1 The View from Basra:

Southern Iraq's Reaction to War and Occupation, 1915–1925

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In 1914, when Britain's Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force entered Basra, Iraq did not exist as a state. The three provinces that form modern Iraq — Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul — were part of the Ottoman Empire and had been ruled well and badly by the Turks and their Sunni Arab cohorts for several hundred years. The population of 3 million was roughly 50 percent Shi'i Arab, 20 percent Sunni Arab, 20 percent Kurd (mostly Sunni, some Shi'i, a few Jewish), and 10 percent "other" (including Jews, Christian Catholics, Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Turkomans). Iraq's Arabs were the last of the multinational groups that comprised the Ottoman Empire to abandon it. Comfortable under the aegis of Islamic governance, Iraq's power barons in city and tribe focused their attention on land tenure and water issues. Any political ambitions they may have had before the Great War were directed at becoming an autonomous state within the Ottoman Empire. Separatism as a political goal was a result of the chauvinistic racial policies of the Young Turks, and not because of repressive Ottoman policies.

By 1916, Sunni Arab political elites educated in Istanbul and working for the Ottoman Sultan and Army had either defected to the Sharif of Mecca, Husayn ibn Ali, and his Great Arab Revolt, or were thinking about accepting the British. On the other hand, Arab tribal leaders and Shi'i clerics in southern Iraq, secure in their isolation, were considering autonomy under the Turks or outright independence. Some Shi'i clerics

in the southern towns were willing to consider going over to the British to obtain *oudh* benefits from the religious endowment denied them by the Turks, while the merchants of Basra had long-standing commercial ties to British and Indian merchants. The southern tribes, in particular, had a common sense of Arab identity, shared traditions and customs, and linkages to the great clans and confederations that had originated in Arabia and spread throughout the Peninsula and the Levant.

If Britain found in Iraq a society in isolation, political disarray, tribal unrest, social chaos, and economic uncertainty, its foreign policy establishment in Whitehall was in equal disarray. Whitehall had no policy for the Arab parts of the Ottoman Empire, let alone the Mesopotamian provinces (*vilayets*). Its foreign and defense policymaking establishments — the War Office, the Foreign Office and the India Office based respectively in London, Cairo, and Delhi — were divided in outlook and mission. Britain ultimately shaped the government and borders of the new state that would emerge in 1920, but the world-view of its rulers, King Faysal and his Sunni Arab military supporters — educated in Turkish military academies and schooled in Arab nationalism — would be shaped by their common experiences in serving the Turks and in the events of the Great Arab Revolt of World War I.

War and Occupation British Style

British forces occupied Fao and Basra in southern Iraq in October 1914 to keep non-British influences (primarily Russian and German) out of the region and protect strategic interests in Iran's oil fields, communications lines to India, and the status quo in the Arabian side of the Gulf, where Britain had been giving security guarantees to several paramount or soon-to-be paramount sheikhly families. Otherwise, Britain had little contact with the reality of Iraq prior to 1914, and few Englishmen were familiar with her language, traditions, or internal conflicts. British military commanders and civil servants from the India Office were drawn to Iraq by the lure of future political and economic wealth and strategic necessity. The campaign was long and bloody, with the British meeting armed resistance everywhere. Despite a humiliating de-

feat at Kut in 1916 and a forced retreat, British forces took Baghdad in 1917 and Kirkuk and Mosul in 1918. Secret agreements with Sharif Husayn (recognizing the Arabs' right to an independent state) and the French (the infamous Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 that divided the Middle East into British and French spheres of influence) ensured Britain would be the dominant power in the Persian Gulf region. The Kurdish highlands bordering Turkey and Iran, the Euphrates region from Baghdad south to Nasiriyya, and the cities of Karbala and Najaf were left unpacified and unoccupied. Najaf, which had been virtually independent under the Turks, was self-governing after 1916. Also ignored were Iraq's southern Arabs who had been educated in the shrine cities and were fast on their way to becoming Arab and Iraqi nationalists. Arab nationalism was particularly strong in Najaf and Karbala, where students and scholars were encouraged to study the history of Arab civilization and culture. These became the most unstable areas of Iraq in the mandate period, after independence in 1932, and after the Gulf war in 1991.

