

## Britain's Policy toward Kurdistan\* at the End of the First World War

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**Abstract :** *In the aftermath of the First World War, Britain aimed to create an autonomous Kurdish state – or states – in the northern Mesopotamia to be governed under its protection. It therefore experimented with various different methods between the years 1918 and 1920. All those attempts were proven futile. Using mainly the British and Ottoman archival material, it has been inquired how the British authorities had developed the plan for Kurdistan, how they tried to implement it in the northern Iraq (then the Mosul vilayet) and the southeastern Anatolia respectively, and how they failed. The reasons for Britain's failure had been discussed. After the failure, new policy options had been given consideration among which the debates on retreat came into prominence. The diplomatic negotiation process between the allies and the legal arrangements on Kurdistan that took place in the Treaty of Sevres was of a nature of keeping up appearances. The Kurdistan plan, though failed in 1920s, gained ground in the following years as the international conditions became more convenient. As the Kurdish problem has once again become an issue of worldwide concern, it will be interesting to see how the British government dealt with this complicated problem when it first emerged, some ninety years ago*

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\* The word “Kurdistan” is not used as a political term, but as a historically defined geo-cultural region

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## Introduction

102 Britain's strategic priority in Mesopotamia before the First World War was to safeguard the Persian Gulf. The Mosul vilayet (today's Northern Iraq), mostly inhabited by Kurds, was not included in this strategy. Thus, when the Allies began to bargain for the spoils of Ottoman territory in March 1915, Mosul was not given much consideration. The under-secretary of state for India, Arthur Hirtzel argued that Britain should take only the Basra vilayet in Mesopotamia and that the Baghdad vilayet should be autonomous with a British administration. Mosul vilayet should not be included in the British zone of influence, as its Kurdish population would raise problems. Were Britain to take over Mosul, it would have to assure the Armenians' safety against Kurdish attacks.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, the interdepartmental committee established to study the question pointed out that in Mesopotamia, defensible frontiers would best be found in the hills north of Mosul. The committee drew attention to the fact that the acquisition of Mosul's valuable oilfields by a foreign power would cause damage to British interests. Yet, the possibility that Britain might border on Russia, which had claims over Eastern Anatolia, was a serious problem. To avoid this, the Mosul vilayet was to be included in the French sphere of influence to constitute a buffer zone between the British and Russian zones. The Sykes-Picot Agreement was arranged on this basis in 1916.<sup>2</sup>

The British campaign in Mesopotamia started in November 1914 and ceased once it was considered that all military objectives had been reached, that is, after the conquest of Baghdad in March 1917. However, when it became obvious that Russia would withdraw from the war after the October Revolution, the British reconsidered the Sykes-Picot Agreement. The interdepartmental committee set up for this purpose suggested that Britain should directly control Mesopotamia, and expand its sphere of influence by shifting the border drawn between the British and French zones to the north.<sup>3</sup> It was no longer necessary to leave Mosul to France, since Russia's withdrawal had dispelled worries of a shared border. Nevertheless, as there was no reason to suppose that France would be disposed to amend the Sykes-Picot Agreement, the government decided not to conduct military operations in Mesopotamia to occupy the Mosul vilayet. Therefore, the number of the troops in Mesopotamia was reduced. The British civil commissioner in Baghdad, Percy Cox was called to Cairo in April 1918 for discussions, after which he was appointed to Tehran as ambassador. The Mesopotamia expeditionary force commander, General William Marshall went to India in July 1918. By all appearances, the British campaign in Mesopotamia was over.<sup>4</sup>

But, soon events took a new turn. As oil increasingly became a vital substance during the course of the war, the parties set down new rules to safeguard their deposits. Allied powers established an oil council to ensure coordination in the distribution and

use of oil in February 1918, when oil shortages reached dangerous levels upon the start of German U-boat campaign. In May, oil was rationed in England. The weight of oil on political and strategic evaluations increased accordingly. As a result, the oil lobby in London began to make intensive efforts to ensure the occupation of Mosul's oilfields. Admiral Edmond Slade's report, prepared in the name of Admiralty on 29 July 1918, constituted the turning point in Britain's Mosul policy. Slade indicated that in order to meet the Empire's increasing oil requirements, Britain had to take the Iranian and Mesopotamian oil pools under its direct control. After lengthy discussions, the government accepted the principle that Mosul must be occupied for strategic reasons, and thus, the British army resumed its campaign in Mesopotamia on October 23. The weak Ottoman Sixth Army withdrew without resistance. On 6 December, five weeks after the ceasefire had officially entered into force, the Mosul vilayet was completely under British occupation.<sup>5</sup> Now Britain encountered the Kurdish problem.

### **Britain's Plan for Creating a Kurdistan**

In a memorandum addressing Mark Sykes, Arnold Toynbee proposed that if an Arab government with British administrative assistance were to be established in Mesopotamia, the natural corollary would be an autonomous Kurdistan, likewise assisted by Britain. Such a Kurdistan, which would function as a buffer zone, would include countries from the south of the Lesser Zab River up to the line, wherever that might be drawn, of the Armenian frontier.<sup>6</sup> Sykes also believed in the need of an autonomous Kurdistan; not because of his concern for the security of an Arab state in Mesopotamia, but because the creation of an Armenian state depended on it. He argued that there should be a Cilician Armenia under French tutelage; a Kurdo-Armenia in Eastern Anatolia extending from the Black Sea to Siirt; and an autonomous Kurdistan to the south, including Urumia in Western Iran and the Kurdish regions of the Mosul vilayet.<sup>7</sup>

The Foreign Office, in a memorandum dated 21 November 1918, extended a reminder that Britain had pledged King Hussein that parts of the territory south of the line running west and east from Jazira on the Tigris would be 'independent' and 'Arab'. However, Russian withdrawal from the war meant that Britain had a free hand in the parts north of that line. The Foreign Office called attention to the fact that Britain, since it possessed Mesopotamia, should have an exclusive position in Kurdistan.<sup>8</sup> The India Office prepared a note supporting the Foreign Office's memorandum, pointing out that the Kurdish question was closely bound up with that of Armenia and that no settlement was likely to prove satisfactory or permanent unless some *modus vivendi* between the Kurds and Armenians could be devised.<sup>9</sup> There was a clear consensus upon the creation of a Kurdish state under British protection. Yet, no one knew how and under which conditions this could be realized. Two names led the discussions: Wilson and Noel.

