TITLE PAGE

British Imperialism in Iraq, 1914-1932: asking for trouble.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis shows that the institutional blockages created by a system of government characterised by a proliferation of departments working largely independently, but with overlapping and conflicting areas of responsibility, substantially hampered the formulation of a clear and consistent British war-time policy for Mesopotamia. The post-war allocation of the League of Nations mandate for Mesopotamia accorded with Britain's aim to rule Iraq indirectly. However, indecision and confusion at the higher levels of government persisted, partly due to suspicions regarding the authority of the League. The decision in 1923 to 'quit' the mandate early was, however, accompanied by mis-steps and unintended consequences. Ultimately, despite the ideals of liberal internationalism, Britain turned back to mid-Victorian forms of informal imperialism in order to secure British interests in 'independent' Iraq by means of a treaty, unfettered by the responsibilities and costs of the mandate, and the unwanted scrutiny of the League of Nations.

DECLARATION:

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Acknowledgements

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The support of my family has also been crucial. In that regard there are three very special people to whom I dedicate this thesis. My mother, whose love, generosity and support for all my endeavours, wise or unwise, has always been constant; my dearly-loved son Tom: guardian, mentor and 'fixer' when I am confounded by twenty-first century technology; and Fiona, whose seemingly unbounding energy and enthusiasm are awe-inspiring. Last but by no means least, thank you Fiona and Tom for enriching my world and extending my familial role to Nanny to my cherished grandsons, Jack and Jordan, born during the course of my candidature.

I am sincerely grateful to Dr Lance Brennan for allowing me to access the papers of Lord Curzon, from research material collected by the late Dr Robin Moore from the India Office and British Libraries. Many thanks also to the amazing Sally Usher, with whom I lodged during my stay in London in the autumn of 2012. Thanks to her friendship and lively wit, the long days searching the archives were punctuated with moments of great conversation and much hilarity.

Introduction.

On 23 November, 1914, Sir Percy Cox, the Chief Political Officer of Indian Expeditionary Force 'D' addressed the following proclamation to an assembly of notables in Basra:

> The British Government has now occupied Basra, but though a state of war with the Ottoman Government still prevails, yet we have no enmity or ill-will against the populace, to whom we hope to prove good friends and protectors. No remnant of Turkish administration now remains in this region. In place thereof the British flag has been established, under which you will enjoy the benefits of liberty and justice.[1]

These words marked the transition from indirect British influence in southern Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf, to direct control of the three former Ottoman Vilayets of Basra, Baghdad and Mosul by the end of 1918, followed by twelve years of 'tutelage' under a League of Nations mandate for Iraq. This thesis demonstrates how in Mesopotamia, the two arms of the British Empire collided. By studying the nodes of imperial power in the Middle East, it can be asked to what extend did the polycratic[2] nature of the system impede the formulation of policy for Mesopotamia before 1921, and in the 1920s, how the mandate system interacted with British expectations. This leads to the question of why did the British government invade Mesopotamia in November 1914, and within the same generation replace the League of Nations mandate with a treaty of alliance with an independent Iraq?

[1] *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part II, Series I, Vol. 11, 42: 'Mesopotamia: British Engagements as to Future Status', Political Department, India Office, 30 January, 1918.

[2] For the origins of the term see Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, London, Arnold, 2000, 75, 77, 80. Kershaw used the term to describe a 'multi-dimensional' structure of government: a system with a proliferation of departments working largely independently of each other, but with overlapping and conflicting spheres of authority. While a comparison is not the intention, it is a useful term, given the jurisdictional confusion in the Middle East.

Drawing on existing historiography[3] and archival sources, this thesis is a study of the process of policy formulation, which reveals a great deal about the management of empire in the first half of the twentieth century. Mesopotamia is of particular interest in terms of the techniques of control, passing from informal British influence prior to 1914, to direct control for six years, to indirect control under the League of Nations mandate, and finally, back to informal imperialism, regulated by the terms of the 1930 Anglo-Iraq Treaty of Alliance. Particular attention is given to the institutional structures of government during David Lloyd George's War Cabinet regime, and the influence of pro-consuls and civil servants in the policy-making process.

As this thesis argues, the institutional conflict generated by jurisdictional divisions was a significant factor in the formulation of policy for Mesopotamia until late 1920. While the inter-departmental conflict was largely resolved by the transfer of management of the mandate to the Colonial Office in 1921, differences with the Foreign Office remained, relating to their roles vis-à-vis the League of Nations. Ultimately, despite the ideals of liberal internationalism, policymakers turned to traditional methods, familiar to their forebears in the nineteenth century, to secure British interests by the creation of an autonomous imperial space in Iraq, bound to Britain by treaty, and at the same time, free from the cost and responsibilities of the mandate, and the scrutiny of the League of Nations.

[3] Regrettably, the preparation of this thesis was completed before the publication of Susan Pedersen's latest monograph, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire*, published by Oxford University Press in July of this year.

Historiography:

While elements of the Mesopotamia/Iraq story have been dealt with in detail by others, few scholars have presented the entire story, from 1914 to 1932, from the perspective of British officials, making clear not only why Iraq was occupied in 1914, but why it was hastened towards independence. Scholarly opinion is divided on the question of oil as the principal influence on British policy. While there are those who argue that oil was the principal reason for the occupation of Basra in 1914,[4] others contend that oil became the primary objective in 1918, and was the reason for the occupation of Mosul.[5] However, John Darwin and Priya Satia offer the more nuanced explanation that after 1920, the possible existence of oil was secondary to the strategic importance of Mosul for the existence of the Iraqi state.[6]

Hitherto, three broad approaches have been taken in the literature concerning British imperialism in Mesopotamia: military histories, political histories and regional studies which deal with the Middle East and feature Mesopotamia as only one part of the broader landscape.[7] The story of the military campaign in Mesopotamia has been well documented; it is the political consequences of the campaign which form the subject matter of this thesis.

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[4] See, for example, A.P. Thornton, *The Imperial Idea and its Enemies*, London, Macmillan, 1963, 177, and H.J. Mejcher, *Imperial Quest for Oil: Iraq 1910-1928*, London, Ithaca, 1976; M. Kent, *Moguls and Mandarins: Oil, Imperialism and the Middle East in British Foreign Policy, 1900-1940*, London, Frank Cass, 1993; E. Black, *British Petroleum and the Redline Agreement: the West's secret pact to get Mideast Oil*, Westport, Conn., Dialog Press, 2011.

[5] P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq: Contriving King and Country*, London, I.B. Tauris, 1976, 114; B. Lewis, *The Middle East: 2,000 years from the rise of Christianity to the present day*, London, Phoenix, 1996, 353.

[6] J. Darwin, *Britain, Egypt and the Middle East: Imperial Policy in the Aftermath of War, 1918-1922*, London, Macmillan, 1981, 265; P. Satia, 'Developing Iraq: Britain, India and the Redemption of Empire and Technology in the First World War, *Past and Present*, no. 197, (Nov., 2007), 229, note 60, (accessed on-line 15/02/2010). For a recent analysis which reaches a similar conclusion, see L. Scazzieri, 'Britain, France, and Mesopotamian Oil, 1916-1920', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol. 26, no. 1, (March 2015), 25-45, (accessed on-line 12/03/2015).

[7] For example, see E. Monroe, *Britain's Moment in the Middle East, 1914-1956*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1963; M.E. Yapp's two volumes, *The Making of the Modern Near East, 1792-1923*, London and New York, Longman, 1987, and *The Near East Since the First World War: a history to 1995*, London & New York, Longman, 1996; and D. Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East*, New York, Avon, 1989.

The first political history of Iraq, which has influenced many later works, was published in 1937.[8] Written by Phillip Ireland, the book covers the period from the establishment of direct British rule in November 1914 to the entry of Iraq into the League of Nations in 1932. Ireland's account is comprehensive insofar as it provides an analysis and critique of the development of the British administration into a system of control, and the subsequent post-war evolution of Iraqi politics during the period in which Britain held the League of Nations mandate for Iraq. However, the institutional mayhem arising from the polycratic system was largely unexplored.

In 1953, Stephen Longrigg, formerly employed in the Revenue Department of the British administration in Iraq, published an account along similar lines, although his criticism of the British administrative system was understandably muted. Significantly, Longrigg combined a political study with an account of the scale of the development projects undertaken by the British military authorities during and immediately after the war.[9] As Longrigg shows, some of the projects undertaken for military purposes, but which served the interests of the civilian population after hostilities ceased, became the subject of heated debates between the War, Foreign and India Offices in 1920, something this thesis examines. Similarly, in a later account, Charles Tripp focused on the war-time development

[8] P.W. Ireland, [1937], *Iraq: A Study in Political Development*, New York, Russell & Russell, 1970. Ireland was an American who later served in the United States Foreign Service. According to Peter Sluglett, he was given 'privileged' access to the Foreign, Colonial and India Office records. P. Sluglett, 'Formal and Informal Empire in the Middle East', in R. Winks & W.R. Louis, (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, Vol. V, *Historiography*, 427.

[9] S.H. Longrigg, *Iraq, 1900 to 1950: A Political, Social, and Economic History*, London, Oxford University Press, 1953.

projects, and the development of Iraqi politics from the 1920s to the regime of Saddam Hussein in the 1980s.[10]

Aside from Ireland's early study, the most widely-referenced work is Britton Busch's masterful trilogy on British imperialism in the Persian Gulf from the late nineteenth century to the Lausanne Conference in 1922-1923. The second volume, covering the period between 1914 and 1921, foregrounds the paradox of India. Crucial for the supply of men and material in war-time, as a separate centre of policy formulation, as Busch stresses, 'India had a different viewpoint'.[11] In other words, India's interests did not always coincide with those of the central government, resulting in conflict between the departments of state in London, and between the two centres of British power in the Middle East, where the British administration in Cairo fell under the purview of the Foreign Office, while the military and political officials in Basra were responsible to the government of India. Busch was the first historian to examine the jurisdictional confusion in detail, and the functions and failures of a series of interdepartmental committees under the chairmanship of Lord Curzon between 1917 and 1920. While drawing on Busch's analysis, this thesis takes a different perspective, focussing not only on the paradox of India, but also on the influence of pro-consuls and departmental civil servants on the development of policy.

John Fisher's insightful study of Lord Curzon's role in the development of Mesopotamian policy complemented Busch's analysis, however, he complicated the confusion further, by stressing the point that the Government of India and the India Office

[10] C. Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000.
[11] B.C. Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs, 1914-1921*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1971, 481.

in London did not always agree on policy issues. [12] With an assured familiarity with the archival material, Fisher delved deeper into the frictions between the departmental representatives on Curzon's committees. He argued that Curzon, acquisitive but at times irresolute, was the chief architect of British 'war imperialism'. Where Fisher succeeded was in analysing the Machiavellian politics which characterised discussions on British Middle Eastern policy, and the attempts to replace Curzon's committees with a separate Middle East Department, spearheaded by Lord Robert Cecil, Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.[13] Fisher's analysis, however, concluded with Curzon's appointment as Foreign Secretary in October 1919, at a time when his influence on Middle Eastern policy was far from over, and as this thesis demonstrates, by 1920, Curzon's views on the mandate were expressed in surprisingly liberal terms.

With regard to the interdepartmental conflict in Whitehall, Darwin's previously mentioned work goes beyond Fisher's, into an analysis of the heated Cabinet debates in 1920 between Curzon, Edwin Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, and Winston Churchill, the Secretary of State for War, over control of Middle Eastern affairs. Darwin located Mesopotamia within the broader Middle East context, highlighting the post-war complications generated by imperial over-stretch. Acutely, he emphasised the difficulties

[12] J. Fisher, *Curzon and British Imperialism in the Middle East, 1916-19*, London, Frank Cass, 1999. Fisher was a reader at the National Archives at Kew for six years. For further contributions to the study of Curzon's committees see H. Mejcher, 'British Middle East Policy 1917-21: The Inter-Departmental Level', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 8, no. 4, (Oct., 1973), 81-101, (accessed 06/09/09); and T.J. Paris, 'British Middle East Policy-Making after the First World War: the Lawrentian and Wilsonian Schools', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 41, no. 3, (Sept., 1998), 773-793, (accessed 20/10/09).

[13] J. Fisher, 'Lord Robert Cecil and the formation of a Middle East Department of the Foreign Office', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42, no. 3, (May, 2006), 365-380 (accessed 04/02/16). Fisher's extensive analysis of the conflict surrounding this issue builds on the earlier studies of Helmut Mejcher and Ephraim Maisel's, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy*, 1919-1926, Brighton, Sussex Academic Press, 1994, 204-227. The outcome of that conflict, the creation of a Middle East Department in the Colonial Office, is also addressed by Mejcher and Maisel. However, the most comprehensive account of the establishment of the Middle East Department can be found in M. Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill, Volume IV, 1917-1922, London, Heinemann, 1917, 507-530, and the documents and correspondence in the accompanying *Companion* volume, part 2, 1283-1349.

faced by British policy-makers due to the non-ratification of the Treaty of Sèvres, signed by the outgoing Ottoman government but repudiated by Mustapha Kemal's Nationalist parliament in Ankara.[14]

In the genre of regional studies, the first of Eli Kedourie's contributions to the historiography was a general narrative of British imperialism in the Middle East during the First World War and the Paris Peace Conference in 1919.[15] A later work was devoted to a detailed study of the negotiations in Cairo leading up to the McMahon-Hussein correspondence, and a forensic examination of the meaning of McMahon's letter of October 1915, which appeared to promise Hussein a great swathe of territory, including Basra and Baghdad, to ensure that he did not align with the Ottomans against Britain.[16]

Ephraim and Inari Karsh's *Empires of the Sand* closely followed earlier narratives, however, their innovation lay in challenging the conventional view of Arab betrayal as a result of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, by presenting Hussein and his sons as historical agents rather than British puppets. In the quest for primacy over the Arab State promised by McMahon, they argued that the collaboration was an opportunistic, albeit unequal, clash of imperial aims, rather than a clash between Arab nationalism and British imperialism, thereby heightening rather than diminishing Arab agency in the eventual outcome.[17]

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[14] J. Darwin, *Britain, Egypt and the Middle East.*
[15] E. Kedourie, *England and the Middle East: the Destruction of the Ottoman Empire 1914-1921*, London, Bowes & Bowes, 1956.
[16] E. Kedourie*, In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth: The McMahon-Husayn Correspondence and its Interpretations 1914-1939*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976.
[17] E. Karsh & I. Karsh, [1999], *Empires of the Sand: The Struggle for Mastery in the Middle East 1789-1923*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2001.

There is an interesting convergence of scholarly opinion on British imperialism in the Middle East in the 1920s. For example, Kedourie concluded that the British government lost the will to impose the new order on the Middle East implicit in the Sykes-Picot Agreement, since 'when the time came to enforce its provisions' policy-makers had 'ceased to believe in the ideas which inspired the agreement'.[18] Kedourie claimed that while the agreement recognised that Britain and France had 'interests to satisfy', they also had 'obligations to the populations which found themselves involved'.[19] As this thesis demonstrates, however, obligations were always secondary to imperial interests. Echoing Kedourie, David Fromkin argued that by the time of the settlement in 1922, British 'official thinking' had changed, and the Middle East settlement 'did not accurately reflect what the government of the day would have wished'.[20] To support his claim Fromkin observed that after earlier supporting Hussein, the British government later pushed him aside, and while suspicious of his sons, Abdullah and Feisal, the government later committed to the Hashemite cause.[21] Fromkin seems to have missed the fact that it was the same coalition government, albeit with a different Prime Minister, which in 1921, not 1922, put its faith in Hussein's sons, ostensibly to honour the promises made to their father in 1915.

A more likely explanation than that of Kedourie and Fromkin, is Fisher's observation that in the interim, 'international, regional and domestic political developments necessitated the evolution of other political configurations'.[22] Moreover, as Darwin argued,

[18] E. Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, 63.
[19] Ibid.
[20] D. Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace*, 562.
[21] Ibid, 563.
[22] J. Fisher, *Curzon and British Imperialism in the Middle East*, 30, note 22.

'Britain retained the will and the ability to guard her strategic positions in the Middle East.'[23] All the accounts mentioned, excepting those of Ireland and Longrigg, conclude with the settlement in 1921. The argument that the devolution of power is an integral part of the history of empire, however, means that the full history of British imperialism in Iraq is incomplete without consideration of British policy during the period of the League of Nations mandate for Iraq.

There is an extensive volume of literature on the establishment and operations of the League of Nations and the mandates system during the inter-war years.[24] However, compared with the literature covering the period between 1914 and 1922, there is a relative dearth of scholarly literature on British policy-making for Iraq during the period of the League of Nations mandate. In 1976, German historian Helmut Mejcher published an analysis of the 'official mind' from the late nineteenth century to the end of the mandate in 1932, with a focus on oil as the principle influence on British policy for Iraq.[25] Mejcher provided a fairly accurate, if cursory, representation of the events in Iraq in the early 1920s,

[23] J. Darwin, *Britain, Egypt and the Middle East*, 277.

[24] For example, see C. Howard Ellis, *The Origin, Structure and Working of the League of Nations*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1928; F.P. Walters, [1952], *A History of the League of Nations*, London, Oxford University Press, 1960;R.B. Henig, (ed), *The League of Nations*, Edinburgh, Oliver & Boyd, 1973. For early but useful literature on the mandates see for example, E. Main, *Iraq: From Mandate to Independence*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1935; H. Duncan Hall, *Mandates, Dependencies and Trusteeship*, Washington, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1948; C.L. Upthegrove, *Empire by Mandate: A History of the Relations of Great Britain and the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations*, New York, Bookman, 1954; Quincy Wright, *Mandates Under the League of Nations*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1930, and 'The proposed termination of the Iraq Mandate, *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 25, no. 3, (Jul., 1932), 436-446, accessed on-line, 26 September, 2011; W.R. Louis, 'The United Kingdom and the Beginning of the Mandates System, 1919-1922', *International Organization*, Vol. 23, no. 1, (Winter, 1969), 73-96, accessed on-line, 26/09/2011. More recent appraisals include M.D. Callahan, *Mandates and Empire: The League of Nations and Africa, 1914-1931,* Brighton, Sussex Academic Press, 1999, S. Pedersen, ' The Making of the Mandates System: An Argument', *Geschichte und Gelleschaft*, vol. 32, 2006, 560-582; D. Gorman, 'Liberal Internationalism, the League of Nations Union, and the Mandates System, *Canadian Journal of History*, Vol. 40, no. 3, (Dec., 2005), 449-477, accessed on-line, 22/03/2015., and P.J. Yearwood, *Guarantee of Peace: the League of Nations in British Policy, 1914-1925*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009.

[25] H.J. Mejcher, *Imperial Quest for Oil.*

and the relationship between the Colonial Office and the High Commissioners in Baghdad. Mejcher did, however, offer a detailed analysis of the origins and development of the mandate idea. His contention was that rather than deferring to Wilsonian liberal idealism, the mandate, as defined in the League of Nations Covenant, was a cloak for British and French colonial policy. As this thesis makes clear, the two were not mutually exclusive, and as John Mackenzie argued, the system was established precisely to conform to Wilson's ideals, while at the same time legitimating imperial policy.[26]

Peter Sluglett's *Britain in Iraq*, also published in 1976, and again based on the premise that oil was the primary influence on British policy for Iraq from the beginning of 1918, explained the development of the Iraqi political system and the politics of resistance. While stressing that it was not his intention to study the 'official mind', he referred to much of the interplay between the High Commissioners and the Colonial Office during the period. His conclusion that the British left Iraq in 1932 'because it was felt possible to take the risk' is an accurate reflection.[27] However, he blurred the distinction between the responsibilities and attitudes of the Foreign and Colonial Offices to the League of Nations. As this thesis shows, given the Foreign Office was responsible for communications with the League, and as a result, more sensitive to criticism from Geneva, officials in that Office were less willing to take risks until nationalist resistance in late 1929 forced a change of attitude.

The most prolific Western author on the subject of Iraq, Sluglett co-edited a later volume comparing the British and French mandates. One of the contributors, Toby Dodge,

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[26] J. Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: the Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984, 256.
[27] P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 211.

highlighted the pressures on the British government in the late 1920s from three directions: Iraqi demands for independence, British domestic opinion, and the judgements of the Permanent Mandates Commission. He concluded that of the three, the pressure from the Permanent Mandates Commission was the weakest, and therefore the easiest and safest to circumvent.[28] This thesis argues, however, that it was that body which proved the most difficult of the three. As Susan Pedersen showed, strong opposition to Britain's plans for Iraq's release from the mandate from the German and Italian members was based on their own national interests. The German member favoured an international system composed of independent sovereign states, but opposed Britain's intention to limit Iraq's sovereignty and access to its national resources. For the same reason, the Italian member opposed Iraqi independence, in order to force the British government to 'share the spoils'. On the other hand, French opposition, anticipated by the British government to be the strongest, was not forthcoming. Rather, the Permanent Mandates Commission was informed in 1931 that the French government favoured the idea of a treaty relationship, and proposed to follow Britain's lead to terminate the Syrian mandate by the same means.[29]

Dodge's earlier *Inventing Iraq* conveys little sense of the confusion and indecision which characterised the debates between the civil servants in the Middle East Department during the period when the Colonial Office was responsible for the administration of the mandate in Iraq.[30] There is little to be gained by entering into the debate about whether

[28] T. Dodge, 'International Obligation, Domestic Pressure and Colonial Nationalism: the birth of the Iraqi state under the mandate system', in N. Meouchy & P. Suglett, (eds), *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspective*, Leiden & Boston, Brill, 2004, 158.
[29] S. Pedersen, 'Getting out of Iraq – in 1932: The League of Nations and the Road to Normative Statehood', *American Historical Review*, October 2010, 975-1000, (accessed 23/06/2012).
[30] T. Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2003.

the British government lied to the Permanent Mandates Commission in order to hasten Iraq's admission into the League of Nations, as Dodge argued.[31] Furthermore, his conclusion that the British did not 'consciously' create an informal empire in Iraq because they were aware of the temporary nature of the mandate is not convincing. Rather, the creation of an informal empire following Iraq's admission to the League of Nations was precisely because the British sought to terminate the mandate.

> Priya Satia hit the mark, describing the entire British effort in Mesopotamia as
>
> > an exercise in covertness, the rhetoric of liberation camouflaging invasion and occupation, since, in the international climate of the Great War, the British had for the first time to conceal their imperial ambitions.[32]

There are a number of studies on the local and international influences which rendered British policy-making reactive and chaotic, albeit within the absolute limits imposed by an overarching commitment to extend British primacy in the East.[33] However, there are few which interrogate the impact of the establishment of the League of Nations on the development of policy in the 1920s, the attitudes of the Foreign and Colonial Offices to the League, or the circumstances in 1921 which motivated the government to regulate its mandatory relations with Iraq by means of a treaty.

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[31] ibid, 41.

[32] P. Satia, *Spies in Arabia: the Great War and the Cultural Foundations of Britain's Covert Empire in the Middle East*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, 157.

[33] For example, together with John Darwin's previously-mentioned volume, see J.S. Galbraith, 'British War Aims in World War I: A Commentary on Statesmanship', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. XIII, no. 1, (Oct, 1984), 25-45; Keith Jeffery, The British army and the crisis of empire 1918-22, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984, and Keith Neilson, '"For Diplomatic, Economic, Strategy and Telegraphic Reasons": British Imperial Defence, The Middle East and India, 1914-1918', in G. Kennedy & K. Neilson, (eds.), *Far Flung Lines: Essays on Imperial Defence in Honour of Donald Mackenzie Schurman*, London, Frank Cass, 1996, 103-123.

Theoretical Context:

This thesis views British imperialism in Mesopotamia occurring as a result of political multipolarity within British imperial policy making where initially, the war aims of the government of India were considerably more expansive than those of the government in London. This approach cuts across explanations that focus exclusively on 'core' or 'periphery'. Core theories locate the impulse for expansion in the metropolis, and the causal factors as social, economic, strategic, or a combination of the three. The contributions of Hobson, Lenin and Schumpeter, seminal to the study of imperialism, are well known. Hobson argued that the impulse for expansion was generated by the effects of the uneven distribution of wealth on the domestic population. However, for Hobson, the political consequences of imperialism were equally important. The 'insane' imperialism of the late nineteenth century, characterised by competing empires and increasing militarism, he predicted, would inevitably lead to war.[34] In 1916, Lenin adopted a more overtly teleological approach, linking empire to the stages of capitalism. Imperialism, decaying monopoly capitalism, was the last stage which would inevitably lead to war and the triumph of socialism.[35] In 1919, Joseph Schumpeter posited that the impulse for expansion was atavistic, inherited from earlier feudal societies and fostered by capitalism. He predicted that as a society matured, the feudal remnant would wither away, and with it, the urge for imperial expansion.[36] As this thesis shows, while certainly important, economic factors were not the sole motivation for the British occupation of Mesopotamia. Similarly, ascribing

[34] J.A. Hobson, [1902], *Imperialism: A Study*, London, Unwin, Hyman, 1988, 54-55, 85, 130, 133, 304.
[35] V.I. Lenin, [1916], 'Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism', *Selected Works*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1963, Vol. I, 667-766. (Translated by T. Delany & K. Goins, 2008). https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/, accessed on-line, 4 March, 2011.
[36] J.A. Schumpeter, [1919], *Imperialism and Social Classes*, New York, August M. Kelley, 1951, translated by H. Norden, 34, 84-85, 125, 128.

British imperialism to atavistic social elements hardly explains the complexity of the shifts in British imperial policy.

In peripheral theories, the distinction between motive and cause is generally less clear; both are packaged together. More than half a century ago, Robinson and Gallagher argued that while the impulse for expansion was motivated by strategic considerations, it was also the product of the actions of the 'men on the spot', as a result of crises on the periphery.[37] Cain and Hopkins later observed that the link between centre and periphery was forged by 'gentlemanly capitalists' in search of new fields for investment.[38] However, peripheral theories alone are not sufficient to explain British imperial expansion in Mesopotamia. As the following shows, the 'periphery or core' dichotomy does not account for Iraq's unique position located between two centres of empire. Furthermore, the theories discussed do not account for the shift back to informal empire in the inter-war period.

Formal and Informal Imperialism:

In the aforementioned texts, Robinson and Gallagher defined informal imperialism as the indirect means to control a territory and people when distinguishing between the mid-Victorian (informal), and late-Victorian (formal) approaches to empire. No less imperialist than formal control by the annexation of territory and the imposition of direct rule, the

[37] R. Robinson & J. Gallagher, with Alice Denny, *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism*, London, Macmillan, 1961 and 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', *The Economic History Review*, New Series, Vol. 6, no. 1, (1953), 1-15; see also J. Galbraith, 'The "Turbulent Frontier" as a factor in British Expansion', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 2, no. 2, (1960), 150-168, (accessed 01/02/2011); A. Scholch, 'The "Men on the Spot" and the English Occupation of Egypt in 1882', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 19, no. 3, (Sept., 1976), 773-785 (accessed 01/02/2011).

[38] P.J. Cain & A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688 – 2000*, London, Longman, 2001, 45.

difference, they argued, lay in the degree of control exercised.[39] They defined informal imperialism as the extension of influence by collaboration with local rulers, dependent always on the extent of Great Power rivalry and the co-operation of the local elites. They also suggested that protectorates came within the rubric of informal imperialism.[40] However, it could also be argued that like the post-First World War League of Nations mandates for the former Ottoman provinces, protectorates were in a class of their own – in between formal and informal imperialism.

Lauren Benton also observed that prior to 1900, the European imperial powers sought to establish hegemony by creating 'anomalous enclaves and loosely configured corridors of imperial control'.[41] This is evident in the establishment of informal imperialism in various parts of the world from the Ottoman Empire and China, to Latin America, and the treaties of exclusivity forged between the government of India and the chiefs of the Persian Gulf states during the nineteenth century. Indeed, this was the mid-Victorians' preferred method of imperial control.[42] This thesis shows that this preference did not change after the Great War. The overarching aim of British post-war policy was to retain Iraq 'within the British imperial system'[43], initially by indirect control and later by gradual devolution by

[39] J. Gallagher & R. Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', *The Economic History Review*, Second Series, Vol. VI, no. 1, (1953), 6.
[40] Ibid, 13.
[41] L. Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400-1900*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010, 280. See also T. Koditschek, *Liberalism, Imperialism and the Historical Imagination: Nineteenth Century Visions of a Greater Britain*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, 65, 72, 74, and D. Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*, Penguin, London, 2001, 59.
[42] For another example, see T.W. Gallant, *Experiencing Dominion: Culture, Identity, and Power in the British Mediterranean*, Notre Dame, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 2002, 7-9, where the British government established a protectorate over the Ionian Islands in 1815, granting limited local autonomy to the local authorities, the terms of which were almost identical to the system of provisional government established in Iraq in October 1920.
[43] The phrase was coined by Lord Curzon in a memorandum written in 1921, with specific reference to the treaties of alliance forged with the Indian Princely States during the nineteenth century. See CAB24/119, C.P. 2589, 'The Egyptian Situation', 14 February, 1921.

means of the mandate. Ultimately, informal 'empire on the cheap' was achieved through an unequal treaty of alliance, signed in 1930. Effectively, Iraq did not achieve true independence until 1958.[44]

The Origins and Development of the Mandate Idea:

Historians have linked the origins of the mandate idea to discussions on imperial unity by the Conservative Round Table group, formed by Lord Milner in the early twentieth century.[45] In 1909, it was suggested that in order for the Dominions to take more responsibility for the management and defence of the Empire, they should take over control of adjacent colonial territories.[46] However, the first articulation of a mandate for Mesopotamia was made by an American, George Louis Beer, in January 1918.[47] His paper, 'The Future of Mesopotamia' introduced the idea of trusteeship, protection of the local population from exploitation, and equal opportunity for trade and development by means of an 'international mandate', with Great Britain taking responsibility for its administration.[48] Shortly thereafter, Sir Mark Sykes developed a similar scheme, setting a limit of twenty-five years on the period of trusteeship under provisional British rule.[49] In

[44] M.A. Fitzsimons, *Empire by Treaty: Britain and the Middle East in the Twentieth Century*, London, Ernest Benn, 1965, 55, 74; P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 213.
[45] For example, see P.B. Potter, 'Origin of the System of Mandates under the League of Nations', *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. XVI, no. 4, (Nov., 1922), 563-583, (accessed on-line 04/07/15).
[46] H.J. Mejcher, *Imperial Quest for Oil*, 50, 51.
[47] An Anglophile historian and author on British colonialism in America, Beer was the American correspondent for the *Round Table Journal* from 1915 to 1918. The 'colonial expert' on President Wilson's Commission of Inquiry in 1917, in 1919 he accompanied President Wilson to Paris as head of the Colonial Section of the United States' Delegation to the Peace Conference. L.H. Gray, (ed.), *African Questions at the Paris Peace Conference, with Papers on Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the colonial settlement*, New York, Macmillan, 1923, 'Introduction', xvi, xxi – xxiv. For Beer's links with the Round Table group see for example, H.J. Mejcher, *Imperial Quest for Oil*, 51.
[48] G.L. Beer, 'The Future of Mesopotamia', 1 January, 1918, in L.H. Gray, (ed.), *African Questions at the Paris Peace Conference, with papers on Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the colonial settlement*, New York, Macmillan, 1923, 411-426.
[49] Sir Mark Sykes, 'Our Position in Mesopotamia in Relation to the Spirit of the Age', 16 January, 1918, cited in J. Fisher, *Curzon and British Imperialism in the Middle East*, 123.