Responsibility for defining and implementing British policy on Iraq fell to several disparate centers. The India Office controlled military operations and policy in the first two years of the war, after which the War Office assumed control of military operations and the Foreign Office over policy. Civil administration remained with the India Office. The Arab Bureau, part of the Intelligence Division of the Foreign Office, tried to coordinate policy on Iraq through its advisers to the Civil Administrator. They were viewed with hostility by the India Office, which had particularly proprietary views towards Basra. The War Office, Foreign Office, Arab Bureau, and India Office all urged different priorities and policies and issued proclamations and aims that were unclear and contradictory. Many Arabs and Iraqi nationalists, however, were eager to have hopes and ambitions confirmed and accepted their promises.

The policy debates in Whitehall were framed by two questions: would the acquisition of new territory make England stronger or weaker? and should allowance be made for the strong feeling in the Muslim world that Islam had a political as well as a religious existence? The Foreign Office and the Arab Bureau advocated creation of an Arab

caliphate and state in Arabia under indirect British control. It would include southern Iraq, Mecca, and Medina, and was labeled the Hashimite School because of its support for the claims of the Sharif of Mecca.[1] In contrast, the India Office viewed Iraq through the prism of India's Muslims and needs.[2] India would absorb Iraq to protect and extend imperial interests into Arabia; Abd al-Aziz ibn-Sa'ud of Najd, the Wahhabi tribal leader who would ultimately rout the Sharif and create the modern state of Saudi Arabia, was viewed as the Arab ruler most fit to lead—and be led. In any event, the British Army sought the cooperation of local tribes and sheikhs to harass the enemy, and Whitehall issued proclamations beginning in 1916 to the Arabs of Iraq and the Gulf that "this War has nothing to do with religion."

While the Foreign Office and Arab Bureau ultimately won the debate by placing an unemployed Hashimite prince on the throne of Iraq, the India Office succeeded in shaping governmental and social controls that would last until the 1958 revolution. The debate was irrelevant to the Iraqis, be they Arab and Iraqi nationalists bent on independence, southern tribal sheikhs, merchants and traders concerned only with their personal and property rights, or religious clerics intent on creating a new Islamic government. Years of British occupation and manipulation would result in the rise of nationalist groups resenting British cooptation and usurpation of rights and, ultimately, a disturbing pattern of military revolts, political repression, ethnic cleansing, and civil unrest.

Establishing Democracy without Democrats

Even before the end of the Great War, British military and civil administrators had put in place mechanisms by which they would exercise control over the new "state-in-waiting" that would become Iraq. The tone was set by British administrators sent out from the India Office who sought to model Iraq on Britain's imperial style of rule in India. They were guided by the nineteenth century's philosophy of the "white man's burden." They believed in direct British rule and distrusted the "natives" capacity for self-rule. Many believed in the inherent inferiority of the Arabs and their inability to rule wisely or justly. One India Office

administrator described "Arab propensities for brutal murder and theft" but expressed his optimism that "if conditions could be moulded aright men would grow good to fit them."[3] They opposed appointment of local Arabs to positions of responsibility, preferring young, inexperienced military officers to "advise" local Arab leaders.

On March 19, 1917, Major-General Sir Stanley Maude, then Commander-in-Chief of British Forces in Iraq, issued a proclamation to the people of Baghdad promising that the British Army had not come as "Conquerors or enemies but as Liberators." Britain, he said, could not remain indifferent to Iraq but did not wish to impose alien institutions on the people of Baghdad. They were, rather, to "flourish and enjoy their wealth and substance under institutions which are in consonance with their sacred laws and their racial ideals." He invited the nobles, elders, and representatives of the Baghdad province to participate in the management of their civil affairs in collaboration with the political representatives of Great Britain. The proclamation, which Maude personally rejected, reflected the romantic vision of the Foreign Office, and not the more control-minded vision of India Office practitioners. It would, Maude observed, only encourage Arab nationalism and confuse the Arabs regarding British intentions. Six months later Maude was dead of cholera. His successor, Sir William Marshall, was tasked with the singular mission of enlisting the Arab tribes of central and southern Iraq to harass the Ottoman enemy wherever possible. Postwar guidance would be more candid. A Foreign Office memorandum issued in November 1920 promised the people of Iraq "to recognize and support the independence of the inhabitants, and to advise and assist them to establish what may appear to be the most suitable forms of government, on the understanding they seek advice and guidance of Great Britain only."