Acting as civil commissioner in Baghdad, Arnold Wilson thought that the British zone of influence must definitely include the mountains of the Mosul vilayet in order to assure a satisfactory border for Mesopotamia. He maintained that the Kurds, who lived in valleys lying between vast mountain ranges, possessed little sense of unity or loyalty other than to the particular tribe to which they belonged and did not have the ability to govern themselves. Thus, a Kurdish state could only be realized with the effective support and assistance of an external power. In order to win the confidence of the Kurdish people, who desired no connection with an Arab state, it would be useful to retain the tribal system and to establish a tribal confederation on the east, and a belt of little autonomous states to the north of Mosul. However, Wilson himself was skeptical about the possibility or permanence of this method. In his opinion, since the Kurds were not in favor of autonomy or a confederation, it would in the end be necessary to return to the traditional Turkish policy of leaving the Kurdish tribes to their own devices.<sup>10</sup>

The political officer at Suleymaniya, Edward Noel led the opposing view. He felt great sympathy towards the Kurds and believed them to have the ability to govern themselves. As he was aware of the Kurds' violently anti-Arab predisposition, he argued against their inclusion in an Arab state. Like Wilson, Noel was also aware of the geographical and social conditions, which prevented the Kurds from uniting. Thus, he offered three Kurdish polities: Southern, Central and Western Kurdistan with the capitals of Sulaymaniya, Mosul, and Diyarbekir respectively. Central Kurdistan, which was thought to be a Kurdo-Christian state, would be roughly separated from Southern Kurdistan with the Greater Zab River, and from Western Kurdistan with the Mardin Mountains. The outer borders of the three polities would be drawn according to ethnic lines. Noel believed that, if an independent Kurdish state (or states) could not be created, then the most appropriate solution for the Kurds would be to leave them under the Turkish administration with wide autonomy.<sup>11</sup>

In the high council meeting of the Paris Peace Conference on 30 January 1919, the prime minister of Britain, David Lloyd George said the draft resolution should add Kurdistan among the areas to be taken from Turkey.<sup>12</sup> In a diplomatic statement given to the peace conference on 7 February 1919 on behalf of Britain, it was stated that it would not be possible to include all Kurdish tribes and settlements in a Kurdish state without violating the integrity of Iran and nor would the Kurds, if united, be capable of governing themselves. Nevertheless, it was suggested that it might be feasible to create a tribal autonomy in Southern Kurdistan. Although the inhabitants of this region were of a different tribal identity from those of Mesopotamia, they were geographically and economically linked to Mesopotamia. Therefore, it was concluded, they should be placed under the mandate of the same power.<sup>13</sup>

Wilson was invited to London to present his proposals before the interdepartmental conference on Middle Eastern affairs held under the presidency of the lord president of the council, George Curzon on 17 April 1919. Replying to

questions put by the participants, he said that he did not think it realistic to establish a united Kurdish emirate. Any combination of Urfa and Diyarbekir with Sulaymaniya was, in his opinion, out of the question, since there was no connection between the Kurds of these areas. Thus, the most appropriate solution was that the Mosul vilayet should be a part of Mesopotamia, leaving a fringe of autonomous Kurdish states around its borders. Among such states might be Sulaymaniya, Rowanduz, Amadiya and Jazira. These would be governed by local chieftains along with British political advisers. Wilson added that it was not deemed likely that these autonomous states would unite at any time in the future. To the contrary, they were more likely to drift even further apart, unless they were united by a wave of pan-Islamic sentiment. The committee authorized Wilson to create a fringe of autonomous states to be led by Kurdish chiefs acting under the guidance of British political advisers.<sup>14</sup>

Upon the India Office's request, Wilson presented his opinions within the framework of a general scheme in June. He repeated that the Mosul vilayet must be included in Mesopotamia for both economic and strategic reasons as well as for security concerns. He suggested that the Turco-Persian frontier form the eastern limit of the area to be recognized as Kurdistan and that the southern boundary should run along latitude thirty-seven up to Birejik on the Euphrates. Then, it should follow the northern boundaries of the vilayets of Kharput, Bitlis and Van. These, together with Diyarbekir vilayet, where the Armenians were only a very small minority, could form a Kurdish state under British auspices. The United States might guarantee the Armenians' prospects of national development in the Trabzon and Erzurum vilayets. The only alternative to this scheme, according to Wilson, was the re-establishment of Turkish authority over all six vilayets. Nevertheless, he clearly expressed that he regarded the extension of Britain's commitments to Northern Kurdistan as unrealistic.<sup>15</sup>

Noel prepared an alternative plan straightaway. In his view, it would be better to wait before drawing the border between the Kurdish and Armenian states because of friction between the Kurds and Armenians. He suggested a compromise for reconciling Kurdish claims with those of the Armenians, which included the collection of six Eastern vilayets under one mandatory power, and their sub-divisions into provinces or zones, of which the southern would be exclusively Kurdish, the northern exclusively Armenian and the central zone mixed. Each zone would have its own local administration or self-government, which would be subject to some independent center, either outside the six vilayets or in the central zone.<sup>16</sup> Many in the British administration supported Noel's suggestion. The British high commissioner in Istanbul, Admiral Arthur Calthorpe and the British high commissioner for Egypt, General Edmund Allenby opposed Wilson's plan because it disregarded ethnicity. Allenby took Noel's plan one step further, arguing that it should be expanded to include the Kurdish regions of the Mosul vilayet. Otherwise, he claimed, a sort of Kurdish irredentism would be created, which would cause regional unrest in the future.<sup>17</sup>

While discussions deepened on the theoretical level, some challenges complicated matters. First, France opposed the plan. In Paris, Georges Picot refused Mark Sykes' suggestion to create an independent Kurdish emirate including the Mosul vilayet. He said that such a plan would be contrary to French interests, and that it would sacrifice the Chaldean and Nestorian people who had been traditionally protected by France.<sup>18</sup> Second, the Allies' insistent demand that an Armenian state be created over predominantly Kurdish areas was unacceptable to the Kurds. It was clear that the Kurds would not want to be placed under Armenian rule. The Kurdistan plan required gaining Kurdish support; gaining Kurdish support required a modification of the Armenian policy; this was not deemed possible.