December 1918, Jan Smuts, the South African Defence Minister, published a paper entitled *The League of Nations: A Practical Suggestion*, which proposed a system of mandates on similar lines for the former Ottoman and German territories.[50] President Wilson was impressed by Smuts' proposals, and ultimately, many of the ideas expressed in his paper were reproduced in the Covenant of the League of Nations.[51]

Beer and Smuts were looking specifically at the design and application of trusteeship and the civilising mission by an international system of mandates. As Eric Weitz has made clear, however, the ideals of the civilising mission embodied in the mandates system had a much earlier heritage. He demonstrated that the peace treaties signed in 1919 and 1923 were based on the outcomes of the Berlin Congress of 1878, and the Berlin West African Conference of 1884. For Europe and Anatolia, this 'signified national states, minority protection and forced deportations – the elaboration of the tendencies of the Berlin Treaty of 1878'.[52] For Africa and the Middle East it meant mandates, according to the principles of the General Act of 1885 which 'enshrined at the international level, not just the individual state level, the language of the civilising mission'.[53] More significantly for this thesis, Weitz argued that Article 22 of the League of Nations Covenant, and the terms of the mandates submitted to the League in 1920 were based on the General Act of 1885, revised in 1890 and revised again in 1919.[54] Furthermore, he concluded that given the mandates system

[50] J.C. Smuts, *The League of Nations: A Practical Suggestion*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1918.
[51] H.R. Winkler, [1952], *The League of Nations Movement in Great Britain, 194-1919*, Metuchen, N.J., Scarecrow Reprint Corp., 1967, 224-227; F.P. Walters, [1952], *A History of the League of Nations*, 27-30.
[52] E. Weitz, 'From the Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilizing Missions', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 113, no. 5, (Dec., 2008), 1319. (Accessed on-line 04/07/15).
[53] Ibid, 1321.
[54] Ibid, 1339. See L.H. Gray, *African Questions at the Paris Peace Conference*, 'Introduction' xxiv, xxvii-xli for the discussions of the Commission revising the General Act of Berlin, 26 February, 1885 and the General Act and

was 'a key institutional expression of the civilising mission' it could not be considered as a camouflage for imperialism.[55]

As this thesis argues, the civilising mission for Iraq was dropped in 1921, in favour of securing British interests by regulating relations with the Iraqi government by means of a Treaty relationship, or more specifically, the subsidiary agreements attached thereto. The mandate, however, remained in force. Therefore, an analogy with formal and informal imperialism as far as the mandate for Iraq was concerned is difficult to make. Rather, according to the League Covenant and the terms of the mandate, British control of Iraq between 1921 and 1932 could be described as internationally-recognised indirect rule under the auspices of, and acting on behalf of the League of Nations. For Iraq, admission to the League of Nations in 1932 as an independent state signalled the automatic termination of the mandate. For British policy-makers, it signified a shift from indirect control and international obligations to informal empire, according to the terms of the 1930 Treaty.

'The imperialism of decolonisation' and the end of empire:

In 1976, Ronald Hyam argued that the year 1918 marked the beginning of the end of the British Empire.[56] In a later work, he posited that a loss of will was the key factor in the Empire's long decline thereafter. John Darwin was among the scholars who contended that

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Declaration of Brussels, 2 July, 1890; and 507-514 for the text of the 'Convention Revising the General Act of Berlin, February 26, 1885 and the General Act and Declaration of Brussels, July 2, 1890', September 10, 1919.

[55] E.D. Weitz, 'From the Vienna to the Paris System', 1340-1341.

[56] R. Hyam, *Britain's Imperial Century, 1815-1914: A Study of Empire and Expansion*, London, Barnes & Noble, 1976, 377; *Britain's Declining Empire: the Road to Decolonisation, 1918-1968*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, 181. See also, J. Gallagher, 'The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire;, in A. Seal, (ed), *The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire: The Ford Lectures and other Essays by John Gallagher*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982, 73, 139, 144. He argued that the empire was in decay before 1939, the Second World War marked the beginning of the end of empire, the reversal of the trend towards informal empire in the inter-war years, and a turn back to the Commonwealth, followed by a sudden decline.

despite the effects of imperial over-stretch in the 1920s, there was no loss of will on the part of policy-makers; it was the determination to maintain the empire which motivated the change from formal rule to a system of 'influence and partnership'. Moreover, he argued that there was nothing novel in this approach. Rather, it reflected continuity with the mid-Victorians' quest for 'empire on the cheap'.[57]

In fact, the maintenance of informal imperialism in Iraq after 1932 was remarkably similar to the 'imperialism of decolonisation' thesis outlined by W.R. Louis and Ronald Robinson in 2003.[58] Robinson and Louis suggested that the trend towards informal imperialism in the interwar years, interrupted by the Second World War and later frustrated by Soviet and American rivalry in the Middle East, was the prelude to decolonisation in the mid-twentieth century.[59] While the international power balance had shifted in the post-Second World War period, with the backing of the United States, the mid-Victorian techniques of informal imperialism in West Africa post-independence served 'to prolong imperial sway and secure British economic and strategic assets'.[60] As this thesis illustrates, while not strictly speaking decolonised, the same solution for Iraq ante-dated the 'imperialism of decolonisation' by almost thirty years.

[57] J. Darwin, 'Imperialism in Decline? Tendencies in British Imperial Policy between the Wars', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 23, no. 3, (Sept., 1980), 669, 678; P.J. Cain & A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Crisis and Deconstruction, 1914-1990*, London & New York, Longman, 1993, 308-309.
[58] W.R. Louis & R. Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Decolonization', in J.D. Le Sueur, (ed.), *The Decolonization Reader*, London & New York, Routledge, 2003, 49-79.
[59] W.R. Louis & R. Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Decolonization', 50, 51.
[60] Ibid, 55, 66, 73.

Orientalism and its influence:

In scrutinising state action, the question of motivation and intent arises, something endlessly theorised by historians, philosophers and international relations theorists. Edward Said coined the term Orientalism in 1978, defining it as a system of thought which, for example, projected the East as a binary opposite to the west, exotic yet backward, which the west sought to dominate.[61] Said's theory generated a wealth of scholarship on the relationship between western perceptions of the east and imperialism. Scholarly opinion is divided on that claim.[62] Interestingly, James Renton observed that towards the end of 1917, the Orientalist rhetoric relating to the failure of the Arabs to progress under Ottoman rule, and the land laid waste during four centuries of misrule, was hijacked for propaganda purposes, juxtaposed with the themes of Arab liberation and self-determination to justify a continuing British presence in the Middle East.[63]

Orientalism's Occidental Self/Oriental Other dichotomy was also key to the development of other forms of post-colonial theory, notably in the work of the Subaltern Studies theorists, led by Ranajit Guha in the 1980s. In a number of volumes, the scholars in the collective sought to uncover the history of the (particularly Indian) subaltern social

[61] E. Said, *Orientalism*, New York, Pantheon, 1978.
[62] For the argument that the process of identity formation was more complex than Said's simple dichotomy, see E. Bar Yosef, *The Holy Land in English Culture, 1799-1917: Palestine and the Question of Orientalism,* Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2005, 8, and T.W. Gallant, *Experiencing Dominion,* xi, 16. See also a discussion on this, largely by French and Spanish scholars, see Patricia Almárcequi, '*Orientalism*: Twenty Years On', Institute de la Mediterránia, 2003. https://www.iemed.org/publications/quaderns/4/aalmarcegui.pdf, accessed 10/02/15. On the other hand, Gyan Prakash challenged the critics, celebrating *Orientalism's* power to subvert western perceptions of the East. G. Prakash, 'Orientalism Now', *History and Theory*, Vol. 34, no. 3, (Oct., 1995), 199-212, (accessed on-line 12/06/2015).
[63] J. Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, 75, 255; J. Renton, 'Changing Languages of Empire and the Orient: Britain and the Invention of the Middle East, 1917-1918, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 50, no. 3, (2007), 645-667, (accessed on-line 16/03/2009).

segment, writing them into the histories of elite resistance which had excluded them. [64] Problematising this project, Gayatri Spivak concluded that, because the subaltern classes were 'irretrievably heterogeneous', and often not represented in the source base used by historians, recovering their voices in histories from below was a fraught project. [65] Spivak's concerns resonate in the case of Mesopotamia prior to 1920, where racial and religious heterogeneity acted to diffuse the voices of resistance. Moreover, when consulted, the voices of the 'elites' were mediated through their British interlocutors to provide the desired responses. Those below the level of Arab elites struggled to be heard at all, save through acts of revolt which were vigorously suppressed by the British military forces. Importantly, however, during the 1920s, Arabs increasingly had a voice which the British heard and acted upon when their aims and aspirations coincided.

The trope of Orientalism certainly served British purposes in other ways, playing a part in buttressing misconceived notions of restoring the land to its pre-Muslim past. Drawing on the Bible and classical texts, Mesopotamia was idealised as the site of the Garden of Eden, the cradle of Western civilisation. In the imperial imaginary, the Mesopotamian El Dorado - the unlimited agricultural potential of the land between the two rivers laid waste by three centuries of Ottoman neglect - would be redeemed by British technology and expertise.[66] Such ideals, however, only gained traction because of the

[64] For a useful discussion on Subaltern Studies see D. Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2002.
[65] G. Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in P. Williams & L. Chrisman, (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1994, 66-111.
[66] For the cultural and mythical dimensions of the El Dorado myth, see N. Atia, 'A Relic of its own past: Mesopotamia in the British Imagination, 1900-1914', Memory Studies, Vol. 3, no. 2, (2010), 232-241, and 'War in the "Cradle of Civilisation": British Perceptions of Mesopotamia, 1907-1921', unpublished PhD dissertation, 2010. http://gmro.gmul.ac.uk/jspui/bitstream/123456789/620/1/ATIAWARin2010.pdf (accessed 27/1/13).

accompanying material importance of Mesopotamia spruiked by railway promoters, investors and politicians well into the twentieth century. Interestingly, as this thesis demonstrates, no government during the nineteenth century, Liberal or Conservative, was willing to provide the guarantees required to attract the capital necessary for such plans. However, promoters also stressed the importance of railways as bulwarks to guard geo-strategically critical areas such as India, Persia and Mesopotamia against Russian expansion in the late nineteenth century.[67] As Christopher Bayly argued, 'any theory of imperialism must take into account developments in continental European states and beyond, even if it is trying to explain British imperialism alone.'[68]

The International system:

With that in mind, theories relating to the international system and the establishment of imperial hegemony may be useful here. Constructivist theory, which posits the international system as a social construct, based on identities, interests and ideas, rather than material power,[69] does not, however, take into account the fact that in order to sustain empire, the European Powers relied on military or naval power. On the other hand, realist theory posits an anarchic international system, composed of sovereign states, military as well as political entities, in which material power is the primary determinant of international politics; in other words, a Great Power struggle between self-interested states. According to this theory, a state requires maximum power in order to mitigate threats from rival states.

This topic is explored further in the forthcoming publication, A. Varnarva, (ed.), *Imperial Expectations and Realities: El Dorados, utopias and dystopias*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2015, which includes my chapter, 'The British Mesopotamian El Dorado: the restoration of the Garden of Eden', 210-227.

[67] R. Robinson & J. Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, 77.

[68] C.A. Bayly, 'The First Age of Global Imperialism, c. 1760-1830', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 26, no. 2, 1998, 29.

[69] For example, see Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999; K.J. Holsti, *The State, War, and the State of War*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

However, if a rival state is militarily stronger, the solution is to establish hegemony over regions considered strategically and economically important.[70] Superficially, Realist theory seems to offer a framework for analysis, at least for the period before 1921. But, given the polycratic nature of British decision-making, there would seem to be no single theoretical explanation for British imperialism in Iraq for the entire period. Accordingly, a careful empirical exegesis of the conflicting currents within British decision making as it unfolded is a more revealing way of understanding post-war approaches to Iraq than any totalising theory.

Policy and Decision-Making:

Any such theory assumes a coherent state structure making informed decisions based on its clearly understood best interests. Yet the formulation and implementation of British imperial policy was generally only achieved following lengthy negotiations between the departments concerned, and decisions were invariably the result of bargains and compromises. While Cabinet Ministers sat atop a pyramid of power, the main lines of policy were formulated by permanent departmental heads and unelected civil servants.[71]

F.M.G. Willson referred to the limited role of Parliament in the policy-making process in a strong two-party system, where questions on government policy were restricted to Question Time, and Parliament was generally not informed of decisions until after they had been made.[72]

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[70] See K.N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Reading, Addison, Wesley, 1979; A-M. Slaughter, 'International Relations, Principle Theories', published in R. Wolfram, (ed.), *Max Planck Encyclopedia of Public International Law, New York*, Oxford University Press, 2011. https://www.princeton.edu/~slaughter/Articles/722_IntlRelPrincipalTheories_slaughter_2011050926.pdf, accessed 17 February, 2015.

[71] R. Rose, (ed.), *Policy-Making in Britain: A Reader in Government*, London, Macmillan, 1969, 132; R. Hyam, *Britain's Declining Empire*, 12.

[72] F.M.G. Willson, 'Policy-Making and the Policy-Makers', in R. Rose, (ed.), *Policy-Making in Britain*, 365.

Outside the formal policy-making apparatus, diplomats and consular officials also possessed considerable influence on policy decisions, and in the post-war period, a number of military and political officials returned from service in the Middle East to take up positions of influence, either as politicians or departmental officials and advisers, blurring the distinction between centre and periphery. Finally, given the 'ramshackle imperial structure', in many cases, power devolved to local political officials.[73] The Arab Bureau, based in Cairo, exerted significant influence in the Levant during its existence from 1916 to 1920. Additionally, such was the influence of Sir Percy Cox, the Chief Political Officer during the military occupation of Mesopotamia, and the first High Commissioner post-war, that he found himself in a position where the home government sought his advice before embarking on major policy changes.

The traditional structures of governance were altered following the establishment of the War Cabinet in December 1916, amplifying the polycratic system following the establishment of a proliferation of ad hoc and standing Cabinet sub-committees, including Lord Curzon's Mesopotamian Administration Committee, set up in 1917, renamed the Middle East Committee in September of that year, and expanded into the Eastern Committee in 1918. Understanding the operations of these committees, and the personnel involved, is essential for understanding the workings of the 'official mind'. While it may have been intended to limit the agency of the individual departments with interests in Mesopotamia, as this thesis shows, the system failed in its purpose. As Ronald Hyam observed,

[73] D. Judd, *Empire: the British Imperial Experience from 1765 to the Present*, London, HarperCollins, 1996, 142.

> people make policy, so it is important to understand ministers and officials (as far as possible) as individuals with differing views – views which are also influenced by discussion and events, and may change.[74]

Complicating the realist position was not only the result of ignorance of local conditions, but also indecision, institutional blockages, or simply the desire to avoid making difficult decisions. The solution to the interdepartmental conflict in the polycratic system arrived at in December 1920, placed responsibility for the administration of the League of Nations mandates with the Colonial Office. For the policymakers, however, Iraq remained a divided space, not only between the Foreign and Colonial Offices with relation to their roles vis-à-vis the League of Nations and the mandate, but also between the British government as the mandatory power, the League of Nations on whose behalf the mandate was administered, and the Iraqi government.

Sources, Methodology, and Structure:

The tortured permutations of Britain's Iraq policy is the subject matter of this thesis. Concerned primarily with policy formulation, the scrutiny of British archival records has been an essential component of this research project, not only for official documents, but also for the inter- and intra-departmental debates between civil servants recorded in the minutes. Foreign Office papers for the period from 1907 to 1932, together with War Office papers for 1918, and Colonial Office records for the period of the mandate, have been accessed at the National Archives in the United Kingdom. The India Office records, pivotal for the period from 1914 to 1920, when the India Office was responsible for the administration of Mesopotamia, have also been scrutinised at the British Library. Cabinet

[74] R. Hyam, *Britain's Declining Empire: the road to decolonisation, 1918-1968*, Cambridge & New York, Cambridge University Press, 2006, xiv.

papers have been sourced via the National Archives' on-line service, and some of the Foreign Office papers from the volumes of *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*. In addition, many original documents, for example, the post-war treaties and the League of Nations *Official Journal* have been accessed on-line.

However, archival sources do not always provide the historian with a view into the private thoughts of participants in the story, and it is fortunate that the memoirs, diaries and letters of many of the actors, while not impartial, are also available. Gertrude Bell's diaries and letters are available on-line, while relevant correspondence between Curzon and other government Ministers has been sourced from the papers of Edwin Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, 1917-1922, and Lord Derby, British Ambassador to France from 1918 to 1920. Correspondence between Curzon, Bonar Law, Robert Cecil and Leo Amery was sourced from Lord Curzon's papers, which also contain a great deal of relevant material relating to his government service in the period between 1915 and 1923. Parliamentary records, the London *Times*, and memoirs and biographies of politicians and officials have also provided other crucial sources of material.

Structured in chapters arranged in chronological order with one exception, this thesis commences with a chapter on the historical background to the expansion of India's sphere of influence into the Persian Gulf region, and the origins of the system of divided jurisdiction in the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia. Chapter two focuses on the period between 1914 and 1918; the establishment of British political control in Mesopotamia during war time military occupation, and the ensuing friction with the authorities in Cairo, particularly following the establishment of the Arab Bureau in 1916. The hesitancy of the

British government to determine war aims in 1915 is outlined, together with the failed intentions of Lord Curzon's Mesopotamian Administration Committee, established following the occupation of Baghdad in 1917, and the responses of Ministers and local authorities to the doctrine of self-determination.

The complexity of dealing with the triangular conflict between London, India, and the two nodes of British power in the Middle East requires interrupting the chronological continuity, in order to explore the conflict and confusion in Curzon's Eastern Committee in 1918, which is the subject of chapter three. This is necessary in order to determine if the polycratic system alone was responsible for the lack of a clear policy by the end of 1918.

Chapters four and five represent an appraisal of the period of vacillation between 1919 and mid-1920, and the contributing endogenous and exogenous factors. Chapter five concludes with the recommendations of the Cairo Conference for future policy for Mesopotamia, amid concerns relating to the League of Nations mandate.

The final chapter focuses primarily on the policy-makers in the Colonial Office in the years between 1921 and 1932, and the discursions, subterfuges and deceptions to which they were prepared to lend themselves in order to rid the government of responsibility for the mandate; the lack of a contingency policy when the Iraqi government resisted British demands, and the points at which the Foreign and Colonial Offices clashed as a result of their conflicting responsibilities to the League of Nations. The chapter concludes with the principal reasons, as this thesis contends, for the decision to quit the mandate prematurely.

Chapter One

British interests in India, the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia before the Great War.

> According to a report written for the Board of Trade in 1908, Mesopotamia
>
> … will ever be a country whose wealth and future destiny must be a source of deep solicitude to Great Britain, whose hold over an Eastern Empire is contingent, not only on the broad oceans, but on the control of the continental trade routes that find their southern outlet in the narrow sea lane that leads from Turkish Arabia to Bombay.[1]

This statement encapsulates the broad strategic and economic significance of Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf in relation to India prior to the First World War. In response to increasing German commercial competition in the region, the report's author, George Lloyd,[2] criticised British traders for failing to seize the commercial opportunities awaiting exploitation in Mesopotamia. However, there was a subtext to his report. He was, in effect, echoing the pleas of explorers, railway promoters, investors, and officials at the British embassy in Constantinople during the nineteenth century, for the government to consider extending informal empire over Mesopotamia. Traditionally the concern of the government of India, early interest related to the strategic importance of Mesopotamia, due to its geographical position, as part of a transport corridor between the eastern Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf. Specifically the term 'Mesopotamia' was applied to the three Ottoman Vilayets (provinces) of Basra, Baghdad and Mosul,[3] where until the late nineteenth century, Ottoman rule did not extend far beyond the towns; in

[1] G. Lloyd, 'Report on Trade and Commerce', 1908. D. Gillard (ed), *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, series B, Vol. 16, 93.
[2] In 1907 Lloyd was serving as an honorary attaché at the British Embassy in Constaninople.
[3] M.E. Yapp, *The Making of the Modern Near East, 1792-1923*, London & New York, Longman, 1987, 138.

the rural areas power rested with largely independent tribal leaders, whose spheres of influence often overlapped.[4]

Locating Mesopotamia in the British imperial mind however, requires a bifocal approach, encompassing both London and India, where historically the responsibility for consular representation in the region was divided between the central government in London and the government of India. Arguably, British imperial designs on Mesopotamia originated not from her involvement in the 'Eastern Question' in the late nineteenth century when the government in London turned its attention to the Ottoman Asian provinces, but with the expansion of commerce in the sixteenth century.

Historical context: the establishment of British Commercial and Political Predominance and the origins of polycratism.

British travellers and a small number of merchants visited Mesopotamia during the sixteenth century.[5] However, the first formal commercial and diplomatic links between England and the Ottoman Empire were established by merchants, who sought to open the trade routes of the Levant to English commerce. Negotiations conducted in 1580 between William Harborne, a leading London merchant, and the Ottoman Sultan, secured concessions (capitulations), granting extraterritorial privileges which exempted Europeans from local laws and taxes,[6] and allowed for the appointment of consuls to adjudicate in disputes between British merchants, thereby confirming consuls as proxies

[4] P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 1, 2; see also R.S. Simon & E.H. Tejirian, (eds.), *The Creation of Iraq 1914-1921*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2004, introduction, 4. Christopher Clay attributes the lack of control by the Porte in the nineteenth century to the government's lack of money, without which the provinces could not be adequately governed. Christopher Clay, *Gold for the Sultan: Western Bankers and Ottoman Finance 1856-1881: A Contribution to Ottoman and to International Financial History*, London & New York, I.B. Tauris, 2000, 335.

[5] S. Lloyd, [1947], *Foundations in the Dust: The Story of Mesopotamian Exploration*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1980, 7.

[6] A.C. Wood, [1935], *A History of the Levant Company*, London, Oxford University Press, 8.

of informal imperialism.[7] The Levant Company's first Royal charter, granted in September 1581, secured a monopoly of British trade in the eastern Mediterranean region; a new charter in 1592 provided for the extension of trade into inland Ottoman territories, where Aleppo became the principal centre for trade with the east.[8] However, attempts to enter into the lucrative silk and spice markets in Persia and the East Indies overland from the Mediterranean coast to the Persian Gulf failed.[9] Moreover, attempts by the Levant Company to break into the eastern trade via the Cape of Good Hope were equally unsuccessful. Hence, the most prominent members of the Levant Company were among the original subscribers to the East India Company, established in 1599.[10]

The Royal Charter granted to the East India Company in 1600, provided for a monopoly of British trade via the Cape of Good Hope. Thwarted by the Dutch East India Company's hold on the East Indies trade, merchants of the British company turned their gaze northward, and in the seventeenth century, the Company expanded its mercantile operations into the Persian Gulf and to Egypt via the Red Sea.[11] In Imperial terms, the operations of the East India Company complemented those of the Levant Company, but

[7] L.P. Gunning, *The British Consular Service in the Aegean and the Collection of Antiquities for the British Museum*, Surrey, Ashgate Publishing, 2009, 2; C. Laidlaw, *The British in the Levant: Trade and Perceptions of the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2010, 20.
[8] A.C. Wood, *A History of the Levant Company*, 30.
[9] H.L. Hoskins, *British Routes to India,* New York, Longmans, Green & Co., 1928, 3.
[10] A.C. Wood, *A History of the Levant Company*, 30, 31, note 5. The East India Company was essentially a child of the Levant Company. Seven of the fifteen members of the committee of Directors of the East India Company were members of the Levant Company, and the Governor of the Levant Company was the first Governor of the East India Company.
[11] A. Webster, *The Twilight of the East India Company: the evolution of Anglo-Asian Commerce and politics, 1790-1860*, Woodbridge, Sussex, Boydell Press, 2009, 1; J.G. Darwin, *Unfinished Empire: the Global Expansion of Britain*, London, Allen Lane, 2012, 13, 51.

the East India Company became a competitor when its merchants established trade with Persia.[12]

There was one significant difference between the two companies. While the Levant Company cherished no territorial ambitions, the East India Company morphed into a politico-military entity, intent on establishing an empire in India.[13] As a result, the expansion of the East India Company's operations opened two new areas of imperial concern: safeguarding the Persian Gulf trade, and securing communications with India[14] in the vaguely demarcated space between the operations of the two Companies, where in some cases, the commercial and consular operations of the two companies overlapped.[15]

By the late eighteenth century, while trade was in decline, there was an increased strategic interest in the region following Napoleon Bonaparte's Levantine military campaign, and occupation of Egypt in 1798. The news received in London in May 1798 that Napoleon and his army had departed from Toulon,[16] gave rise to fears that their intended destination was India, overland through Mesopotamia and Persia.[17] In response, 'diplomatic wedges' were inserted to fortify Britain's political presence in the

[12] C. Laidlaw, *The British in the Levant,* 23.
[13] C. Laidlaw, *The British in the Levant*, 11; A.C. Wood, A History of the Levant Company, 182.
[14] M.E. Yapp, *The Making of the Modern Near East*, 48-49.
[15] For example, George Baldwin, a merchant and British Consul at Cairo, also acted the East India Company's agent. Baldwin's principle claim to fame lies in the fact that he was a proponent for the development of an overland route from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean via the Suez isthmus. See A. Varnava, *British Imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915: the inconsequential possession,* Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2009, 30; H.C.G. Matthew & B.H. Harrison, (eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2004, 451.
[16] E. Ingram, *Commitment to Empire: prophecies of the Great Game in Asia, 1797-1800*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1981, 292.
[17] J. Cole, *Napoleon's Egypt: Invading the Middle East*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 14-17; M.S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question 1774-1923: A Study in International Relations*, London, Macmillan, 1966, 25.

Levant and Mesopotamia.[18] The local agent of the East India Company in Baghdad was replaced by a British Consul, and the Company's agent at Aleppo was recognised as a consul by the Levant Company in 1803.[19] At the same time, the Bombay government despatched a marine force to establish a base at the mouth of the Red Sea to block the sea route to India, and subsequently secured the consent of the local chieftain to utilise Aden as a base and coaling station.[20]

Napoleon did not march his army to India, but by the early nineteenth century the commercial fortunes of both the Levant and East India Companies were following a similar trajectory: diminishing trade, financial crises, dependence on government loans, followed by the loss of their commercial monopolies and the assumption of government control of the Companies' consular services.[21] Responsibility for the supervision of the Levant Company's consuls was taken over by the Foreign Office in 1825.[22] While expansion and militarisation in order to defend its burgeoning operations saw the East India Company establish itself as the ruler of a significant portion of the Indian sub-continent, the downward trajectory mirrored that of the Levant Company. In financial straits by 1783, the Company sought the assistance of the British government, at the cost of government supervision of its affairs.[23] The 1784 India Act established the Board of

[18] S. Lloyd, *Foundations in the Dust,* 33; M. Yapp, *The Making of the Modern Near East*, 54; S. Pollock, *Ancient Mesopotamia: The Eden that never was*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, 12.
[19] C. Laidlaw, *The British in the Levant*, 209.
[20] H.L. Hoskins, *British Routes to India*, 60.
[21] A. Webster, *The Twilight of the East India Company*, 2; C. Laidlaw, *The British in the Levant*, 223, A.C. Wood, *A History of the Levant Company*, 199.
[22] See L.P. Gunning, *The British Consular Service in the Aegean and the Collection of Antiquities for the British Museum*, for an interesting study of the professionalization of the former Levant Company Consuls after 1825, and their participation in the collection of antiquities as a means of supplementing their stipends following the loss of their mercantile benefits.
[23] A. Webster, *The Twilight of the East India Company*, 1.

Control, its President holding a seat in Cabinet,[24] and the Charter Act of 1833, divested the Company of its commercial arm, leaving it solely as 'a bureaucratic machine for governing most of Britain's Asian possessions.'[25] Responsibility for the Company's political agents passed first to the Bombay government, and in 1835, to the central government at Calcutta.[26] Those arrangements laid the foundation for the later jurisdictional divisions, when the Government of India extended its sphere of influence to the Persian Gulf.

The Euphrates Valley Railway:

In the meantime, the British government officially revealed an interest in the Euphrates Valley. In 1834, a House of Commons Select Committee recommended sending an expedition to investigate the possibility of establishing overland communications between the Mediterranean Sea and India, the penultimate section to be traversed by steam boat on the river Euphrates to the Persian Gulf. A secondary, but equally salient motive for the expedition was given as 'the promotion of the commerce and general interests of His Majesty's subjects.'[27] In other words, while presented as a peaceful mission, arguably it was also intended to establish a British presence beyond Basra, given Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston's concerns regarding the expansionist ambitions of the governor of Egypt, Mehmet Ali.[28] The expedition led by Colonel Francis Rawdon Chesney, reached the Persian Gulf, albeit with the loss of one of its two steamers and twenty lives.