Iraq remained under British military rule after the war, but the administration of government shifted to the Chief Political Officer of the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force, Sir Percy Cox. As Civil Administrator, Cox was responsible for establishing relations with the Iraqis and setting up the machinery of government.[4] Without stating its policy objectives in Iraq and without publicly acknowledging the once secret and now public agreements with the French, Britain installed an administration based on its Indian model.

In September 1918 the occupied territories of the Basra and Baghdad provinces were combined under one civil commissioner. Political officers were placed in charge of districts, and administrative centers were established in the main towns of the provinces. They administered justice, maintained law and order, settled disputes between town and tribe, and attempted to pacify quarrelsome tribes. They also recruited labor for irrigation and flood control projects, collected supplies for the military, determined compensation for war damages, and protected communication lines. The political officers were, for the most part, young and inexperienced in either military or civil administration. Many were former military officers demobilized in 1918. They knew little of Iraq, its languages, law codes, customs, or traditions.

Although Britain had promised to create an indigenous Arab government under British "guidance," it continued to directly administer the provinces according to India Office policies and procedures. It abolished elected municipal councils that had been established by the Ottomans. Instead, the new political officers in the districts worked directly through local notables on whom they relied to maintain order. Justice was based at first on Indian and Turkish civil law codes and administered by the district political officer in tribal courts. After the war, the British drew up a tribal criminal and civil disputes regulation that gave the political officer authority to convene a tribal council (*majlis*) to settle disputes involving tribesmen according to tribal custom.[5] Tribal sheikhs designated by the British were empowered to settle all disputes with and between members of their tribe and charged with collecting taxes on behalf of the government. Turkish courts and laws replaced the Anglo-Indian civil code. The taxation code was Turkish; the Indian rupee was the official currency. The political officer relied on civil police constables recruited from Aden and India, as well as native soldiers, tribal levies, and local police recruited from the Arab tribes of the district. The tribal levies served as escorts, messengers, jailers, policemen, and soldiers. Although tribal leaders could find some satisfaction in this use of tradition, law as administered by the British Civil Administration came to represent a foreign, rigid, and inflexible system of control.[6]

Tribal Policy in Southern Iraq

Turkish tribal policy had been one of divide-and-rule — dealing with individual tribesmen and tribal subsections rather than the sheikhs and powerful confederations to weaken their traditional power and prestige. It also served to instigate intratribal and intertribal rivalries, all of which played to the benefit of the Turks. British policy aimed at restoring the power and prestige of a select group of sheikhs, considered "natural" leaders, who were officially accorded legitimate status after they submitted to British authority and agreed to work for the Civil Administration. Each sheikh was given responsibility to keep peace in his tribe, arrest wrongdoers, protect lines of communication, collect revenue, and during the war, cut off supplies to the Turks. In return, he received arms, agricultural loans, subsidies, the support of a prestigious British political adviser, and relief from taxes. Most importantly, the British established a land tenure policy based on Ottoman law and custom and excluded the tribes from national law. Regardless of how they acquired their leases to land, sheikhs and townsmen holding rights to property became virtual owners and landlords of tribal lands. Usages developed by the Ottomans — sheikhs as landlord and tribesmen as peasants — were thus legitimized by the British.