Besides, the question of where the British zone's northern border would be drawn brought forward the problem of access to the sea. If Diyarbakir and Urfa were included in the British zone, access to the sea would be secured through a railway via Alexandretta. If not, it would be achieved through the Tigris River via Baghdad and Basra, disabling the Mediterranean option. The latter option was more convenient for Britain commercially, as well as politically, since Alexandretta was located in the French sphere of influence. The inclusion of Diyarbakir and Urfa in the British zone would entail a definite change in Mosul's status, because then the British sphere of influence would include numerous Kurdish population, which would make it imperative to establish a state of Kurdistan including the Kurdish regions of the Mosul vilayet. This would cause conflict with Arab nationalists who wanted the Mosul vilayet to be a part of the Arab state. In fact, Emir Faisal clearly stated in a letter he wrote to the British General Command that his support for Britain depended on the precondition that Mosul be included in the Arab state to be established in Mesopotamia.<sup>19</sup>

On 9 August 1919, Britain signed an agreement with the Iranian government by which it undertook to respect the independence and integrity of this country. This undertaking was contrary to the idea of a united Kurdistan, since it was not possible to establish such a state, with a homogenous Kurdish population, without endangering the territorial integrity of Iran.<sup>20</sup> It was inconceivable that the Iranian government would remain unresponsive to the establishment of an independent Kurdistan state just beyond its borders while experiencing serious problems with its own Kurds.

### **Implementation of the Plan**

Direct occupation of the mountainous areas populated by the Kurds of the Mosul vilayet was risky in military terms due to the lack of transportation and communication facilities, so it was decided to assert indirect control over these regions with the help of intelligence experts. These experts, who had been specially trained to apply imperialist policies, were people of great experience and talent, who had lived in the region for a long time, knew the local population well, spoke their language,

were familiar with their traditions and were able to establish direct contact not only with tribal leaders such as aghas, sheikhs, sayyads but also with the general public. Amongst them were names such as Noel, Leachman, Soane, Hay, Longrigg and Edmonds. Wilson, who was also closely acquainted with the region, appointed these experts to different Kurdish centers as political officers.<sup>21</sup>

On the east of the vilayet, the population was almost entirely Kurdish. Their dealings with the Christians were moderate. On the north, where the population was mixed and interaction between the Muslim and Christian communities was high, Christian-phobia among Muslims was widespread. Accordingly, British officers carried out different methods in the respective regions. They cooperated with local tribal chiefs in the east, gave them support, and strengthened their established order. The chiefs were enjoined to ensure compliance with the orders of British executives and collect taxes for remuneration. In the north, British executives tried to agitate and benefit from disagreements among tribes. The method was to back one of the conflicting tribes – naturally, the stronger one – against the others and to ensure order in the region by means of reliable local leaders who were regularly paid.<sup>22</sup>

### ***The East: Sheikh Mahmud Experiment***

Sheikh Mahmud of the Berzenji tribe had contacted the British as early as 1917 with the aim to ensure their support to establish his power over the Kurds. His expectations coincided with British intentions and thus he was appointed governor of Sulaymaniya. The duties entrusted to Sheikh Mahmud were to keep order, ensure the safety of agricultural and commercial activities, and collect taxes regularly in the name of British authorities in Baghdad.<sup>23</sup>

Wilson paid a visit to Sulaymaniya on 1 December 1918. There he held a meeting with the slogan 'Kurdistan for the Kurds' which was attended by approximately 60 of the leading chiefs. Two documents were drawn up in the meeting. In the first, it was stated that the British government's intention in the war was the liberation of Eastern peoples from Turkish oppression and to grant them assistance to establish their independence. The chiefs, "as the representatives of the people of Kurdistan," asked the British government to take them under British protection and to attach them to Iraq. They also requested that the civil commissioner of Mesopotamia send them a representative. In the second document, which was also signed by Wilson, all chiefs present at the meeting accepted the leadership of Sheikh Mahmud. He would have Britain's moral support in controlling the region between Diyala and the Greater Zab on behalf of the British government, whose orders he undertook to obey. All attendees approved of the British protection but a considerable number of them were not willing to come under the Arab administration that was to be established in Baghdad. However, so reduced were the Kurds by poverty and hardship that they were ready to sign any document or make any statement to achieve tranquility and food.<sup>24</sup>

Noel proceeded to implement the instructions immediately and established the confederation of tribes suggested by Wilson. The system was completely based on a feudal organization. All the Kurdish chiefs were appointed to each of the minor sub-divisions according to their strength to work under the guidance of British political officers. Turkish and Arab officers were removed and replaced by Kurds and Kurdish was made the official language. The scheme was put into practice in an area extending from Halabja to Rowanduz. Noel was so confident of the scheme that he advised that the area of application be extended as far as Van. He believed that this was the only method to fulfill the national desires of the Kurds while preserving their characteristic features. Sheikh Mahmud, for his part, saw in Kurdish autonomy an opportunity of furthering his own advancement and assuming the leadership and control of the other tribal chiefs. A more democratic organization model excluding the tribal system was not desirable for him, as it would not satisfy his personal ambitions. In any case, such an organization was not possible within the actual social structure of the region.<sup>25</sup>

In a few weeks, it became apparent that Sheikh Mahmud had no support amongst local people. Nearly all the tribes around Sulaymaniya opposed him. The settled and educated population of the cities found it insulting to be ruled by a tribal chief from the mountains. Both the tribesmen and the townsmen expressed their wish to enter directly under the British rule. It was soon accepted that a method of administration based on tribal patterns could not be coherent or sustainable. Sheikh Mahmud treated his own relatives and tribe members with favor and neglected the other members of the community. It was also recognized that too much power in the hands of a man of his character was bound to lead to injustice and the oppression of the people. Besides, he did not act in concert with the British authorities. He believed his power to be based on his personal prestige, while in fact it depended on the arms, munitions and monthly allowance of 10,000 rupees provided by Britain.<sup>26</sup>

Steps were therefore taken to restrict Sheikh Mahmud's authority to Sulaymaniya and to prevent his retaining an oppressive power over tribes who neither supported nor desired his rule. Koisanjak, Rowanduz, Halabja and other centers were separated from Sheikh Mahmud's 'Kurdistan' and linked directly to Baghdad. Eventually, Ely Soane, who was known to be the strongest critic of the plan, replaced Noel.<sup>27</sup>

In May 1919, Sheikh Mahmud suddenly brought in a band of supporters from across the Iranian frontier, imprisoned the British officers in Sulaymaniya, cut all communications, and proclaimed the independence of Kurdistan. This sudden and unexpected outbreak astounded Baghdad. Wilson, reporting the issue to London, underlined the need for urgent suppression, because that the tribes' wait-and-see attitude would be converted into movement unless Britain immediately suppressed Sheikh Mahmud; that unless promptly suppressed, the outbreak would be emulated by the Kurds of Iran and Mosul as well as of Mesopotamia; that it was crucial to keep Sulaymaniya under effective control, given its peculiar position vis-à-vis Baghdad and Mosul vilayets and Persian Kurdistan.<sup>28</sup>

