoptical ability of the state and its allied human sciences force him or her to internalize the rules governing personal behavior. This allows the state to dispense with the costly spectacle of violence and rely on subtler, more pervasive ways of exercising its power.

This move from wholesale to retail, crucial for understanding the modern European state, never happened under the Mandate. The nature and extent of the state's power, constrained by time, international opinion and most of all by lack of resources, never allowed for this concentration of administrative power. In order to understand the type and effect of the state's power in Iraq, then, a different understanding of state-society relations is needed. The political sociologist Michael Mann analyzes state power by breaking it down into three related aspects : ideological, economic, and military.[6] The making of the state in Iraq depended upon its ability to dispense largesse and upon the legitimacy conferred by the international promise to honor the principle of self-determination. Both of these attributes of the successful state, in the case of Iraq, were heavily underpinned and ultimately guaranteed by the overt and frequent deployment of organized violence. For Anthony Giddens a state's power is either allocative or authoritative.[7] Allocative power concerns the control of resources whereas authoritative power is the deployment of coercion to control the activities of the state's subjects. In the case of state-society relations under the Mandate, it was the state's ability to deploy violence simultaneously with the influence given to it by the exercise of largesse that defined the nature of its relations with the Iraqi population. More important still is Giddens's point that all power has to be mediated through state institutions and is transformed by the essence of this mediation. In Iraq, after 1921, the main institution mediating the application of state power was the RAF. The control of the population by airplane, although comparatively cheap and superficially attractive, had a pro-

found effect on the way the state ruled Iraq and heightened a particular understanding of society.

Mann further distinguishes between infrastructural and despotic power.[8] Infrastructural power is based on the "the capacity of the state to actually penetrate civil society, and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm." It needs coherent and efficient state institutions that reach across the whole extent of a state's territory. The state also needs legitimacy to negotiate with civil society and have its presence and the extraction of resources seen as justifiable. Despotic power, on the other hand, involves "the range of actions which the élite is empowered to undertake without routine, institutionalized negotiations with civil society groups."[9] This can involve the extraction of resources from society without consent and the arbitrary but frequent deployment of violence to facilitate the state's survival.

The financial constraints that the mandated state worked under from 1920 until 1932 meant that it did not have the resources to deploy statewide armed forces in great numbers or with any degree of permanence. Nor did it have the ideological legitimacy or bureaucratic institutions to extract greater military manpower from society by the enforcement of a conscription law. It was forced instead to rely on bombing to guarantee the collection of taxation and the enforcement of some kind of order. This had two consequences. First, it gave the British administration an overwhelming technological advantage over the population it was seeking to dominate. The start of the First World War had seen the Middle East flooded with modern, accurate and efficient rifles. This had greatly narrowed the weapons gap between British forces and what had become a heavily armed population and had made military domination a costly business in terms of lives and resources. The use of air power, represented a reversal of the weapons balance, with the state once again gaining and retaining the upper hand.[10]

The second consequence of the reliance on airplanes was that the power of the state in Iraq came to resemble that of Mann's definition of despotic power. The coercive manifestations of the state that carried the most weight were the fleeting visits of government airplanes. They regulated the broad parameters of permissible behavior by bombing tribes who were "out," rebelling against the government, or those which refused to pay taxation. This dependence upon air power led to the neglect of

other state institutions. Power—counter to Michel Foucault's description of it— became largely symbolic, based on the demonstration of aircraft above recalcitrant tribes or the use of punitive bombing raids against tribes as an example to others.[11] The state through its dependence upon air power not only became detached from society but also hung two hundred feet above it, bombing people when they did not behave in the way the state wanted.

The triumphalism within the British cabinet that resulted from the signing of the armistice of Mudros on October 30, 1918 was replaced relatively quickly by the stark realization that Britain's newly-achieved predominance in the Middle East had to be secured and sustained within strict financial limits.[12] In 1918 the government's spending deficit was running at £1,690 million a year, with British exports failing to recover their pre-war levels.[13] It had also become clear that attempts to lure the United States into the Middle East to share the burden of controlling the area were not going to succeed.[14]

With the rising specter of industrial and political unrest at home, domestic demands for speedy demobilization and the continuing problem of Ireland, the already stretched deployment of British troops became unmanageable. In July 1920, the Chief of the imperial General Staff summed up the situation:

> In no single theatre are we strong enough, not in Ireland, not in England, not on the Rhine, not in Constantinople, nor Batoum, nor Egypt, nor Palestine, nor Mesopotamia, nor Persia, nor India.

To add to this problem, the defense budget was cut in half each year between 1919 and 1923.[15] Before the First World War, the Empire had been controlled by the use of Indian troops, and Indian tax to pay for them, but political instability on the sub-continent had made this no longer feasible. The head of the military, as early as 1919, had sought an answer to these problems by suggesting the concentration of troops in the "coming storm centers" of the Empire: Ireland, Egypt and India. His advice had little effect on his political masters.[16]

The precarious nature of the armed forces' control in the Middle East was brought home to those in Baghdad and London alike by the 1920

revolt in Iraq. The incoherence of British policy towards Iraq from the end of the war until 1920 had allowed A.T. Wilson, the acting High Commissioner, to pursue his own vision of how Iraq should be run. By the end of Ramadan in June 1920, his insensitivity to the politically active in the Iraqi population, the increasing desperation of Faisal and his entourage to capture British attention and the disgruntlement of the heavily taxed tribes in southern Iraq, had exploded into a widespread revolt against the British presence in the country.[17] The revolt lasted through July, August and September, with British control firmly re-established only in February 1921. At its peak the rebels managed to field an estimated 131,000 men across Iraq. Of these the British army estimated that 17,000 had modern rifles comparable in accuracy, speed and reliability to those of the imperial troops they were fighting against.[18]