Turkish policy had aimed at weakening tribal leaders, who were obliged to protect their tribes, and bringing tribes under state control. Britain reversed this decline of tribal authority at the same time it tried to contain the growth of power among the more nationalist-minded, Turkish-educated city Arabs. The effect of British tribal policies was to weaken relations between sheikh and tribe. Sheikhs now came under British protection and not under tribal obligation. By restoring the sheikhs to a semi-feudal position of power and authority, the British believed they it would be easier to maintain stability and order and cut the high costs of administration. In reality, the sheikhs, endowed with new power and motivated by enhanced self-interest, reverted to autocratic authoritarianism and were increasingly alienated from their natural power base. Britain's tribal policy had a devastating long-term impact on Iraq's political development. It minimized interaction between

town and tribe and solidified these cleavages by consolidating and officially recognizing tribal customs. From 1918 to 1958 Iraq was legally under two laws: one for towns and another for tribes. It was the presence of the British military, however, especially the Royal Air Force (RAF) that kept town and tribe together.

Occupation and Revolt

British authority encountered increasing resistance after the end of the war. In Najaf and Karbala a group of Arab Sunni military officers and officials who had served under the Ottomans joined notables, clerics, and tribal sheikhs to defend Islam against the British as well as to oppose tighter British administrative control. The murder of a British officer in Najaf in 1919 led to swift retaliation in the form of arrests, executions, and a blockade of the city. Prominent Shi'i clerics and civilians began forming groups seeking independence and opposing British occupation, similar to Sunni Arab nationalist factions that had resurfaced. Sunni and Shi'i Arab communities formed links. While they may have disagreed over the desirable form of government and leadership — Islamic state or secular monarchy, Sultan or Faysal — many new members of these organizations had lost jobs and status and been marginalized by the imposition of direct British rule.

Beginning in 1919 the British Civil Administrator, Sir Arnold Wilson, introduced a series of measures aimed at sustaining British control over Iraq. He ordered a survey, or plebiscite, which asked prominent Iraqi notables what shape of government and constitution they preferred. The responses seemed to indicate support for a state comprised of three provinces under Arab rule, but with no consensus on the form of government or ruler. Wilson, who visited Basra and other southern towns, reported they preferred "Englishmen speaking Arabic" to French or American officers and that British political officers should continue their work. In Basra in particular, where most of the people interviewed were either landowners or others who had benefited from personally from British occupation, the majority favored direct British rule.[7] Tribal leaders in the rich agricultural regions on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers

asked for continuation of British rule. Wilson reported that 271 tribal sheikhs and notables signed a petition calling for the continuation of British rule and rejecting appointment of an Arab amir. Wilson quoted a sheikh as saying that "Ignorance is prevalent among us. . . . We do not want an Emir, because we are people of Irak, who are known as the most faithless and hypocritical nation."[8]

Wilson, the imperialist, exaggerated the degree of popular acquiescence to British control by submitting only those pledges supporting continued British control. Others in the Foreign Office, for example Gertrude Bell, concluded that Arab nationalism in Iraq was developing an unstoppable momentum. She wrote a secret report describing opposition to the plebiscite in the Shi'i shrine cities of Najaf, Karbala, Kazimayn, and the Middle Euphrates. Bell concluded that the British should work with the largely urban and Sunni nationalists to modernize the country and end what she viewed as the reactionary and obscurantist influence of the Shi'i clerics and their tribal followers. She advocated Arab self-rule under British tutelage.

The divisions among the British confused Iraqis. They rejected the Paris Peace Conference's recommendation for a League of Nations mandate for Iraq. The idea that Iraq would only gradually become an independent, self-governing nation-state under tutelage of a foreign power met with contempt; it was seen as ominous and patronizing. In Karbala a leading Shi'i cleric, Ayatollah Muhammad Taqi al-Shirazi, issued a legal opinion *(fatwa)* declaring that "one who is a Muslim has no right to elect and choose a non-Muslim to rule over Muslims" and said service in the British Administration was unlawful.[9] Religious leaders in the shrine cities threatened excommunication and exclusion from the mosque for anyone voting for continued British occupation. One Iraqi scholar wrote that participation in local municipal councils — the only political body allowing Iraqis a role — was "a comedy." These councils were headed and run by British officers; Iraqi council members had responsibility only for public health and sanitation, parks, trade, assistance to the poor, and road building. How, he asked, could supervising parks and roads train anyone for autonomy and political independence?[10] Merchants and other prominent secular notables, however, wrote declarations of support for continued British rule.