British forces advanced on two lines, joining 17 June at the Bazyan Pass, where the battle was fought and ended in the rout of Sheikh Mahmud's forces and his own capture, severely wounded. Many of the Kurdish tribes fought against him on the side of the British. Sheikh Mahmud was sent to Baghdad and sentenced to death, but the commander-in-chief commuted this to ten years' banishment in India. The administration was reorganized under the direct control of Soane.<sup>29</sup>

### *The North: Lasting Unrest*

Wilson intended to benefit from Sheikh Ahmed of Barzan, Ahmed Faik Bedrkhan and especially Sayid Taha of Nihri to create the fringe of autonomous Kurdish states in the north. However, the Kurds' antagonism against Christians weakened the feasibility of Wilson's plan. This antagonism became apparent when a military operation was carried out to resettle Assyrians who were displaced from their homes in Hakkari and Urumia after they had taken the offensive by rising in arms against the Ottomans at Russian instigation in 1915. In March 1919, two mercenary Assyrian battalions were charged to clear certain areas in the Amadiya district. They took drastic steps to evacuate the Kurdish villages. This initiative was tantamount to an open invitation for rebellion. Thus, as expected, an anti-Christian rising in the north of the Mosul vilayet broke out in April 1919.<sup>30</sup>

Sheikh Abdalrahman of Shirnakh incited the Goyan tribe to retaliate against Assyrian operations by attacking Assyrian villages on the border area. On 4 April, a British political officer was murdered at Zakho. Reprisals by ground forces were proven abortive when the attackers escaped out of the Mosul vilayet border. Seeking to ingratiate itself with the British administration, the Sublime Porte offered to help punish the escapees. General Allenby in Cairo and General Marshall in Baghdad asked Admiral Calthorpe to accept the Turkish offer. However, Calthorpe declined, arguing that it was the Turks who had instigated the rebellion, and that it would create the false presumption that Britain would retreat from the region, leaving it once again to the Turks.<sup>31</sup>

As the counterinsurgency campaign failed, incidents rapidly spread out onto a wide area. The Barwari and Guli tribes joined the Goyan tribe. British mail and military convoys were attacked one after another. In July, three British officers were murdered in Amadiya, whereupon the settlement scheme was postponed and the troops were withdrawn. However, the rebellion continued in the following months with the inclusion of the Barzan, Zibar, Surchi and Soran tribes. In November, a political officer, an officer and two gendarmes were killed in an ambush near Bira Kapra village. Meanwhile, the rebels looted Aqra town. By the end of 1919, realizing that it was impossible to cope with the Kurdish rebels by the use of regular army troops, Britain resorted to aerial bombardment. It had the advantage of immediate impact and economy of cost. Inevitably, it also caused heavy civilian casualties among the Kurds, which heightened their enmity against Britain. Yet the situation

was considerably kept down in the following months. The insurgency was finally suppressed in the first months of 1920. British officers were confident that the Turks provoked the incidents,<sup>32</sup> which was probably true.<sup>33</sup>

Wilson intended to use Sayid Taha, to reestablish British authority in the region. Taha was offered the post of governor over the Shamdinan, Rowanduz and Dasht-i Harir districts on behalf of Britain in return for an allowance. He made four stipulations: first, that a general amnesty be proclaimed; second, that the country be organized in autonomous groups and that no attempt be made to set up a single chief in Kurdistan; third, that the Kurds not be placed under Armenian or Nestorian domination; and fourth, that the British government provide material assistance. These conditions were acceptable for Britain; however, Taha did not have the strength to undertake this responsibility without the support of Simko, the powerful leader of the Shikak tribe in Western Iran. Britain was not inclined to meddle in Iranian affairs, and did not trust Simko, who had murdered the Assyrian Patriarch, Benjamin Mar Shimun. Simko, for his part, suspected that Britain was exploiting Taha to create an autonomous Assyrian state in the region. Eventually, the plan ended in failure.<sup>34</sup>

### *The Kurdish Regions of Anatolia*

With the purpose of creating an autonomous Kurdistan in the north of Mesopotamia within its own sphere of influence, Britain occupied the stations on the Baghdad Railway line. In November 1918, Wilson presented and recommended a plan to the India Office to send Noel to the Kurdish regions of Anatolia. His task would be to obtain information about Turco-Kurdish relations in the area, so that the British government would have first-hand evidence to be used at the peace conference. Once London's approval was granted, Noel left Baghdad for Nisibin on 1 April 1919. For three months, he toured various centers in Southeast Anatolia from where he dispatched several telegraphs reflecting his personal belief that the Kurds possessed strong national aspirations.<sup>35</sup>

Noel reported that anti-British agitation was due to the fear of a policy of retaliation against Muslims for their massacre of Christians. He suggested that a general amnesty be proclaimed to the Kurds for all murders committed at the instigation, or on the direct orders of the Turks, and that a formal declaration should be made that nothing would be demanded of them other than the restitution of immovable property.<sup>36</sup> The proposal found wide acceptance among the British authorities in Istanbul and Baghdad; but London did not agree, as it would cause a radical change in Britain's Armenian policy. The British foreign secretary, Arthur Balfour declared that the Kurds should be advised to remain quiet and desist from agitation pending a decision from the peace conference, where their claims were known. He suggested that Noel should be instructed to give private assurances that no vindictive policy would be pursued and that the peace conference would not forget Kurdish grievances.<sup>37</sup> Eventually, Noel was directed to give private assurances

on the lines he had proposed with respect to Kurds within the areas under his charge. Wilson made an announcement with similar assurances for the Kurds within the Mosul vilayet.<sup>38</sup>

In May, Calthorpe suggested to make use of influential Kurdish elements to calm the situation in Kurdistan, indicating that the Ottoman government was prepared to allow Sayid Abdulkadir to go to the region on a pacification mission. Wilson supported the offer, stating that the appointment of Kurds as governors and military commanders in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia might be helpful. However, he expressed the opinion that Abdulkadir had been absent from Kurdistan for too long and would therefore not be of great use. He thought that the Bedrkhan brothers might be more effective and suggested that they should meet Noel at Aleppo and proceed with him on a mission to Kurdistan.<sup>39</sup> The Ottoman government, which was reluctant to accept this offer, gave in after negotiating with the Kurdish elite, even though its incertitude had not been absolved.<sup>40</sup> In fact, regardless of who would be appointed to this task, it was questionable whether they would have any influence over the local people. Above all, it would be naive to think that the Turkish nationalist leader, Mustafa Kemal Pasha, who deeply suspected Britain's motives and was keeping Anatolia under control, would allow the appointment of Kurdish governors and commanders.