The 1920 revolt had the immediate effect of focusing the British government's collective mind. How could order be maintained in such a turbulent area, in the face of drastic budgetary restrictions, while the international responsibilities of the Mandate were being fulfilled? Churchill (possibly with the public humiliation of the campaign in the Dardanelles still fresh in his mind) forced both the cabinet and the administration in Iraq to focus on the unsustainable nature of the current situation. From May 1920 onwards he began suggesting drastic policy solutions in cabinet, recommending the evacuation of outlying regions and then arguing that, by pulling British forces all the way back to Basra, the cost of occupation could be cut from £30 million to a more sustainable £8 million.[19] He coupled this with direct threats addressed to the administration in Iraq, stressing that the continuation of the British presence hung in the balance.[20]

The combined result of the revolt and the rise of a new realism in London about British capabilities in the Middle East resulted in the convening of the Cairo Conference in March 1921. Churchill assembled over forty military and civilian experts for a week in Cairo to determine the best way forward for British policy in the region.[21] The overall conclusions of the conference were that the emphasis of British policy should be shifted in an attempt to rely more on ideological and economic power than on force. Resources previously expended on military control would be drastically reduced in favor of subsidies paid to indigenous rulers, who, in theory, were to reign with the consent of the population.[22] Militarily, the success of the plan rested on a speedy and thorough reduction

of imperial troops stationed in Iraq. The imperial garrison was reduced to twelve battalions by 1 October 1921, and then to just four battalions by a year later.[23]

The success of the Cairo Conference scheme and the continued British presence in Iraq depended on the ability of the Mandated state to maintain order while simultaneously reducing the cost of Iraq to the British exchequer. Order and economy were to dominate British concerns until the end of the Mandate in 1932.[24] These apparently contradictory aims could be achieved only by the massive technological innovation represented by the development of air policing. The airplane became "the backbone of the whole organization."[25] Air power was the "midwife" in the birth of the Iraqi state. Without it, the whole Mandate project would have been in jeopardy.[26]

The Cairo Conference plan not only launched the air-policing scheme but also set about creating indigenous armies in the hope that they would eventually take over responsibility for the creation of internal order and, ultimately, external defense. This, it was hoped, would assist in the speedy reduction of imperial troops and cut the defense budget. But the post-Versailles international system under which these armies were being created complicated this task. At the heart of Churchill's plan was the creation of indigenously run states with native armies under the banner of Wilsonian self-determination. The Iraqi army was to be staffed, run and funded by Iraqis. This division of control between a shrinking imperial power and a growing yet untried indigenous élite was a constant source of tension between Iraq and Britain. Combined with the acute shortage of financial resources, this tension stifled the growth of the army, leading to it becoming an appendage of a planned Iraqi air force.

The decision to create an indigenous army unleashed a struggle among competing constituencies revealing different interests in, and disagreements about, every aspect of the new Iraqi army. The two constituencies based in London were the Colonial Office, primarily concerned with Britain's international responsibilities and the cost of the Iraqi Mandate, and the Air Ministry, which was responsible for British imperial forces in Iraq and for Britain's overall strategic interests in the Middle East. Yet, although there were clear tensions between the Colonial Office and the Air Ministry in London, the main battle, over the nature and size of the army to be built in Iraq, was fought out in Baghdad.

The main group in Iraq, who would ultimately inherit the state and its army, consisted of King Faisal and the Hashemite officers he had brought with him from Syria. There was also the British Mandate administration in Iraq, officials employed by the Colonial Office to oversee the creation of the state. The violent disagreements between these two groups about the growth and use of the Iraqi army had their roots in differing conceptions of the role and nature of the state they were building, its relation to Iraqi society, and, ultimately, what the Iraqi nation was and what it should become. Faisal and his Hashemite officers wanted to build an army that would be the personification and instrument of a strong Arab state. To this end they favored a mass conscript army that would act as an institution of, and weapon for, the imposition of national unity. They wanted to build an army through which young Iraqi conscripts would learn Arabic and a Hashemite vision of Iraqi nationalism. Such an army would become a powerful symbol of an independent Hashemite state.

The British High Commissioner and his staff saw the army in very different terms. Their approach was dominated by what they saw as strict financial, but also social, constraints within which the new state would be forced to work. The Mandate staff wanted to build a small and efficient army that would guarantee internal order without bankrupting the state. Dobbs especially feared the possibility of a larger army becoming the tool of a government with despotic aspirations. Those British advisers with influence on the growth of the army chose for the rank and file those they considered the most representative and efficient.

How was the army to achieve the level of efficiency and strength it needed to replace imperial troops and guarantee order across the country? How and where would the personnel for this army be found? Could the state afford a professional volunteer army or was it strong enough to enforce conscription on an unwilling and well-armed society? The financial and ideological impasse created by these questions was overcome only when all sides agreed on the creation of an Iraqi air force.

From within the Iraqi political class, the most active, vocal and homogeneous group concerned with the issue of the army were those who can be usefully classified as Hashemites.[27] Their positions of power, expertise in military matters and close links to the Palace led them to become the major pressure group from within the Iraqi élite -— one which scrutinized British attitudes towards defense and demanded change. Aside

from King Faisal, Nuri Said and Ja'far al Askari were two of the most prominent and powerful of this circle.[28] Before Faisal's arrival in Iraq, Ja'far had actively promoted his kingship and by the mid-twenties Nuri had in effect become Faisal's right-hand man.[29]

Both Ja'far and Nuri had had wide-ranging experience and had fully formed opinions on the role of the military in society. They had both studied at the Military Academy and Staff College of the Ottoman army in Istanbul. The leading authority on these men notes that there was something of a "martial temper" about them; a "partiality for a forced social change, for a push from above."[30]

From the early days the issue of the Iraqi army had deeply divided Iraqi politicians. Certainly Ja'far and Nuri were overly concerned with military matters, constantly pushing for the expansion of the army to the exclusion of wider issues of socio-economic development.[31] For them the first step in state building was the creation of a strong and autonomous army. This fuelled a series of clashes between the Hashemites and more established urban notables in the nascent cabinet. At a meeting of the Council of Ministers in May 1921, the proposed appointment of Nuri as head of the army caused unease among those present. The *naqib*, with a prescient reference to the Committee of Union and Progress and Faisal's short reign in Syria, warned of the dangers inherent in building an army unrestrained by the rules and regulations of civilian government. The Council, then, instead of agreeing to appoint a largely autonomous head of the army, demanded to see a general program for the building of a national defense force before they would countenance Nuri's appointment.[32]

In response to the bitterness that this debate fuelled, the High Commissioner wrote to the Council taking the Hashemites' side. He pointed out that the British Government regarded the making of speedy progress with the creation of the army as the most important and urgent problem which lay before the Arab Government, and he asked that army questions should be given precedence over all other business in the council.