Beginning in the spring of 1919, Shi'i clerics and tribal sheikhs from the Middle Euphrates joined with Sunni nationalists who were unemployed civil servants, ex-soldiers for the Sharif, teachers, scholars, and lawyers. The movement was centered in Najaf and Baghdad. By May 1920, Sunni and Shi'i clerics and nationalists were holding mass meetings in Baghdad at Sunni and Shi'i mosques. They opposed British occupation and called for cooperation in the nationalist cause for Iraqi independence. They sent representatives to the Sharif in Mecca stating their support for one of his sons as king of an independent constitutional government.

Ramadan in Iraq is traditionally a month of pilgrimage to the shrine cities in addition to the prescribed fasting and prayer. Sunnis celebrate the birth of the Prophet Muhammad in a ceremony called the *mawlud*. Shi'is commemorate as well the birth and martyrdom of the Imam Husayn, the Prophet's grandson, on the 10th of Muharram in a service of ritual mourning called the *ta'ziyya*, a passion play reenacting the murder of Husayn at Karbala. Sunnis are unwelcome in Shi'i mosques and prayer houses since they are held responsible for the murder. When Ramadan began on May 17, 1920, huge demonstrations took place in the mosques of Baghdad. *Mawlud* celebrations and *ta'ziyya* commemorations were held in combined services that took place alternatively in Sunni and Shi'i mosques with members of each sect participating. Besides the intense religious ceremonies, patriotic speeches were made and poems recited appealing to Arab nationalism, honor, and Islam. Even Muslims who opposed the nationalist cause and Shi'i participation in government attended and helped defray expenses lest they be branded infidels and traitors.[11]

The spark for rebellion came one week later in Baghdad, when the British arrested and deported a young employee of the department of Muslim endowments *(waqf)* for reciting a fiery anti-British poem. Representatives of the Baghdad notables sought a meeting with Arnold Wilson, the Acting Civil Commissioner for Iraq. Wilson refused to meet with them unless a larger number of his own preselected Baghdadi notables were present. They met, with the notables appealing for creation of an elected national assembly to determine the shape of the nation state of Iraq. Wilson could not imagine Shi'i Arabs of southern Iraq

making common cause with the Sunni notables of Baghdad and Mosul. In this, he was wrong. He opposed any compromise that would enhance the power and prestige of Shi'i clerics and extend their authority to areas from which they had traditionally been excluded, e.g. government and military service. Moreover, Wilson opposed the innovative idea that numbers should now count in politics. In this, he underestimated the strength of the nationalist movement, the capabilities of the Iraqis for self-rule, and their ability to see in the new mandate a disguised imperialism.

In June 1920 the British Civil Administration announced that the League of Nations had granted Britain the mandate for Iraq "until such time as it can stand by itself," that a provisional committee drawn from former representatives in the Turkish parliament would be established, and that elections would be held for a constituent assembly. The provisional committee chose a newly returned exile and supporter of the returning Ottoman-trained military officers, Sayyid Talib, the Naqib of Basra, to be its president — the naqib is the leader of the descendants of the prophet Muhamad (sing. *sharif*; pl. *ashraf*) The British viewed this as a step toward creating the kind of national institutions called for in the mandate. They viewed the politicians from the old regime as the obvious people to consult.[12]

Fearing the consequences of prolonged British rule for their personal well-being and dreams of national self-rule, oppositionists in Najaf and Karbala began an armed revolt in June 1920. The clerics were dismayed by the British refusal to establish an independent Islamic government and manipulation of popular opinion opposed to continued British rule. They were joined by tribesmen discontented with the stringent tax system and forced labor, ex-Turkish and Iraqi officials disappointed by their failure to find jobs and status in the British-run Civil Administration, and nationalists angered by British suppression of the independence movement. Senior Sunni and Shi'i clerics issued a *fatwa* authorizing rebellion and began a brief period of unprecedented cooperation. The British responded with preemptive arrests of tribal sheikhs, and the revolt spread. By late July the rebels controlled the Middle Euphrates region and districts around Baghdad in a pattern to be replicated in 1991 following the end of the first Gulf War. Sensing weakness in the

central authority in Baghdad and opportunity in the southern revolt, the Kurds rose in southern Kurdistan. As in 1991, Kurds and rebellious Arabs operated in isolation from and ignorance of the other.