Anyway in July 1919, upon official approval of London, the Kurdish mission in Istanbul went to Aleppo. In September, Noel left Aleppo for Malatya in the company of two members of the Bedrkhan family, Kamuran and Jeladet.<sup>41</sup> When they arrived at Malatya, Ali Galip, governor of Elaziz, who had been assigned by the Istanbul government to attack the national congress organized in Sivas, was gathering the city's local Kurdish tribes. This gave rise to suspicions that Ali Galip, Noel, and the Bedrkhans were working in close collaboration. The plot failed through the rapid and effective intervention of Mustafa Kemal Pasha. Ali Galip, Noel and his followers, against whom Mustafa Kemal issued an arrest warrant, escaped to Aleppo with great difficulty.<sup>42</sup>

For British authorities, this was an unfortunate coincidence. They argued that they had neither knowledge of, nor a role in this plot.<sup>43</sup> In a letter Mustafa Kemal Pasha submitted to General James Harbord, who was in Eastern Anatolia on behalf of the United States government to investigate the possibility of undertaking an Armenian mandate, he stated that Britain provoked the Kurds in order to establish an independent Kurdistan under its protection. He indicated that British officers were exploiting Kurdish notables such as the Bedrkhans to instigate a fraternal fight between Turks and Kurds.<sup>44</sup> He also mentioned a secret agreement signed between the Sublime Porte and British authorities in Istanbul on 12 September 1919, by which the former had undertaken not to oppose the creation of an independent Kurdistan.<sup>45</sup> Harbord was convinced by this letter. His chief of staff, General Frank McCoy, told the Britain's chargé d'affaires in Istanbul, Thomas Hohler, that he agreed with the allegation that Britain occupied Urfa and Mosul in contradiction with armistice

provisions to create an independent Kurdistan. Hohler objected, arguing that the occupation was in accordance with article seven of the Armistice Treaty of Mudros concerning the protection of Christians from massacres. As for Noel's activities, he repudiated the accusation that involved British government in the plot.<sup>46</sup> The Noel - Ali Galip event and its results were severely criticized in various layers of the British administration. It was said that the event had sharpened Turkish concerns about the British-supported Kurdish movement, that it had strengthened the position of nationalist leaders in Anatolia, that the peace process was negatively affected, and that Britain's prestige was damaged. Eventually, Curzon asked the secretary of state for India, Edwin Montagu, to call Noel back from office.<sup>47</sup>

### **The Plan Fails**

For the fulfillment of the Kurdistan plan, a Kurdish leader – or leaders – needed to be found. However, it was soon realized that there were no such leaders either in the region or in the Diaspora. All the local leaders desired autonomy. What they intended was the continuance of the tribal system under the protection of a foreign power. To start with, Sheikh Mahmud and Sheikh Taha were considered as leaders of the Kurdish states to be established in Sulaymaniya and Rowanduz. Sheikh Mahmud seemed to have an advantage over his rivals, as he was the religious chief of the Kadiri tariqah, but the Kurds were mostly related to the Nakshibendi tariqah, and were likely to turn to their own sheikhs. He failed to use the opportunity that he had been extended, as has already been mentioned. Sayid Taha was the grandson of the nineteenth century legendary Kurdish leader Sheikh Ubeydullah; however, he had been in prison in Russia for many years, and had thus lost his influence in Kurdistan. He tried to regain his power by acting together with Simko of the Shikak tribe who was in Iran. Britain, as known, was reluctant to interfere in Iranian affairs. In the north, Sheikh Mahmud of the Milli tribe was contemplated as a leader of the autonomous state to be created in the Botan region; however, he had no weight there. The influential figure in Botan was Sheikh Abdalrahman of Shirnakh, who stood by the Turks, to the extent that he led all anti-British rebellions to the north of the Mosul vilayet. Most important, it was clear that neither of these figures harbored feelings of national Kurdish identity, and neither had the support of the Kurdish people other than those belonging to their own tribes.<sup>48</sup>

Meanwhile, some Kurdish opportunists living in the Diaspora were trying to benefit personally from Britain's Kurdistan plans. They contacted the British authorities and made every effort to win their favor to obtain an effective position in the Kurdish state they hoped to see established. Sayid Abdulkadir and the members of the Kurdish League in Istanbul visited British dragoman Andrew Ryan in December 1918 and supplicated for the establishment of an autonomous or independent Kurdistan under Britain's protection. Calthorpe telegraphed the report

of the interview to London, stating that the territorial demands of Kurds conflicted with those of Armenians and a problem was likely to occur in the future if they were not reconciled. Sayid Abdulkadir visited British authorities in Istanbul two more times in April and May. He was the most effective figure among the Kurdish community in Istanbul; however, he had no influence in Kurdistan. Personal rivalry between himself and his nephew Sayid Taha was weakening his hand. Besides, the British did not find him reliable enough because of his close relations with the Ottoman government. As he could not find the support he expected from the British, Sayid Abdulkadir approached the Turks and tried to obtain a pledge of autonomy from them. An inconclusive meeting was held between Ottoman authorities and the representatives of the Kurdish League in August 1919.<sup>49</sup>

Sureyya Bedrkhan visited British officers in Cairo on behalf of an organization named Committee of Kurdish Independence in Egypt in January 1919 to appeal for British assistance to form an independent Kurdistan. Cairo sent the petition to the British delegation in Paris, where Sykes mentioned it to his French counterpart, Picot, and received a negative answer.<sup>50</sup> After Noel's second mission in Anatolia ended in a fiasco, the British authorities in Baghdad brought Kamuran Bedrkhan to the northwestern border of the Mosul vilayet, which his family had dominated for decades until the 1850s. They tested his influence and saw that the name Bedrkhan had utterly lost its sway. A similar test was applied to a family member of the Babanzades, the hereditary rulers of Sulaymaniya. The result was the same. Having settled in Baghdad long ago, the Babanzades were now forgotten in Sulaymaniya. It was clear that to live outside of Kurdistan and to lose one's tribal connections led to an inevitable fall from grace with the Kurds.<sup>51</sup>

Finally, there was Sherif Pasha, who introduced himself as the Kurdish delegate during the Paris Peace Conference, and asked Balfour on 20 May 1919 to be acknowledged as Kurdistan's leader. He argued that he had been elected as the president of Kurdistan. No one took him seriously.<sup>52</sup>