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[24] S. Mahajan, *British Foreign Policy 1874-1914: The Role of India*, London & New York, Routledge, 2002, 30.
[25] A. Webster, *Twilight of the East India Company*, 2.
[26] H.L. Hoskins, *British Routes to India*, 64.
[27] House of Commons Parliamentary Papers 1837, no. 540: The Report of the Euphrates Expedition: The Duke of Wellington to the President, Board of Control, 28 November, 1834. House of Commons Parliamentary Papers Online, 2005, ProQuest Information and Learning Co, http://www.proquest.com, accessed 27 August, 2011.
[28] G.L. Simons, *Iraq: from Sumer to Saddam*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1994, 182. See J.S. Guest, [1992], *The Euphrates Expedition*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2013, 1, for the argument that the strategic objective of the expedition was to halt Russian expansion.

While Chesney's report on the navigability of the Euphrates was less than optimistic, the expedition's significance lies more in the emphasis Chesney placed on the commercial potential awaiting exploitation in Mesopotamia',[29] a theme which formed the basis of the arguments of the railway developers who followed in his footsteps twenty years later.

Coming shortly after the failure of the Euphrates Expedition, the British occupation and annexation of Aden in January 1839 concentrated attention both in London and India on the overland route via the Suez isthmus, leaving the Euphrates project as merely an alternative.[30] While posing no immediate threat to India's interests in the Persia Gulf, the Greek insurrection in the 1820s together with the expansionist pretensions of the governor of Egypt, Mehmet Ali, revealed the vulnerability of the Ottoman Empire to attack at the periphery, and shaped British policy thereafter. As a result of British military intervention in Syria in 1841, however, Mehmet Ali's imperial dreams were curbed.[31]

A shift in British policy regarding the Ottoman Empire during the Crimean War paved the way for developers, investors and entrepreneurs. Given Britain's stated aim was to preserve the integrity of the Ottoman state, the first of a series of loans to the Porte was raised in London in 1854, accompanied by a government guarantee.[32] Together

[29] H.L. Hoskins, *British Routes to India*, 327-328.
[30] E. Monroe, [1963], *Britain's Moment in the Middle East, 1914-1971*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1981, 12; H.L. Hoskins, *British Routes to India*, 207. Informal to formal control of Aden in 1839, marked the first acquisition of territory in the Near East by India. For a thorough explanation of the events which preceded the annexation of Aden, see Hoskins, 196-206.
[31] M. Yapp, *The Making of the Modern Near East*, 70-71; A. Palmer, *The Decline and Fall of the Ottoman Empire*, London, John Murray, 1992, 108-9; A. Varnava, *British Imperialism in Cyprus*, 52-53, 70.
[32] M.S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question*, 147.

with the terms of the Anglo-Ottoman free trade Convention signed in 1838[33] an increased financial stake in the Ottoman Empire provided scope for creating new opportunities for economic penetration,[34] and a proposal soon emerged for the construction of a railway linking the Mediterranean Sea with the Persian Gulf.

In 1856, William Patrick Andrew, president of the Scinde, Punjab and Delhi Railway Company, formed the 'Association for the Promotion of the Euphrates Valley', which issued a prospectus for a railway, tracing the course of the River Euphrates, overland from Seleucia to Basra. Chesney took part in negotiations with the Porte for the concession for the first section of the proposed railway, from the Mediterranean to the river Euphrates, which was granted by the Porte in early 1857. In his report to the government, Chesney stressed the advantages for Britain if the railway was constructed, such as the extension of commerce, the conveyance of troops, *materiel*, mail and passengers from England to India in just 15 or 16 days.[35] But given that the Ottoman guarantee of a minimum rate of interest at 6 per cent was considered unlikely to attract British investors,[36] a deputation approached the Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston, seeking a British government guarantee. The deputation, led by Lord Shaftesbury, included members of Parliament,

[33] M. Lynn, 'British Policy, Trade and Informal Empire in the Mid-Nineteenth Century', *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, Vol. III, *The Nineteenth Century*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, 112.
[34] Ibid, 112. A discussion of the Ottoman financial crisis in the nineteenth century is beyond the scope of this study. Among the many volumes dedicated to this topic, Donald Blaisdell's *European Financial Control in the Ottoman Empire*, published in 1966, is a valuable contribution. See also Sevket Pamuk, *The Ottoman Empire and European Capitalism, 1820-1913: Trade, investment and production*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, and Christopher Clay's previously mentioned *Gold for the Sultan.*
[35] Major-General F.R. Chesney to the Chairman and Directors of the Euphrates Railway Company, 13 February, 1857. Document no. 656.350.E89/143716 accessed from the John Crerar Library, University of Chicago, 28/09/2011.
[36] W.P. Andrew, *India and her Neighbours*, London, H. Allen & Co., 1878, 373. http://openlibrary.org/books/OL7223670M/India-and-her-neighbours accessed online 17 July, 2012.

and W.F. Ainsworth and Major-General Chesney from the Euphrates Expedition.

Shaftesbury pointed out in forcible language

> the vast importance to this country of securing an alternative route to India, and the great interest generally felt throughout the country in this great undertaking, so calculated to promote commerce, civilization and Christianity.[37]

Andrew employed a different tactic, combining materialism with Orientalism in an effort to gain government support for his project, stating that

> the countries to be traversed were the richest and most ancient in the world, and might again become the granaries of Europe, and not only supply us with wheat, but with cotton of excellent quality.[38]

Unconvinced by Andrew's utopian argument, Palmerston countered that the Red Sea route was adequate for communications with India.[39] Lacking the necessary government guarantee, the project was shelved, temporarily.

In 1858 the last vestige of the old East India Company's political arm was extinguished. The Governor-General was replaced by a Viceroy, and in London, the Board of Control was dissolved, and replaced by a Secretary of State for India and the India Office.[40] The change was more one of substance than form, however, the jurisdictional division and overlapping interests of the Foreign and India Offices in the Middle East inherited from the defunct trading companies slowed the metropolitan decision-making process, which empowered the men on the spot to take the initiative on matters for which prompt action was required.[41] Moreover, as head of the India Office, the Secretary of State often found himself at odds with other members of the Cabinet when Indian and

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[37] ibid, 368,369, 373.
[38] Ibid, Andrew to Lord Palmerston, 30 June, 1857, p. 368.
[39] H.L. Hoskins, *British Routes to India*, 341.
[40] S. Mahajan, *British Foreign Policy 1874-1914*, 30.
[41] C. Cross, *The Fall of the British Empire*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1968, 143.

imperial interests collided.[42] Kaminsky referred to tensions between the India Office and the War Office over the deployment of Indian troops for imperial ventures elsewhere, paid from Indian revenues for which the Government of India received no compensation.[43]

In late 1871, a House of Commons Select Committee was appointed to investigate the viability of a Euphrates Valley railway line once more. But division of opinion on the Mediterranean terminus of the proposed railway, the route, and whether it would repay the cost of construction resulted in a further postponement.[44] Consistent with the Liberal approach to imperial expansion inspired by the Radical M.P.s Richard Cobden and John Bright[45], during a debate in the House of Commons in February 1873, the Prime Minister, William Gladstone, stated that the government was unable to commit to financing or providing guarantees for the estimated £8,000,000 to £10,000,000 required for the construction of the railway.[46] In any case, communications with India had been considerably improved by 1865, following the opening of the Indo-European telegraph

[42] A.P. Kaminsky, *The India Office, 1880-1910*, London, Mansell, 1986, 110. Lord Lamington explained the complexity, and, it must be said, the absurdity of the system during a speech on British policy in the House of Lords in 1903. Following the demise of the East India Company, the Vice-Consuls in the Persian Gulf were appointed by the Government of India, but their salaries were paid by the Foreign Office, except for the Gulf Resident at Bushire, who was paid by the India Office, but given that he also held the position of Vice-Consul, he was obliged to report to the British Minister at Tehran, the Foreign Office, the India Office, and the Government of India. Vice-Consuls were poorly paid, since the Foreign Office refused to raise them to the rank of Consul, because it had not appointed them. *Hansard*, House of Lords Debates, 4th series, Vol. 121, 5 May, 1903, c1336.

[43] A. Kaminsky, *The India Office, 1880-1910*, 110. Indian Army troops were despatched to China, 1857-1860; Abyssinia in 1867; Cyprus and Malta in 1878; Egypt in 1882; the Sudan in 1896, and China and South Africa between 1899 and 1901.

[44] The National Archives, Parliamentary Papers 1871, no. 386: 'Report from the Select Committee on the Euphrates Valley Railway', 27 July, 1871.

[45] Richard Cobden, Liberal M.P. 1841-1865, and Bright, Liberal M.P. 1843-1889, argued that expenditure on imperial expansion was immoral, an impediment to social reform in Britain, and above all, unnecessary. See, for example, M. Lynn, 'British Policy, Trade and Informal Empire in the Mid-Nineteenth Century', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, W.R. Louis & A. Porter (eds.), Vol. III, *The Nineteenth Century*, 103-4; A. Varnava, 'British and Greek Liberalism and Imperialism in the Long Nineteenth Century', in M.P. Fitzpatrick, (ed), *Liberal Imperialism in Europe*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 226-227.

[46] *Hansard*, Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, Vol. 214, 13 February 1973, cc368-9.

line which passed overland, terminating at Fao at the southern extremity of the Basra Vilayet.[47] Moreover, the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 reduced the time taken to reach India by sea.[48]

William Andrew, however, was not about to let go of his dream. During an address to the United Services Club in May 1873, he referred to a prediction made in 1858 by the Austrian War Minister, Baron von Kuhnenfeld, that Russia would seek to gain a warm-water port in the Persian Gulf by advancing through Armenia and northern Persia to the Euphrates River. Therefore, in order to bolster British influence, and reduce the Russian threat, von Kuhnenfeld suggested that England should build the Euphrates Valley Railway, since 'secure possession of the Euphrates line is decisive as regards the ownership of all land lying within the [Arabian] quadrilateral'.[49] A further attempt to gain support from Disraeli's Conservative government in 1875, met with the response that the Suez Canal was 'sufficient for all purposes',[50] particularly following the purchase of the Khedive's shares in the Suez Canal Company, which secured British representation on the Board of the Company.[51] In 1877, von Kuhnenfeld's suggestion was taken up by Austen Henry Layard,[52] British Ambassador to the Porte, following Russian gains in the Caspian region during the Russo-Ottoman war. However, Disraeli (now Lord Beaconsfield), rejected his

[47] J. Onley, 'Britain's Informal Empire in the Gulf, 1820-1971', *Journal of Social Affairs*, Vol. 22, no. 87, (Autumn 2005), 40; A. Karbelashvili, 'Europe-India Telegraph "Bridge" via the Caucasus', *Indian Journal of History of Science*, Vol. 26, no. 3, 1991, 277-278, accessed 14/06/2013.
[48] H.L. Hoskins, *British Routes to India*, 430; A. Varnava, *British Imperialism in Cyprus*, 31.
[49] W.P. Andrew, *India and her Neighbours*, 328-330.
[50] *The Times*, 14 August, 1875, 9,
[51] H.L. Hoskins, *British Routes to India*, 434.
[52] A traveller, archaeologist and diplomat, Layard's interest in Mesopotamia extended back to 1820, when he made his first visit to the region. He returned following the Euphrates Expedition, taking part in the surveys of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers undertaken by Indian Navy following Chesney's expedition. Between 1845 and 1849, he took part in excavating the Assyrian palace at Nineveh, near Mosul. For an account of Layard's career see G. Waterfield, *Layard of Nineveh*, London, John Murray, 1963.

proposal to extend informal empire over the territory extending from the eastern Mediterranean to the western borders of Persia.[53]

India and the Persian Gulf:

While successive Liberal and Conservative governments may have been unwilling to commit to the construction of the railway, the Government of India's sub-imperial enterprises in the Persian Gulf region progressed, unhindered by competition from the other European Powers for most of the nineteenth century, and the region remained isolated from events further north. During this time, communications with India were not seriously threatened, as India's frontiers extended towards Central Asia, Persia and the Gulf by the favoured method of preserving and cultivating local regimes in order to 'deny strategic advantages to their imperial rivals'.[54] Armed expeditions, in 1809 and 1820 to suppress attacks on British merchant ships from the 'Pirate Coast', were followed by the establishment of treaty relations between the government of India and the chiefs of the six independent Gulf states: the first in 1820, subsequently extended to a Treaty of Maritime Truce between 1835 and 1839, hence the term 'Trucial States', and in 1853, the treaties were re-negotiated and re-named as a Treaty of Perpetual Peace.[55] Not until the late 1870s did the government in London take a serious interest in the region.

[53] Layard to Lord Beaconsfield, 12 December, 1877, cited In D.E. Lee, *Great Britain and the Cyprus Convention Policy of 1878*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1934, 188.
[54] J. Darwin, *Britain, Egypt and the Middle East*, 4.
[55] *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Series B, vol. 18, 207-208: 'Memorandum Respecting British Interests in the Persian Gulf', Foreign Office, 12 February, 1908; P. Sluglett, Britain in Iraq, 3. For an interesting account of the history of the Gulf emirates, see J. Bulloch, *The Gulf: a portrait of Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and the UAE*, London, Century Publishing, 1984.

The first perceived threat to British interests in Mesopotamia, in the 'official mind' at least, emerged as a result of the Russo-Turkish War, 1877-1878, which concluded with Batum on the Black Sea coast, and Kars, Ardahan and Beyazid, near the headwaters of the Euphrates River, in Russian hands. Accordingly, the focus of the British government shifted to the Ottoman Asian provinces.[56] Britain and Austria, dissatisfied with the provisions of the Treaty of San Stefano relating to the Ottoman Empire's European provinces, agreed to hold a conference in Berlin to discuss the issue.[57] During negotiations with their Russian counterparts prior to the opening of the Berlin Congress, the prime minister, Beaconsfield, and his Foreign Secretary, Lord Salisbury, agreed to the retention by Russia of the Ottoman Armenian territories, in exchange for a pledge from the Russian government that it would take no further territory in the Ottoman Asian provinces. To buttress Britain's position further, and in a shift away from the previous Liberal governments' policy of maintaining the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, Disraeli and Salisbury conducted secret negotiations with the Ottoman Sultan, which resulted in the cession of Cyprus to Great Britain, ostensibly in order to establish a military base from which to defend British interests in western Asia.[58] While Layard may have preferred to extend British influence from Mohammerah, in the Shatt el-Arab, the occupation of Cyprus demonstrated again that the British government had no interest in penetrating

[56] D. Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, 37.
[57] By the terms of The Treaty of San Stefano, signed on 3 March, 1878, an autonomous 'big Bulgaria' was created, intended as a 'satellite' of Russia in the Balkans. A.P. Thornton, *The Imperial Idea and its Enemies*, London, Macmillan, 1963, 34. The British viewed this with alarm, believing it to be a threat to Ottoman power in Europe, and a 'springboard' from which the Russians could attack Constantinople. M.S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question 1774-1923: A Study in International Relations*, London, Macmillan, 1966, 199.
[58] See A. Varnava, *British Imperialism in Cyprus*, 75-87; R. Blake, *Disraeli*, London, Eyre & Spottiswood, 1966, 641-645, and W.N. Medlicott, *The Congress of Berlin and After: A Diplomatic History of the Near Eastern Settlement, 1878-1880*, London, Frank Cass, 1963, 7, 19.

into the interior of Mesopotamia. At the same time, however, the acquisition of Cyprus encouraged the promoters of the Euphrates Valley Railway scheme to re-state their case.

On the day the Cyprus Convention was announced, the Duke of Sutherland, William Andrew and Sir John Macneill formed the 'Asia Minor and Euphrates Railway Association'.[59] Their argument in favour of the railway received the same response as that given in 1873, however, and the project was again shelved. [60] Further attempts were made to revive interest in the Euphrates Valley Railway, but as a result of the rejection of the scheme by Gladstone's Liberal government in 1882 and 1885, the project was finally abandoned.[61]

The saga of the Euphrates Valley Railway, and the refusal of successive British governments to commit to providing the necessary guarantees, highlighted the general lack of official interest in the interior, despite the ostensible threat posed to British interests in Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf by Russian expansion and Ottoman weakness.[62] At the same time, whether the Russian threat was real or imagined, by the late nineteenth century there were concrete British-Indian interests in southern Mesopotamia to defend from foreign competition. The London-registered Lynch Brothers' Tigris and Euphrates Steam Navigation Company was established in 1861. This service linked with the British India Steam Navigation Company which operated a

[59] D.E. Lee, *Great Britain and the Cyprus Convention Policy of 1878*, 135, 136, note 27. Lee observed that the membership of this association, the 1857 deputation to Lord Palmerston, and many of those connected with the 1871-72 Select Committees was 'strikingly similar'.
[60] Ibid, 125, 126, 142.
[61] H.L. Hoskins, *British Routes to India*, 447.
[62] The Marquess of Salisbury to A.H. Layard, Constantinople, 9 May, 1878, cited in M.S. Anderson, (ed.), *Great Powers and the Near East, 1774-1923: Documents of Modern History*, London, Edward Arnold, 1970, 102.

subsidised mail service to India, and with the Indian Postal System, established at Basra and Baghdad in 1868.[63]

A perceived threat to British interests in the Persian Gulf emerged in 1898, causing a certain degree of panic in India. Maurice de Bunsen, the British Ambassador in Vienna, notified the Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, of a proposal by Count Vladimir Kapnist, a nephew of the Russian Ambassador, for the construction of a railway from the Mediterranean coast to the Persian Gulf, terminating at Basra.[64] While assuming the proposal was genuine, Sir Nicholas O'Conor, the British Ambassador to the Porte, doubted its viability, given his understanding that the Porte was opposed to granting guarantees.[65] Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India 1899-1905, doubted that the funds could be raised in Russia, noting that 'the sympathy of the Russian Government may perhaps be due to a desire less to construct the railway themselves than to block its construction by others'.[66]

While it was later revealed that Kapnist had no support from his government, the idea of a Russian-owned railway to the Gulf was enough to inspire Curzon to propose the declaration of a protectorate over Kuwait, where the only alternative to a railway terminus at Basra could have been located. Salisbury vetoed Curzon's proposal, and instead, the British Political Agent on behalf of the Government of India, concluded a 'bond' with the Kuwaiti chief, Sheikh Mubarak, with terms similar to the treaties of

[63] P.W. Ireland, *Iraq,* 47-48.
[64] British Library, European Mss, Curzon Papers F111/65, f. 49: Mr de Bunsen to Lord Salisbury, 1 August, 1898.
[65] Curzon Papers F111/65, f. 51: Sir N.R. O'Conor, Constantinople, to Lord Salisbury, 6 October, 1898.
[66] *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Series B, vol. 17, 191: 'Memorandum by Lord Curzon respecting Persian Affairs', 19 November, 1898.

exclusivity re-negotiated with the Trucial chiefs in 1892.[67] By the terms of the agreement, Mubarak agreed not to cede any territory except to Great Britain, to exclude representatives of other Powers, and to conduct foreign relations through the British government,[68] thereby extending Britain's informal empire in the Persian Gulf.

The Baghdad Railway and German commercial penetration of the Persian Gulf:

Kapnist's scheme was almost certainly a chimera, however Curzon sensed a German threat to British Indian interests in the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia earlier than most. While not perturbed by the concession granted in 1889 to the German-backed Anatolian Railway Company for the construction of a railway from Constantinople into the Anatolian hinterland,[69] he noted that 'Germany is the Power that is now pushing her way into the Gulf … she is making a determined bid to get hold of the Bussorah [sic] trade'. Given the possible threat this posed to British trade, Curzon also alluded to the axiom that 'commercial interests are the familiar precursor to political claims.'[70] An editorial in the *Times of India* attacked 'the policy of *laissez faire*, so long followed by the British Government in these regions.' Furthermore, the writer warned,

[67] P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 3. Sluglett argues that the treaties were re-negotiated to counter what the British believed to be a growing French interest in the Gulf.
[68] *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part II, Series B, Vol. 17, 272:'Agreement (Secret) with the Sheikh of Kuwait', 23 January, 1899; M.A. Fitzsimons, *Empire by Treaty: Century*, 6-7; P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 2-3.
[69] For a recent detailed analysis of the beginnings of the Baghdad Railway, see J.S. McMurray, *Distant Ties: Germany, the Ottoman Empire, and the Construction of the Baghdad Railway*, Westport, Praeger, 2001.
[70] *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Series B, vol. 17, 191: 'Memorandum by Lord Curzon respecting Persian Affairs', 19 November, 1898.

> unless the government takes prompt steps to strengthen its position, and, above all, make up its mind to *pursue a definite policy*, we shall soon see ourselves shouldered out by more capable Powers.[71]

In response to reports that German surveyors had been sighted in Kuwait in 1900, seeking a possible site for a railway terminus, the Foreign and India Offices advised the government to take action. Unwilling to risk an entanglement with the Ottoman authorities, however, Salisbury advised a policy of 'watch and wait'.[72] But when the formal conventions between the Anatolian Railway Company and the Porte were drawn up in 1902, it was revealed that the railway was to be extended from Konia to Baghdad, and ultimately to the Persian Gulf, leaving the British to contemplate a terminus at either Basra or Kuwait. [73] The terms of Curzon's agreement with Sheikh Mubarak should have been enough to allay British fears regarding Kuwait. However, the local authorities were unwilling to leave British primacy in the Gulf to chance. This was in stark contrast to the hesitancy of ministers and bureaucrats in London.

The Foreign Secretary, Lord Lansdowne's, declaration of 'policy' in 1903, in response to a question in the House of Lords, would not have completely eased the fears expressed in the *Times of India* some years previously. Often cited as declaring the Persian Gulf a British lake, Lansdowne's declaration was hardly that. Rather, he was less suspicious of the link between commercial and political interests, stating that the British should not attempt to exclude the 'legitimate' trade of other Powers. In fact, he only drew the line at the competitive militarisation of the Gulf, declaring that

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[71] British Library, Curzon Papers, F111/65, f. 153: *The Times of India*, 'Great Britain and Germany in the Persian Gulf: a review of the present situation', 13 August, 1898.
[72] B.C. Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf*, *1894-1914*, Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1967, 189-193.
[73] ibid, 203.

> We should regard the establishment of a naval base, or of a fortified port, in the Persian Gulf by any other Power as a very grave menace to British interests, and we should certainly resist it with all the means at our disposal. I say that in no minatory spirit, because, so far as I am aware, no proposals are on foot for the establishment of a foreign naval base in the Persian Gulf.[74]

Thereafter, in order to impress the benefits of British predominance upon the ruling sheikhs in the Persian Gulf, the Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, undertook a three-week tour of the Gulf in November 1903. [75] Significantly, Arnold Kaminsky argued that the tension between the Foreign, India, and War Offices on the question of securing the Persian Gulf 'reached its zenith' at the time of Curzon's tenure as Viceroy.[76] As the following chapters demonstrate, however, the inter-departmental tensions increased thereafter.

Stuart Cohen considered the Baghdad Railway 'a strategic red herring'; the threat it posed to British interests in Mesopotamia, he argued, was 'more apparent than real'. [77] However, the prospect of a German-owned railway in Mesopotamia certainly alarmed officials in India and Whitehall. According to Lord Minto, (Viceroy of India 1905-1910) a German railway terminating at Basra would damage British prestige, dilute the hitherto commercial predominance enjoyed by Britons in lower Mesopotamia, and challenge British predominance in the Persian Gulf. [78] Sir Percy Cox, the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf concurred, proposing that the line from Baghdad to Basra should not be

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[74] *Hansard*, Parliamentary Debates, 5 May, 1903, House of Lords, 4th series, Vol. CXXI, cc 1348.
[75] M.A. Fitzsimons, *Empire by Treaty*, 6-7.
[76] A.P. Kaminsky, *The India Office*, 110.
[77] S. Cohen, 'Mesopotamia in British Strategy, 1903-1914', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 9, no. 2, (April 1978), 176.
[78] *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Series B, vol. 17, 263: Viceroy to Secretary of State for India, 12 July, 1906

allowed to fall into German hands.[79] Furthermore, he found the idea of the railway terminating in Kuwait equally disturbing. [80]

In March 1907, the Foreign Office Baghdad Railway Committee went further, recommending that the British government should attempt to gain control of the Mosul to Basra section of the line. [81] On the other hand, Colonel Surtees, the Military Attaché at the British Embassy in Constantinople, advocated the occupation of Bubiyan and Warba islands at the head of the Gulf. The presence of British troops, he figured, would have the advantage of not only preventing the establishment of a terminus at the head of the Gulf north of Kuwait without the consent of the British government, but it would also block the activities of the Ottoman forces manning the fort at Fao. [82] However, suspicious of Mubarak's legal claim to the islands, the India Office showed a reluctance to support Mubarak on that issue, while the Foreign Office hesitated to support the proposal to occupy the islands for fear of alienating the Ottomans. [83] Ultimately, another scheme proposed by Cox in 1905, was implemented in August 1907, when the Government of

[79] B.C. Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf*, 308.

[80] ibid, 149. The archetypal Victorian imperialist, Cox was appointed by Curzon as the Government of India's representative in the Persian Gulf, initially as Political Agent and Consul, Muscat, in October 1899, specifically in order to force the Sultan to withdraw a concession for a coaling station recently granted to the French government, Cox was appointed Political Resident and Consul-General in the Persian Gulf in 1904. For details of Cox's early career see P. Graves, *The Life of Sir Percy Cox*, London, Hutchinson, 1941.

[81] *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Series B, vol. 17, 378-392, 393-4: 'Report of the Baghdad Railway Committee', 26 March, 1907; Foreign Office memorandum, 4 June, 1907.

[82] *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Series B, volume 18, 6: 'Memorandum respecting British Occupation of certain localities situated at the head of the Persian Gulf in connection with the projected Terminus of the Baghdad Railway', Colonel Surtees, Military Attaché, Constantinople, 21 September, 1907. The complicating factor concerning Kuwait arose from two points: its status vis-à-vis the Ottoman Empire, and Sheikh Mubarak's claim to Warba and Bubiyan Islands, which was contested by the Ottoman authorities. For an extensive analysis of the question of Kuwait see B.C. Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf*, 94-105, 187-234, 329, 304-347.

[83] *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Series B, vol. 18, 23: Secret telegram Secretary of State for India to Viceroy, 20 November, 1907; L. Mallet, Foreign Office, to the Under-Secretary of State, India Office, 12 November 1907.

India leased an area on the Kuwait foreshore for no other reason than to prevent the construction of a terminus there by the Baghdad Railway Company.[84]

The 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention, the consolidation of informal imperial spheres of influence, recognised a Russian sphere in northern Persia, a small British sphere in southern Persia with a neutral zone separating the two, together with Russian recognition of British predominance in Afghanistan. Anderson argued that this seemed to eliminate the perceived Russian threat to the Persian Gulf.[85] As Jennifer Siegel argued, however, the Convention did not prevent Russian penetration into the neutral zone, leaving Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf vulnerable to Russian expansion.[86] At the same time, Curzon's warnings regarding the implications for British trade of the expansion of German competition in the Persian Gulf were heeded.

As previously mentioned, in 1907, George Lloyd was despatched by the Board of Trade to survey the region with a view to the expansion of British commerce. His report, written following a six month tour from Mosul to Basra, was the first and most comprehensive undertaken to date.[87] Lloyd wrote of the potential utopia in Mesopotamia, awaiting development by means of British technology and expertise. Alluding to the danger posed by German commercial competition in the Gulf, he criticised

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[84] *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Series B, vol. 17, 123: Major S.G. Knox, Political Agent, Kuwait, to the Under-Secretary of State, Foreign Office, 21 August 1907, containing the English translation of the lease Agreement signed by Sheikh Mubarak on that date.
[85] M.S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question 1774-1923,* 272; D.E. Lee, *Great Britain and the Cyprus Convention Policy of 1878*, 262.
[86] For a detailed study of Anglo-Russian relations between 1907 and 1914, see J. Siegel, *Endgame: Britain, Russia and the Final Struggle for Central Asia*, London & New York, I.B. Tauris, 2002.
[87] *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Series B, vol. 16, 91-348: G. Lloyd, 'Report for the Board of Trade Advisory Committee on Commercial Intelligence', 1908.

the general lack of interest in the development of the interior, especially Baghdad, which he argued

> to the average British merchant and manufacturer conveys little except a lingering remembrance of Arabian Night fable; or at most, the feeling that it is a spot buried in the interior of an unknown East, uncivilised and undeveloped. [88]

Significantly, he charged that Mosul, while hitherto neglected, was of 'very special importance', not because of the suspected oil deposits, which were mentioned only briefly in his report, but because it represented 'the trade outpost that is to mark off British-Indian commercial interests from Turkish commercial interests.'[89]

While Lloyd and the railway promoters before him exaggerated the agricultural potential of Mesopotamia, not all were convinced. Alwyn Parker of the Foreign Office, involved in discussions regarding the Baghdad Railway at the time, painted a much gloomier picture. When considering the value of a railway to the development of the regions through which it was to pass, he stated that

> If the first two sections of the Baghdad Railway beyond Konia may … be expected to earn a fair revenue, the same can certainly not be predicated of the further sections, and especially not of those which cross the arid wastes of the Upper Euphrates and Tigris basin … Even in what were of old the most fertile tracts of Mesopotamia, extensive and costly works of both irrigation and drainage will be required in addition to the railway, if anything like its ancient prosperity is to be restored.[90]

Parker's thoughts related to the misguided materialist justifications for imperial expansion based on Orientalist assumptions of an agricultural El Dorado in Mesopotamia,

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[88] Ibid, 122.
[89] 'Report for the Board of Trade Advisory Committee on Commercial Intelligence', 195. The significance of that remark becomes clearer in the following chapters.
[90] FO371/148/10680: A. Parker, Foreign Office, 'Memorandum Respecting the Baghdad Railway (Amended Version)', 30 June, 1906.

which in many cases accompanied strategic, commercial and political considerations.[91] Sir William Willcocks provided a good example. Previously employed on irrigation works in Egypt and India, he arrived in Mesopotamia in 1902, in order to study the feasibility of an irrigation scheme to harness the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Through the offices of the British Ambassador in Constantinople, in 1908 Willcocks was engaged by the Porte to undertake a survey and prepare plans for the vast project he had envisaged. In Orientalist terms, Willcocks informed an audience at the Royal Geographical Society in London in 1910: 'I started with the Garden of Eden.'[92] His discourse, liberally sprinkled with passages from the Old Testament, included a complex description of the plans and the work required to restore Mesopotamia to what he and others believed had been its 'glorious past'.[93]

Together with Willcocks' irrigation works, which were halted by the outbreak of hostilities in 1914, British commercial interests in southern Mesopotamia increased during the early years of the twentieth century. In 1906, 96 per cent of the shipping at the port of Basra was British; 60 per cent of the imports originated from Britain, India or other British colonies; 11,535 pilgrims from India passed through Mesopotamia in 1905 in order to visit Shi'a shrines in the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala or on pilgrimages to Mecca.