Opinion was divided among prominent Iraqis on the proper course of action to serve Iraq's interests and their own. Some Sunni notables and Shi'i tribal sheikhs looked to the British to secure existing privileges. They agreed to support Britain so long as Britain guaranteed them the same privileges they had held under the Turks. Others, fearing loss of autonomy, land tenure, and increased taxation, rejected any form of colonial tutelage. By June 1920 the revolt had spread from the mosques and streets of Baghdad to the tribes of the Middle Euphrates. Regional leaders raised money for the revolt and sent it to Baghdad and nationalist forces fighting the British in northwestern Iraq, but neither Baghdad nor the Sharifian Arabs had control over the actions of the sheikhs and clerics of the Middle Euphrates. They obtained reluctant support from Ayatollah Muhammad Taqi al-Shirazi in Najaf, who feared that the tribes lacked the means to fight the British.[13] Nevertheless, he gave the movement his support and urged leaders in Baghdad, Kazimayn, Najaf, Karbala, and the Middle Euphrates to demand the establishment of an Islamic government.[14] Representatives from Najaf and Karbala were sent to the local British political officer to petition for Iraq's independence free from all foreign intervention under an Arab king limited by a national legislative assembly.[15] When the British refused to accept the petitions, demonstrations broke out in Karbala, the British sent in troops and armored cars to suppress them, and revolt erupted in the cities of southern Iraq.

With the arrest of his son and deportation of a number of notables, Ayatollah Shirazi now issued a *fatwa* that "the time has come to take your rights."[16] In a meeting with the district's political officer, one prominent sheikh said, "You have offered us independence; we never asked for it, nor dreamed of such a thing till you put the idea into our heads. For hundreds of years, we have lived in a state as far removed from independence as it is possible to conceive: now we have asked for it, you imprison us."[17]

Provisional governments controlled by nationalists were established in the Middle Euphrates. They had the power to tax, supply the forces

fighting the British, supervise their districts, and interact with other districts. Trains were derailed, Arabs supporting the British were denied burial in the shrine cities, councils headed by radical clerics controlled Najaf and Karbala while tribes and notables controlled other cities and towns in the region.

In October Sir Percy Cox, now High Commissioner for Iraq, ended military rule, formulated a constitution in consultation with local elites, and established a provisional government with an Arab president and council of state. He selected as president an aging leader of Baghdad's Sunni community, Abd al-Rahman al- Kaylani, the Naqib of Baghdad, whose sole qualifications were his religious position, family background, and lack of political experience. This left Cox to exercise real authority. Council members came from traditional upper classes and were religious leaders, landowners, and tribal sheikhs who could be expected to support the British.

The revolt was quelled by November. The nationalists had run out of arms, ammunition, and supplies; the British, however, were receiving fresh troops and supplies. Aerial bombings by the British Royal Air Force were effective in leveling whole villages, and damaging the Great Mosque in Kufa. Karbala, Najaf, and Kufa surrendered in mid-October. With most of the leaders under arrest or in exile, the tribes and towns of southern Iraq submitted to British authority. The tenuous ties that had bound the fractious Iraqi Arabs of town and tribe were easily broken. Religious sects and political groups resumed their traditional sniping at each other. Moderate political figures had been alienated by the violent tribal disturbances, declarations of revolt, and uncontrollable clerics and tribes; but they, too, had told the British they opposed the mandate system, which was only a disguised form of annexation. According to Wilson's account, the nationalists told him that to accept anything less than independence would admit acceptance of similar schemes in Syria and Palestine.[18]