Towards the end of 1919, all the assumptions that Britain based its Kurdistan plan were proven wrong. Kurdish rebellions in the Mosul vilayet continued for almost a whole year and a number of civilian and military British officers were killed. These developments refuted the assumption that Kurds wanted British protection. Thus, it was concluded that the expected benefits were not worth the costs of taking under British protection a lawless community, devoid of social integration dynamics and leadership.<sup>53</sup> The political officer in Arbil William Hay stated that the more he was acquainted with the Kurds, the more he was convinced that they were neither capable of self-government and nor did they wish for it. He pointed out that the tradesmen and peasants feared the aghas and the aghas feared from each other. One thing that the Kurds wanted was for an external power to provide balance and safety without intervening in the main patterns of social structure.<sup>54</sup> The oriental secretary to the British commission in Iraq, Gertrude Bell optimistically believed that people would cooperate with Britain if they were secured against the aghas' pressure.<sup>55</sup>

Soane, who was fully acquainted with the Kurds, described the tribal organization as a product of natural conditions. He remarked that the Kurdish people desired no change whatsoever. They did not support the Kurdish central government under Sheikh Mahmud, because they perceived it as a threat against their traditional way of living. Soane drew attention to the reality that the Sheikh Mahmud rebellion had not been suppressed by the British military; it had failed because of the lack of Kurdish support.<sup>56</sup>

Two requirements had underlined Britain's Kurdistan policy from the outset: ensuring the safety of Mesopotamia by creating a buffer zone in the north and enabling the establishment of an Armenian state. Both of these goals could only be achieved by keeping the Turks away from the region by completely occupying the mountainous areas; however, this seemed militarily impossible. Demobilization led to the rapid melting down of British military forces in the region, so that it was no longer possible to carry out challenging plans by use of force. The post-war economic depression in Britain was so serious that even the cost of the military power to ensure the safety of Mesopotamia was being questioned. No one in London could think of taking part in new adventures in the remote mountains of Anatolia.

The foundation of an Armenian state also depended on preventing the Kurds' opposition. In order to withdraw the Kurds' support, Britain tried to cultivate Kurdish nationalism. Nevertheless, this not only contradicted Britain's Armenian policy, but it was soon realized that there was no Kurdish nationalism to be cultivated.<sup>57</sup> By the end of 1919, Turkish nationalists began to employ effective propaganda discourses toward the Kurds such as 'Armenian danger', 'Islamic union' and 'saving the Caliphate.' This, together with the pro-Armenian policies of the allies, pushed the Kurds under the influence of Turkish nationalists. Noel's amnesty plan was only partially executed. However, even if it had been completely executed, the Kurds would not have been persuaded by these commitments while Western Anatolia continued to be occupied. Eventually, all the great and influential Kurdish tribes of Anatolia such as the Milli, Jelali, and Hayderan joined the Turkish national movement.

An Armenian state could only be established with the United States' undertaking of a mandate responsibility in the region. When the Senate vetoed the Versailles Agreement and thus rejected the League of Nations Covenant on 19 November 1919, great expectations were reduced to vain hopes. Upon the Senate's decision, the French prime minister, Georges Clemenceau came to London to meet with Lloyd George on 11 December 1919 and declared France's intention to retreat from Cilicia. Thus, the Armenian project lost all its material support.<sup>58</sup>

## New Policy Options and the Debates on Retreat

Coming around to the facts, the British officers in Istanbul began to support Wilson's opinions as early as August 1919. The British assistant high commissioner at Istanbul, Admiral Richard Webb stated that Britain's Kurdish policy should be restricted to ensuring Mesopotamia's strategic borders and denounced both Armenian and Kurdish demands as equally unreasonable.<sup>59</sup> Hohler compared the Kurds to a rainbow of every shade of color, and proposed to leave them to their own devices.<sup>60</sup> John de Robeck pointed out that only a few Kurds saw beyond their tribal aghas, and that such a thing, as 'Kurdish opinion' did not exist.<sup>61</sup>

Eventually, everyone in the British administration understood that the Kurdistan scheme could not be fulfilled. Thereupon two offers came along. The first was from Curzon, who suggested that Britain withdraw from the Kurdish areas and leave the Kurds to themselves. The second was defended by Wilson from the start: to withdraw beyond the borders to be drawn according to Mesopotamia's strategic requirements, including the Mosul vilayet. A third opinion was voiced by Noel. He agreed on a complete withdrawal from Kurdish lands, but opposed the idea of leaving the Kurds to themselves. He conceded that the Kurds might be left under Turkish dominance with a comprehensive autonomy. He detailed his plan as follows: 1) Maintenance of Turkish sovereignty over six vilayets combined with the granting of a wide measure of local autonomy under the supervision of a mandatory state; 2) Administrative districts to be re-adjusted along racial and tribal lines; 3) The administrative personnel of the *gendarmérie* and the official language to be Kurdish; 4) Higher officials to be appointed with the consent of the mandatory state; 5) The area with mixed ethnicity to be supervised closely by the mandatory state and the principle of ethnic proportionality to be followed while appointing officials in the area.<sup>62</sup>

Retreating from Kurdistan was first mentioned during the meeting of the interdepartmental conference on Middle Eastern affairs on 20 August 1919, held to investigate Wilson's demand for a railway construction in Kirkuk. Curzon stated that the immediate necessity for the Kirkuk line was to provide a means of maintaining Britain's hold over the Sulaymaniya area in the event of hostile action on the part of the local population. He said that this had come to him as a surprise, as it had never been hinted that the Kurds themselves did not eagerly desire British control. Therefore, he added, the question had naturally arisen in his mind of why the British were there at all.<sup>63</sup> Wilson, in his response on August 29, argued that railways were powerful civilizing factors, it was this aspect of their construction rather than their strategic value that interested him; and the railway line passed through an oilfield of proven value, as well as through the Mesopotamia's principal wheat growing tracts.<sup>64</sup> Thereupon, the construction of the railway was approved.<sup>65</sup>