At the same time he wrote privately to the *naqib* promoting the Hashemite cause, stressing that Nuri and Ja'far were regarded by the British as trustworthy allies, that their skills and experience made them indispensable to the Iraqi army and that the government should rely on them as much as possible.[33]

This clash of opinions over the position of the armed forces in the new Iraq caused the fall of the first cabinet appointed after Faisal's coronation. Against the background of increasing violence and raiding across the southern desert from Saudi Arabia, Faisal demanded that a much larger proportion of government expenditure be devoted to defense. Sasun Hesqel, the Minister of Finance, and also an important Jewish Baghdadi merchant, refused to stop development projects in education and irrigation to pump money into the army instead. The ensuing trial of strength resulted in the fall of the government.[34]

This dispute was ultimately resolved in two ways. As the king and the Hashemites began to gain ascendancy over other political groupings within Iraq, it became less of an issue. More importantly, Nuri, Ja'far and the king set about building a specifically Hashemite army, loyal to the king and his retainers and not to the wider Iraqi government. Indeed, by July 1922, when the *naqib* asked Ja'far whether the army was loyal enough to be used to suppress internal uprisings, Ja'far could reply that "Arabs could not be relied upon to fight against Arabs." When asked the same question shortly afterwards in private by the king, his answer was that "the Iraqi Army would obey his [the king's] orders to a man."[35]

Throughout the Mandate period, the king used the army as the ultimate symbol of national pride and dignity, tenderly nurtured by Hashemite hands and easily trampled upon by British insensitivity or mendacity. In this guise the extent to which the High Commissioner and Colonial Office would acquiesce in the king's military plans became the personification of British sincerity and the primary test of the degree to which they would deliver the long-promised independence. British Ministers for the Colonies and Air suggested in 1925 that the efficiency of the Iraqi army would be increased by the appointment of British officers in positions of executive control. This was seen by the king and the Prime Minister as an unmasking of Britain's true intent. The Prime Minister saw this as "the thin end of the wedge" designed to safeguard British investments by keeping the army small and powerless. For the king this was part of a general British policy used throughout the region to deprive Arab armies of all power and secure the air-route to India.[36]

It was over the issue of conscription that the themes of state power, army efficiency and the lack of mutual trust between Britain and Iraq came to dominate the interaction among the Mandate officials, the king

and his Hashemite courtiers. For the Hashemites conscription eclipsed all other military matters. Ja'far had been Minister of Defense in the first Iraqi cabinet for less than a month when he suggested it as the only way to build an efficient army. The Hashemite vision of the role of the state and the character of the nation therefore fused over the issue of conscription. Ja'far saw compulsion as the only way to transform ordinary people into satisfactory soldiers. The only suitable candidates for this transformation were those with "a certain stake in the country."[37] These people were not the "homeless wandering" Kurds and Bedouin, but those property owners who were tied to the soil of the Iraqi nation.[38] Obviously, the state could not afford to tempt such people into a volunteer army and so had to resort to conscription. The bias towards townspeople by the Hashemites was written off by the High Commissioner as a manifestation of the weakness of the state. But consistent with Ja'far's first musings on the subject, this commitment to an urban social base for the army represented the Hashemite ideal of the Iraqi nation, one comprised of the urban lower and middle classes—much the same as the Hashemites themselves—not of the majority tribal population favored by the British.

The Hashemite vision of a mass conscripted army mirrored their conception of the state and nation. Conscription of the urban population into the army would forcibly create a homogeneous and loyal nation through state action. The army was to be the primary tool of education and state building. In the early 1920s, the Hashemites saw reliance on an air force as being misplaced as it did not allow nation-building to happen. When Nuri was struggling to build a mass conscript army, the resources diverted into the air force were a distraction. Although it could exact revenge through bombing, the air force could not hold territory or impress the government's propaganda on the population.[39]

The British were philosophically opposed to the state vision of the Hashemites. The High Commissioner, as the personification of British power and responsibility in Iraq, embodied British opposition. He represented the overwhelming advantage in military power that Mandate officials had over Iraqi politicians. Dobbs summed up his power by claiming that "the sheet anchor" of the British role in the country was the threat to withhold military assistance to the Iraqi government.[40] Institutionalized by formal agreement, this meant that any decisions taken by the Iraqi government against the High Commissioner's advice which resulted

in social unrest or violence would not be supported by the intervention of imperial forces. This veto, although overshadowing the whole Anglo-Iraqi relationship, was overtly threatened only on military matters, specifically the issue of conscription.

Throughout the Mandate period, the High Commissioners were aware of the constraints within which they were working. The conflict was between furthering the strategic interests of Britain whilst meeting the demands from London for a rapid reduction in expenditure. The primary and constant goal of those in London was to reduce the costs of the Mandate by forcing the Iraqi government to take greater financial and strategic responsibility for its own defense as soon as it could. But juxtaposed against this was the contradictory goal of securing and furthering Britain's strategic interests in Iraq and the wider Middle East. These tensions caused an incoherent and frequently changing policy towards the Iraqi army.[41]

Added to these competing aims were the contradictory goals of Henry Dobbs. Following the 1920 revolt, High Commissioners had been acutely aware of the potential strength of tribal society in comparison to that of the state. But, with his perception of the legacy of Ottoman despotism, Dobbs was equally concerned by the ability and perceived desire of Baghdad's politicians to use the army to dominate and oppress the largely rural society. This series of contradictions between power and economy and state and society all came together over the Hashemites' demands for a large conscript army.