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[91] For the cultural and mythical dimensions of the agricultural El Dorado in Mesopotamia, see N. Atia, 'A relic of its own past: Mesopotamia in the British imagination, 1900-1914', *Memory Studies*, Vol. 3, no. 2, (2010), 232-241, and her unpublished PhD thesis, 'War in the "Cradle of Civilisation": British Perceptions of Mesopotamia, 1907-1921', 2010. http://gmro.gmul.ac.uk/jspui/bitstream/123456789/620/1/ATIAWARin2010.pdf, accessed online, 27 January, 2013, and P. Satia, 'Developing Iraq: Britain, India and the Redemption of Empire and Technology in the First World War', *Past and Present*, 197, (Nov., 2007), 211-255. For a more general application of the imperial utopia trope see E. Bar Yosef, *The Holy Land in English Culture 1799-1917,* and for similar imaginings regarding Cyprus, see A. Varnava, *British Imperialism in Cyprus*.

[92] Sir W. Willcocks, 'Mesopotamia: Past, Present and Future', *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 35, no. 1, (January 1910), 1.

[93] Ibid, 10,11.

Approximately twenty-five per cent of the river transport between Basra and Baghdad was carried by the Lynch Brothers' Tigris and Euphrates Steam Navigation Company.[94] In the years between 1903 and 1914, the British community at Basra 'trebled', and there were substantial Indian communities in most of the larger towns of central and southern Mesopotamia.[95] Despite this, H.G. Chick, the commercial adviser to the British Residency at Bushire was stridently critical of the government's policy, stating his concern that

> [r]eports have been constantly sent in to His Majesty's Government, pointing out the progress made by German interests … yet His Majesty's Government, though apprehensive, have so far offered no opposition … The advance of German commercial and political interests in the Gulf will not be met by a policy of drift and "do nothing active", which has been the line up till now.[96]

There was cause for concern regarding the infiltration of German commerce and culture in Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf in the first decade of the twentieth century. In 1897, there was one German merchant, Robert Wonkhaus, trading in the Persian Gulf. By 1910, he had expanded his operations to other centres, including Basra, and had been appointed 'honorary consul' in Basra.[97] However, his operation remained the only German company with interests in the region until the Hamburg-Amerika Line established a regular shipping service to the Persian Gulf in August 1906, for which Wonkhaus acted as agent.[98] From 1903, pamphlets were being distributed in Germany, encouraging farmers to migrate to Mesopotamia to use their expertise to increase the agricultural

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[94] *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Series B, vol. 17, 365: Consul F.E. Crow to Mr G. Barclay, Constantinople, 8 January, 1907.
[95] S.H. Longrigg, *Iraq, 1900-1950,* 67-68.
[96] *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Series B, vol. 16, 413: Mr H.G. Chick, 'Report on German Trade and Shipping in the Persian Gulf for the period October 1911-12', enclosed in Lt.-Col. Sir P. Cox to Sir Edward Grey, 21 September, 1913.
[97] U. Trumpener, 'Germany and the End of the Ottoman Empire', in M. Kent (ed), *The Great Powers and the End of the Ottoman Empire*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1984, 113-114.
[98] B.C. Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf*, 353-4; S.H. Longrigg, *Iraq*, 66.

productivity of the country.[99] In 1909, a German *Propagandaschule* was established in Baghdad, with the object of disseminating German language and culture to the local population,[100] and by 1912, there were German Consulates at Mosul, Baghdad and Basra.

Furthermore, it seems German business practices reflected badly on the methods of British traders. The Hamburg-Amerika service was more reliable than the British India Steam Navigation Company, running a regular schedule and calling at ports which the British bypassed.[101] Moreover, what should have concerned the British authorities on the spot even more was the fact, noted by the British Vice-Consul at Ahwaz, that

> German firms consider their clients, their convenience and their foibles. … Their rates are favourable and lastly … they treat their clients with politeness and even go out of their way to suit their convenience.[102]

While British interests were concentrated primarily in the south, there was no unanimity among British authorities regarding which part of Mesopotamia would be of most value to the British Empire. In 1903, the War Office Intelligence Department commissioned Captain H. Smyth of the First Battalion, Cheshire Regiment, to undertake a reconnaissance of the country where it was proposed to construct a railway line running from Adana to the Persian Gulf.[103] In his estimation, Basra was the primary centre for

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[99] P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 3.
[100] F. Stremmel, 'An Imperial German Battle to win over Mesopotamia: the Baghdad Propagandaschule (1909-1917)', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 51, no. 1, 2015, 49-71, accessed 7/08/2014.
[101] British Library, Asian and African Studies, India Office Political and Secret files, L/P&S/10, file 366, register no. P.2658, Lord Inchcape to T.W. Holderness, India Office, 3 July, 1914, forwarded to Board of Trade, 19 June, 1914: British ships were bypassing Bahrain, and calling infrequently at Lingah.
[102] L/P&S/10/366, register no. 2993, Vice-Consul Ranking, Ahwaz to British Consul, Mohammerah, 14 May, 1914.
[103] *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Series B, vol. 17, 222-223: 'Captain Smyth's Journey from England to India', 1903, enclosed in War Office Intelligence Department to Foreign Office, 6 May, 1904.

British trade. [104] F.E. Crow, the British Consul at Basra, however, dismissed that town as 'merely the ocean port of Baghdad' which he believed was the centre for trade extending to Mosul in the north, Aleppo to the west, and western Persia to the east. [105] In 1913, J.S. Lorimer, the acting British Resident at Baghdad, advocated extending the British sphere to include Mosul, since he perceived the control of water and irrigation systems to be the best means of securing British predominance.[106]

War plans, 1912.

The foregoing illustrates that as long as the policy of maintaining the Ottoman Empire remained in force, despite the views of the local officials, British interests were confined to the Gulf coast and the waterways of southern Mesopotamia, given that successive governments of both persuasions had vetoed plans to open up the interior through the construction of railways, 'the most direct route to carving out spheres of influence within the Ottoman Empire.'[107] But that was soon to change.

Harking back to Lord Lansdowne's 1903 declaration in the House of Lords regarding the establishment of bases in the Persian Gulf by other Powers, it was not a rival European Power which disturbed the *pax Britannica* in the Gulf, but the Ottomans, when news was received at the British Embassy in Constantinople in December 1911, that the garrison at Fao Fort, and Ottoman military posts near Basra were being

[104] Ibid, 227, 240.
[105] *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part I, Series B, vol. 17, 365: Consul F.E. Crow, Basra, to Mr G. Barclay, Constantinople, 8 January, 1907.
[106] P.W. Ireland, *Iraq*, 57, note 2.
[107] S. Pamuk, *The Ottoman Empire and European Capitalism, 1820-1913,* 79.

strengthened.[108] From London, the Liberal Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey's response was predictable: 'watch' and report signs of Ottoman troop movements.[109] At the same time, Lord Hardinge (Viceroy of India, 1910-1916) alerted Lord Crewe, the Secretary of State for India, to a despatch received from the Baghdad Resident, recounting instances of Ottoman hostility towards the British. Hardinge informed Crewe that if outstanding issues, such as the status of Kuwait, and navigation rights on the rivers, were not settled with the Ottoman authorities, he considered that in order to restore British prestige, 'it may be necessary to vindicate our position vis-à-vis Turkey, in the Persian Gulf.' [110] However, it is apparent that before notifying Crewe, Hardinge had already taken measures towards that goal.

A committee convened in Calcutta issued a report on the day the Viceroy's despatch was sent, recommending the 'temporary' occupation of Basra and the establishment of British authority over the Shatt-el-Arab for 30 miles north of the town, thereby depriving the Ottoman authorities of the revenue from the Basra trade. The kernel of the war plan executed in 1914 appeared in the statement that

> It is clear that the regularisation of our position in the Shatt-el-Arab would be one, and perhaps the most important, of our objectives in undertaking operations conceivably ending in war.[111]

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[108] FO371/1490/2865: Consul F.E. Crow, Basra, to Sir G. Lowther, Ambassador, Constantinople, telegram no. 61, 22 December 1911, enclosed in Sir G. Lowther to Sir E. Grey, 17 January, 1912.
[109] FO371/1490/2865: Grey telegram no. 52 to Lowther, 7 February, 1912.
[110] L/P&S/11/1256, register no. P.787: Viceroy, Foreign Department, Government of India, to Secretary of State for India, 15 February, 1912. (Copies are held at FO371/1490/10200).
[111] L/P&S/11/1256, register no. P.787: 'Measures to be adopted for the vindication of the British government vis-à-vis Turkey in the Persian Gulf and its littoral', 15 February, 1912, 1-2. The members of the Committee, who all went on to play important roles in the Middle East during the war were: Sir Percy Cox, British Resident and Vice-Consul in the Persian Gulf; Admiral Sir E.J. Slade, Commander-in-Chief, East Indies Station, (a director of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company from 1913); General Sir Percy Lake, Chief of Staff, Indian Army, (Officer Commanding of Indian Expeditionary Force 'D' in Mesopotamia in 1916); and Sir Henry McMahon, Secretary, Foreign Department of the Government of India (High Commissioner, Cairo, in 1915).

Hardinge was not prepared to contemplate the occupation of Basra, given he considered the number of troops recommended by the committee would be insufficient to hold the town. Nonetheless, he conceded that in the event of widespread hostilities with the Ottoman Empire, it might be considered 'under certain circumstances', if only to create a diversion.[112] Sir Beauchamp Duff, Military Secretary at the India Office, shared Hardinge's concerns regarding the troop strength required to hold Basra. His principal concern, however, related to the possible reaction from Muslims in India, Afghanistan and the Ottoman Empire, to what would have been perceived as an attack on the Caliphate.[113] As before, Grey advised the British Ambassador in Constantinople to 'watch' and report any signs of Ottoman troop movements.[114] The primacy of naval considerations became evident when in January 1912 Hardinge assured Crewe that given the ability of the British Navy to block the entrance to the Persian Gulf, the occupation of Basra would be unnecessary.[115]

By March, while the India Office may have believed that the situation in the Persian Gulf had improved, rendering the recommendations of the Calcutta committee

[112] L/P&S/11/1256, register no. 787, Viceroy to Secretary of State, 15 February, 1912. Hardinge's one concern regarding the Committee's proposals was that more troops would be required in order to hold Basra than the one division recommended. In response to provocations from Ottoman authorities, in 1906 and again in 1910-1911, the Committee of Imperial Defence had also given consideration to the occupation of Basra. See S. Cohen, 'Mesopotamia in British Strategy', 171.

[113] L/P&S/11/1256, register no. P.787: note by the Military Secretary, India Office, 5 March, 1912. Following a distinguished career in the Indian Army, General Sir Beauchamp Duff held the post of Military Secretary at the India Office from 1910 to 1914. In March 1914, he was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army, but was relieved of his post following the military disaster in Mesopotamia during the first attempt to reach Baghdad. J.H. Seabrooke, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* on-line service, 2008. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/32918, accessed 27 March 2015.

[114] FO371/1490/2865: Sir Edward Grey telegram no. 52, to Sir G. Lowther, Constantinople, 7 February, 1912.

[115] Hardinge to Crewe, 8 January 1912, cited in S. Cohen, 'Mesopotamia in British Strategy', 178.

unnecessary,[116] Cox was not content to let the matter rest. As Hardinge informed Crewe, when the British Consul at Basra informed Cox 'demi-officially' of Grey's recommendation, in true Palmerstonian style, he urged Hardinge to request the Admiralty to send a gun-boat, to pay a 'friendly visit' to the Gulf to report on the current military strength of the Ottoman Army.[117] However, the Foreign Office, the India Office, and the Admiralty, for once in accord, rejected Cox's proposal.[118] However, with reference to Hardinge's comment regarding 'certain circumstances', between 1909 and August 1914, there had been significant changes, further drawing British interests into Mesopotamia.

The Anglo-Persian Oil Company was formed in 1909 to work a concession granted by the Ottoman Sultan in 1901 to search for oil in Persia,[119] On 16 July, 1909, the Company leased Abadan Island, in the Shatt al-Arab, from Sheikh Khazal of Mohammerah.[120] Construction of the oil refinery began in 1910.[121] A long-standing territorial dispute over the border between the Ottoman Empire and Persia was settled by a Frontier Commission established in 1913, which secured an undertaking that British-held oil rights would be preserved in any Persian territory transferred to the Ottoman

[116] FO371/1490/10200, R. Ritchie, India Office to the Under-Secretary of State, Foreign Office, 7 March, 1912.
[117] FO371/1490/11094: Viceroy to the Secretary of State for India, 11 March, 1912.
[118] FO371/11094: L. Mallet, Foreign Office, to the Under-Secretary of State, India Office, 22 March, 1912; R. Ritchie, India Office, to the Under-Secretary of State, Foreign Office, 13 March, 1912.
[119] L/P&S/10/410, P.3654/1913, register no. 2463/14, copy of 'Agreement with the Anglo-Persian Oil Company Ltd.', Cmd. 7419, 1914.
[120] B.C. Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf*, 381.
[121] E. Black, *British Petroleum and the Redline Agreement: the West's Secret Pact to Get Mideast Oil*, Westport, Conn., Dialog Press, 2011, 38.

Empire. Two parcels of territory were awarded to the Ottoman Empire, both of which were included in the 1901 concession.[122]

The bipolar British imperial infrastructure was evident when in June 1914 the British government signed an agreement with the Anglo-Persian Oil Company to purchase a majority shareholding in the company.[123] This inspired an angry response from Sir Arthur Hirtzel, head of the Political and Secret Department of the India Office, who stated indignantly that the India Office had not been consulted before the transaction occurred. Nor, he insisted, was his Office informed that this would place 'fresh responsibilities on the Government of India for the protection of the Company's oilfields.'[124] Hirtzel's anger was understandable, given that the oil-fields and refinery were within India's sphere of influence, and if the need arose, Indian troops would be called upon to defend them, a point which Sir Thomas Holderness, the Permanent Under-Secretary also recognised. While doubting the sincerity of statements made by Grey and Winston Churchill (First Lord of the Admiralty) in the House of Commons dismissing the significance of the oil works at Abadan, Holderness noted with some reluctance, that in the event of war with

[122] S.H. Longrigg, *Iraq, 1900 to 1950*, 73.
[123] L/P&S/10/410, P. 3654/1913, register no. 2463/14: copy of Cmd. 7419, 'Agreement with the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, 1914'. P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 68, states that the British government made the decision to purchase the shares a few days before the declaration of war on Germany. However, debates in the House of Commons suggest that Cabinet made the decision earlier. The House of Commons approved the purchase of the shares on 7 July, 1914. *Hansard*, House of Commons debates, 7 July 1914, vol. 65, c. 923; the Bill sanctioning the expenditure of £2,000,000 for the purchase passed its third reading in the House of Commons on 28 July 1914. *Hansard*, House of Commons debates, 28 July, 1914, Vol. 65, c. 1302. Following its passage through the House of Lords, the Bill came into effect on 10 August 1014. E. Black, *British Petroleum and the Redline Agreement,* 66.
[124] L/P&S/10/410, register no. 3654/13, Hirtzel to T.W. Holderness, 27 June, 1914.

the Ottoman Empire, India would be pressed to send troops, 'however difficult it might be to spare them.'[125]

The Anglo-Ottoman Agreement of July 1913, together with the Anglo-German Convention on the Baghdad Railway, initialled on 15 June, 1914, came close to clearing up the outstanding issues which had prompted the war plans in 1912. Britain's 'special' position in the Persian Gulf was recognised, as was the validity of the 1899 agreement with Sheikh Mubarak of Kuwait. It was agreed that the Baghdad Railway would terminate at Basra, and a new river-boat company would be formed, merging the Lynch brothers' Tigris and Euphrates Navigation Company with Lord Inchcape's British India Steam Navigation Company and the existing Ottoman service. Lord Inchcape was to be appointed as the head of the company, which was to hold a monopoly on river transport, and responsibility for conservancy of the rivers for the duration of the construction of the Baghdad Railway. [126]

However, the rapid march of events in August ensured that those agreements were not ratified. The Porte formalised an alliance with Germany on 2 August 1914, and two days later, Britain declared war on Germany.[127] The polycratic imperial state showed its divergent interests when Lord Crewe again expressed reluctance to involve India in a war with the Ottoman Empire, stating

[125] L/P&S/10/P.3654/13, register no. 2357a, Holderness to Secretary of State, 1 July, 1914; *Hansard*, House of Commons debates, 5th series, Vol. 63, no. 79, 17 June, 1914, col. 1132.
[126] E.M. Earle, 'The Secret Anglo-German Convention of 1914 Regarding Asiatic Turkey', *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 38, no. 1, (Mar. 1923), 25, (accessed 13/03/2012); P.W. Ireland, *Iraq*, 56.
[127] J.C. Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East: a documentary record, 1914-1956*, Vol. II, Princeton, D. Van Nostrand & Co., 1956, 1-2.

> I am very strongly of opinion … that to keep ourselves right with Indian Moslem opinion, we must carefully abstain from picking a quarrel with Turkey, even under provocation.[128]

However, Ottoman hostility towards British enterprises and personnel in Baghdad, following the outbreak of war with Germany, together with reports of 'anti-British' sentiment in Basra,[129] breathed new life into the war plans developed in 1912.

Conclusion:

In diplomatic, strategic and commercial terms, the view from India and its representatives in the region did not always accord with the view of the government in London, which was itself by no means united on every issue. The only certainty, if certainty can be applied to the disparate views of the politicians, residents and consuls responsible for the jurisdiction of British interests in the region, was that in the event of war with the Ottoman Empire, despite the apparent reluctance of officials at the India Office, British troops would be required to protect British interests in the Persian Gulf. So entrenched was this understanding by 1914, the war plan was implemented without a formal declaration of war.

[128] University Library, Cambridge, Crewe Papers C/12: Crewe to Curzon, 19 August, 1914.
[129] FO371/2141/53604: Captain H.T. Fitzgerald, R.N. demi-official letter to India Office, 3 September, 1914.

Chapter Two

Mesopotamia, 1914-1918: continuity and change.

The war plans of the 1912 committee were put into effect in late 1914, prior to the declaration of war on the Ottoman Empire. The occupation of Basra, and the new dynamic created by the establishment of a second locus of British power in the Middle East pivoted on India, resulted in a complex web of overlapping jurisdictions, divided between the governments in London and India, and tensions and jealousies between British officials in Egypt and Mesopotamia. The decision to exploit the resources of the country for military self-sufficiency and for ensuring post-war commercial predominance showed some elements of continuity with nineteenth century colonial development in India and Egypt. Yet at the same time, following the entry of the United States into the war, a new doctrine of self-determination for subject peoples was developing. The object of this chapter then, is to assess the impact of these competing trends on British imperial policy for Mesopotamia.

Prelude to War:

Busch argued that the independent stance of India in the Persian Gulf region was the reason for the incoherence of British Middle Eastern policy at the end of the war; that the Government of India and officials in Mesopotamia operated without consideration of wider imperial war aims.[1] Yet in August 1914, Lord Charles Hardinge, the Viceroy of India, shared the reluctance of India Office officials to provide Indian troops for the defence of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company's refinery at Abadan, informing the Secretary of State for India that he did not believe an attack on Abadan was likely. In any case, he doubted if the value of the

[1] B.C. Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs,* vii.

refinery outweighed the risk of precipitating hostilities with the Ottoman Empire by the presence of British troops in the Shatt-el-Arab. However, he deferred to the decisions of the Cabinet in London.[2] But with no decision forthcoming, and discounting the Viceroy's fears, the Admiralty recommended that a force should be assembled at Karachi, to move into the Persian Gulf at the shortest possible notice in case of an attack on Abadan.[3] Revealing his imperial ambitions, Sir Arthur Hirtzel, head of the India Office Political and Secret Department, warned that if the Ottomans were to retain possession of territory that had

> always been regarded as strategically and politically of the utmost importance to India, we shall not be in a strong position to turn the situation to our advantage when the final settlement comes.[4]

Accordingly, General E.G. Barrow, Secretary of the India Office Military Department, devised a plan in which the defence of Abadan would serve as a vehicle for setting the Government of India's 1912 war plans into action.[5] At the same time, Sir Percy Cox, head of the Foreign Department of the Government of India, revealed his intention to recruit local sheikhs, nurtured by him during his term as Persian Gulf Resident, to take an active part in the defence of British interests at the head of the Gulf if hostilities commenced. Cox believed that Sheikh Mubarak, the ruler of Kuwait and Sheikh Khazal of Mohammerah, together with notables in Basra, and possibly ibn Saud, 'if given certain assurances', would be willing to assist in the British occupation of Basra.[6] Hardinge seemed to have overcome his earlier

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[2] L/P&S/10/462, register no. 3305: Viceroy to the Secretary of State for India, 21 August, 1914.
[3] L/P&S/10/462, register no. 3340: F. Graham Greene, Admiralty, to the Under-Secretary of State for India, 25 August, 1914.
[4] L/P&S/10/462, register no. 3439: Sir A. Hirtzel, Secret Reference Paper to the Secretary, Military Department, India Office, 2 September, 1914. John Fisher, *Curzon and British Imperialism in the Middle East*, 15, credits Hirtzel with expansive imperial ambitions, aims which this paper certainly supports.
[5] Command Paper 8610: Mesopotamia Commission Report, part II, 'Origin of the Mesopotamia Expedition', p. 12: 'The Role of India in a Turkish War', memorandum by Lt.-General E.G. Barrow, Military Secretary, India Office, 26 September, 1914.
[6] L/P&S/10/462, register no. P.3848: Secretary to Government of India Foreign and Political department, telegram no. 7015, to the Political Resident, Persian Gulf, 6 September, 1914. The 'assurances' were subsequently translated into policy: Kuwait was declared an independent principality under British protection; a treaty with ibn Saud was signed on 26 December, 1915, binding Britain to recognise him as the independent

reluctance, since he supported Cox's proposal and moreover, informed the Secretary of State for India that he proposed to send Cox to the Gulf if an expedition proceeded, given his previous experience as Gulf Resident from 1904 to 1913. There was a degree of ambiguity in the Cabinet decision relayed to Hardinge in early October. He was informed that Cabinet had decided to take military action to protect the oil tanks on Abadan, and other British interests in Persia. But as regards an attack on Ottoman territory, the Commanding Officer was allowed discretion to make that decision 'in case of absolute military necessity'.[7]

Six days later, one month before the British government declared war on the Ottoman Empire, the Chief of the General Staff of the Indian Army, Sir Beauchamp Duff, issued instructions to the Commanding Officer of the force heading for the Gulf, henceforth to be known as Indian Expeditionary Force 'D', to take military and political action 'as you think feasible to strengthen your position, and if possible, occupy Basra'.[8] Had it not been for poor weather conditions in the Gulf, that objective would probably have been achieved prior to the declaration of war with the Ottoman Empire on 5 November, 1914. As events transpired, the force, which had been encamped on Bahrain since the 23 October, moved into the Shatt-el-Arab on the day war was declared. The Ottoman fort at Fao was overrun, Abadan secured, and on 16 November, the force was making its way towards Basra before

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ruler of Nejd, and to protect his territory 'against aggression by any foreign power'. Curzon Papers, F112/254, f. 67: Appendix XX to the de Bunsen Committee Report, 'British Assurances to the Sheikhs of Koweit and Mohammerah and to the Amir of Nejd', note by the India Office, 15 April, 1915.

[7] Curzon Papers, F112/163, f 177: 'Papers relating to the Operations in Mesopotamia, Secretary of State for India to the Viceroy, 2 October, 1914.

[8] Curzon Papers, F112/163, f. 178: 'Papers relating to the Operations in Mesopotamia', Chief of the General Staff, India, to Colonel W.S. Delamain, 8 October, 1914

Hardinge was notified that Cabinet had given approval for the capture of the city.[9] Indian Expeditionary Force 'D' marched into Basra on 21 November, and on the following day the familiar colonial flag-raising ceremony was held before an assembly of local notables, who were given a pledge that 'the Turks' would never return.[10] For India, this represented an opportunity too good to miss to secure British interests built up over the past century in the Persian Gulf and its environs.

War, 1914 – 1918: Mesopotamia under British Administration.

In describing the logic of political control in India, Phillip Ireland noted that the maintenance of political authority over occupied territory

> [b]ecomes its chief objective … It might claim that only thus can it facilitate economic development … and increase the prestige and power which are associated with the command of such territory. The political authority is therefore constantly engaged in efforts to consolidate its control over territory won, and to extend, wherever possible, by conquest or peaceful penetration, its dominion.[11]

Certainly, the pattern of 'military conquest, pacification and the introduction of civil machinery'[12] in Mesopotamia following the occupation of Basra has parallels with British imperialism in India.

Cox's first act as Chief Political Officer of Indian Expeditionary Force 'D' was to request permission from the Viceroy to announce the permanent occupation of Basra.[13] Hardinge agreed to Cox's request, since he believed 'it would facilitate administration of the

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[9] Curzon Papers, F112/163, f. 140: 'Precise of Correspondence regarding the Mesopotamian Expedition – Its Genesis and Development', prepared in the Military Department of the India Office, 14 February, 1916: Secretary of State for India to the Viceroy, 16 November, 1916.
[10] Curzon Papers, F112/163, f. 182: 'Papers relating to the Operations in Mesopotamia', General Barrett, General Officer Commanding, Indian Expeditionary Force 'D', to the Secretary of State for India, 24 November, 1914.
[11] P.W. Ireland, *Iraq,* 35.
[12] K. C. Ulrichsen, 'The British Occupation of Mesopotamia, 1914-1922', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 30, no. 2, (2007), 360.
[13] L/P&S/10/513, P.4097/14, register no. 4726: Sir P. Cox, Basra, to the Viceroy, 27 November, 1914.

area, settle once and for all the question of Gulf supremacy … and end the issue of the Baghdad Railway terminus'.[14] The Foreign Office objected, however, stating that a declaration of annexation, while likely to arouse French and Russian suspicions, was also contrary to the Hague Regulations of 1907, which stipulated that the occupation of enemy territory was provisional only, pending a peace settlement.[15] In private correspondence with Hardinge, Sir Arthur Nicolson, Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, agreed that Basra should be retained after the war, however, he warned that British intentions in that regard must remain secret.[16] While Lord Crewe, the Secretary of State for India, did not endorse Cox's request, he considered that in view of political and commercial considerations relating to the port of Basra, the British authorities should establish a 'working administration' without delay.[17] Hirtzel noted that the Foreign Office would not wish to be consulted on administrative arrangements in Mesopotamia, unless international questions were raised.[18]

V.H. Rothwell asserted that the Government of India, the India Office and the men on the spot 'preferred to treat the occupied territory in isolation, almost from the start as though the rest of the Arab world did not exist'.[19] Prior to the commencement of the Dardanelles campaign in early 1915, arguably Mesopotamia was isolated both geographically and in terms of British military operations. Furthermore, with no specific

[14] Hardinge to Crewe, 7 December, 1914, cited in B.C. Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs*, 17.
[15] L/P&S/10/513, P. 4097/14, register no. 4887, E.A. Crowe, Foreign Office, to the Under-Secretary of State for India, 15 December, 1914.
[16] FO800/377, Nicolson Papers, f. 114: Sir A. Nicolson, private, to Sir Charles Hardinge, 3 February, 1915.
[17] Curzon Papers, F112/163, f. 183: 'Papers relating to the Operations in Mesopotamia, Part II: Occupation of Basra to the battle of Barjisiyeh': Secretary of State for India to the Viceroy, 16 December, 1914.
[18] L/P&S/10/513, P.4097/14, register no. 4726: Hirtzel note, 11 December, 1914 on Viceroy to Secretary of State for India of 5 December, 1914.
[19] V.H. Rothwell, 'Mesopotamia in British War Aims, 1914-1918', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 13, no. 2, (June, 1970), 293.

instructions from London or Simla, the men on the spot made the immediate decisions regarding the establishment of the administrative machinery.[20] This was no departure from British imperial practice, given that traditionally, one of the leading characteristics of the British Empire was its decentralised nature, whereby power and authority rested with the imperial proconsuls on the spot.[21] By the same token, the programme of collaboration with Hussein ibn Ali, the Sharif of Mecca, pursued by British officials in Cairo was, for the most part, conducted without adequate supervision by the Foreign Office.[22]

Distance also proved a barrier to close supervision of the activities of the officials on the spot.[23] But given that the majority of the political officers were plucked from the Indian Civil Service or the Indian Army, it was inevitable that the administrative system with which they were familiar would be replicated in Mesopotamia. Referring to the fact that Mesopotamia was viewed as a suitable location for the establishment of an Indian colony to relieve overpopulation in the Punjab and Scinde,[24] Satia argued that authorities did not imagine Mesopotamia as a place apart.[25] Rather, it was a place largely unknown beyond the immediate environs of Basra and Baghdad. The lack of interest in the interior was soundly criticised by one of their own, who reported in 1915 that

[20] P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 12.
[21] C. Cross, *The Fall of the British Empire*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1968, 143; Alexander Scholch, 'The "Men on the Spot" and the English Occupation of Egypt in 1822', 773-785.
[22] E. Kedourie, *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth: The McMahon-Husayn Correspondence and its Interpretations 1914-1939*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976, 31; G.J. Protheroe, *Searching for Security in a New Europe: the diplomatic career of Sir George Russell Clerk*, London & New York, Routledge, 2006, 24-25.
[23] R. Hyam and G. Martin, *Reappraisals in British Imperial History*, London, Macmillan, 1975, 7.
[24] L/P&S/10/463, P.4717/1914: Captain A.T. Wilson to Colonel Yate, 28 November, 1914 is the most widely quoted iteration of the proposal to develop Mesopotamia as an Indian colony.
[25] P. Satia, 'Developing Iraq: Britain, India and the Redemption of Empire and Technology in the First World War, *Past and Present*, no. 197, (Nov., 2007), 247. Satia rather overstates the case while contradicting her earlier references to soldiers' correspondence, which illustrates the dichotomy of 'known' and 'other'. The 'known' in their accounts, as in many Europeans' accounts of Mesopotamia reflected an epistemology framed by classical history and Bible stories, rather than a connection with India.