In a meeting of the interdepartmental conference on Middle Eastern affairs held on 17 November 1919, Curzon, who succeeded Balfour as foreign secretary in October, stressed that many of the suggestions had been based on the false assumption that Britain would undertake a mandate in this part of the world. He stated clearly that the government did not intend to do anything of the kind. The hope that the United States might undertake this responsibility had also been definitely abandoned, as there was no likelihood of the Senate considering the duty of maintaining order in any part of the late Ottoman Empire. As to the French, it was quite clear that they had no intention of taking up the role of protector of the Christian population. This being the case, he confessed that he had no idea what would become of the region. He said: “the question must solve itself, but the conference must accept the position that no humanitarian or political consideration would induce His Majesty’s Government to undertake the responsibility of administering or in anyway mixing themselves up with the political future of the marches of Anatolia.” He warned the attendees that the British government’s aim was to confine itself within the narrowest possible limits. He emphasized that his own inclination was to cut Kurdistan altogether off from Mesopotamia, and to draw a boundary which should include the plains of Mesopotamia and exclude the mountains of Kurdistan. Montagu and the chief of the general staff, Field-Marshal Henry Wilson advocated Wilson’s well-known views that Mesopotamia should have strategic borders and objected to the idea of retreating from the Kurdish regions of Mosul. Noel was also among the attendees. His ideas on the issue of retreating from Kurdistan coincided with Curzon’s, which helped him to influence the conference. Stating that an organized Kurdish nationality, in the western sense of the term, was almost non-existent, Noel described Kurdish nationalism as inchoate. The main determinant among the Kurds was still the feudal spirit. He thought that if the Turks were kept out by the terms of the peace settlement, it would be possible to set up a series of independent Kurdish states composed of mixed non-Turkish elements. He argued that Kurdish national feeling would act as a barrier against the Turks. Noel repeated his view that the Kurdistan-Mesopotamia border should be drawn on racial grounds. In the light of Noel’s argument that it was desirable for Britain to withdraw entirely from the Kurdish areas, the conference decided to stop the construction of the Kifri-Kirkuk railway line.<sup>66</sup>

Montagu informed Wilson about the decisions, declaring that Noel’s views had played a crucial role. In this context, he referred to Noel’s three main arguments: that Turkish influence should be excluded from Kurdistan; that Kurdistan should not be partitioned; that the frontier should follow the ethnographical line between Kurds and Arabs.<sup>67</sup> Naturally, these arguments were strongly opposed by Wilson. He categorically denied Noel’s views. Turks were already in Kurdistan and they were getting stronger every day. Who would eject them from there, and how? Besides, the continuance of Turkish authority in the region was not as great a danger for the safety of Mesopotamia as it was presented to be. He attached no significance to Noel’s second point. Kurdistan had never been united, so how could it be partitioned? Kurds living in different parts of Kurdistan had hardly anything in common. If the whole of

Kurdistan were to be united under a single mandatory state, there might be reasons against excluding some districts from this entity; but no such development seemed probable. Kurds were so scattered and geographically isolated by mountain ranges that it was inconceivable for him that they could be united except under a strong foreign administration. Wilson considered Noel's last argument to be unrealistic, and repeated his well-known view that borders should be drawn according to geographical, economic and strategic criteria rather than on an ethnic basis.<sup>68</sup>

Upon Wilson's protests, the whole problem of Kurdistan was examined at the India Office on 6 December, in consultation with officers who had recent experience of these regions. After that, Montagu made some new recommendations. Accordingly, Southern Kurdistan would be given autonomy and remain within the British sphere of influence. The state of Southern Kurdistan, with the capital of Sulaymaniya, would be financially and politically separated from Mesopotamia and governed by a Kurdish executive council assisted by British advisers appointed by the civil authority in Baghdad. A Botan-Kurdish state would be established on the northwest under the Bedrkhans and with Jazira as its capital. The external borders of this state would be of no concern to the British government. As the complete expulsion of the Turks from Kurdistan was no longer a practical proposition, the frontiers of Mesopotamia would be secured from Turkish aggression by the friendly state of Botan, on the northwest.<sup>69</sup>

### **The Diplomatic Negotiation Process and Legal Arrangements**

After the American Senate's decision and the Turkish nationalists' gaining full control over Anatolia, Britain and France had demarcated the borders of their spheres of influences in the Middle East by 1920. While Britain had given up its intentions in Southeast Anatolia, France was looking for a means to retreat from Cilicia. This signified relinquishing all hopes of establishing a greater Armenia and an autonomous Kurdistan. Thus, a complete political transformation was required. However, promises had been made and war aims had been publicly announced. The matter needed to be settled with care to soften potential public reactions. Therefore, Serif Pasha and Bogos Nubar, representing the Kurdish and Armenian people in Paris, were made to sign an agreement on 20 November 1919, just before the start of negotiations between Britain and France to determine the provisions of a draft treaty with Turkey. It was stated in the agreement that Armenians and Kurds had common interests; that a united Armenia and an independent Kurdistan should be established under the same mandatory power; that the drawing of the Kurdistan-Armenia border was left to the decision of the peace conference; that both states would respect minority rights.<sup>70</sup> This would help to allay Armenian fears of Kurdish attacks. Once the traditional Kurdish-Armenian antagonism had been appeased and an agreement had been ensured among the parties, they could now be left alone.

In a diplomatic note dated 23 December 1919, France suggested that a federal organization be set up in Kurdistan under the European control. As the Kurds were divided into tribes and clans, which had hardly ever been united into a national state, any other régime than that of federal autonomy was unsustainable. According to the plan, Kurdish areas would be divided between the British and French spheres of influence in order to keep the Turks away from the region. Curzon objected the plan, as it would enable France to settle in Northern Kurdistan and establish contact with the Christian population of the Mosul vilayet.<sup>71</sup> He had an unsolvable dilemma. On the one hand, he was aware that Britain did not have the power to undertake any responsibilities in the region. On the other hand, he did not want to leave the area open to either the French or the Turks. He also knew that the Kurds lacked social and political dynamics, without which they could not establish an independent state. It was an inextricable problem.

In the London Conference, convened on 12 February 1920, the secretary to the French ministry of foreign affairs, Philippe Berthelot said that he was under the impression that it had been decided to place Northern Kurdistan under Turkish sovereignty. Curzon explained that at present he could not accept even a provisional statement to the effect that Kurdistan should remain under Turkey's sovereignty.<sup>72</sup>

On 23 February 1920, Curzon explained the main points of Britain's Kurdistan policy before the interdepartmental conference on Middle Eastern affairs. He said that the Kurds now appeared to desire to retain their connection with the Turks. If this were truly the case, Britain could no longer consider a potentially independent Kurdistan. Recent discussions indicated that the French had given up all ideas of extending their sphere of influence in Cilicia to the confines of the Armenian state. This would considerably change the situation. The first question to be answered was whether Britain would undertake any responsibilities in Southern Kurdistan and, if so, whether this state would be incorporated in Mesopotamia, as demanded by Wilson, or whether it would be granted an autonomous status, as suggested by the India Office. Curzon recommended that Kurdistan be left altogether. Robert Vansittart from the foreign office pointed out that the recognition of Turkish sovereignty over the Kurdish areas would be the deathblow to Armenian independence. Hirtzel said that the establishment of an autonomous Kurdistan would be extremely difficult now that the French had retreated from Cilicia and that the best step towards the achievement of an eventual autonomous Kurdistan would be the setting up of Kurdish states in Botan and Southern Kurdistan under British control. The conference decided that the only chance of attaining the aims set for Armenia and Kurdistan would be for the Turks to withdraw from all Kurdish areas and for pressure to be brought to bear upon them during peace treaty negotiations by making their retention of Istanbul dependent upon this withdrawal.<sup>73</sup>