The creation of an effective Iraqi army was at the core of the Cairo Conference plan but was always a major focus of dispute. By 1926 it was listed in intelligence reports as the "first chief problem" remaining to be addressed.[42] Even then it remained unclear to the High Commissioner and his staff just what type of army Iraq should have and how they should get it. After the Mosul dispute with Turkey had been settled, Dobbs saw little chance of an invasion from either Iran or Turkey. This left internal security as the principal problem. Dobbs worried about the heavily armed rural population, but, unlike the Hashemites, he believed that economic expansion and minimum taxation were essential for a quiescent society. The military was the main draw on government resources and Dobbs saw a rapid expansion of the army as the most likely cause of an armed uprising.[43] The army thus became for him not a tool of stabil-

ity and national integration but a cause of instability and potential mass rebellion. This clash of outlook with the Hashemites sprang partly from Dobbs's conception of state weakness, but also from a set of beliefs about an attainable balance of power between state and society.

Faced with the continuing battle of wills and the shortage of funds, Dobbs concluded by the mid-1920s that the creation of an Iraqi air force was the only realistic way of guaranteeing internal order. A 10,000-man army would act as the air force's appendage. For Dobbs, accepting the Air Ministry's propaganda, the reach of the state would be limited only by the role and utility of aircraft. The Hashemites would be denied the ability of bankrupting the state and dominating society through the creation of the all-encompassing institution of a mass army.[44]

If the Hashemite ideal for the Iraqi army mirrored their vision of what the Iraqi state and nation should look like, then Dobbs's understanding of the military equally reflected his own conception of Iraqi society and his wishes for the state. Mirroring imperial cultural constructions of the "martial races," Dobbs saw the urban classes favored by the Hashemites as being effete.[45] He therefore constantly encouraged the recruitment of tribal soldiers for the rank and file and sons of shaikhs for the officer class.[46] This was reflected in recruitment for the military college, with the enlistment forms sent to each *liwa* stating that recruits had to be verifiably the sons of a shaikh or head of a tribe.[47]

The results of this developing battle of wills over the social composition of the army were mixed. At the creation of the army, 640 ex-Ottoman and ex-Sharifian officers were inducted into it. This largely urban bias remained, with only 25 per cent of officers having a tribal origin. But amongst the rank and file the picture was more mixed, with anything from 37 per cent to 74 per cent of each regiments' troops being drawn from the tribes, mainly those based between the Tigris and Euphrates south of Baghdad.[48] It was conscription that revealed the true depth of the fault lines dividing the Hashemites and the British.

From the early 1920s, both Henry Dobbs and Cornwallis, the Adviser to the Ministry of Interior, saw that conscription would arouse the intense hostility of the rural population across Iraq. Dobbs understood this potential hostility as having its roots in Ottoman rule, when, he thought, a general fear of the state was all-pervading. But this adamant opposition to conscription did not subside throughout the 1920s. In 1925,

the conscription bill was drafted for application in 1928. Dobbs argued that Britain would have few imperial forces left in the country by then. If the High Commissioner was asked to help impose the unpopular conscription law across rural Iraq, it would have to be done by aircraft. By bombing the tribes to enforce a widely-resisted law, "the popular dislike of it would concentrate itself on the British, and there would be every kind of misrepresentation of British intentions."[49]

The British administration would be helping to enforce an unpopular law at a time when the forces it had at its disposal would be at their weakest. Dobbs warned that not only would this focus discontent on the few remaining British troops in the country, but

> failure would be followed by a widespread tribal combination and rising which might easily bring about a return of the conditions of 1920, conditions which *ex hypothesi* the Iraq Army would have to attempt to suppress without any aid from British forces.[50]

As the debate surrounding conscription developed, both sides recognized that the Iraqi state was not strong enough to conscript the tribal sections of the population. This left the urban and suburban sections of society as the only source of possible recruits. For Dobbs and Cornwallis this presented another set of problems. On a practical level, the removal of a large section of the workforce would have a negative effect on "sub-urban agriculture."[51] The supposed qualities of these potential recruits fuelled British unease with the scheme. Cornwallis argued that the scheme would fail to produce the "virile . . . tribal element so necessary for the army" and was hardly worth pursuing.[52] Dobbs agreed, believing that even the "best townsmen" would not match the fighting skills and courage of the "ordinary tribesman."[53]

The British position resulting from these concerns created a policy hostile to conscription. But because the Hashemites had made the army, and by extension conscription, the touchstone of British sincerity, it could not be actively opposed. Dobbs and Cornwallis recognized that conscription offered a solution to the desperately needed expansion of the armed forces, although they favored a volunteer army recruited on the basis of attractive rates of pay. In the end, it was decided to let the Iraqi government proceed with conscription if and when they believed

their own armed forces were strong enough to enforce it independently of any British support.[54]

The fiercely contested nature of military policy in Iraq, the growing power of the Iraqi political élite, British indecision and the general scarcity of finance all combined to undermine the growth of the Iraqi army. Recruitment, training and deployment all suffered from changing policy priorities and the confusion inherent in having two separate military forces, two separate chains of command and two sets of objectives, Iraqi and British, competing to administer order. It is hardly surprising that as early as 1923, Iraqi politicians were pressing for the creation of their own air force. In addition to citing the same argument that had made air policing so attractive to Churchill in Cairo in 1921— the economic efficiency it gave state control— Iraqi politicians added a new element. Air control developed as a way to defend state violence from negative press coverage in Britain. Air policing, the Iraqi Prime Minister stated, was "extremely efficient" and "a merciful instrument of government." The answer to the defense problems of the new Iraqi state would be to equip it with airplanes.[55] With the primary goal of the Colonial Office in London being the reduction of both direct military spending and the subsidies needed to support the Iraqi state, the logic of the position was undeniable. By the end of 1923, the High Commissioner, whilst fearful of the new power airplanes would give to the Iraqi state, was persuaded of their value and began to push for the creation of an Iraqi air force.[56] Despite opposition from the Air Ministry, fearful of nationalist reaction in India and Egypt, the Military agreement drafted in 1924 and attached to the new Anglo-Iraqi treaty, foresaw the building of an Iraqi air force. Iraqi pilots would be trained in England taking over responsibility for the preservation of order once Iraq had entered the League of Nations.[57]