> The Iraqis have had very little connection with us, and dwell too far away ever to have come under the influence of our Persian Gulf officials. The Resident at Baghdad has in all probability had little opportunity of cultivating their friendship or of making his influence felt amongst them … Their country nowhere touches upon Persian Gulf administrative limits, and I learn that no decided efforts have ever been made by His Majesty's Consuls at Basrah [*sic*] to establish friendly relations with them.[26]

The precise form of the administrative system established in Basra needs little reiteration here.[27] A British military governor was appointed on arrival, and within a week, a police force was established, and Cox's plan for the take-over of the former Ottoman administrative departments was approved by the Viceroy.[28] In early 1915, the Iraq Occupied Territories Code of law was instituted, based on the Indian model, and as further territory came under British occupation, under the Tribal Criminal and Civil Disputes Regulations, based on the Indian Frontier Crimes Regulations, the Political Officers were accorded full magisterial powers.[29] As noted by several scholars, the system of civil administration established by Anglo-Indian officials in Basra, also assessed as Anglo-Indian sub-imperialism, was a foreign and inflexible system of control.[30] As a result, local collaborators were carefully selected, and any sign of an organised Arab nationalist movement were actively suppressed, and potential political troublemakers were discreetly removed.[31]

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[26] FO371/2486/97255: Lt.-Col. W.G. Grey, Indian Army, Political Agent Kuwait, to the Secretary, Political Department, India Office, 9 June, 1915.
[27] For more detailed analyses of the British administrative system see P.W. Ireland, *Iraq*, 81-94. For personal account see A.T. Wilson, *Loyalties: Mesopotamia, 1914-1917: a personal and historical record*, London, Oxford University Press, 1930, and S.H. Longrigg, *Iraq, 1900 to 1950,* 1953.
[28] Curzon Papers, F112/163, f. 182: 'Papers relating to the Operations in Mesopotamia', Part II: Viceroy to the Secretary of State, 5 December, 1914.
[29] FO371/4148/34797: 'Review of the Civil Administration, 1914-1918', from the Office of the Civil Commissioner, Baghdad, November 1918, 47.
[30] See P.W. Ireland, Iraq, 81-94; K.C. Ulrichsen, 'The British Occupation of Mesopotamia, 1914-1922', 376; Judith Yaphet, 'The View from Basra: Southern Iraq's Reaction to War and Occupation, 1915-1925', in R.S. Simon and E.H. Tejirian, (eds), *The Creation of Iraq 1914-1921*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2004, 24.
[31] J. Townsend, *Proconsul in the Middle East*, 75; P.W. Ireland, *Iraq*, 103.

An Arab Revolt in Mesopotamia?

Pre-war Arab 'nationalism' in Mesopotamia was inspired by the Young Turk revolution in 1908. The Baghdad-based Arab Patriotic Society was established in 1912, and a second group was formed in Basra by Sayid Talib, the son of a prominent family.[32] Yapp asserted that their aspirations were limited to demands for more Arab participation in the administration of the region, and the replacement of Turkish with Arabic in official usage.[33] During pre-war discussions in Cairo regarding British support for an Arab revolt against their Ottoman suzerains, Gertrude Bell hinted that in the event of war, the 'Arab Unionists' in Mesopotamia might rise in revolt against the Ottomans, and if so, she believed 'they would not be too difficult to direct'.[34] Yet Abdul Aziz al Masri, a former Mesopotamian officer in the Ottoman Army, was rebuffed when he approached British officials in Cairo seeking British support for an Arab revolt in Mesopotamia prior to the outbreak of hostilities. After Britain declared war on Germany, al Masri made a second attempt, but was again rebuffed, since by then, Cairo officials had staked their fortunes on Sharif Hussein.[35]

For their part, authorities in Basra and India did not share the same opinion regarding an Arab revolt in Mesopotamia. A.H. Grant, the Secretary of the Foreign Department of the Government of India feared that if a revolt was successful, the British

[32] M.E. Yapp, *The Making of the Modern Near East*, 212.
[33] Ibid, 211.
[34] FO/371/2141/48014: extracts from a letter from Gertrude Bell to W. Deedes, Military Intelligence, Cairo, forwarded to the Foreign Office, 5 September, 1914. The daughter of a wealthy family, Gertrude Bell (1868-1926), graduated from Oxford with a first-class degree in modern history. Subsequently she travelled in Europe, and during the first decade of the twentieth century, she travelled extensively throughout the Middle East. Her intimate knowledge of the territory and the Arabs was valued by the Foreign Office. Newcastle University Library, the Gertrude Bell Archive. http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk.
[35] P.A. Mohs, *Military Intelligence and the Arab Revolt: The First Modern Intelligence War*, London and New York, Routledge, 2008, 16, 17.

authorities would not be able to contain it.[36] Characterised by the Government of India as an 'unpractical visionary',[37] Nuri es Said, a Mesopotamian officer in the Ottoman Army, was interviewed by Cox in early December 1914. His proposal for an Arab revolt[38] was rejected by Cox, however, given that it ran counter to his desire for the permanent occupation of Basra.[39] As an alternative, when the civil administration was established in newly occupied territory beyond Basra, the leading sheikhs of the districts were co-opted by the British authorities, paid subsidies for their loyalty, and charged with the task of keeping the peace. Those who chose not to co-operate were also transported to India.[40] Nomadic tribes were assigned areas of pastoral land, given food and paid subsidies. The settled tribes were more difficult to control, and it was not until early 1918 that the entire Vilayet of Basra was brought under direct British administration. The tribal units, as perceived by the British authorities, were consolidated under a single sheikh, and land was redistributed as claims to ownership were settled by the divisional Political Officers.[41] These arrangements tend to support David Cannadine's argument that the British visualised their empire in terms of the hierarchical social structures with which they were familiar. [42] In the main, status was all-important; for example, just as the important land-owning sheikhs were co-opted, in cases where hierarchical structures did not exist they were artificially created.

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[36] A.H. Grant, Secretary of the Foreign Department of the Government of India, note dated 5 December, 1914, cited in B.C. Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs*, 61.
[37] L/P&S/10/535, register no. 763: Foreign Office cypher telegram no. 432 to Mr. Cheetham, Cairo, 18 December, 1914.
[38] J. Townsend, *Proconsul in the Middle East,* 72.
[39] Nuri es Said and Sayid Talib were both transported to India, but paradoxically both men, Nuri in particular, proved to be useful to British authorities later.
[40] FO371/4148/34797: 'Review of the Civil Administration, 1914-1918', 17.
[41] Ibid. See P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, chapter 6, 161-181, for a thorough analysis of the land tenure system, and the consequences of the system imposed by the British authorities.
[42] D. Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*, xix, 4-6, 10, 71-82. Gertrude Bell was a fine example of Cannadine's thesis: her correspondence illustrates that her relations with the Arabs were primarily based on status.

Following a visit to Basra in early 1915, Hardinge wrote to his friend, Sir Arthur Nicolson, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, that Basra, 'the key of the Gulf' could never be given up.[43] Subsequently, he sketched a tentative plan for the future administration of Mesopotamia. Given the importance of a regular water supply, he believed the development of Basra depended on the exercise of either direct or indirect British control over the Baghdad Vilayet as well. Something along the lines of an Indian princely state would serve his purpose, but he believed it would be impossible to co-opt a ruler, given the tribes were divided into 'small and wavering factions'.[44] He also shared Willcocks' utopian imaginings, by recommending opening up the area to Indian migrants, in order to provide the labour necessary for the completion of his irrigation scheme, in order to 'open up a vista of endless prosperity and wealth in the not too distant future'. [45] Adding to Hardinge's thoughts, a local British merchant mused that in order to guarantee a constant supply of water Mosul Vilayet should also be brought under British control.[46] However, the extent of territory to be occupied was to be determined later. In the meantime, the India Office Political and Secret Department, bound by military exigencies, continued to refer to the administration as 'temporary and provisional'. As a result, they attempted to apply the brakes on public works such as irrigation, given that Lord Crewe believed development should be deferred until the political and military situation, and the future sovereignty of the territory had been settled.[47]

[43] FO800/377, Nicolson Papers, f. 121: Lord Charles Hardinge to 'Nico', private, 4 February, 1915.
[44] Ibid, ff. 127-129: Lord Charles Hardinge, 'Note on the Future Status and Administration of Basrah', 24 February, 1915.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid, f. 129: W. Graham, 'Trade of Basrah', 10 February, 1915. Graham was a representative of Messrs Graham, Bombay, a commercial company with established trade links between India and Basra.
[47] L/P&S/10/513, P.4715/1915, register no. 3676: minute by Sir Thomas Holderness, 8 October, 1915.

London: muddling through.

The period between 1915 and 1917 was characterised by intermittent interest from London, where political considerations were affected by war aims for the Middle East, but military operations and the control of the civil administration remained under the direction of the Government of India and the India Office.[48] Fundamentally, the development of policy demonstrated an underlying sense of indecision and confusion regarding the British government's war aims in the Middle East, despite Hardinge's pronouncement regarding Baghdad.

In early 1915, in response to the post-war claims to Ottoman territory of the Russian and French governments, both the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, and the Prime Minister, H.H. Asquith, were unable to make a decision on the corresponding requirements of the British government.[49] Accordingly, Asquith appointed an inter-departmental committee to discuss the question.[50] Predicated on victory over the Ottomans, and giving consideration to the negotiations with Sharif Hussein then in progress, the Committee concluded that the Porte should be requested to formally recognise the British position in the Persian Gulf, and interests already acquired in Mesopotamia; in other words, a reaffirmation of the rights acquired in the unratified Anglo-Ottoman Agreement of 1913.[51] Four alternatives were considered by the committee: the partition of Asian provinces of the

[48] Austen Chamberlain replaced Lord Crewe as Secretary of State for India in May 1915.
[49] 'The Constantinople Agreement', in J.C. Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East*, 7-9.
[50] The Committee was chaired by Sir Maurice de Bunsen, a former diplomat; the members were Sir G. Clerk, Foreign Office; Sir Thomas Holderness, India Office; Admiral H.B. Jackson, Admiralty; Major-General C.A.E. Calwell, War Office; Sir H. Llewellyn-Smith, Board of Trade, Lt.-Col. Mark Sykes, M.P., and Lt.-Col. M.P. Hankey, secretary.
[51] Curzon Papers, F112/254, f. 19: The report of the de Bunsen Committee: 'British Desiderata in Turkey in Asia', 30 June, 1915.

Ottoman Empire; the establishment of spheres of interest; or the maintenance of the *status quo* - support for a reformed, decentralised Ottoman Empire.

The records of the Committee's discussions reveal considerable tension between adhering to traditional policy or embarking on new imperial ventures in Mesopotamia, as well as differences of opinion on the extent of territory to be occupied. Discussion on the partition scheme revealed the different strategic and economic priorities of the departments represented on the committee, chiefly concerning the Vilayet of Mosul. The majority agreed that from a military, strategic, and economic perspective, holding the Basra and Baghdad Vilayets would be insufficient. The War Office representative, fearing a future war with Russia, pointed out that the optimal defensive position lay in the hills north of Mosul. From an economic and developmental point of view, Sir Maurice Hankey, secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence, stressed the importance of Mosul for the supply of water for irrigation projects further south, while Vice-Admiral Sir E.J. Slade, a director of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, referred to the enormous potential of the suspected oil deposits in Mosul.[52] However, Sir Thomas Holderness informed the Committee that both Crewe and Hardinge opposed the inclusion of the 'entire' Vilayet of Mosul in the British sphere.[53] Given the territorial dimensions of Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907, Fisher argues persuasively that Crewe and Hardinge sought to leave the northern portion of the Vilayet as a buffer zone between the British and Russian spheres of influence.[54]

[52] Curzon Papers, F112/254, ff. 27 -28: minutes of the second meeting of the Committee on 'British Desiderata in Turkey in Asia', 13 April, 1915.
[53] Curzon Papers, F112/254, ff. 22-28: minutes of the second meeting of the Committee on 'British Desiderata in Turkey in Asia', 13 April, 1915.
[54] J. Fisher, *Curzon and British Imperialism in the Middle East*, 7, 22-23.

Ultimately, the Committee rejected the partition scheme, opting instead to adhere to the traditional nineteenth century policy of maintaining a reformed, decentralised Ottoman Empire.[55] The Committee's decision was conservative and unrealistic, given the French and Russian claims, and furthermore, by the time the report was submitted to Cabinet on 30 June, the majority of the Basra Vilayet was under British military occupation, with Baghdad beckoning. Echoing Hardinge's thoughts, Hirtzel wrote that the annexation of Basra and the establishment of a protectorate over 'Upper Mesopotamia' would satisfy India's aims.[56]

The recommendation of the de Bunsen Committee were not adopted as government policy. Moreover, following the failure of the Dardanelles campaign, the focus of the government shifted to the military campaigns in France, and so a comprehensive policy for the Middle East was temporarily shelved, leaving the departments of state with interests in the region to carry on in the divided political space between Cairo and Basra for the duration of the war.[57]

Later in the year, discussions in the Dardanelles Committee[58] further reflected the increasingly polycratic approach to decisions on Mesopotamia, primarily relating to the

[55] Curzon Papers, F112/254, f. 19: Report of the Committee on 'British Desiderata in Turkey in Asia', 30 June, 1915.
[56] CAB24/1: Sir A. Hirtzel, 'The Future Settlement of Eastern Turkey in Arabia', Note by the Secretary, Political and Secret Department, India Office, 14 March, 1915. All turns on what was meant by 'Upper Mesopotamia'. In Hirtzel's paper the meaning is unclear.
[57] A.S. Klieman, Britain' War Aims in the Middle East in 1915', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 3, no. 3, (July, 1968), 250. Klieman argued that the shelving of the de Bunsen report represented a lost opportunity, since the British government did not use the recommendations to formulate a coherent policy for the Middle East. Be that as it may, given the political and military position in the Middle East in 1915, any kind of coherent policy was probably unachievable.
[58] British Library, Eur Mss, Curzon Papers, F112/161, f. 7: Curzon note on minutes of the Dardanelles Committee: the Committee was established in May 1915 after the formation of the Asquith coalition

sanctioning of a military advance to Baghdad. Discussions in mid-October centred on the availability of troops, given the ongoing campaign at Gallipoli, concerns regarding the German advance into the Caucasus, and the grave situation in the Balkans following the defection of Bulgaria to the Central Powers.[59]

At the same time, negotiations between the British authorities in Cairo and Sharif Hussein of Mecca had also reached a point which threatened to upset India's plans for Mesopotamia. By mid-October, the Sharif was believed to be wavering over whether to take his chances with the British or the Ottomans.[60] On the 21st, Grey informed the Committee that he had authorised Sir Henry McMahon, the British High Commissioner in Cairo, to offer the Arabs an independent Arabia in the hope that they would finally break with the Ottomans. He believed that if the offer was made, Hussein would not hesitate to throw in his lot with the British. However, opinions were divided on the Arab State idea promoted by Cairo. Grey and Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War, were heartily in favour of the idea; Balfour thought it was 'a gamble worth trying', and asked 'why not give Baghdad to the Arabs at once?' Lord Curzon, on the other hand, objected to the creation of an Arab State, stating that the Arabs had 'no capital and no cohesion', therefore he declared, if there was to be an Arab State, it would have to be administered 'under our tutelage'.[61] Austen

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government, in order to 'regulate the operations' at the Dardanelles. In June 1915, the Committee replaced the War Council, which had hitherto managed the war on behalf of the Cabinet. In November 1915, the Dardanelles Committee was replaced by the War Committee. See also D.N. Chester & F.M.G. Willson, [1957], *The Organization of British Central Government 1914-1964*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1968, 436-7.

[59] Curzon Papers, F112/161, f. 108: Minutes of the Dardanelles Committee, 14 October, 1915; and F112/163, ff. 94-101: 'Committee of Imperial Defence: Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on the Strategical Situation in Mesopotamia', 16 October, 1915. This Committee recommended that an attempt should be made to capture Baghdad in order to increase Britain's prestige in the East.

[60] D. French, 'The Dardanelles, Mecca and Kut: Prestige as a Factor in British Eastern Strategy, 1914-1916', *War and Society*, Vol. 5, no. 1, (May, 1987), 56.

[61] Curzon Papers, F112/161, f. 111: Minutes of the Dardanelles Committee, 21 October, 1915. Lord Privy Seal in 1915, Curzon was invited to join the committee, undoubtedly due to his experience in the east. Curzon was

Chamberlain, appointed Secretary of State for India on 25 May 1915, took no part in the discussion, stating only that the Government of India should be consulted before an offer was made to Hussein. However, when informed that McMahon had ceded a vast swathe of territory to Hussein, including Baghdad and Basra, as a reward for his collaboration, the Viceroy expostulated against the inclusion of Basra. In a despatch to Chamberlain, he declared that

> [b]y surrendering Bussorah [*sic*] vilayet to Arab Govt. of any kind, we shall not only be preparing trouble for ourselves at the head and along southern littoral of the Gulf, but shall be giving up main fruits of hard won victories in Mesopotamia. This will not only be abandoning enormous potential sources of revenue, but will also be resented by Indian people, and the European commercial community who look to Mesopotamia as a field for commercial expansion and migration in return for the blood of their countrymen there shed.[62]

The responses from the India Office and the authorities in Mesopotamia were a reflection of two imperatives: hostility to anything resembling interference from Cairo, and the views of Mesopotamian officials regarding Arab nationalism, as two responses from the Commanding Officer of IEF 'D' illustrate. Reinforcing Cox's earlier views, Nixon fired off a furious despatch, observing that it would be

> highly unnecessary and inexpedient to put into the heads of backward people of the country what seems to us the visionary and premature notions of the creation of an Arabian state … [it] will only tend to make endless difficulties here for Great Britain, and serve no present purpose but to stimulate a small section of ambitious men to turn their activities to a direction from which, for many years to come, it is highly desirable to keep them.[63]

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not invited to join the War Committee when it replaced the Dardanelles Committee in November 1915, and in an undated note in his papers relating to the Dardanelles Committee, his disappointment is clear.

[62] FO371/2486/165415: copy of Viceroy to the Secretary of State for India, repeated to Cairo, 4 November, 1915. See E. Kedourie, *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth*, 65-137 for a forensic examination of the meaning of the correspondence between McMahon and Hussein of Mecca between 4 July 1915 and 10 March 1916.

[63] FO371/2492/196455: General Officer Commanding, Force 'D', Basra, telegram no. 1603, to the Secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign and Political Department, 9 November, 1915.

Five days later, Nixon insisted that both he and his Chief Political Officer should be informed before any decisions were made on issues affecting Mesopotamia.[64] The response from the India Office reflected the real significance of the situation brought about by McMahon as they saw it. In a rebuke to the Foreign Office, Holderness characterised McMahon's pledges as 'unfortunate' and possibly embarrassing if the Mesopotamian campaign was successful.[65] However, a little over a fortnight later, the forces of IEF 'D', advancing up the Tigris river, were defeated by a superior Ottoman force at Ctesiphon, fifty miles south of Baghdad. Three days later, the British forces retreated down-river to Kut-el-Amara.[66]

While this first attempt to reach Baghdad failed, the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement of May 1916 added a new incentive for the government to sanction a second attempt in order to exercise its provisions, given McMahon's pledges to Hussein.[67] The Agreement between the French and British governments which bears the names of its negotiators, Sir Mark Sykes and French diplomat François Georges Picot, was designed to prevent Great Power competition in the Middle East.[68] The Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire were partitioned into areas of direct and indirect British and French control, leaving the large expanses of desert in the hinterland of Arabia to the Arab State or Confederation of States. In the Basra and Baghdad Vilayets, the British government was free to conduct 'direct or indirect administration or control as they desire and as they may think fit to arrange with

[64] FO371/2486/171826: General Nixon, Aziziyah, to the Secretary, Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, 14 November, 1915.
[65] FO371/2486/166403: Sir Thomas Holderness to the Under-Secretary of State, Foreign Office, 6 November, 1915.
[66] Curzon Papers, F112/164, f. 269: Copy of Cmd. 8610: The Mesopotamia Commission Report: Statement by the Military Secretary, India Office, General E.G. Barrow, 4 August, 1916.
[67] P.W. Ireland, *Iraq*, 69-70.
[68] J. Fisher, *Curzon and British Imperialism in the Middle East*, 24, 25-26, 198. See also R. Adelson, *Mark Sykes: Portrait of an Amateur*, London, Jonathon Cape, 1975, 199-202; D. Fromkin, *A Peace to End all Peace,* 189-193, 286, 288, and D.K. Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East 1914-1958*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006, 49-52.

the Arab State or confederation of states'.[69] Despite Nixon's request in November, the authorities in Mesopotamia were not informed of the Agreement until the following year.[70] However, while the military advance was at a temporary standstill, the political officers were preoccupied with further unwelcome distractions emanating from Cairo.

Distractions and Diversions, 1916.

Attempted interventions by the political and intelligence authorities in Cairo were further distractions within the general confusion generated by the jurisdictional division of the Middle East between the governments in London and Simla, and the departments of state with responsibilities in the region, exacerbated by the number of military, political and intelligence officials with a voice in the direction of British affairs in the region.[71] In addition, in February 1916, the War Office entered the crowded space, assuming responsibility for the direction of military operations in Mesopotamia.[72] Mark Sykes, an early critic of this division of responsibilities, described it as a system which lurched 'from crisis to inertia, and from coma to panic, watching assets frittered away and opportunities missed'.[73] Given the polycratic confusion, however, there was some foundation for Mesopotamian officials' suspicions concerning Cairo's intentions.

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[69] *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, part II, series I, vol. 11, 26-27: 'Arrangements of May 1916, commonly known as the Sykes-Picot Agreement (English Text)'.
[70] E. Monroe, *Britain's Moment in the Middle East,* 36.
[71] B.C. Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs*, 205, listed the number of personnel involved in 1916. In Egypt, the British High Commissioner; the Director of Military Intelligence, Colonel Gilbert Clayton; the General Officer Commanding of the Egyptian Army and the Governor-General of the Sudan, Sir Reginald Wingate. The Resident in Aden and the Bombay authorities to whom he was responsible; the Commander-in-Chief of the East Indies Station; Sir Percy Cox and the General Officer Commanding of the forces in Mesopotamia; the Viceroy, the Foreign Secretary, and the Secretary of State for India.
[72] Curzon Papers, F112/163, f. 135: W.C. 22, extracts from the minutes of the War Committee, 3 February, 1916. Following the transfer from the Government of India to the War Office, Indian Expeditionary Force 'D' was renamed the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force.
[73] L/P&S/10/705, register no. 4293: Sykes minute on Arabian Report no. XIV, 15 November, 1916.

In early 1916, Sykes and McMahon formulated a plan to liberate Arab and Kurdish officers of the Ottoman Army languishing in prisoner of war camps in India, to assist Mohammad al Faruqi, a Mesopotamian officer who had deserted from the Ottoman Army at Gallipoli, and al Masri, in making contact with Arab officers serving with the Ottoman Army in Mesopotamia. The object of the plan was apparently to convince the Arabs to desert, and form an Arab movement in Mesopotamia. But given Cox's antipathy, the project was abandoned, to the disgust of officials at the Foreign Office.[74]

The establishment of the Arab Bureau in Cairo in early 1916, under the direction of the War Office Intelligence branch, (the product of one of Sykes' many attempts to co-ordinate Middle Eastern policy), again aroused the consternation of Indian authorities who suspected, wrongly as it turned out, that policy for Mesopotamia would now be dictated by the Bureau.[75] As was often the case, Hirtzel reflected the problems associated with this growing polycratism, noting that 'neither the Bureau, nor Gen[era]l Lake is to have an independent Arab policy, which both of them would like to have'.[76] However, Hirtzel's lament came a little too late. On 6 June, the Arab Bureau-sponsored Arab Revolt began in the Hejaz: an affair in the desert which would lead to innumerable complications in the

[74] FO371/2768/62377: L. Oliphant minute, 2 April, 1916. There is extensive correspondence in this file between the authorities in India, Cairo and Basra, and the Foreign, War and India Offices regarding the mission. For Faruqi's negotiations with Cairo officials see E. Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, 36-37; E. & I. Karsh, *Empires of the Sand,* 216-217.

[75] L/P&S/10/576, register no. 3008: General Lake, Basra, to the Secretary, Foreign Department, Government of India, 11 June 1916; Viceroy to the Secretary of State, 20 June, 1916; Secretary of State to the Viceroy, 28 June, 1916. For analyses of the role of the Arab Bureau see E. Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, 89, and *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth,* 254; J. Keay, *Sowing the Wind: the Seeds of Conflict in the Middle East*, New York & London, W.W. Norton, 2003, 59, 132, and B.C. Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs*, 100-109, 200-207.