The British government's final decision on the Kurdish issue, based upon the suggestions of the interdepartmental conference, was conveyed to Wilson on 23 March 1920.<sup>74</sup> Wilson warned London once again that the abandonment of the Kurdish areas would cause fatal results; that neither a national movement nor a

national leadership existed in Kurdistan; that the proposed evacuation of the Kurdish areas was bound to give great impetus to activities of pro-Turkish and pro-Bolshevik parties; and that there was no one other than the Turks to hand the administration over to.<sup>75</sup>

The interdepartmental conference on Middle Eastern affairs considered the matter for the last time on 13 April 1920, just before the San Remo Conference. Curzon declared that the Cabinet was anxious to reduce Britain's financial and military commitments as much as possible. He repeated his stance that they should disassociate themselves altogether from Kurdistan. However, Britain was unable to find a leader to set up an autonomous state in Kurdistan. This being the case, Montagu remarked that any further discussion on the future of Kurdistan would need to include solutions on how to expulse the Turks from the area. The conference then discussed the draft clauses relating to Kurdistan to be inserted in the peace treaty submitted by Vansittart. Montagu said that anything would be preferable to the establishment of an independent frontier district of Mesopotamia resembling the northwest province of India. He expressed the hope that Southern Kurdistan would become an independent state with its own revenue and administration. It might even join Northern Kurdistan at some future date. Curzon said that one of the chief objections to the establishment of a quasi-autonomous Kurdish state with British advisers was that the French might be tempted to establish a similar state with French advisers in Northern Kurdistan. Montagu questioned the desirability that the Turks should be left in the area. Curzon pointed out that if the Turks were allowed to occupy Northern Kurdistan, they would then be in a position to threaten the new Armenia that was to be established in Erzurum. Montagu stated that an independent Kurdistan could be arranged by treaty, which some party in Turkey could sign, in which case they might willingly abandon Kurdistan. Hubert Young from the foreign office suggested that Britain might make it clear that its intention was to set up an independent state in Southern Kurdistan, which could later opt to join either Mesopotamia or Northern Kurdistan, if the latter eventually succeeded in establishing its autonomy.<sup>76</sup>

Curzon announced Britain's final decision in San Remo on 19 April 1920, declaring that although it was deemed advisable to detach Kurdistan from Turkey and to make it autonomous; it was difficult to find out what the Kurds themselves desired, and whether they could achieve stability as an autonomous state. Not a single individual Kurd appeared to represent anything more than his particular clan. The Kurds felt that they could not maintain their existence without the backing of a great power. If neither Britain nor France undertook this task, it would be better to leave them under Turkish protection. The people were already accustomed to Turkish rule. On the other hand, Curzon argued that it was not practicable to divide the Mosul vilayet, and that the Kurds themselves would be the first to object. Therefore, it should be left to the Kurds of Mosul to decide whether they wished to remain under a British mandate or to unite with an eventually independent Northern Kurdistan.<sup>77</sup>

These decisions being taken, the articles of the draft treaty related to Kurdistan were finally settled. Thus, a scheme of local autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish areas lying east of the Euphrates, south of the Armenian boundary, and north of the frontier of Turkey with Syria and Mesopotamia would be drafted by a special commission of three members appointed respectively by the British, French and Italian governments within six months after the implementation of the peace treaty. The Kurds could form their own independent state on condition that they presented a demand for independence to the Council of the League of Nations within one year after the date of enforcement, together with proof that the majority of the Kurdish population wished for independence from Turkey. Should the Council deliver a positive response, taking into account the viability of such a state, then Kurdistan could declare its independence. Kurds living in the Mosul vilayet could also join this Kurdish state if they so desired.<sup>78</sup>

Although these arrangements, which constituted articles sixty-two, sixty-three and sixty-four of the Treaty of Sèvres, were judged by Noel as positive steps,<sup>79</sup> they were in fact impracticable and were drafted solely in accordance with political considerations. It was clear that the Kurds did not want to be part of an Arabic administration. However, from the very beginning, British policy was to bind the Kurds of Mosul to the Arab administration in Baghdad. Northern Kurdistan, on the other hand, was already under Turkish rule, and the Allies had no means to change this. To say in the treaty that the demands of the Kurdish people would be taken into consideration was purely deceptive.

## Conclusion

Although the Allies had the puppet government in İstanbul sign the Treaty of Sèvres on 10 August 1920, as the Turkish nationalist movement rejected, it was never implemented. The areas populated by Kurds were definitively divided among Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria.

The League of Nations Council announced its final decision on the future of Mosul on 16 December 1925 and ruled that the vilayet would be united with the State of Iraq under a British mandate. In its decision, the council invited Britain to take the necessary administrative measures to guarantee the protection of the Kurdish people.<sup>80</sup> On 2 March 1926, Britain filed a letter indicating that the necessary conditions had been fulfilled and applied to the League to take action as it would deem necessary. In annex to this letter was a memorandum signed by the acting high commissioner in Baghdad, Bernard Bourdillon and the prime minister of Iraq, Abdulmuhsin al-Sa'dun, which indicated the scope of the rights given to the Kurds. In this joint memorandum, it was reported that ten out of thirteen judges and head clerks working for the ministry of justice would be Kurdish; that tribunals would function and records would be held in Kurdish. Foundations, postal and telegraph

services, public, legal and water services as well as all units of the customs bureau and the ministry of agriculture would employ thirty-eight Kurds out of fifty-five officials. There were twenty-five schools in the Kurdish regions. Five of these were Christian schools and the languages used were Chaldean and Arabic. Sixteen out of the twenty remaining schools taught in Kurdish; in four schools, Christians and Kurds were taught together and the language employed was Arabic and Kurdish, together. While the Kurdish language was used neither in official, nor in private writings before the war, it had obtained an alphabet and had become a communication tool thanks to the efforts of British officials. Before, only Farsi, Turkish and Arabic had been used in written correspondence. The use of Arabic and Turkish was still wide-spread in the whole of the vilayet. However, thanks to thorough efforts, Kurdish had also become a literary language. Kurdish newspapers were published in Suleymaniya. The government not only allowed the use of Kurdish in a wide range of areas, but also encouraged it.<sup>81</sup> Thus in Iraq, Kurdish national identity, to enable the creation of a Kurdish state in time, was being built by Britain. While the Kurds' assimilation process into prevailing cultures throughout the following years was proven unsuccessful, the fruits of the British plan would be ripe for the picking in a few decades.

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