The political contest over military policy from 1920 until 1932 effectively stymied the development of a state-wide military force capable of creating and preserving order. As the Hashemite political élite gained greater power over the creation of the army, their goals for the nation, and the military's position within it, came increasingly into direct conflict with British intentions. Ultimately, neither side in Baghdad had the resources to create an efficient army. Reliance upon the air force remained the state's means of enforcing its will. Unlike that of the army, airplanes enabled the

rapid deployment of retribution against rebels. This power was necessarily a blunt instrument, however, mediating state-society relations in a one-dimensional way. By relying on aircraft, the Iraqi state developed a modern but nonetheless despotic state power. State institutions did not penetrate society, and therefore the state's presence became neither permanent nor legitimate to the Iraqi people. It was fleeting and violent with a limited and extractive purpose.

> The development of the military aircraft created a weapon with the near-miraculous property of lengthening the arm of government whilst shortening its purse. —*Charles Townsend* [58]

The development of a new strategy of air power and the use of Iraq as its laboratory were not immediately popular amongst military and political circles. For institutional reasons, it is not surprising that the main criticism came from the army, the service it was designed to replace. Although the scheme had been devised to meet Henry Wilson's charge of imperial overreach, the Chief of the imperial General Staff was not initially supportive of the scheme.[59]

The very novelty of the new technology meant that its utility and methods were doubted by those not directly involved in its development and application. There was a need from the outset to construct an ideology surrounding air power that would explain its use and promote its effectiveness. The ideology first stressed air power's uniqueness. The airplane gained a military identity by claiming to be everything that the army was not. With the horrors of the static and bloody trench warfare of the Western Front still very much in the public mind, the airplane was sold as a break with the past, drawing a line separating the present from past mistakes. For its promoters, it was cheap, precise and quick. It involved small numbers of people on both sides, its effects were immediate, in contrast to the drawn out stalemate of ground war. Above all, its targets were material not human. The strategy governing this new military tool was to have an entirely different logic, one governed by RAF personnel and distinct from anything that had preceded it.[60]

The ideology of air power bore all the hallmarks of its age. It was explicitly developed as a technology of control not occupation. Whereas at the height of imperial conquest large armies had stamped the charac-

ter of Britain on the center of seized territory, the airplane's effects were diffuse. It was also to be deployed against a new category of the world's population, that of the "semi-civilized." Linked to the philosophy of the Mandate ideal, the "semi-civilized" were involved in a process of evolution, with a recognized and respected material and cultural civilization that needed the distant discipline of the airplane, not the ever-present occupation of the army.

Key to the promotion of air power was its definition as being an explicitly moral instrument of social control. Those championing it against charges that bombing was "hunnish" and unsportsmanlike contrasted it with the effects of sending a column of troops to subdue an area. British public disquiet about this novel war technology was blamed on a general lack of education. In 1920 A.T. Wilson argued that the people of Iraq, being fully acquainted with the pros and cons of air power, viewed it as "a legitimate and proper form of warfare." Hence it was only a matter of time before the British public would do the same. Air power was novel not brutish.[61] The morality of using air power lay in its alleged mercy. Although, if given full rein, its effects could be "very severe," this was rarely if ever necessary.[62] Instead, it was claimed, casualties were usually "remarkably small," even "negligible."[63] Air strategy made a virtue out of technological shortcomings. The chief targets of air action were not the miscreants themselves but their property. Bombing would target the livelihoods of those tribes that were misbehaving; it attacked livestock, grain and fuel stores and the houses of those communities it wanted to punish. Because complete surprise "was impossible"

> the real weight of air action lies in the daily interruption of normal life which it can inflict, if necessary for an indefinite period, while offering negligible chance of loot or hitting back.[64]

The target was thus transformed. This was not a conventional attack on individual life and limb, but a

> moral attack upon the nerves, the habits, and the means of livelihood of the peoples against whom it is necessary to take action, and its moral effect is obviously enhanced in the case of semi-civilized

> people by the fact that it is a weapon against which they cannot effectively retaliate.[65]

The symbolic effect of the planes themselves further expanded the theme of the moral and comparatively cost-free nature of air power. In reverse of Foucault's dictum that modern power involves the move from spectacle to intrusion, those developing the ideological promotion of airplanes claimed their mere presence in the air above a trouble spot was usually more than enough to halt a potential insurrection. The power of "demonstrations" as opposed to actual bombing was first noted by A.T. Wilson as early as 1918 and was again cited by him and Sir A. Haldane, the Commander in Chief of British forces in Iraq, as a reason why certain areas of Southern Iraq did not join the 1920 revolt.[66]

The "moral" use of the airplane in contrast to its capacity for violence was stressed throughout the 1920s and integrated into a theory of state-building. Government could "show the flag" and emphasize its capacity for influence in areas too inaccessible for regular administration by directing airplanes to patrol the area. This faith in the symbolic power of planes appears to have sprung from the idea that the tribesmen appreciated the awesome destructive potential of bombing and the unbridgeable gap in technology between them and the state the planes represented. If this appreciation began to fade with familiarity, then a bombing mission or the threat of one would soon restore it.[67]

The disciplinary impact of planes was extended to their power of surveillance. In March 1920 the Air Staff claimed that

> It must be remembered that from the ground every inhabitant of a village is under the impression that the occupant of the airplane is looking at *him*, and the frequent, and perhaps daily appearance of aircraft apparently overhead will do much towards establishing the impression that all their movements are being watched and reported.[68]

This allowed supporters to claim a highly centralized but detailed intelligence system as another benefit of the air-policing scheme.[69] The moral defense of air policing lay in the limited effect it had as a weapon on

humans. Its real attraction in the 1920s and 1930s was the economy of the control it delivered. Crucial to this was the rapidity with which an air operation could be launched:

> almost before the would-be rebel has formulated his plans, the droning of the airplanes is heard overhead, and in the majority of cases their mere appearance is enough.[70]

Retribution for misdeeds could fall from the skies within twelve to twenty-four hours of the act. In military terms, this allowed an almost immediate response to challenges to government authority taking place hundreds of miles from Baghdad.