The rebellions failed, but the events of 1920 played an important role in the creation of an Iraqi national mythology and in shaping future British policy in Iraq. The insurgency itself lasted three months, affected one-third of the countryside, and cost Britain 400 lives and £40 million. For Iraqis, it became the symbol of nationalist pride and opposition to

colonial domination. Gertrude Bell wrote in the autumn of 1920 that "No one, not even His Majesty's Government, would have thought of giving the Arabs such a free hand as we shall now give them — as a result of the rebellion."[19]

For the British, the nine months of continuous military operations were a financial as well as human burden at a time when postwar sentiment was growing against outside adventures and widespread defense economies were being implemented. London preferred to draw down its military force in Iraq as quickly as possible. To achieve political and military economies, Britain decided to use air power and local levies for internal security operations and create a pliable government that would accept and implement British "advice."

The Aftermath of Occupation and Revolt

In late 1920 Britain appointed a new government in Baghdad, headed by a passive Arab Sunni religious official, and a council of ministers, both under British supervision. The new cabinet included representatives from all three formerly Ottoman provinces. Most members were prominent representatives of the Sunni Arab community, with a few Christians, Shi'i, and a Jew as ministers. Municipal councils were restored, with each unit, council, and ministry under a British adviser. Shi'is were noticeably absent from most government offices, partly because of their lack of administrative experience, partly because of prevailing anti-Shi'i attitudes among Sunni Arab notables in Baghdad, and mostly because of British wariness of Shi'i clericalism. The old order was reestablished — Ottoman-educated Sunni Arabs and arabized Kurds under foreign (now British) patronage dominated Iraq once again. Finally, Iraq's first army was formed, comprising 600 returning Ottoman-trained Iraqi army officers, most from Sunni Arab families.

Britain chose Faysal, the third son of the Sharif of Mecca as king. He was a known quantity to British and Arab observers, with no ties to any Iraqi political faction or region of the country — surely a plus in British eyes. Although he had been rejected by the French as king of "their" Syria, the British preferred him because of their history of co-

operation and assumed that they could manipulate him. Many Iraqis, however, regarded him as an interloper, despite his virtually impeccable Arab nationalist and Muslim credentials as a leader of the Arab Revolt and a descendent of the family of the Prophet Muhammad. As an Arab, he lacked Kurdish support; as a Sunni he lacked Shi'i favor; and as a Hashimite from Arabia he was rejected by many old Sunni noble families. Yet, he had the loyalty of Iraqis who had served in the Ottoman military and defected to the Arab Revolt. Faysal was "elected" by unanimous resolution on July 11, 1921 in the Council of State under Cox's direction. His government pledged to be constitutional, representative, democratic, and limited by the rule of law. A plebiscite managed by the British gave the King 96 percent of the popular vote — Kurds and pro-Turkish elements opposing Arab rule did not vote, nor did Shi'is in southern Iraq who wanted theocratic government.

Conclusion

As state builders, the British created an impressive array of institutions — a monarchy, a parliament, a Western-style constitution, a civil service, and an army. They established a government that would protect British interests at the least possible cost to the British taxpayer. To this end, historian Phebe Marr noted in her *The Modern History of Iraq*, they designed "a structure that was less a system of government than a means of control." "The British," she concluded, "created an imposing institutional façade, but put down few roots."[20] My favorite story, however, is one told by the Naqib al-Ashraf of Baghdad to Gertrude Bell about his visit with a sheikh of the Shammar.