[76] L/P&S/10/576, register no. 2379: Hirtzel minute, 12 June, 1916.

future.[77] After failing to become head of the Arab Bureau, Sykes was appointed to the Committee of Imperial Defence, and continued his efforts to undermine India's influence in Arab affairs.[78] His attempts underscored the fundamental division between authorities in Cairo and Baghdad, which Gertrude Bell[79] was quick to realise. Shortly after her arrival in Cairo in January 1916, Bell noted the lack of co-operation between the two centres. In a letter to her father, she wrote, 'Basra think us fools … and we reciprocate … They don't realise what Arabia looks like from the West and I daresay we don't realise how it looks from the East'.[80] In February Bell visited her friend Charles Hardinge in India and shortly thereafter, on his recommendation, she arrived in Basra as liaison officer for the Arab Bureau, ensconced in the office of the Chief Political Officer.[81] But when Cox learned that Colonel Gilbert Clayton, the Director of Military Intelligence in Cairo, sought information regarding affairs in Mesopotamia privately, utilising Bell as an informant, Cox imposed his authority. He informed Bell that he must approve all correspondence relating to the political administration.[82]

The final attempt by Cairo authorities to interfere in Mesopotamia directly occurred in April, when two of the Arab Bureau's brightest stars, T.E. Lawrence and Aubrey Herbert, arrived in Basra with orders to attempt to bribe the Ottoman Commander to release the British troops held under siege at Kut. Cox, it seems, was furious and refused to have

[77] J. Nevakivi, *Britain, France and the Arab Middle East 1914-1920*, London, Athlone, 1969, 25, 45; D. Fromkin, 'Britain, France and the Diplomatic Agreements', in R.S. Simon & E.H. Tejiriran (eds), *The Creation of Iraq 1914-1921*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2004, chapter 4, 144; R. Storrs, *Orientations*, London, Ivor Nicholson & Watson, 1937, 181; J. Renton, 'Changing Languages of Empire and the Orient: Britain and the Invention of the Middle East', 654.
[78] B.C. Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs*, 203.
[79] See page 8, footnote 33.
[80] Gertrude Bell to Hugh Bell, 24 January, 1916, Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University,
[81] Viceroy to the Secretary of State for India, 28 May, 1916, cited in B.C. Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs*, 107, note 108.
[82] P. Graves, *The Life of Sir Percy Cox*, London, Hutchinson, 1941, 203.

anything to do with the operation.[83] The Ottoman commander, however, demolished a central Orientalist assumption by refusing to accept the bribe. At the end of the month, General Charles Townsend, the Commanding Officer of the troops incarcerated at Kut surrendered, ending the 140-day siege.[84] Ultimately, all attempts from Cairo to interfere in Mesopotamian affairs failed; however, suspicion and misunderstandings between the 'Indian' and the 'Egyptian' schools lingered.[85]

General Sir Stanley Maude replaced Sir Percy Lake as Genera Officer Commanding of the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force in August, and in December, the second phase of military operations began.[86] In the interim, Bell precipitated a debate on the future political control of Mesopotamia, alerting the Foreign Office to the danger, as she saw it, of employing Indians in the civil administration.[87] Apparently unaware of the system already in place, Holderness agreed, noting that 'it would be a profound pity if the highly developed and intricate system now prevailing in India were to be transplanted to Mesopotamia'.[88] The Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford,[89] informed Chamberlain that while not wishing to take on more responsibilities should the military campaign succeed in reaching Baghdad, he felt that as

[83] J. Townsend, *Proconsul in the Middle East*, 77. Townsend states that a member of the Intelligence Section of the MEF was also part of the deputation. While it is not significant to that episode, it goes some way to explain the conflict between the military and political wings of the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force resulting from such polycratism, and the reluctance of the military and political chiefs to share information received from their respective superiors in London and India.
[84] S.H. Longrigg, *Iraq, 1900-1950*, 81. See Priya Satia, 'Developing Iraq', 196: in highlighting the magnitude of the events at Kut, Satia points out that the capitulation of the British commander was only the second time a British military force had surrendered; the first time in 1781 during the American War of Independence.
[85] P. Graves, *The Life of Sir Percy Cox*, 206; B.C. Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs*, 100-109; P. Satia, 'Developing Iraq', 246.
[86] S.H. Longrigg, *Iraq, 1900-1950*, 89.
[87] L/P&S/10/617, register no, 3511: 'Note by Miss Bell on the Basis of Government', 31 August, 1916.
[88] L/P&s/10/617, register no. 3511, minute by Sir Thomas Holderness on Bell note, no date, August, 1916.
[89] Hardinge resigned in spring 1916 as a result of criticism for his part in the military disaster, for which as Viceroy, he was held partly responsible.

long as India was called upon to provide the men and material for the Mesopotamian campaign, the Government of India should continue to have a voice in political matters. As a solution, he proposed the establishment of a system of indirect control over the Baghdad Vilayet, the Government of India retaining responsibility for external relations.[90] Hirtzel, however, shared Holderness' concerns, noting that if the Government of India continued to administer Mesopotamia, 'the Indian public will certainly look upon the country as their preserve'. But he was caught in a dilemma, because if the Government of India was relieved of control over Mesopotamia, he presumed that 'a new Dependency', that is, a British-controlled Arab state, would be created, extending from the western borders of Egypt and the Sudan to the border between Mesopotamia and Persia.[91] While this solution may have resolved the jurisdictional divisions, presumably it also implied that the Foreign Office would assume the responsibilities of the India Office in the region. However, Hirtzel's chief concern was that, whatever the system of administration established in Baghdad, it must be under British control. Furthermore, he opined that the Power which detaches a country 'with the history and potentialities of Mesopotamia makes itself morally responsible to humanity and civilisation for their reclamation and development'.[92] Chamberlain opposed the Viceroy's proposal on the grounds that if Basra was to be annexed and a protectorate established over Baghdad, it would prove too costly,

[90] Curzon Papers, F112/256, f. 54: Document B246, 'Secret', extracts from Lord Chelmsford, private, to the Secretary of State for India, 18 October, 1916.
[91] Curzon Papers, F112/256, f. 56: 'Notes by Sir A. Hirtzel', 30 December, 1916. See H.J. Mejcher, 'British Middle East Policy 1917-1921', 84. He argued that the India Office supported the creation of the new dependency as a means of retaining Mesopotamia and at the same time, safeguarding imperial interests in the Persian Gulf. J. Fisher, *Curzon and British Imperialism in the Middle East*, 51, argued that Hirtzel's vision of a new British dependency stretching from Egypt to Persia reflected the earlier visions of the British authorities in Cairo of a Middle Eastern Viceroyalty. However, this was a view also expressed by Salisbury, Beaconsfield and Layard in the nineteenth century. See, for example, D.E. Lee, *Great Britain and the Cyprus Convention Policy of 1878*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1934, 185-90 for A.H. Layard to the Earl of Beaconsfield, 12 December, 1877; A. Varnava, *British Imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915*, 71.
[92] Curzon Papers, F112/256, f. 56: 'Notes by Sir A. Hirtzel', 30 December, 1916.

and for legal and constitutional reasons, impractical. He concluded that the aforementioned arguments 'point to the complete detachment from India of the new Dependency which is to be carved out of the Ottoman Empire in that region'.[93]

While Indian authorities were preoccupied with debates over the future role of the Government of India in Mesopotamia, a fundamental change in the structure of war-time governance occurred with the establishment of Lloyd George's War Cabinet in December 1916. Considering the existing War Committee too large and inefficient,[94] Lloyd George and the Conservatives Lord Curzon, Lord Robert Cecil, Austen Chamberlain, Walter Long and Andrew Bonar Law, devised a scheme for a stream-lined War Cabinet. Originally intended to consist of four permanent members, the Prime Minister and three ministers without portfolios, the War Cabinet was to meet daily 'to deal with the war'. [95] The Secretariat of the Committee of Imperial Defence under its chief, Sir Maurice Hankey, became the Cabinet Secretariat, responsible for record-keeping and facilitating communications between a proliferation of *ad hoc* and standing committees appointed to advise the Cabinet on various aspects of policy.[96] As a result of that meeting, Conservatives such as Lord Curzon were returned to positions of power at the centre of government, and in Curzon's case, at the

[93] Curzon Papers, F112/256, f. 55: 'Memorandum on the Future Administration of Mesopotamia prepared at Mr Chamberlain's Request by Sir Thomas Holderness', 9 January, 1917.
[94] See D.N. Chester & F.M.G. Willson, *The Organization of British Central Government 1914-1964,* 285-287, for an analysis of the progression of committees dealing with the war, from the War Council in 1914, to the Dardanelles Committee, 1915-1916, to the War Committee, to the establishment of the War Cabinet. For an analysis of the inefficiency of the War Committee, see R. Warman, 'The Erosion of Foreign Office Influence in the Making of Foreign Policy, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 15, no. 1, (Mar., 1972), 135.
[95] Curzon Papers, F112/131, ff. 5-10: 'Very Secret Memorandum of a Conversation between Mr Lloyd George and certain Unionist ex-Ministers', 7 December, 1916. See Lord Hardinge of Penshurst, *Old Diplomacy: The Reminiscences of Lord Hardinge of Penshurst*, London, John Murray, 1947: Hardinge claims that at the first meeting of the War Cabinet there were 12 ministers present.
[96] J.F. Naylor, 'The Establishment of the Cabinet Secretariat', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. XIV, no. 4, (1971), 783; K.O. Morgan, 'Lloyd George's Premiership: A Study in "Prime Ministerial Government"', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. XIII, no. 1, (1970), 133.

centre of policy-making for Mesopotamia, following the occupation of Baghdad in March 1917.

The Mesopotamian Administration Committee:

On 16 March, five days after the occupation of Baghdad, Curzon was appointed to the chair of the inter-departmental Mesopotamian Administration Committee, with a remit to consider if the Government of India should continue to control political affairs in Mesopotamia, and to consider the possibility of recruiting political and administrative officials from elsewhere, rather than India.[97] There is no doubt, as John Fisher asserted, that Curzon's involvement in Mesopotamian affairs was intended to maximise Britain's presence in the country, given his role in Persian Gulf affairs in 1903 whilst Viceroy of India.[98] At the same time, Curzon was probably selected because of his role in the establishment of the War Cabinet, together with his administrative abilities[99], although notably Curzon was excluded from high office until 1919.

The Mesopotamian Administration Committee met nine times between March and August 1917. However, the first meeting was the only one at which anything concrete was agreed in terms of future policy for Mesopotamia. [100] The Committee agreed on a number of recommendations, later approved by the War Cabinet, the chief of which was the transfer of administrative control from the Government of India to the government in

[97] Curzon Papers, F112/272, f. 6: draft extract from War Cabinet minute no. 11, 16 March, 1917.
[98] J. Fisher, *Curzon and British Imperialism in the Middle East 1916-1919*, 61.
[99] R.F. Holland, 'The British Empire and the Great War, 1914-1918', *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, Vol. IV, *The Twentieth Century*, 125.
[100] At the first meeting, apart from Curzon, the members were Lord Milner, Austen Chamberlain, Holderness and Hirtzel from the India Office, Lord Charles Hardinge, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, with Sir R. Graham and George Clerk from the Foreign Office, and Sir Mark Sykes, secretary.

London. As Hardinge had predicted two years previously, the exercise of British rule over Baghdad would be indirect behind an Arab facade, while essentially a British Protectorate 'in everything but name', while Basra would remain under permanent British control. While no decision was made regarding the formal annexation of Basra province, the Committee advised that the two Vilayets should be administered as separate entities. However, given that the development of the country's resources was considered to be vitally important, the Committee also recommended that the control of irrigation, navigation, and the conservancy of the rivers in both Vilayets should be placed under a single British administration.[101]

Given the government of India was no longer to be responsible for the civil administration, a sub-committee, set up to discuss the future employment of administrative officials, recommended amalgamating the Mesopotamia and Sudan administrative services, and possibly including the Egypt service at a later date.[102] Helmut Mejcher argued that the recommendations of the sub-committee heralded the creation of a new British empire in the Middle East.[103] As a move towards centralisation if a new dependency was to be created, it would have made sense. However, it is also reasonable to argue that the introduction of Arabic-speaking officers from the Sudan Service was a pragmatic solution, in order to mitigate the predominance of Indian officials in the Mesopotamian civil

[101] CAB24/9: Secret War Cabinet Paper G.T.373, 'Report of the Mesopotamian Administration Committee', 29 March, 1917.
[102] Curzon Papers, F112/256, ff. 58-59: 'Mesopotamian Administration Committee: Report of a Sub-Committee appointed under paragraph 17 of the Minutes of 21 March, 1917', 27 March, 1917. The members of the sub-committee were Sir Henry McMahon, Sir Mark Sykes, Sir Thomas Holderness and Sir Arthur Hirtzel representing the India Office, and Sir R. Graham, representing the Foreign Office, with John Shuckburgh of the India Office Political Department acting as Secretary.
[103] H. J. Mejcher, 'British Middle East Policy 1917-1921', 81, 84.

administration.[104] During the war, however, the intention to amalgamate the Services appears to have been disrupted by the Treasury's refusal to raise the salaries of officials from the Foreign Office Services to the level of at which officers from the Indian Political Service were paid.[105]

The recommendations of the Mesopotamian Administration Committee were, it could be argued, deliberately vague – the Arab Revolt was not meeting expectations, thus there was no urgent requirement for a more definitive statement of policy. Cox's response to the Committee's recommendations suggests that he had no confidence in the ability of a committee in London to formulate a policy for Mesopotamia. While promising to put the Committee's recommendations into action 'when the time comes', contrary to the recommendation for separate administrations in the two Vilayets, Cox advocated a centralised administration, with headquarters located in Baghdad. More significantly, and in the category of lost opportunities, he recommended the appointment of a Commission of Inquiry, to visit Mesopotamia to study various questions relating to the administration of the proposed Arab state, Arabian policy generally, and immigration and land policy.[106] Chamberlain later clarified the issue of the administration of Baghdad, assuring the Viceroy that while the government did not intend to establish an Arab administration in the immediate future, nothing should be done in the meantime which would prejudice the

[104] L/P&S/10/516, register no. 1433: Sir C. Hardinge, Foreign Office, to Sir C. Marling, Teheran, 4 July, 1917.
[105] L/P&S/10/514, register no. 4127/1917: this file contains correspondence between the Government of India, the India Office, the Treasury and the Foreign Office regarding the transfer of R.W. Bullard, former British Consul, Basra, to the civil administration in October 1917. Given the Treasury's reluctance to raise Bullard's salary, Hirtzel left the issue to the Foreign Office to resolve. A. Hirtzel note, 13 October, 1917. The author has not been able to trace the outcome of this issue, however, by the end of 1918, there were only 4 officials from the Sudan Service on the payroll in Mesopotamia. See Sir James Aylmer Haldane, *The Insurrection in Mesopotamia*, 1920, London, W. Blackwood & Sons, 1922, 21.
[106] Curzon Papers, F112/256, ff. 18-20: Sir P. Cox to the Secretary, Foreign Department of the Government of India, 7 April, 1917.

establishment of a local administration at a later date. In particular, he objected to Cox's proposal for the centralisation of the two administrations advising that 'only such administrative efficiency should be aimed at as is necessary to preserve order and meet [the] needs of [the] occupying force'.[107]

While the recommendations of the Mesopotamian Administration Committee did not place Mesopotamia within a framework for Middle Eastern policy in general,[108] another committee, also chaired by Curzon, was appointed to make recommendations for Britain's post-war territorial claims. This committee was in favour of 'the experiment' of an Arab state or states in Arabia, however, it was considered that from a strategic and military perspective, it was of the utmost importance to communications with India, to maintain British control over Palestine and Mesopotamia. The exact geographical extent of 'Mesopotamia', however, was not specified.[109]

The Mesopotamian Administration Committee also provided a suitable forum for Cox to air longstanding grievances and to establish a position for himself as a *de facto* Mesopotamian viceroy, indispensable to London for all political matters relating to the country. The remainder of the meetings of the Committee were devoted to discussions on Cox's demand for greater autonomy, his request to be designated High Commissioner with the authority to correspond directly with the India Office, and his threat of resignation if his relations vis-à-vis the current General Officer Commanding, General Sir Stanley Maude,

[107] L/P&S/10/666, register no. 978: Secretary of State for India, despatch P.1854, to the Viceroy, 10 May, 1917.
[108] V.H. Rothwell, 'Mesopotamia in British War Aims, 1914-1918', 280.
[109] Curzon Papers, F112/131, f. 31: minutes of the third meeting of the Committee on Terms of Peace (*Territorial Desiderata*), 19 April, 1917. The others taking part in the discussion were Austen Chamberlain, Walter Long, Colonial Secretary, representatives from the Dominions, and Captain L.S. Amery, secretary.

were not adjusted according to his request.[110] There was a history of friction between Cox and the military commanders dating back to 1915, largely in relation to his position of subordination in the chain of command, and his assertion that correspondence of a political nature was not being passed on to him.[111] John Fisher claimed that it was not known who the motivating figures behind Cox's elevation were.[112] However, it is clear that Hirtzel and Shuckburgh at the India Office led the charge, with the assistance of Curzon and Gertrude Bell, who alerted Hirtzel to the cause of the friction, as she saw it, placing the blame squarely on Maude. Supporting Cox's earlier complaints, Bell claimed Maude was withholding correspondence with the War Office of a political nature.[113] However, the prime motivator was Cox himself, given his threat to resign. Furthermore, if it was the Committee's intention to transfer responsibility for the civil administration to the Foreign Office as Fisher argued,[114] the resolution of the dispute in Cox's favour was crucial to the subsequent conflict over control between the India and Foreign Offices, given that the India Office retained responsibility for the administration of Mesopotamia. While the Government of India may have been relieved of the responsibility, in all other respects, the *status quo* obtained.

At the ninth and final meeting of the Mesopotamian Administration Committee on 22 August, following the War Cabinet's decision to enlarge its scope in order for it to deal

[110] Curzon Papers, F112/256, f. 79: Sir P. Cox to the Secretary of State for India, 25 July, 1917. Cox's complaint was not a new or isolated phenomenon. There was similar friction between the military and political officers in Egypt at the same time. See B. Westrate, *The Arab Bureau: British Policy in the Middle East, 1916-1920*, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992, 25.
[111] L/P&S/11/98, register no. 3765: Sir P. Cox, private, to the Under-Secretary of State, India Office, 15 October, 1915.
[112] J. Fisher, *Curzon and British Imperialism in the Middle East*, 59.
[113] Curzon Papers, F112/256, f. 124: Sir Arthur Hirtzel, private, to Lord Curzon, 13 August, 1917, informing him of the contents of a letter he had received from Gertrude Bell, outlining the cause of the friction.
[114] J. Fisher, 'Lord Robert Cecil and the formation of a Middle East Department of the Foreign Office', 368.

with questions concerning the Middle East more generally,[115] the name was changed to the Middle East Administration Committee, (abbreviated to the Middle East Committee). A little over a month previously, Edwin Montagu replaced Chamberlain as Secretary of State for India.[116] Embroiled in his plans for constitutional reform in India, and the reform of the system of control in the India Office, Montagu was visiting India when the Committee settled the dispute in Cox's favour.[117] Henceforth, as a result of Cox's intervention, the India Office now assumed responsibility for the civil administration. Nominally responsible to the Secretary of State for India, for all practical purposes, Cox would be virtually autonomous, despite Chamberlain's concern that he intended to set up an administration in which there would be minimal local participation.[118] Unhappy coincidence worked to Cox's advantage. In November, General Maude contracted cholera which proved fatal. His replacement, Lt.-General W.R. Marshall, a former divisional chief, was of lower rank and seniority than Maude.[119] The military authorities, however, remained hostile to the establishment of civil administration in Baghdad while military operations were in progress.[120] Furthermore, Lieut.-General George Macdonogh, the Director of Military Intelligence, complained that the only Arab allies, the sheikhs of Kuwait, Mohammerah and Zubair, 'carefully nursed by Sir P. Cox', were not Mesopotamians. As a result, he charged that rather than 'planning out little

[115] Curzon Papers, F112/256, f. 29: War Cabinet 184: extracts from the minutes of the War Cabinet meeting, 13 July, 1917.
[116] A Liberal Member of Parliament from 1906, Montagu served as Under-Secretary of State for India, 1910-1914, and Minister for Munitions in Asquith's administration in 1916. See D. Waley, *Edwin Montagu: A Memoir and an Account of his Visits to India*, Bombay & London, Asia Publishing House, 1964.
[117] S.D. Waley, *Edwin Montagu,* 133-6.
[118] Curzon Papers, F112/256, ff. 7-13: minutes of the second meeting of the Mesopotamian Administration Committee, 8 May, 1917.
[119] J. Townsend, *Proconsul in the Middle East*, 20.
[120] Curzon Papers, F112/256, f. 113: Chief of the Imperial General Staff to the Secretary of State for India, 1 August, 1917.

niceties of civil administration', the Political Officers should be taking measures to prevent local hostility towards the British forces.[121]

The deliberations of the Mesopotamian Administration Committee illustrated how a proconsul with the confidence of ministers and bureaucrats could influence policy in no small measure. It also showed the inability of a committee in London to do anything other than muddle through. As for a future policy in Mesopotamia, the committee achieved little, merely affirming Hardinge's proposal of 1915 for Baghdad, and irresolution regarding Basra. Despite Chamberlain's strictures, the civil administration carried on as before, with little oversight from London. The concerns of the military authorities were ignored. Rather, the system of administration of the Baghdad province was established on similar lines to that in Basra, with the exception of the Indian-inspired code of laws imposed in Basra. Captain Arnold Wilson, Cox's deputy, later claimed that the orders regarding 'minimum administrative efficiency to preserve order' were not ones with which he or Cox agreed. As Wilson stated, it was essential to aim at self-sufficiency by developing local resources, which required a greater degree of control than that envisaged by Chamberlain.[122]

The Political and Commercial Implications of Development, current and future:

Certain aspects of the Mesopotamian story have been well documented, but one of the most important features of imperialism – the development of resources – has been overshadowed by oil. Agricultural development was one of the key justifications for the occupation of Basra, and was also one of the principle reasons for the expansion of the

[121] Curzon Papers, F112/256, ff. 118-119: G. Macdonogh, Director of Military Intelligence, minute dated 10 August, 1917.
[122] A.T. Wilson, *Loyalties*, 264.

administrative apparatus which came in for a great deal of criticism post-war. In the first instance, development projects were undertaken for military purposes only. This included immediate necessities such as the modernisation of the port facilities at Basra, construction of embankments to mitigate the effect of flooding, the construction of roads and light railways to serve the port, and the realignment of channels to aid navigation. A military Directorate of Inland Water Transport was established in July 1916, together with a Directorate for the organisation of labour.[123] As more territory came under British control, the difficulties of providing food for the military force and the local population increased.[124]

As a result, the authorities were urged to develop local resources as far as possible.[125] However, haphazard methods of procurement and distribution illustrated the necessity for centralisation. According to Wilson's account, when Cox was notified in late 1916 that the establishment of a Department of Local Resources was contemplated, he vetoed it on the grounds that it would place an unnecessary burden on the officers of the civil administration.[126] As a consequence, when established early in 1917, the department was placed under military control.[127] It was originally contemplated that the department would also perform the function of an exporting agency, shipping grain, hides, skins and wool to India. But due to a shortage of grain, and the needs of the army of occupation and the civilian population, this was found to be not possible. As a result, grain was imported from India and by late summer of 1917, an agricultural scheme was implemented to boost

[123] S.H. Longrigg, *Iraq*, 88.
[124] K.C. Ulrichsen, 'The British Occupation of Mesopotamia. 1914-1922', 362.
[125]Ibid, 350.
[126] A.T. Wilson, *Loyalties*, 148.
[127] WO32/52/16N182, no. 121/3/1237: Brig.-General E. Dickson, Director of Local Resources, Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force, 'Report of the Department of Local Resources (Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force) for the First Eighteen Months of its Existence', February 1917 to 31 July, 1918, 1.

local production. Initially under the supervision of the Revenue Department of the civil administration, the responsibility for agricultural production was transferred to a Military Directorate in January 1918.[128]

While recognising that agricultural development would serve the immediate needs of the occupying forces, Cox noted that there were political benefits accruing from irrigation projects which would serve imperial ends. Again resorting to Orientalist discourse, he noted that politically

> it would go far to convince the tribes that British administration offers signal advantages over that of the Turk. The distribution of water is beyond all comparison the most important administrative problem in the Iraq. Scientific control of the two rivers means not only economic progress but it is also the first step towards the pacification of the tribes.[129]

A lack of labour proved to be one of the principal barriers to bringing the development schemes of the British authorities to fruition. While the prospect of a Mesopotamian agricultural utopia was not abandoned altogether, expectations were scaled back considerably, despite the importation of labourers from India.[130] Heavy military demands led to a serious shortage of labour for agricultural work,[131] and irrigation work, based on Willcocks' pre-war plans had not been completed by the end of the war.[132]

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[128] Curzon Papers, F112/256, f. 221: Sir P. Cox, 'Report for the Period ending 15th January 1918', enclosed in 'Mesopotamia: Civil Administration', Note by the Political Department, India Office, 12 April, 1918.
[129] L/P&S/10/678, register no. 231: Sir P. Cox, 'Note on "Irrigation and Supply", a paper forwarded to the Arab Bureau', 15 October, 1917.
[130] P. Satia, 'Developing Iraq', 240. Satia observed that by the end of 1918, there were more than 71,000 men in the Labour Corps, most of whom were Indians, with another 42,000 working in the Directorate of Inland Water Transport.
[131] L/P&S/10617, register no. 5119: P.Z. Cox, C.P.O., I.E.F. 'D', Baghdad, 'Attitudes of the Notables in the Basrah Sanjaq', 6 November, 1917, 3,4.
[132] FO371/4148/38644: Brig.-General Ll. W. Lewis, Director of Irrigation, Baghdad, 'Brief Note on Irrigation Works in Mesopotamia and the operations of the Irrigation Directorate, M.E.F., up to November 1918', 6 December, 1918.

Despite the difficulties with agriculture and irrigation, the potential for the expansion of British commerce was perceived by Indian authorities as the most promising avenue by which prosperity would be achieved, markets created, and British predominance assured.[133] The men on the spot took the lead, taking concrete steps towards this goal. In May 1916, George Lloyd returned to Basra from Cairo, where he was serving in the Arab Bureau.[134] During a two month stay, Lloyd prepared an updated version of his 1908 report on the potential for British commerce in Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf.[135] In a note accompanying the report Cox wrote

> I greatly fear that peace negotiations of the conclusion of the War will find us as little prepared to face the problems of peace as we were in 1914 to face those of war. [136]

Aiming at a 'definite commercial policy', Cox stressed Mesopotamia's potential as a grain producing country, and the political advantages of making it an important contributor to Imperial wheat supplies, as well as highlighting the potential for cotton growing in the southern irrigated areas to supply the Bombay and Manchester markets. Furthermore, he envisaged the importation of British manufactured goods as the best way of encouraging British merchants to enter the market 'so as to maintain its predominantly British character'.[137] To achieve these ends, he recommended the appointment of a temporary 'Director of Trade Development' and a permanent Commercial Adviser to act as his deputy, in order to promote Mesopotamia's potential.[138]

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[133] J. Townsend, *Proconsul in the Middle East*, 23. By way of indicating continuity, Townsend refers to similar development projects in India.
[134] A.T. Wilson, *Loyalties*, 155.
[135] FO371/1650/199753: G. Lloyd, 'The Economic Situation in the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamian Markets', September, 1916.
[136] FO371/1650/199753: Lt.-Col. Sir P.Z. Cox (Chief Political Officer, I.E.F. 'D'), Basra, to A.H. Grant, Secretary, Foreign Department, Government of India, Simla, 18-24 July, 1916, 3.
[137] FO371/1650/199753: Lt.-Col. Sir P.Z. Cox, (Chief Political Officer, I.E.F. 'D', Basra, to A.H. Grant, Secretary, Foreign Department, Government of India, 'The Economic Situation in the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamian Markets', 18-24 July, 1916, 2.
[138] Ibid.

Discussions in early 1916 prior to the signing of the Sykes-Picot Agreement revealed that Hirtzel was also looking to development prospects in Mesopotamia. He wrote to Holderness that 'the loss of Mosul vilayet is a serious sacrifice for us', given that it would disrupt British trade in the region. Echoing Hankey's thoughts during the discussions of the de Bunsen Committee in 1915, he asserted, 'we want the water of the Tigris up to Mosul in order to secure our irrigation and navigation further south'.[139] Rothwell's argument that it was 'characteristic' of Hirtzel to put forward economic arguments for Mosul without mentioning oil is incomplete.[140] The oil theorists seem to ignore the fact that for Indian authorities, the development of Mesopotamia's resources lay in the direction of the 'known'; in 1916, hypotheticals such as oil rarely appeared in India Office correspondence. Furthermore, the foregoing suggests that prior to the entry of the United States into the war in 1917, for Indian authorities, whatever the post-war settlement, political predominance would be achieved through development and commerce, and as a result, rivals would be excluded from establishing competition in the Persian Gulf. In other words, the policy of political predominance through trade still held good. But the bureaucratic wheels turned slowly in the polycratic system. Cox directed his enquiries regarding a trade commission to the Government of India in mid-July.[141] However, the India Office did not take the matter further with the Board of Trade until early November, and it was a further five weeks before the Foreign Office received a copy of the Board of Trade's reply to the India Office.[142] The Foreign Office baulked at Cox's proposal. While as Viceroy in early 1915, Hardinge had

[139] FO371/2767/14106: A. Hirtzel to T.W. Holderness, 10 January, 1916.
[140] V.H. Rothwell, 'Mesopotamia in British War Aims, 1914-1918', 289.
[141] FO368/1650/204256: Sir P. Cox, despatch no. 6510, to the Secretary, Foreign Department, Government of India, 18 July, 1916.
[142] FO368/1650/252827: India Office to Foreign Office, 13 December, 1916.

stressed the potential wealth of Mesopotamia, now back in his previous post as Permanent Under-Secretary of State in the Foreign Office he put the brake on Cox's plans, given that the future policy and political status of Mesopotamia remained unclear.[143]

Significantly, Hardinge's concerns were ignored. While Cox's proposed appointments were not approved, the trade commission proceeded. R.F. Holland, Deputy Secretary, Foreign Department of the Government of India, and J.E. Wilson, of Gray, Mackenzie & Co. of Bombay, agents for the Tigris and Euphrates Navigation Company, conducted an investigative mission in spring 1917. Their subsequent report consisted of a comprehensive survey of existing and possible future avenues for development and trade, primarily in the Basra vilayet.[144] The Commissioners recognised that post-war there would be new rivals in Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf, noting that 'the Mesopotamian markets are already flooded with cheap Japanese goods and severe competition may be expected after the war'.[145] In September 1917, when the British government was apparently considering sending Japanese troops into Mesopotamia, Montagu expressed alarm at

> the price which we may have to pay for Japanese assistance and of the footing the Japanese would secure in Mesopotamia … There are already indications of Japanese attempts at commercial penetration in the Persian Gulf … [which] leads inevitably to political influence, and it is clearly not in our interests to encourage a new rival.[146]

Whether Montagu's fears were real or exaggerated, by late 1917, as a result of the influence of the United States, there was recognition in London that commercial development was vital to imperial plans for Mesopotamia, whatever they might be. Hirtzel

[143] FO371/1650/224141: Hardinge minute, no date, early November 1916.
[144] Curzon Papers, F112/256, ff. 144-149: 'Report of Mesopotamia Trade Commissioners (Messrs R.E. Holland & J.H. Wilson), Summary of Recommendations', 15 June, 1917.
[145] Curzon Papers, F112/256, f. 148: 'Report of Mesopotamia Trade Commissioners'.
[146] E.S. Montagu, private, to Lord Curzon, 28 September 1917, Montagu Papers (122), University Library, Trinity College, Cambridge.

noted in December 'that the peoples of the conquered territories are to have a voice – if not the determining voice – as to their future destiny'.[147] He assessed that in order for the local population to accept some form of British control their material well-being should be a priority. At the same time, however, he urged the Board of Trade to act on the recommendations of Holland and Wilson, in order to 'get a head start on our rivals'.[148] Sluglett argued that following Woodrow Wilson's 14-point speech, and Lloyd George's address to the Trade Unions on 5 January 1918, 'long-established and hitherto almost unchallenged assumptions of British imperial policy had to be reconciled with a whole new set of requirements'.[149] But given that Indian authorities were already formulating plans for the post-war period, it seems that there were some in the British establishment who had anticipated this shift almost a year earlier than Sluglett suggested, and that the creation of an Arab state had become a reality rather than an abstract idea. As Hirtzel explained to Wilson in Baghdad, 'the "Arab façade" may have to be something more solid than we originally contemplated'.[150]

In early 1918 Cox was called to London for discussions on how best to tailor the policy laid down in 1917 to the new political reality. On his way back to Baghdad in August, Cox received orders to proceed to Teheran, to relieve the British Minister, Sir Charles

[147] L/P&S/10/617, register no. 5119: Hirtzel note, 24 December, 1917.
[148] L/P&S/10/367, register no. 2094: A. Hirtzel to W.H. Clark, Comptroller General, Board of Trade, 31 December, 1917.
[149] P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 13. The challenge, however, began well before 1918. From 1916, influential pressure groups in Britain had been formulating schemes for the establishment of a League of Nations along the lines proposed by Woodrow Wilson. Among the most influential were the Union of Democratic Control and the League of Nations Society, both groups dominated by members of the left wing of the Liberal and Labour Parties. The first scheme, however, was commissioned by the Fabian Society. See A.J.P. Taylor, *The Trouble Makers: Dissent over Foreign Policy 1792-1939*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1958, 141-145; H. Hanak, 'The Union of Democratic Control during the First World War', *Historical Research*, Vol. 36, no. 94, (Nov., 1963), 168-180, accessed on-line, 27 April, 2015.
[150] A. Hirtzel to Col. A.T. Wilson, 12 March, 1918, c/f A.T. Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917-1920: A Clash of Loyalties*, London, Oxford University Press, 1931, pp. 165-166, note 1.