The construction of the ideology surrounding air power gained its coherence and strength from drawing a stark contrast with the use of armed troops. With the horrors of the First World War still weighing on the British population, the wasteful destructiveness of infantry was easily contrasted with the clean and efficient deployment of airplanes. In the time it took to organize a punitive expedition of troops, the rebels would have had the space to find allies for their cause. Planes, on the other hand, could be there in hours. By marching into an area troops offered a target to well-armed rebels who wanted to strike out against a recognized government institution. By removing the target for retaliation, planes also removed the chances of potential booty and so undermined one of the alleged main incentives to revolt.

> [A]ir action rapidly taken at the focus of trouble, and before it has a chance to spread, and discriminating in its incidence, is in every way a less severe and yet a more powerful corrective than the visit of a column of troops to a then extended area of trouble, with its inevitable accompaniment of destruction and tribal retaliation, and casualties to both sides and long-remaining misery in the area visited.[71]

Trenchard, the Chief of Air Staff from 1919, and Churchill, Minister for the Colonies from 1921, sought to promote air power as a solution to the "crisis of empire" in the Middle East for their own reasons.[72] But they both agreed on the way it was to be promoted and defended. The vulnerability of the army as an instrument and the drawbacks of mass and

unpredictable slaughter were to be escaped through deployment of a clean, efficient and moral technology. Airplanes, as a new form of coercion, combined with the Mandates as a new form of government, would allow order to be brought to the Middle East in a time of British austerity. What was not appreciated in the Colonial Office, the Air Ministry or amongst the governing classes of Baghdad, however, was how the efficiency and economy of air policing would directly influence the process of state-building in ways no one quite imagined.

British perception of Iraqi society, the comparative weakness of both British imperial forces and the nascent Iraqi army, and the ideological climate all united to structure the way in which air power was used in Iraq. The planes' bombs and machine-guns were blunt instruments and therefore dependent for their effect on a readily available intermediary on the ground. The shaikh, as the dominant figure of the tribe, would be the enforcer and guarantor of the order deployed by the state's airplanes.

Three dominant themes emerged as air power was tentatively tested in the early years of the 1920s, institutionalized after 1923 and then used as the main instrument for providing order until 1932. First, efficiency: it could get to places troops could not or should not go. Secondly, knowledge: the maps planes provided confirmed and consolidated the dominant understanding of rural Iraq. Third, triumphalism: the destructive force of the new weapon was widely celebrated as a vindicating testament to western superiority over the world's backward peoples.

The first period during which air power was used ran from the First World War to October 1922 when the RAF took over responsibility for the provision of order in Iraq. Internationally this was a period of great turmoil and political uncertainty. The British government's attitude to Iraq underwent a profound change and policy, both political and military, had to change with it. Until October 1922 air power was not the main coercive tool used to enforce order across Iraq. It acted as a useful and novel ancillary to the army. However, its utility became increasingly apparent. In Kurdistan, around Rowanduz, and in the south of Iraq, in the marshes around Suq and Hammar Lake, the British army struggled with the geography as it attempted to impose the will of central government on the more peripheral areas of Iraq. In both these areas it quickly became apparent that the utility of airplanes greatly outweighed that of

ground troops. Casualties were minimized and the novelty of the new technology startled its adversaries.[73]

Although the rationale for the deployment of air power was not fully articulated until 1923, the dominant discourse concerning Iraqi society structured the use of airplanes from the beginning. It was tribal shaikhs who felt the full force of the bombing. They were the targets of the airplanes and it was their guarantees that would result in the order to stop the planes from returning to bomb again.[74] The initial success of airplanes led the Commander in Chief in 1921, General Haldane, to make the bold claim that "had I sufficient aircraft last year I might have prevented the insurrection spreading from beyond the first incident at Rumaitha."[75]

From the moment the Royal Air Force took over formal responsibility for military order in Iraq from the army in October 1922,the need for a large-scale operation against an unruly section of the population was clear.[76] It would enable the much trumpeted theory of air power to be put into practice, silencing those skeptics who thought it unworkable. It would also further refine the regular use of air power so that eventually it could be perfected and exported to the rest of the Empire.

The first large-scale deployment of air power was against the Barkat and Sufran sections of the Bani Huchaim confederation at Samawah on the Euphrates. This early example of concerted air policing underscores the way the social vision of the Colonial officials directed the creation of the new state. That early bombing also helped put in place a set of rules by which recalcitrant tribes were to be judged on whether they were sufficiently deviant to be subjected to bombing. Ultimately, the bombing of Barkat and Sufran draws attention to the combination of state vision and new technology that determined the direction of the new state institutions.