"Are you a Damakrati?" says the Naqib. "Wallahi, no!" says the Shammari, slightly offended. "I'm not a Magrati. What is it?" "Well," says the Naqib enjoying himself thoroughly, "I'm Shaikh of the Damakratiyah." "I take refuge in God!" replied the Shaikh, feeling he had gone wrong somewhere. "If you are the shaikh of the Magratiyah, then I must be one of them, for I'm altogether in your service. But what is it?" "Damakratiyah," says the Naqib, "is equality. There is no big man and no little man, all are alike and equal." With which the bewildered Shammari plumped

onto solid ground. "God is my witness," said he, seeing his tribal authority slipping away from him, "if that's it I'm not a Magrati."[21]

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Endnotes

1. Proponents of the Hashimite plan included Prime Minster Lloyd George, Foreign Secretary Lord Arthur Balfour, T. E. Lawrence, and Oriental Secretary to Percy Cox, Gertrude Bell.
2. India's Muslims opposed the Arab Revolt led by forces loyal to the Sharif of Mecca; they viewed the revolt as a revolution against the authority of Islam and an attack on Muslim unity. Their perceptions shaped the views of the India Office towards the ambitions of Sharif Husayn and Arab nationalism.
3. Sir Arnold T. Wilson, *Loyalties: Mesopotamia, 1914–1917*, (London: Oxford University, 1930), 207. Wilson described the making of a civil administrator for Iraq as "a tale of great deeds by land and river, sea and air, of suffering and endurance and of faithfulness unto death . . . in pursuit of objects dimly seen, and of aims but darkly understood." Ibid., p. xiii.
4. Cox as Chief Political Officer reported to the General Officer Commanding the British Forces, who was responsible for both civil and military government in the occupied territories. In 1917, the Civil Administration was reorganized and Cox named Civil Commissioner, reporting directly to the British Government rather than the military commander. In 1918 Cox was named High Commissioner for Persia and Wilson became Acting Civil Commissioner for Iraq. Wilson's belief that the Arabs were incapable of self-rule, that a tutorial and imperial role was appropriate for Iraq, and his determination to incorporate Iraqis into government gradually would lay the groundwork for mistrust and rebellion.
5. The Tribal Civil and Criminal Disputes Regulation, which was based on the Government of India Act, was adopted in July 1918; it would later be encoded into the 1924 constitution.

6. The number of British officers serving in the "temporary" Iraqi government grew at Arab expense. In 1917, 59 British officers served in the civil administration; by 1920 their number had grown to 1,022, with Arabs holding less than 4 percent of the senior grades. In 1923 there were 569 British advisers; by 1931 the number had shrunk to 260.
7. A. T. Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917–1920: A Clash of Loyalties* (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), 112–113.
8. *The Times* (London), December 16, 1919, 13; Philip Ireland, *Iraq: A Study in Political Development* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), 167.
9. Shirazi's son, described by the British as "a bigoted Muslim," organized anti-British forces in Najaf in early 1920. Abd al-Razzaq al-Hasani, *Al-Thawra al-iraqiyya al-kubra* (Sidon, 1952), 34.
10. Ibid., 28.
11. Elizabeth Burgoyne, *Gertrude Bell: From Her Personal Papers 1914–1926* (London: Ernest Benn, 1961), 2: 142–143; Hasani, 43; F.O. E8915, Memorandum of a conversation with Sulaiman Faidi by Gertrude Bell, June 13, 1920, enclosure in Telegram of the Secretary of State for India to the Foreign Office, July 26, 1920.
12. Hasani, 52–53; letter of July 11, 1920, in Burgoyne, 2: 146–147; editorial in the *The Times* (London), August 16, 1920, p. 9.
13. Ibid., 133–144.
14. Ibid., 57–58; Fariq al-Muzhir Fir'awn, *Al-Haqa'iq al-nasi'a fi al-thawra al-iraqiyya sanat 1920 wa-nata'ijuha* (Baghdad, 1952), 108.
15. Ibid., 59; Fir'awn, 109–110.
16. Hasani, 64; Fir'awn, 195.
17. Wilson, *Mesopotamia*, 295–296.
18. Hasani, *Tarikh al-Iraq al-siyasi al-hadith* (Sidon, 1946), 2: 126–127; Wilson, *Mesopotamia*, 267–268.
19. Letter to Hugh Bell, September 19, 1920, in Burgoyne, 2:164.
20. Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985), 29.
21. Florence Bell, *The Letters of Gertrude Bell* (London: Ernest Benn, 1927), 2: 618.