Marling, leaving his deputy, Captain Arnold Wilson, to assume responsibility for the civil administration.[151] Nonetheless, Cox was kept abreast of events in Mesopotamia by way of a weekly news telegram from Baghdad.[152]

Militarily, from mid-1918, the Tigris front had lost importance when compared to concerns regarding the spread of Bolshevism, together with Germany's final attempt at victory in the East. [153] British military authorities in London and Simla focussed attention on north-west Persia, the Caucasus and the Caspian regions, fearing a Turko-German threat to Afghanistan and the northern borders of India.[154] In the interim, the civil authorities in Mesopotamia focussed on consolidating positions already under occupation, including the amalgamation of the administrations of Basra and Baghdad.[155] In September, Wilson asked for the long-delayed commission, to visit Mesopotamia to consider political and administrative questions which he believed would require settlement as soon as hostilities ceased.[156] Rather than the commission Wilson requested, without consulting the India Office, the War Office despatched a commission of its own, to the chagrin of Montagu, who was not informed until after the mission had departed for Mesopotamia.[157] Sir John Hewett, a former Lieutenant-Governor of the United Provinces, was selected to head the mission. His task was to report to the Army Council whether military expenditure could be reduced

[151] Among the many analyses of Wilson's methods, his deficiencies as a colonial administrator in the changed political conditions in 1918, see P.W. Ireland, *Iraq*, 136-221, and J. Fisher, *Curzon and British Imperialism in the Middle East*, 244-257.
[152] FO371/3386/211728: Sir P. Cox, Teheran, despatch no. 1075, to the Secretary of State for India, 23 December, 1918.
[153] Curzon Papers, F112/274, ff. 118-119: Minutes of the Eastern Committee, 18 September, 1918, Appendix C, 'The Military Command in the Middle East', Lt.-General J.C. Smuts, 16 September, 1918.
[154] R. Anderson, 'Logistics of the Indian Expeditionary Force D in Mesopotamia, 1914-18', in R. Kausnik, (ed.), *The Indian Army in the Two World Wars*, chapter 3, 130.
[155] L/P&S/10/686, register no. 4679: Political, Baghdad, despatch no. 7725, to the Secretary of State for India, 15 September, 1918.
[156] L/P&S/10/368, register no. 4471: Political, Baghdad, despatch no. 8075, to the Secretary of State for India, 27 September, 1918.
[157] L/P&S/10/749, register no. 4611: E.S. Montagu, private, to the Viceroy, 5 September, 1918.

by transferring the operations of the military departments which would be of most benefit to the civilian population post-war, such as irrigation and agriculture, to the civil administration.[158]

Meanwhile, events moved quickly. The Armistice with the Porte was signed on 30 October, and several days later the occupation of Mosul brought a new area under British military occupation. Helmut Mejcher asserted that the desire to boost British commercial influence, together with an appreciation of the value of the oil deposits in the Mosul province in August 1918, were the motives behind the stampede to secure the territory at the end of the war. [159] Arguably, however, strategic objectives were equally influential. Control of Mosul was considered vital due to geography, since the river valleys and flood plains of the Baghdad and Basra Vilayets were deemed to be indefensible without control of the range of mountains to the north-east of Mosul.[160] Nonetheless, military occupation of the territory implied some form of political control. A policy vacuum emerged, however, as no clear instructions were issued other than a directive from the India Office that 'no large or controversial' questions were to be raised.[161] Given that the town of Mosul lay in the French area of indirect control according to the Sykes-Picot Agreement, the India Office was concerned that the French government should not be given the impression that the British were acting in disregard of the provisions of the agreement.[162]

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[158] Curzon Papers, F223/256, ff. 247-249, 'Mesopotamia: Sir John Hewett's Mission', Political Department, India Office, 18 October, 1918.
[159] H.J. Mejcher, *Imperial Quest for Oil*, 111.
[160] Curzon Papers, F112/163, f. 59: Sir F.R. Maunsell, United Services Club, to Lord Curzon, private, 27 September, 1916. The strategic argument, based on geography, was laid out by Maunsell. Clearly a response to the Sykes-Picot Agreement, he advocated the creation of a state of Kurdistan, under British control, lying between Armenia and Mesopotamia.
[161] A.T. Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917-1920: A Clash of Loyalties: A Personal and Historical Record*, London, Oxford University Press, 1931, 116.
[162] L/P&S/10/769, register no. 5426: J.E. Shuckburgh, India Office, to Political, Baghdad, 9 December, 1918.

By late 1918, unresolved questions remained; for example, the extent of British power to be exercised in Mesopotamia, and a head for the proposed Arab state if such a state were to be created. The Anglo-French Declaration, broadcast on 7 November 1918, left no doubt on that score, pledging support for self-determination in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire, albeit with assistance from the two governments in their respective spheres.[163] Whether the declaration was merely propaganda, as it was perceived by Cox,[164] there were consequences for Wilson in Baghdad. The long-delayed Commission, requested by Cox in 1917, did not proceed. Wilson informed the India Office that other than 'a handful of amateur politicians in Baghdad', he believed the majority of the local population was content with British rule. But given the Anglo-French declaration, he advised that the commission should be deferred until the future of Mesopotamia had been decided and the local population consulted.[165] Unperturbed, Holderness mused

> If there is to be no Commission, the Civil Commissioner and his establishments would carry on as at present, feeling their way as they become increasingly familiar with the conditions of the country, and devising measures in the light of experience. British officers have done this before in other parts of the globe with not unsatisfactory results.[166]

Accordingly, with no detailed instructions from London, Wilson set about preparing for a future according to his lights.[167] In early December he visited several centres in the southern Mosul vilayet. Following a meeting with a deputation of Kurdish tribal leaders at Suleimaniyah, he appointed a local notable, Sheikh Mahmud Barzinji, as the British representative for the region. A document was drawn up and signed by the Kurdish chiefs to

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[163] For the text of the Anglo-French Declaration, see J.C. Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East*, 30.
[164] FO371/3386/211728: Sir P. Cox, Teheran, despatch no. 1075, to the Under-Secretary of State, Foreign Office, 24 December, 1918.
[165] L/P&S/10/686, register no. 5179: Political, Baghdad, despatch no. 10213, to the Secretary of State for India, 23 November, 1918.
[166] L/P&S/10/686, register no. 4679: T.W. Holderness minute, 23 October, 1918.
[167] L/P&S/10/617, register no. 4067: J.E. Shuckburgh to T.W. Holderness, 18 October, 1918: when Wilson requested copies of the minutes of the committee in London for his guidance, Shuckburgh advised Holderness to refuse his request, on the basis that those papers were classified as 'secret'.

the effect that they wished to be attached to Iraq and placed under British protection; in return, the chiefs pledged to accept British assistance and advice. The India Office approved Wilson's actions, claiming that the Kurds had thus exercised their right of self-determination.[168]

On the other side of the Arabian Peninsula, the remnant of the Arab Revolt formed the Arab League, and joined forces with the Egyptian Expeditionary Force which, under the command of General Sir Edmund Allenby, occupied Jerusalem in December 1917. Following the occupation of Damascus on 1 October 1918, Sharif Hussein's third son, Feisal, was installed as military governor of Occupied Enemy Territory 'A', the French area of indirect control according to the Sykes-Picot Agreement, thereby creating complications not only for the British government, but also for the authorities in Mesopotamia.[169]

At the end of November, Wilson was notified of a proposal by T.E. Lawrence for the sons of the Sharif to become heads of Arab governments in Mesopotamia and Syria.[170] Completely opposed to Lawrence's scheme, Wilson expostulated that a Sunni head of state would be opposed by Persians of the Shia branch of Islam.[171] Given that Cox was at that

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[168] Curzon Papers, F112/256, ff. 282-283: 'Kurdistan', note by the Political Department, India Office, 14 December, 1918. For Wilson's arrangements with the Kurdish chiefs in late 1918 see B.C. Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs*, 275; J. Fisher, *Curzon and British Imperialism in the Middle East*, 248-250, and P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 77-78. Sluglett also provides a detailed account of Sheikh Mahmud's subsequent tumultuous career as a British collaborator, 80-84, 125-127, 140-146. See also Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, 54-55.

[169] Curzon Papers, F112/277, f. 85: War Cabinet Paper E.C. 2054: Sir Edmund Allenby, General Officer Commanding, Egypt, to War Office, 21 October, 1918. For Feisal's career in Damascus see E. Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, 166-174; J. Nevakivi, *Britain, France and the Arab Middle East*, Press, 177-189; B.C. Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs,* 355-377, and B. Porter, *The Lion's Share: a short history of British Imperialism, 1850-1870*, London & New York, Longman, 1975, 244.

[170] FO371/4148/13298: copy of Secretary of State for India to the Viceroy, repeated to Baghdad, 18 November, 1918. Lawrence's proposal and the response of the India Office are discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

[171] FO371/3386/206913: copy of Political, Baghdad, paraphrase telegram no. 10973, to the Secretary of State for India, repeated to Delhi and Teheran, 11 December, 1918.

moment in treaty negotiations with the Persian government, Wilson's protestation was hardly flimsy. But perhaps of more significance, he believed that

> The trend of our present Arab policy if followed to … (group omitted) may in certain circumstances result in creation of a series of Mohammedan States, with nothing in common but their religion and their anti-European (i.e. racial) prejudice; such a consummation would be the negation of progress and put an end to hope of peace in the Middle East … I submit that we are in danger of creating something closely resembling a new Balkan problem.[172]

While Wilson's objective was to retain direct control over Mesopotamia, and at the same time, deny Hussein or his sons any part in the country's future, with the benefit of hindsight, elements of his prophecy have proved remarkably accurate. His solution, however, was out of step with current thinking in Cairo or London. In order to avert the danger he anticipated, Wilson proposed the establishment of a British protectorate, separate from the rest of the Arab Middle East.[173] The Foreign Office response to Wilson's proposal illustrated the fundamental problem resulting from the jurisdictional divisions in the Middle East. The Foreign Office Political Intelligence Department noted that

> The problem for His Majesty's Government is to co-ordinate their policy in Mesopotamia (a) with their general policy, and (b) with their policy towards other Arab countries … Chief Political Officer is apt to consider policy from an exclusively Mesopotamian point of view, and ignore our interests in the Hejaz and Syria.[174]

Conclusion.

Despite their differences, authorities in Cairo and Baghdad were essentially working towards the same imperial ends by different means. Cairo officials envisaged exercising indirect control through the medium of Hussein, harnessing what they believed to be Arab

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[172] FO371/3386/206913: copy of Political, Baghdad, paraphrase telegram to the Secretary of State for India, repeated to Delhi and Teheran, 11 December, 1918.
[173] Ibid.
[174] FO371/3386/203526: A. Toynbee minute on Baghdad telegram no. 10973, 13 December, 1918. The Foreign Office Political Intelligence Department was established in March 1918, with the express purpose of providing memoranda on issues likely to arise at the forthcoming peace conference, for discussion by the Eastern Committee. E. Goldstein, 'British Peace Aims and the Eastern Question: The Political Intelligence Department and the Eastern Committee, 1918', *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 23, 1987, 419; E. Maisel, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1919-1926*, 4-5.

nationalism, while Wilson in Baghdad sought to extend direct control over the three Ottoman Vilayets of Basra, Baghdad and Mosul. In both cases, the principle aim was to establish British hegemony over the Arab provinces to the greatest extent that the French government would allow, Sykes-Picot Agreement notwithstanding. The tension between the two loci of British power in the Middle East was a result of the division of control, and differing interests and priorities as much as the lack of coherent policy from London. Furthermore, as Malcolm Yapp observed, it was the men on the spot who, for most of period between 1914 and 1918, produced the ideas which eventually became official British policy.[175] However, it is not sufficient to mention this factor, without investigating how this situation was allowed to occur. For that, it is necessary to take a closer look at the third leg of the messy triangle: the politicians and bureaucrats in London who were ultimately responsible for the lack of a clear cut policy in Mesopotamia.

[175] M.E. Yapp, *The Making of the Modern Near East*, 349.

Chapter Three

The Eastern Committee, 1918: conflict and confusion.[1]

As foreseen by Hirtzel, by early 1918, international developments required policy-makers to recalibrate imperial aims within the language of self-determination as a result of the United States entering the war as an Associated Allied Power. Policy formulation was also complicated, however, by the differences between the Arab policies of Cairo and Baghdad. These differences were replicated in the inter-departmental committee in Whitehall which was established in an attempt to coordinate military and political affairs in Britain's expanding areas of interest in the Near and Middle East. Here, two separate but related themes emerge – the business of the committee, and the frequent attempts to do away with it. The latter often distracted the committee from the former, and furthermore, the powers of the committee were from the outset, ill-defined. Scrutiny of the 'official mind', the discussions of Ministers and departmental officials, many of whom sat on the committee, who wrote the papers and memoranda which were circulated for discussion, remains useful, given that it was these officials, more often than not, guided by actions already taken, or proposals from the political officers on the spot, who largely set the policy which the committee either endorsed, or set aside for further consideration.[2]

[1] As noted in the introduction to this thesis, the inter-departmental conflict over control of British interests in the Middle East has been studied in detail by a number of historians. See for example, H.J. Mejcher, 'British Middle East Policy 1917-1921'; E. Maisel, The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1919-1926; J. Fisher, 'Lord Robert Cecil and the formation of a Middle East Department of the Foreign Office', and his monograph *Lord Curzon and British Imperialism in the Middle East.* Unlike those studies, this chapter discusses the conflict as it occurred in the Eastern Committee in 1918, in order to assess the impact of polycratism on the formulation of policy in Mesopotamia, in addition to the attitudes of policy-makers to the changed political environment in 1918, and the nascent League of Nations.

[2] The term 'official mind' is borrowed from John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson's *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism.*

Discussions in Cabinet regarding the centralisation of control of Middle Eastern affairs were sparked by a memorandum penned by Lord Edward Cecil, financial adviser to the Egyptian administration. Cecil criticised the Foreign Office practice of communicating with the authorities in Cairo via private correspondence between the High Commissioner, Sir Reginald Wingate, and Lord Hardinge, the Under-Secretary of State. [3] Lord Robert Cecil, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs and Minister for the Blockade, used the opportunity afforded by his brother's criticism to suggest that since he believed that Cairo would soon become the centre for the management of British Middle Eastern affairs, the question of coordination should be addressed. However, he considered the existing Middle East Committee was 'far too big to deal satisfactorily with the matter'. Possibly with his own position in mind, Lord Curzon retorted that given the expansion of British military and political activity in the Middle East, the establishment of a new department of state might become a necessity. [4] But no decision was made, and in the interim, the Middle East Committee ceased to meet.

Four months later, when the committee reconvened, Curzon complained that the Departments concerned had been dealing with matters which should have been discussed by his committee, and expressed the hope that regular meetings would be arranged.[5] In an attempt to minimise its role, Robert Cecil suggested that the committee should meet weekly, on Saturday mornings, and in a pre-emptive move, announced that he had arranged

[3] CAB23/4: minutes of War Cabinet Meeting, 14 September, 1917, 3. The same practice had been roundly criticised by the Mesopotamian Commission of Inquiry in 1917, when the main channel of communication between India and London had been via private correspondence between the then Viceroy (Hardinge) and the Secretary of State for India. See Curzon Papers, F112/163, f. 220: 'The Report of the Mesopotamia Commission', note by Austen Chamberlain, Secretary of State for India, 5 June, 1917; J. Fisher, *Curzon and British Imperialism in the Middle East*, 43-44.

[4] CAB/23/4: minutes of War Cabinet meeting, 14 September, 1917, 4.

[5] Curzon Papers, F112/273, f. 3: minutes of the Middle Eastern Committee, 12 January, 1918.

for the appointment of Sir Mark Sykes as head of a proposed Eastern Department in the Foreign Office. [6] What Cecil obviously had in mind was that when established, the Foreign Office Eastern Department would perform the function of the separate department which Curzon had suggested, thus obviating the need for the Committee's existence. Cecil's intervention marked the beginning of a campaign which developed momentum, as the conflict created by overlapping and conflicting departmental responsibilities developed into an assault on the committee and its chairman, largely spearheaded by Cecil, with some assistance from the Secretary of State for India, Edwin Montagu. The underlying ambivalence regarding its very existence was arguably one of the factors which contributed to the Committee's lack of focus on issues actually relating to Mesopotamia.

The cleavage between the Foreign and India Offices over future policy crystallised into two distinct and conflicting schools of thought. The Foreign Office, generally upheld the view that McMahon's pledges to Hussein should be honoured, while the India Office and its subordinates in Mesopotamia, opposed to any accommodation with Hussein, sought to obtain British supremacy through the well-established techniques of control established in 1914, including a monopoly over development and commerce under a system of direct rule. The confidence that the British position in Mesopotamia would thereby be assured was shaken when in early 1918, 'self-determination' became the guiding principle of a future peace settlement with the German Habsburg and Ottoman Empires.[7] While by no means abandoning the objective 'to get ourselves started commercially so as to be ahead of

[6] Ibid, f. 38.
[7] 'President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points', text of the speech delivered on 8 January, 1918, *Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy*, the Avalon Project, Yale University, 2008. http://www.avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/Wilson14.asp, (accessed 03/03/2015).

competitors whom it may be impossible to exclude after the war',[8] Hirtzel's chief concern related to Basra and the fact that Mesopotamia was part of the Arab State, according to the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and therefore annexation was out of the question. However, consistent with Indian views since 1915, Hirtzel stressed that 'practically it cannot be governed by King Hussein.'[9]

Hirtzel's note prompted a response from Sir Mark Sykes, who issued a proposal whereby, as a precursor to independence, British rule over Mesopotamia should be 'provisional' for twenty-five years, the government answerable to an international authority.[10] But Sykes' early iteration of the League of Nations' mandates system was rejected by Hirtzel. Seemingly, Hirtzel was annoyed by Sykes' proposal on the grounds that it had been made with little knowledge of the conditions in Mesopotamia. Yet in a remark to Lord Islington, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for India, he revealed that the India Office was also 'imperfectly' acquainted with current conditions.[11] On the other hand, Sir Thomas Holderness, the permanent Under-Secretary, conceded that

> we may find that a British Protectorate over this region is not acceptable to our Allies and to the Americans without the addition of some international machinery, and we may have in the end to submit to this.[12]

This exchange illustrated not merely the differences in outlook generally between Foreign Office and India Office officials, but also a division of opinion within the India Office. More importantly, Hirtzel's comment suggests a lack of communication between Baghdad and the India Office, and an early expression of resistance to the prospect of international scrutiny.

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[8] FO371/3394/14564: MEC 24, 'Future of Mesopotamia', note by Sir A. Hirtzel, 11 January, 1918.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Sir Mark Sykes, 'Our Position in Mesopotamia in relation to the Spirit of the Age', 16 January, 1918, cited in J. Fisher, *Curzon and British Imperialism in the Middle East*, 123.
[11] India Office Records, L/P&S/10/686, register no. 617/1918, Hirtzel to Islington, 22 January, 1918.
[12] Ibid, Holderness minute on Hirtzel note to Islington, 22 January, 1918.

Hirtzel seems to have accepted that while the 1917 policy recommendations of the Mesopotamian Administration Committee were no longer relevant, he wondered how the local population could be encouraged to consent to the principle aim of the British government, which was to secure influence 'to the utmost extent that circumstances permit'. [13] Ultimately, it was decided that no decision on future policy for Mesopotamia was possible without first ascertaining the views of the Civil Commissioner. [14]

In the interim, the committee was invited to consider a draft despatch from the India Office to the Civil Commissioner in Baghdad, requesting information on what steps could be taken

> to encourage principal sheikhs of both settled and Nomad districts to vote for British assistance? Can a large majority be secured in favour of British assistance … [and] to what extent will such assistance or administration require maintenance of British or Indian troops or police in Mesopotamia? … What form of Arab government is practicable? Is it conceivable that a Member of Shereefial family will be accepted as sovereign under Shereef's suzerainty? If not, is there any other individual? And if not, what body or bodies are practicable and what powers could be entrusted to them?[15]

The telegram was not sent; rather, it was decided to invite Cox to London to bring him up to date with recent trends.[16] The India Office Political Department noted that while politicians in London were no longer confident that the policy of March 1917 still held good, it was not known if Cox realised that, or that 'local political action' could be turned to British advantage. [17] But while there had been concerns within the India Office regarding the 'Indianisation' of the Mesopotamian administration since 1915, Cox was to be allowed some freedom of action, given that Holderness noted that 'it was not proposed to work out with

[13] Curzon Papers, F112/256, f. 138: M.E.C.68, 'Future of Mesopotamia', India Office, 31 January, 1918.
[14] Curzon Papers, F112/273, f. 6: Middle East Committee, 2nd minutes, (New Series), 26 January 1918.
[15] Curzon Papers, F112/256, ff. 131-2: un-dated draft telegram from Secretary of State to Civil Commissioner, Baghdad.
[16] L/P&S/11/132, register no. P.538, Islington to Curzon, 15 March, 1918.
[17] Curzon Papers, F112/274, f. 191: 'Future of Mesopotamia, note by Political Department, India Office, on points for discussion with Sir P. Cox', 3 April, 1918.

him in detail' the necessary adjustments to the system of administration in order to conform to 'the probable requirements of a Peace Conference, but to leave that to him on his return to Mesopotamia.'[18]

Pending Cox's arrival, the India Office devoted its attention to the promotion of commercial interests in Mesopotamia.[19] Accordingly, the Middle East Committee received two items for consideration: a summary of the report of the Mesopotamia Trade Commissioners, conducted in early 1917, and correspondence between Lord Hardinge and the shipping magnate Lord Inchcape, relating to Inchcape's request to recommence his river boat service, as arranged in the unratified pre-war agreements.[20] Curzon rejected Inchcape's request, on the grounds that Mesopotamia's future was yet to be decided, therefore monopoly rights could not be granted to a British firm. Furthermore, signalling that the United States was impinging on British imperial decision-making, Curzon stated, it would be 'difficult to reconcile the proposed action with the war aims of the Allies as stated by the Prime Minister and President Wilson.'[21] The ensuing discussion revealed that all those present opposed the granting of a monopoly on river transport, with the exception of Alwyn Parker, the Foreign Office representative who had participated in the 1913 negotiations with the Porte, and Sir William Clark, Comptroller-General at the Board of Trade. Echoing the difficulties which confronted the supporters of the Euphrates Valley Railway during the nineteenth century, Clark supported Inchcape's request, because he

[18] Curzon Papers, F112/256, ff. 175-6: Sir Thomas Holderness to Lord Islington, 19 February 1918.
[19] L/P&S/10/367, register no. 2094, Islington to Curzon, 4 February 1918.
[20] Curzon Papers, F112/256, ff. 150-155: E.C. 72, 'Mesopotamia Trade', India Office note, 6 February 1918, with document, B274, 'Report of Mesopotamia Trade Commissioners (Messrs. R.E. Holland and J.H. Wilson), Summary of Recommendations'; and ff. 142-143, 165-170: Inchcape to Hardinge, 30 October 1917; Hardinge to Inchcape, 9 February 1918; Inchcape to Hardinge, 15 February 1918.
[21] Curzon Papers, F112/273 f. 9: Middle East Committee, 4th Minutes (New Series), 18 February 1918.

doubted if British investors would be willing to participate in the development of Mesopotamia without a government guarantee.[22] Despite the presence of Clark at this meeting, specifically to take part in discussion on the Mesopotamian Trade Commissioners' Report, Inchcape's request occupied the committee's time in a lengthy and ultimately unproductive discussion, which resulted in a decision to defer consideration until Cox's views were known. Meanwhile, the report on trade prospects in Mesopotamia was not discussed by the Committee, either on that occasion or subsequently.[23]

The Eastern Committee:

In March, a fundamental change was made to the Committee's terms of reference, which would have implications for Mesopotamian policy. On 11 March, the War Cabinet decided that the three committees hitherto dealing with Middle Eastern questions should be amalgamated into a single committee, the Eastern Committee, under the chairmanship of a cabinet minister.[24] When offered the chair, Balfour declined,[25] thus Lloyd George requested Curzon to prepare an outline of the structure and responsibilities of the Committee. While it may have provided for coordination of Britain's Middle Eastern policy, Curzon's imperial ambitions were set forth clearly in a memorandum he produced two days

[22] Ibid. ff.9-10.

[23] Correspondence in early 1919 between the Government of India, the India and Foreign Offices, and the Board of Trade is in L/P&S/10/367, register nos. 582 and 2090. A.H. Grant, Secretary of the Foreign Department of the Government of India and E.J. Turner, Board of Trade, did not want the report published, in order to give opportunities to British firms first. The Foreign and India Offices wanted publication withheld until the Peace Conference had made its decision on Mesopotamia's future, while Hirtzel believed that giving preference to British traders was no longer possible, given that 'absolute freedom of transit and transport and equality of treatment is the order of the day.' In early 1920, further correspondence between the Foreign and India Offices and the Department of Overseas Trade, in L/P&S/10/368, reveals that the Government of India still hoped to provide selected firms in India with an expurgated version of the Report, but Curzon objected, and in January 1920, a joint decision was made by the Foreign and India Offices to prevent publication of the Report.

[24] Curzon Papers, F112/274, f.2: G.T.3905, 'The Eastern Committee', memorandum by Lord Curzon, 13 March, 1918.

[25] Curzon Papers, F112/274, f. 1: A.J. Balfour memorandum, 15 March 1918.

later. The proposed Eastern Committee, he declared, would be responsible for formulating policy for 'the entire glacis of the Indian Fortress (the Black Sea, Caucasus and Trans-Caucasus, Armenia, Persia, the Caspian, Trans-Caspia, Turkestan, Afghanistan) to Sinai, Palestine, Syria, the Hejaz, Arabia, Mesopotamia, and the Persian Gulf'.[26] Despite Curzon's lofty ambitions, however, the War Cabinet decided that the Eastern Committee should absorb the functions of the Middle East and Persia Committees only. Moreover, giving consideration to British military operations in Persia, it was decided that the Committee was

> to deal with military even more than diplomatic questions. It should be in the nature of a Vigilance Committee, ready to warn the War Cabinet and furnish advice on the Eastern area of operations.[27]

As Nevakivi asserted, however, the committee had little influence over the activities of the political officers of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force in Palestine and Syria.[28] Furthermore, given the War Cabinet's decision on 21 March, the Eastern Committee's precise function was unclear. While it retained the executive functions of its predecessors, it was also to perform an advisory role.

While there may have been a shift of focus eastwards, more pressing questions relating to future policy in Mesopotamia were deferred until the committee had been furnished with the views of Sir Percy Cox. This was despite intermittent reminders from the

[26] Curzon Papers, F112/274, f. 2: G.T.3905: 'The Eastern Committee', memorandum by Lord Curzon, 13 March 1918.

[27] CAB23/5: War Cabinet 369, minutes of War Cabinet meeting, 21 March 1918, 5. At the first meeting, the Committee consisted of Curzon (chairman), Lt.-Gen. J.C. Smuts, A.J. Balfour, Lord Hardinge and Lord Robert Cecil (Minister for the Blockade) representing the Foreign Office; Lord Islington and J.E. Shuckburgh representing the India Office; Gen. Sir Henry Wilson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and Major-Gen. Sir G.M.W. Macdonogh, Director of Military Intelligence representing the War Office, with Sir Mark Sykes and Lancelot Oliphant acting as secretaries. During its existence the membership fluctuated considerably, according to the subject under discussion; a representative of Treasury attended from the second meeting, and Sykes and Oliphant were elevated to associate members at the 5th meeting. See R. Holland, 'The British Empire and the Great War, 1914-1918', *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. IV, *The Twentieth Century*, 1999, 119: Smuts represented South Africa at the Imperial War Conference in 1917. He was invited to remain in London, and was appointed as a member of the War Cabinet.

[28] J. Nevakivi, *Britain, France and the Arab Middle East 1914-1920*, 107.

India Office. In early April, the Political Department circulated a memorandum, signalling again that the policy laid down by the Mesopotamian Administration Committee was in need of revision. The memorandum revealed that the India Office position had indeed shifted and it was now recognised that a transition from direct to indirect control was inevitable. While in the opinion of the India Office, Mesopotamians were 'ill-qualified for the exercise of self-determination' it was recognised that the attempt would have to be made to 'put the principle into operation'.[29] Curzon scoffed at the India Office's 'needlessly pessimistic view' adding that

> no note is taken of the fact that "self-determination" as a principle of international settlement at the Peace Conference (in any case a singularly fallacious criterion) has now been heavily discounted by the actions of Germany in the W. provinces of Russia … in these circumstances for the Allied countries to preach or still more to practice self-determination, if it be contrary to their own interests, will be ridiculous.[30]

Thereafter Curzon lapsed into irresolution, recognising that Britain had pledged to set up some form of Arab rule under British guidance 'and probably control', while at the same time, asserting that even though the exercise of direct British rule should be avoided, 'it may be necessary to make a British enclave of Basra for reasons both political and commercial.'[31]

Moreover, if the India Office was ignorant of the current situation on the spot, Curzon was even more so, posing further questions for Cox to consider, such as

> the extent to which and the manner in which (without our knowing much about it here) British Indian administration may have been set up or be now in existence in the occupied territories… Is the administration in consonance with Arab ideas? How far is it borrowed from the Turks? Do the local population (town and country) like it? To what extent is it Indian? Can it be worked by other than Indian agents? Are British officials necessary to its supervision?[32]

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[29] Curzon Papers, F112/256, ff. 190-192: document B281, 'Future of Mesopotamia, note by the Political Department, India Office, on points for discussion with Sir P. Cox', 3 April, 1918.
[30] Curzon Papers, F112/256, ff. 211-213: Curzon to Islington, 3 April, 1918.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Curzon Papers, F112/256, f. 188: E.C.76 'Future of Mesopotamia', note by Lord Curzon on India Office memorandum, 3 April, 1918.