Political and technical reasons made the Samawah *qadha* in southern Iraq the ideal choice for the debut of air power. Until the bombing at the end of November 1923, this small area was portrayed as the epitome of all the problems the new state faced in establishing its authority. Military action in the area from 1914 onwards also highlighted the fitful nature of the control that British forces, at their strongest—at the end of the war and after the suppression of the 1920 rebellion—actually had over Iraq. For the whole of the war and up to the autumn of 1920, British troops

had not entered the area. When Glubb was preparing to survey the *qadha* in October 1923 he complained that the civil authorities had no data on it at all.[77] When he traveled through Samawah he was surprised to find that "very few" of the shaikhs he met "had ever seen a British officer."[78]

For those planning air action the area had been "untouched and intolerant of Government" under the Turks and had remained so for the British.[79] The Barkat's and the al Sufran's constant defiance of government had ranged from refusing to pay the rifle fines levied on them in the aftermath of the rebellion, to the kidnapping and beating of the *Mudir* of Roumeith and the chasing of both the Iraqi Levies and the Police from the area when they attempted to make arrests. [80] Their proximity to the Baghdad-Basra railway meant that their rebelliousness threatened national communications, while their frequent raiding of major roads and towns in the area highlighted the continued weakness of government.[81]

This instability was blamed on the sub-standard nature of the al Sufran's and the Barkat's tribal solidarity. Their coherence as tribes had deteriorated under Turkish influence contributing to high levels of intra-tribal violence.[82] Glubb on his second reconnaissance of the area noted that the disintegration of tribal structures had led to the rise of a plethora of smaller shaikhs with the power to make mischief. These "petty chiefs" living in a state of anarchy were well armed and situated in over 44 forts in 40 square miles.[83] They built unauthorized dams that cut off other people from water supplies and also engaged in constant fighting.

The Samawah *qadha* exemplified social instability for the British. Its tribal structures had begun to deteriorate so that its internal logic and order were failing. It had escaped all governmental discipline and was ripe to be taught an exemplary lesson. There were good technical reasons too for choosing this particularly troublesome area. Part of the justification of air policing was to distinguish it from the traditional uses of ground troops. Samawah was the perfect place to demonstrate this alternative. The failure of troops, both British and Iraqi, to enter the area could be blamed for its instability. The area's rebelliousness could be explained primarily by its geography: the *qadha* was criss-crossed by numerous water channels, making the passage of pack animals or motor vehicles almost impossible. Hence the number of troops needed to dominate it would be "out of all proportion" to the possible results of any operation.[84] A suc-

cessful attempt to bring the area under control, carried out before reducing the British garrison to two battalions, would also boost confidence in air policing and the ability of the remaining forces to control the country.[85] It was also claimed that this was exactly the type of area where the intervention of ground troops would inflame the situation, uniting the disparate sections of the tribe, allowing "the tribesmen to descend like a swarm of bees on the troops."

The geographic and strategic inaccessibility of Samawah meant that it had to be thoroughly mapped before any coercive action could be taken. Both the Administrative Inspector in the *liwa* and the Air Officer Commanding stressed that the operations map drawn up in advance of the bombing made it "possible and even simple."[86]

Glubb mapped the area during two trips in November 1923. Social cognition was clearly supported and was in turn reinforced by the deployment of air power. Glubb saw his task as "pin-pointing the shaikhs for subsequent bombing purposes." To this end he visited as many tribal leaders as possible to establish which were important enough to warrant bombing. The operations map that resulted was divided into two categories: the general positioning of the tribes; and "the location of the villages belonging to the Shaikhs and Headmen whose influence amongst the tribes rendered them particularly suitable for attack."[87]

The society of Samawah had been "heroically simplified" by Glubb using the discourse the British staff employed to create the state. First, the area to be bombed was divided into the two sections of one tribe, the Beni Huchaim, thought to dominate the district. Glubb then ranked the shaikhs and headmen of each section in order of influence and size. The point was to identify the "nominal shaikh" of each section. A complex and "fuzzy" society was thus transformed, rationalized into discreet objects of cognition and control. By deploying the collective social vision through which they understood Iraqi rural society, the British ordered Samawah in a way that they could understand. This ordering was seen not as an imposition but as the delineation of authentic social structures.

The trigger for the bombing to start would be the issuing of a general ultimatum. The "nominal shaikhs" identified by Glubb would be told to surrender to the government in Samawah town within twenty-four hours. They were to be informed of their long-standing delinquent behavior, told they must deposit monetary security against their future

good behavior, guarantee the safety of all government officials entering the area and, finally, pay the arrears of their *koda* tax.[88] The weight of government-imposed order was to fall upon the shaikhs identified by Glubb. For Glubb and his commanders these shaikhs represented their communities. They were responsible for their tribe's obeying these orders.

The possibility of a mismatch between British perceptions of the position of the "nominal shaikh" and their actual role became apparent before the bombing started. Khashan al Jazi, the nominal shaikh of the Barkat, and Azzarah al Ma'jun, the nominal shaikh of the al Sufran, both duly arrived at *qadha* headquarters. Khashan and Azzarah were informed of their duties and sent back to "their" tribes with a government official to collect the bond for future good behavior. Much to the chagrin of the Administrative Inspector, not only did Azzarah return the next day empty-handed but he refused to accept responsibility for his section and even requested police support to enable him to maintain his own village. Khashan al Jazi delivered the same response the following day.[89] Far from being able to meet government demands, they had "made no real effort to comply with the terms imposed" and were "merely attempting to evade them." So "as they refused to come in, their area was severely bombed" for two days and nights.[90]

The effects of this sustained bombing raid surprised the tribesmen it targeted. It also induced awe of bombing's destructive powers in those who had ordered the attack. The novel deployment of night bombing caught villagers returning home after hiding from daytime raids. It also, according to RAF reports, did "away with the idea that they [the targets] will ever have any period of peace once an attack has begun."[91] Night bombing heightened the audiovisual spectacle of air power, making it apparent to tribes in a wide area, imposing upon them an understanding of the new might and reach of the state. A further technological innovation increased the planes' destructive power: incendiary bombs. With the huts of southern Iraq being constructed from reeds, the effect of night bombing was to spread fires throughout the target villages.[92]

The costs for these targeted villages were heavy. Flight Lieutenant Bowen, who was sent into the area to assess the damage, conservatively estimated that approximately 100 men, women and children had been killed, and six villages destroyed, along with six horses, 71 cows and 530

sheep.[93] This first foray into sustained aerial assault on the population of Iraq considerably undermined the ideological promotion of air policing as being humane. Indeed, the mismatch between the propaganda for air policing and its effects is strikingly borne out in Glubb's memoirs. Influenced by considerable British public disquiet about its use, he claimed that the whole two-day operation cost only one Iraqi life.[94]

If the damage to the population of Samawah had to be hidden from the British public, the impression that air power was having on its targets exceeded all expectations. The combination of night bombing and incendiary devices helped foster the apparent belief amongst tribes of the neighborhood that airplanes could seek them out wherever they fled. The shaikhs across the area surrounding the bombed villages all reported to government officials the next day despite not having been sent for. Overall it was felt that the "moral" effects of the operation on Samawah would be long-lasting. The tribes had formed "a most exaggerated idea of the capabilities of aircraft," which should be guarded for as long as possible.[95]

The order this new tool of modern social discipline could deliver when employed as part of the awesome arsenal of the liberal state turned out not to be as robust as the planners in Baghdad had hoped. The terms demanded for an end to the bombing were issued. Specific tasks were delivered in person to the nominal shaikhs. General demands were delivered all at once to all the shaikhs and *sarkals* gathered at a *majlis.* The meeting was addressed by the Minister of the Interior, Ali Jaudat Beg, and his adviser, Colonel Cornwallis, both of whom had flown down from Baghdad.[96]

The specific requirement delivered to the nominal shaikhs had three components. Each section had to deliver a rifle fine of 300 weapons, demolish its forts, pay one year's back taxes immediately and arrange terms for the phased payment of all other arrears. The latter two demands were agreed to and fulfilled without much trouble. The "guilty consciences" of the tribes meant that "many minor Shaikhs and sarkals have been scraping together money, in order to bring in at least a portion of their overdue taxes and make peace with Government."[97] However, the personal nature of the tax liability imposed was highlighted by the spread of indebtedness, with shaikhs and *sarkals* paying 60 per cent per half-yearly interest to urban money lenders to meet government demands.[98]

The raising of the rifle fines proved much more difficult and pointed to the limited authority of the shaikhs amongst the Sufran and the Barkat. When the demands were set before the Sufran after the bombing,

the destruction of forts and the payment of taxes were readily agreed to, but the payment of 300 rifles within ten days was rejected as impossible. It was only after further consultation and a threat to resume bombing that the shaikhs reluctantly agreed to pay the fine.[99] Although these nominal shaikhs agreed to the rifle fine it soon became clear that the tribesmen themselves would not give up their weapons. [100] The two shaikhs managed to collect only 38 rifles each.

Since the tribespeople of the two sections were refusing to obey government instructions, both were subjected to another two days of bombing. But, by the time of the second bombing raids, Azzarah and Khashan had been recognized as the official shaikhs of their respective sections. It was also accepted that their efforts to collect rifles from their tribesmen had been genuine and their villages were exempt from bombing in an attempt to increase their prestige.[101]

The second deployment of extensive bombing on the Barkat and the Sufran had unforeseen results. Instead of delivering 600 rifles and unconditional loyalty to the government, the population dispersed. Leaving their villages and land, the people moved out of the area and took up residence amongst other tribes not targeted by the bombing.[102] Pursuing them amongst these dispersed groupings was discussed, but finally rejected because it would "entail serious slaughter" and was therefore deemed not feasible.[103]

The contradictory and confusing results of this air policing in Samawah were to become general and familiar themes in the deployment of air power under the Mandate regime. While the operation was called a success, the failure to extract the rifles and the loss of a large part of the population understandably made for a rather uninspiring finale. The weapons had worked well, with night bombing and the use of incendiary and heavier munitions delivering greater than expected destruction of houses and livestock. "Morally" the bombing had had a profound effect on those targeted and the surrounding population. People were terrified that this new technology could apparently target them night and day, dropping high explosives into the middle of their villages from an unassailable height. But the mixed utility of this awesome new power—good for raising tax; bad for extracting rifles—puzzled those in Air HQ, the Ministry of Interior and the Residency. On the face of it, the rifle fine had not been harsh, amounting to one rifle per nine or ten men.[104] The puzzle was that people would rather emigrate from the area than pay it. The

conclusion arrived at was that they had fled in fear and not defiance. Air policing could not co-opt tribes but could only punish them.[105]

Despite the conundrums raised by the concluding stages of the Samawah operation the exercise allowed for the development of a standard template for justifying, deploying, and celebrating uses of air power. Its comparatively low cost, in terms of protecting the lives of government forces and lowering financial expenditure, meant that its role was secure. From 1922, the use of airplanes grew rapidly and became essential for asserting and defending the sovereignty of the state, internally and externally. Their deployment in 1923, then, marked the institutionalization of air power as the state's main weapon of coercion. The RAF was also credited with stopping a major threat to the sovereignty of Iraq by turning the tide against the *Ikhwan* raiders who caused havoc along the Saudi-Iraqi border in 1924 to 1925 and again in 1928 to 1929.[106] Again, it was the RAF that limited the political ramifications of the 1931 general strike by flying repeated missions over the Euphrates to highlight the consequences of a tribal revolt in support of the strike.[107] As the Mandate itself drew to a close, the RAF was central to the expansion of order into the periphery of Iraqi Kurdistan. Airplanes unleashed the full force of state-deployed violence against Shaikh Ahmad of Barzan from 1931 to 1932.[108] In the diverse geographical conditions of both northern and southern Iraq, the airplane's versatility against those fermenting revolt was unrivalled. The social imagination of domination that accompanied air power was reinforced amongst British staff in Iraq and eventually encouraged across the Empire.[109] When Shaikh Mahmud finally surrendered in 1931, after many years of revolt against the centralizing Iraqi state, he pointed to the winged insignia on an RAF officer present and said "You are the people who have broken my spirit."[110]

The deployment of air power was clearly a blunt weapon; bombs dropped from above 200 feet were wholesale in their effect. The power deployed was authoritative but ultimately despotic. Air power could not explain, it could not negotiate, and it could not distribute largesse. For air power to have any infrastructural effect on the population, the state needed a certain type of mediator. In theory, the office of shaikh would take the place of extended state institutions and would sharpen the blunt instrument of bombing. However, the figure of the shaikh did not deliver the mediated access to society that the British had hoped for; his position within society was secured only by the use of the state's coercive power.