His questions were only partially answered when a memorandum prepared by Cox was discussed during his appearance before the Eastern Committee in April. The fears of the India Office proved unfounded on one point, given that Cox acknowledged that the policy laid down in 1917 'must … be regarded as a counsel of perfection, and we must be prepared to accept something less.'[33] However, apparently less affected by international opinion, he appeared to be reluctant to yield on the question of switching from formal to informal control. Moreover, as Curzon had, he argued that given the assurances made to the local population in December 1914 that the Turks would never return, and considering the extensive and costly development of the port at Basra, there were grounds for annexing the territory from Basra to the Persian Gulf Coast. [34] Nor, it seems, was he willing to relax British control, stressing that the Arab façade 'offers no insurmountable difficulties'. Rather, he declared,

> the more complete the British control can be the better for the country. In fact, unless it is assured the country has no future, for it would be impossible to get money for development unless investors are satisfied that their interests are fully safeguarded, a condition which cannot be assured unless under protective British supervision.[35]

While dismissing Hussein's claims based on the correspondence with McMahon, declaring that he 'carried no weight in Iraq', he suggested the Naqib of Baghdad as titular head of the future state.[36] The administration, as he had contemplated following the occupation of Baghdad, would be headed by a British High Commissioner, but with a nod to the principle

[33] L/P&S/10/666, register no. 1499, E.C. Paper 173, P.Z. Cox, 'Future of Mesopotamia', 22 April, 1918.
[34] Ibid, 1.
[35] Ibid, 2.
[36] Curzon Papers, F112/274, f. 15: Eastern Committee minutes, 24 April, 1918. 'Abd al-Rahman al-Gaylani, the Naqib of Baghdad, was a senior descendant of the prophet Muhammad. Hitherto, while supporting the British administration, the Naqib had not been directly involved in political matters, which is no doubt why Cox selected him as a suitable head of the future state. However, Gertrude Bell disagreed. Insisting that there was no suitable local candidate, she advocated Sharif Hussein as 'nominal overlord' of Mesopotamia given that she believed he would be acceptable to the members of both the Sunni and Shia sects of Islam. Curzon Papers, F112/256, ff. 228-235: G. Bell, 'Arab Aims', enclosed in Bell to Lord Hardinge, Foreign Office, 25 May, 1918.

of self-determination, 'working with a small body or Cabinet of Ministers, say half native and half British, and assisted perhaps by an advisory body or council of a dozen prominent and representative natives.'[37] Cox listed the elements of the population whose support would be necessary if British administration of the country was to be maintained: the Jewish community in Baghdad, the Arab urban upper classes, wealthy Arab and Jewish landlords, and the 'important Sheikhs of the settled tribes'. The rural population was dismissed as 'quite inarticulate', and their opinion not worth consulting.[38] Moreover, he loftily informed the Committee that a survey of local opinion regarding self-determination 'was quite unsuited to Arab thought and habits, and could only excite the liveliest misgivings.'[39]

Meanwhile, Balfour alluded to the inconsistency of the principle of self-determination with the 'Arab façade' proposed by Cox. He stated, however, that President Wilson

> did not seriously mean to apply his formula outside Europe. He meant that no "civilised" communities should remain under the heel of other "civilised" communities … as to politically inarticulate peoples, he would probably not say more than that their true interests should prevail as against exploitation by conquerors. If so, an Arab State under British protection would satisfy him … if it were shown that the Arabs, if offered the choice, would choose what we wished.[40]

Henceforth, Balfour's rationalisation of the meaning of self-determination became the guiding principle underlying British policy for Mesopotamia. That is, if the people were given the choice, and they opted for a continuation of British rule, they could be considered to have exercised their right of self-determination. Given the nature and extent of British control, however, it was unlikely that the population would have that choice. Cox's

[37] Curzon Papers, F112/274, f. 14: Eastern Committee minutes, 24 April, 1918.
[38] L/P&S/10/666, register no. 1499, E.C.173, P.Z. Cox, 'Future of Mesopotamia', 22 April, 1918, 5.
[39] Curzon Papers, F112/274 f. 14: Eastern Committee minutes, 24 April, 1918.
[40] Ibid, f. 14.

proposals were approved by the Eastern Committee, and he was instructed 'to proceed with the development of the administration in Mesopotamia on the lines that had been laid down.'[41]

Hardinge also took the opportunity afforded by Cox's presence to raise the question of Inchcape's request again. But Cox objected to the establishment of a monopoly, insisting that local commercial enterprises should be given the opportunity to participate in the lucrative river trade. Rather than making an executive decision, the Committee instructed Holderness to arrange a meeting at the India Office, at which Cox and Inchcape could settle the matter between them.[42] As a result, Inchcape was given permission to recommence operations, with the proviso that he was to understand that a monopoly was not being granted, and that his vessels were liable to be requisitioned by the military authorities.[43] While Curzon, Cecil, and Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, played an instrumental role in the appointment of Cox to replace the British Minister at Teheran shortly thereafter, the Committee seemed to have overlooked the fact that under Cox's replacement in Mesopotamia, Colonel Arnold Wilson, the proposals endorsed in April were not implemented.

Following Cox's appearance, where (as far as the Committee was concerned), policy for Mesopotamia had been settled, the focus shifted to military operations in Persia, the Caucasus and the Hejaz, where Sharifian forces led by Abdullah were embroiled in a frontier dispute with ibn Saud. From July, the Committee was preoccupied with discussions on the

[41] Ibid, f. 15.
[42] Curzon Papers, F112/274, f. 16: Eastern Committee minutes, 24 April, 1918.
[43] L/P&S/10/367, register no. 2094, J.E. Shuckburgh, Political Department, India Office to Lord Inchcape, 21 May, 1918.

Sykes-Picot Agreement in relation to the French position in Syria, where British troops of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force were advancing towards Damascus, leaving little time for considering the future status of Mesopotamia.[44]

Perhaps of more significance for Mesopotamian policy, in July Lord Robert Cecil was appointed Assistant Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs with responsibility for Middle Eastern affairs, creating confusion regarding the lines of authority.[45] Responding to a question regarding military and political matters in the Middle East, Cecil took the opportunity to praise the activities of the British authorities in Mesopotamia, declaring that 'very satisfactory progress is being made in redeeming the country from the state of ruin into which it had fallen under the Turks … a spirit of harmony and co-operation prevails.'[46] 'Harmony' and 'cooperation' were not, however, words which applied to the Eastern Committee's proceedings.

The effects of polycratic decision-making.

Departmental activities were not always brought to the attention of the Eastern Committee.[47] Nor, for that matter, were the departments inclined to correspond over matters where jurisdiction overlapped. A case in point was the War Office mission to Mesopotamia to investigate the possibility of transferring the military departments to the

[44] D.K. Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East, 1914-1958*, 57; J. Fisher, *Curzon and British Imperialism in the Middle East*, 286.
[45] Z. Steiner and M.L. Dockrill, 'The Foreign Office Reforms, 1919-21', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 17, no. 1, (Mar., 1974), 133; B.C. Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs*, 196.
[46] *Hansard*, Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 23 July 1918, vol. 108, cc 1615-16. For an excellent analysis of the rhetoric of imperialism in the Orient, particularly in the way that 'the Turk' was represented, see J. Renton, 'Changing Languages of Empire and the Orient: Britain and the Invention of the Middle East, 1917-1918', 645-667.
[47] J. Fisher, *Curzon and British Imperialism in the Middle East*, 296. Fisher asserts that information regarding Arabian and Mesopotamian affairs was deliberately withheld from Curzon by both the Foreign and India Offices.

civil administration. The India Office protested that it had not been consulted before the mission went ahead;[48] the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army protested to the War Office,[49] and Shuckburgh noted 'it is 'almost incredible that so important a step affecting the future of Mesopotamia should be taken without the knowledge of the India Office or the Eastern Committee.'[50]

But closer to home, in early July Montagu joined Cecil in criticising the management of British military and political affairs in the East. He cited Foreign Office intelligence which suggested that there was 'a serious menace' looming in the East. Conferences between German and Ottoman officials, held in winter 1917-18 and spring 1918, he claimed, pointed to a military thrust towards Trans-Caspia and Turkestan, thus 'disturbing Afghanistan and threatening India.' He questioned if the British government was organised to respond to this threat, however, rather than addressing the subject directly, he opened up a lively debate on the management of British military and political affairs in the Middle East.[51] Directing his attention to the Eastern Committee, Montagu questioned its utility as a policy-making instrument, and criticised the confused jurisdictional division of the Middle East between the Foreign, India, and War Offices, a system, he claimed, which had worked reasonably well as a peace time arrangement. But he defended the India Office, which he explained

> is differentiated from the others in that its whole activities are concerned with the East, with India and its defences, with India and the countries which border it, whereas the Foreign Office and the War Office have immeasurable and overwhelming responsibilities in other directions.[52]

[48] L/P&S/10/749, P.3156/1918, register no. 4611, Secretary of State to Viceroy, 5 September, 1918.
[49] L/P&S/10/749, P.3156/1918, register no. 3809, Sir Charles Monroe, Commander-in-Chief, India, to War Office, 22 August, 1918.
[50] L/P&S/10/749, P.3156/1918, register no. 3809, Shuckburgh minute, 13 July, 1918.
[51] Curzon Papers, F112/274, f. 90: E.C. paper 718, 'The War in the East', E.S. Montagu, 5 July, 1918.
[52] Ibid.

As a solution, he proposed that the entire region, extending from the western Arabian Peninsula to the borders of India, should be managed by the Government of India. Moreover, he opined that the Eastern Committee should be a committee of Ministers, deciding policy only, while day-to-day matters would be better handled by an inter-departmental sub-committee.[53] He seemed to have overlooked the fact that the Government of India had been relieved of control of military operations in Mesopotamia in 1916, and political affairs the previous year, and that officials in Cairo would undoubtedly oppose such a solution. Indeed, the Foreign Office Political Department, Cecil, and the War Office objected to Montagu's proposal with varying degrees of vitriol, but all were adamant that political control of the region should not be entrusted to the Government of India or the India Office. The Foreign Office argued that Montagu's proposal would entail the 'bankruptcy of the Arab movement to which we are committed'. Furthermore, it was pointed out that only the Foreign Office was equipped to handle diplomatic relations with the Allies.[54] As regards the Eastern Committee, the Foreign Office advocated a return to the position obtaining prior to its establishment, where the departments performed executive functions, leaving the Committee responsible only for formulating policy and advising the departments of the best means of implementing that policy.[55] Given the departments' predilection to work independently despite their overlapping responsibilities, it is doubtful if this solution would have been workable; rather, it appears to have been another attempt by the Foreign Office to do away with Curzon's committee.

[53] Ibid. See also E. Maisel, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy*, 1919-1926, 208-9.
[54] Curzon Papers, F112/274, f. 93: E.C. 978, '"The War in the East", Departmental Note by the Foreign Office on Mr Montagu's Paper of the 5th July, 1918', 17 July, 1918.
[55] Ibid.

Concerned that the committee was not suitable for executive purposes, Cecil raised Curzon's earlier proposal for a separate Department. While uncertain if the proposed Foreign Office Middle Eastern Department would be equipped to take on the political functions of the India Office, he thought it was an option worth considering. [56] Furthermore, while Balfour recommended that the question of the management of Middle Eastern affairs should be reviewed after the war, both he and Henry Wilson suggested setting up a sub-committee of the Eastern Committee, consisting of representatives from the three departments most directly concerned. [57] But when Cecil informed Curzon that he intended to hold regular meetings in his office with Lancelot Oliphant, (Foreign Office), John Shuckburgh, (India Office), and Sir G. Macdonogh, (Director of Military Intelligence), in order to settle 'routine matters without reference to the Eastern Committee', sensing another attempt to undermine his authority, Curzon responded angrily, summarily rejecting Cecil's proposal, which was speedily withdrawn, albeit with a rider that the whole matter should be discussed further.[58]

At the next meeting of the Committee, Montagu also withdrew his proposal for the extension of the Government of India's control to the Arabian Peninsula, noting that Cecil's

[56] Curzon Papers, F112/274: Cecil note, 20 July, 1918. For the proposal by Lord Hardinge in 1916, and the ensuing internal Foreign Office conflict over the establishment of a Middle East Department in that Office, see E. Maisel, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy*, 204-227, and J. Fisher, 'Lord Robert Cecil and the formation of a Middle East Department of the Foreign Office', 370-373. For Cecil's relations with Hardinge on this issue, see R. Warman, 'The Erosion of Foreign Office influence in the Making of Foreign Policy, 1916-1918', 152.

[57] Curzon Papers, F112/274, f. 94: Note by A.J. Balfour, 27 July, 1918; E.C. 809, 'Note on Mr Montagu's Memorandum "The War in the East".', Henry Wilson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, War Office, 15 July, 1918.

[58] British Library, Additional Manuscripts, no. 51077, Cecil of Chelwood papers, ff. 9-13: Cecil to Curzon, private, 1 August, 1918; Curzon to Cecil, private, 1 August, 1918; Cecil to Curzon, private, 1 August, 1918. It seems one of the reasons for Curzon's opposition to the proposal was that he distrusted General Macdonogh, who as Director of Military Operations had advocated (unspecified) military action which Curzon considered 'dangerous'. While Curzon's complaint is unclear, he suspected that In Cecil's sub-committee, Macdonogh would be tempted to stray beyond the limits set by the Eastern Committee, weakening its control over military matters.

new appointment essentially represented a Minister for the Middle East, and therefore provided a 'temporary' solution to the problems he had raised.[59] Yet further criticism of the Committee from Cecil invoked the retort from Curzon that 'he had now learned for the first time that there was a Secretary of State for Middle Eastern affairs' and that Montagu's perception of Cecil's appointment as a temporary solution 'amounted in fact to the disbandment of the Eastern Committee'. Moreover, even though it had been withdrawn, Curzon identified Cecil's 'unsound' proposal of 1 August as 'the creation of an *imperium in imperio'* which would render the Eastern Committee largely irrelevant, and he announced that in those circumstances, 'he would have to ask to be relieved of his present duties.'[60] In all probability, Montagu recognised Curzon's proposal as an empty threat, given that at the conclusion of proceedings, he acclaimed Curzon's 'unique' knowledge and experience.[61] While there were no further attempts to destabilise Curzon's committee at that time, Cecil continued to provide distractions.[62]

At the end of September, Cecil chaired an Anglo-French conference at the Foreign Office, also without reference to the Eastern Committee,[63] where a provisional agreement was reached for the administration of the regions allocated to France in the Sykes Picot Agreement, which were occupied or soon to be occupied by General Allenby's Egyptian Expeditionary Force heading towards Damascus. When, at its next meeting, the Committee

[59] Curzon Papers, F112/274, f. 87: Eastern Committee 24th minutes, 13 August, 1918.
[60] Curzon Papers, F112/274, f. 89: Eastern Committee 24th minutes, 13 August, 1918.
[61] Ibid.
[62] For Cecil's tendency to interfere See Roberta Warman, 'The Erosion of Foreign Office Influence in the Making of Foreign Policy, 1916-1918', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 15, no. 1, (Mar., 1972), 133-159, and H. Mejcher, 'British Middle East Policy 1917-21: The Inter-Departmental Level', 4.
[63] This episode is an indication of the structural blockages inherent in the polycratic state, where the Eastern Committee was not informed of significant decisions relating to future policy until after they had been made. J. Fisher, *Curzon and British Imperialism in the Middle East*, 228-9, argued that this was another attempt by the Foreign Office to undermine the Eastern Committee.

was informed of the text of the agreement, confusion over what it meant for Mesopotamia was settled by Sir Eyre Crowe, (Assistant Under-Secretary, Foreign Office), who explained that the agreement applied solely to the areas under the occupation of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force.[64] However, Montagu drew the Committee's attention to the final paragraph of the agreement, which referred to a proposal for the British and French governments to issue a declaration, giving an assurance that neither government intended to annex any of the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire post-war. Montagu asked whether the declaration would apply to Mesopotamia, to which Cecil replied that 'it undoubtedly applied to all Arab territories' given that the paragraph to which Montagu referred 'was specifically inserted at our insistence'.[65] Shuckburgh stated that as far as he understood, the policy for Mesopotamia had been outlined by Cox and accepted by the Eastern Committee in April. If there were to be no annexations, Shuckburgh urged the Committee to make up its mind regarding Basra 'before tying their hands by a declaration which would preclude its annexation altogether.'[66] No decision was made on the future status of Mesopotamia, however, given that questions relating to Mesopotamia became inextricably linked to the problem, as perceived by the Committee, of the Sykes-Picot Agreement. This question had remained unresolved since the matter was discussed at meetings in July and August, despite the Committee agreeing that the French government should be induced to abrogate the Agreement, one of the principal points being the exclusion of the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers from area (a), the French area of indirect control.[67]

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[64] Curzon Papers, F112/274, f. 121: Eastern Committee, 34th minutes, 3 October, 1918.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid. See V.H. Rothwell, 'Mesopotamia in British War Aims, 1914-1918', 289-290. Rothwell is among those who argued that from mid-1918, oil became the prime factor in British war aims in regard to Mosul, which by

Busch stated that the Eastern Committee was responsible for the text of the Anglo-French Declaration. [68] However, the minutes show that the committee was presented with two drafts, the first written by Sykes, and the second, a day later, by Sykes and Eyre Crowe, both of which were criticised by members of the committee due to the ambiguity of the text. The Foreign Office was requested to write a third and final draft, however, there is no evidence that the Eastern Committee was consulted after the third draft was completed.[69] Analysis of the purpose of this declaration is well-trod ground.[70] However, the minutes of the Eastern Committee's discussions provide a good explanation for how British policy-makers rationalised the meaning of 'self-determination' in order to comply with its principles, and at the same time, safeguard British interests in Mesopotamia. For example, adopting Balfour's earlier rationalisation, Shuckburgh concluded that while annexation of Basra was now out of the question, the Anglo-French Declaration did not preclude some form of British control if the local population requested it.[71]

At a meeting of the War Cabinet in early October, Lloyd George announced that he wished to conclude peace with the Ottoman Empire immediately. When reminded by

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the terms of the Sykes-Picot Agreement was divided between the British and the French. But on the recommendation of Sir Maurice Hankey, head of the Cabinet Secretariat, the aim to secure the territory where oil deposits were suspected to exist was obscured by the argument that control of the headwaters of the rivers was essential for the supply of water to the south. However, departmental aims differed, and for Indian authorities, water actually was a priority for the development of agriculture in the southern provinces, as Hirtzel had argued in 1916.

[68] B.C. Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs*, 197.

[69] Curzon Papers, F112/274, ff. 140, 141: Eastern Committee minutes, 17 October, 1918, and 18 October, 1918.

[70] R. Adelson, *Mark Sykes*, 224,and J. Renton, 'Changing Languages of Empire and the Orient', 646,652 describe the Declaration as short-term war propaganda to appease opinion in the United States; J. Fisher, *Curzon and British Imperialism in the Middle East*, 286, note 142 argues that the declaration reflected the Foreign Office view of the post-war Middle East, while the India Office viewed it as a propaganda statement. J. Darwin, *Britain, Egypt and the Middle East*, 155, argues that it was a way of exploiting the post-war balance of power in order to secure traditional imperial objectives. See also B.C. Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs*, 197-199; E. Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, 132, J. Nevakivi, *Britain, France and the Middle East*, 81-2.

[71] L/P&S/10/686, register no. 2571: Minute by J.E. Shuckburgh, 26 November, 1918.

Curzon that in one of his war aims speeches Lloyd George had stated that Mesopotamia should be dealt with at the Peace Conference, the Prime Minister retorted, 'if we made peace with Turkey now, it would be ours and not Turkey's to dispose of. Hence, if President Wilson raised questions of self-determination, he would be told that he must deal with us on the matter.'[72] Sluglett argues that on the strength of the treatise, 'The Future of Mesopotamia' written in early 1918 by George Louis Beer, the United States government conceded to British aims in Mesopotamia.[73] Regardless, the views expressed by Lloyd George suggest that the commitment to Woodrow Wilson's liberal ideals could be framed in order to preserve British imperial aims, while at the same time appearing to conform to the President's credo.

Given the general lack of attention to Mesopotamian policy over the preceding months, the India Office re-submitted Cox's April memorandum to the committee in October, which like Shuckburgh, Montagu presumed was 'the authorised statement of the Mesopotamian policy of His Majesty's Government.'[74] However, when T.E. Lawrence, recently returned from Syria, appeared at the Eastern Committee at the end of October, his proposals threatened to upset that policy. With Feisal ensconced as head of an Arab administration in Damascus, Lawrence submitted a proposal to install his elder brother, Abdullah, as ruler of Baghdad and Lower Mesopotamia, and his younger brother, Zeid, in Upper Mesopotamia, which, according to Lawrence, was to be 'a separate province or kingdom' distinct from Lower Mesopotamia and Syria.[75] In other words, he envisaged three

[72] Curzon Papers, F112/132: Minutes of Secret War Cabinet 482A, 3 October, 1918.
[73] P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 249-50, note 43, and 288 note 27. For the text of Beer's treatise see L.H. Gray, (ed.), *African Questions at the Paris Peace Conference*, 411-426.
[74] Curzon Papers, F112/274, ff. 144-145: Eastern Committee minutes, 24 October, 1918.
[75] Curzon Papers, F112/274, ff. 149-153: Eastern Committee minutes, 29 October, 1918.

Arab kingdoms, under British influence, straddling the northern overland route from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf.

Lieut.-General George Macdonogh, Adjutant-General to the British Forces, submitted a similar proposal, which T.J. Paris suggests, signified War Office approval of Lawrence's scheme.[76] In Macdonogh's scenario, however, Abdullah's area was to be under direct British administration behind an Arab façade. In addition, he proposed the appointment of a High Commissioner to oversee a single political department for the 'whole Arab area', not directly connected with the Egyptian administration and not based in Cairo. He suggested a centre somewhere on the Suez Canal such as Ismailia, with subordinate British officials in the principle centres between Cairo and Baghdad.[77] In both schemes, the reality of British control was evident, but the India Office response to Lawrence's proposal was predictably hostile. While denouncing 'King Husain and his scheming sons,' Hirtzel claimed that Lawrence had no 'first-hand knowledge at all' of the views of the Mesopotamian population, and he dismissed Lawrence's claim of Arab solidarity, which he stated, 'we have no interest in encouraging.'[78]

Towards the end of October, Cecil announced that he was forming a separate Middle Eastern Department in the Foreign Office, and grasped the opportunity provided by Macdonogh's note to re-introduce the subject of centralisation of control. But on this occasion, he envisaged the establishment of a condominium of the Foreign and India Offices

[76] T.J. Paris, 'British Middle East Policy-Making after the First World War: The Lawrentian and Wilsonian Schools', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 41, no. 3, (Sept., 1998), 775.
[77] R. Bidwell, (ed), *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part II, series B, Vol. 15, E.C. Paper 2133, 'Note on Policy in the Middle East', G.M.W. Macdonogh, 28 October, 1918, pp. 176-77.
[78] CAB27/37: E.C. Paper 2454, 'Policy in Arabia', (Note by the Political Department, India Office), 20 November, 1918.

in his Middle Eastern Department, along the lines of the Department of Overseas Trade.[79] However, as for a single civil service for the area, no progress had been made since the idea was first raised in early 1917. Montagu opposed a War Office proposal to place the Mesopotamian service under the control of the Foreign Office temporarily, stating that 'the Government of India had administered Mesopotamia with great success, and would regard the transfer of their duties to the Foreign Office as something in the nature of a slight.'[80] The question of a Commission of Inquiry to investigate conditions in Mesopotamia first-hand, also unresolved since 1917, also came to the attention of the Eastern Committee at the end of October. However, that too was eventually shelved, but not before another confrontation between Curzon and Cecil.

The Acting Civil Commissioner in Baghdad had accepted that the arrival of a Commission of Inquiry in Mesopotamia would not be suitable before the opinions of the local population had been canvassed. However, arguments in the Eastern Committee, and in private correspondence, reveal that there had been little progress on formulating a policy in Mesopotamia, given that some of the questions the Commission was to have resolved had been those which were being asked at the beginning of the year. While insisting that Cox's April policy still stood, the India Office sought to revive the Commission proposed by Cox in 1917, in order to 'form a clearer idea in our own minds as to the main lines on which we are to proceed' relating to the commercial development of the country. The note revealed that

[79] Curzon Papers, F112/274, f. 150: Eastern Committee minutes, 29 October, 1918. Established in 1917 as a compromise between the Foreign Office and the Board of Trade over the question of which department should be responsible for the formulation of overseas commercial policy and the activities of commercial representatives , the Department of Overseas Trade was answerable to the Foreign Secretary and the President of the Board of Trade. The department was dissolved in 1946. D.N. Chester & F.M.G. Willson, *The Organization of British Central Government 1914-1964,* 69-70, 459. See also E. Maisel, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy*, 189-203.

[80] Curzon Papers, F112/274, f. 150: Eastern Committee minutes, 29 October, 1918.

there was a good deal of interest among the commercial community in Britain at the prospect of entering new markets in Mesopotamia, but given the uncertain future status of the country, the India Office was unable to encourage potential investors.[81]

As a result, a draft set of instructions for the proposed Commission was submitted to the Eastern Committee by the India Office, containing points for consideration. These included economic and development questions, the size of the British garrison required in peace time, and the question of Mosul. However, the committee objected to two points of considerable political importance contained in the instructions. Firstly, the suggestion that the Commission should make pronouncements on a head of state, and what relationship, if any, he should have with the King of the Hejaz and, echoing Wilson's wish to keep Mesopotamia apart from the rest of the Arab countries, in what position the Arab state, or states, should be in relation to the Sykes-Picot Agreement's confederation of Arab States, if that was to be established. [82] An additional paragraph was circulated for consideration which, while in accord with the objectives of Cox and Wilson in Baghdad, ran completely against the principles embodied in the Anglo-French Declaration, shortly to be broadcast. The paragraph read:

> It is essential at all times, and more particularly during the initial stages, that British control over the new administration should be as complete and effective as possible. Otherwise, in Sir P. Cox's words, "the country has no future, for it would be impossible to get money for its development unless investors are satisfied that their interests are fully safeguarded, a condition which cannot be assured except under protective British supervision".[83]

[81] Curzon Papers, F112/256, f. 251: E.C. Paper 2030, 'Administration of Mesopotamia', Political Department, India Office, 21 October, 1918.
[82] Curzon Papers, F112/274 f. 153: E.C. Paper 2104: 'Draft Instructions for the Commission', India Office, undated, Appendix (A) to 37th minutes of the Eastern Committee, 29 October, 1918.
[83] Ibid.

Cecil informed the Committee that he was very much in favour of a Commission going ahead, stressing that, unaware of the British government's intentions, the Arabs were becoming uneasy. Given that the Committee had not decided on a post-war policy, he believed that the findings of a Commission would assist in framing a policy, and in advising 'as to the right kind of administration to adopt in Mesopotamia.'[84] Curzon countered that if the Commission went ahead, it would become public knowledge, questions would be asked in Parliament, and the suspicions of the Allies would be raised regarding the government's intentions.[85] Following a heated discussion, the Committee decided, with Cecil dissenting, to drop the matter for the present.[86] Cecil's attitude regarding the way the Commission was vetoed angered Curzon, who expostulated indignantly that

> if my principal colleague is to proclaim before the assembled Committee that the Eastern Committee is hated by all the Departments (as it evidently is by himself) and that he would like to move for a return of all the recommendations that it has postponed (including I may remark a good many very unwise ones) I confess that I feel little temptation to go on.[87]

Curzon's response to Cecil's later apology for his outburst at the committee meeting was revealing. Among the reasons for vetoing the Commission was his

> conviction that if we acted prematurely we should not be helping but hindering our case at the Peace Conference, and giving a handle to the Pacifists, Idealists, anti-imperialists and Incompetents at large, who will be against British occupation in any form.[88]

Given Cecil's involvement in discussions on the establishment of the League of Nations from early 1918, Curzon's outburst revealed the ideological gulf which separated them on issues

[84] Curzon Papers, F112/274 f. 151: Eastern Committee minutes, 29 October, 1918.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Curzon Papers, F112/274, f. 152: Eastern Committee minutes, 29 October, 1918.
[87] British Library, Add Mss 51077, Cecil of Chelwood papers, f. 33: Curzon to Cecil, private and confidential, 29 October, 1918.
[88] Ibid, f. 36: Curzon to Cecil, private and confidential, 31 October, 1918.

relating to the post-war settlement.[89] The most surprising perhaps, was Curzon's admission 'that the main structural outlines of the future Government of Mesopotamia will have to be determined … by diplomatic negotiations with King Hussein and his sons.'[90] During Cabinet discussions on a head for the future Arab State, Curzon had remained strangely silent; his apparent 'conversion' to the Sharifian cause was more likely to have been a pragmatic calculation relating to the requirement to reconcile his imperial aims with Wilsonian liberal ideals, rather than the result of T.E. Lawrence's influence.[91] Alternatively, Fisher argued that consonant with his imperial acquisitiveness, Curzon's support for Hussein was motivated by a determination to prevent France and Italy from establishing influence in strategically important points in the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf.[92]

By the end of 1918, the British and Indian Governments were exercising five different techniques of imperial control in the Middle East: the Hejaz, recognised as independent, but subsidised by Great Britain; formal protectorates with titular Arab heads in Egypt, Aden and Kuwait; the Arabian and Gulf Sheikhs, under a form of indirect control, by means of a treaty and subsidy; an Arab administration under British military occupation in Syria, and direct rule under British military occupation in Palestine and Mesopotamia. Yet a coherent and coordinated policy for the areas under British control was still under

[89] For a good account of Cecil's role in the establishment of the League of Nations see G.W. Egerton, *Great Britain and the Creation of the League of Nations: Strategy, Politics and International Organization, 1914-1919*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1978, 65-80. For the peace movements and non-government pressure groups advocating a post-war alliance of nations, and the negative attitude of most Conservatives, see H.R. Winkler, [1952], *The League of Nations Movement in Great Britain, 1914-1919*, Metuchen, N.J., Scarecrow Reprint Corp., 1967. For a more recent account see H. McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations: Democracy, citizenship and Internationalism,* Manchester & New York, Manchester University Press, 2011.

[90] British Library, Add Mss 51077, Cecil of Chelwood papers, Curzon to Cecil, 29 October 1918.

[91] Curzon Papers, F112/132, f. 287: War Cabinet 491A, draft minutes of a meeting held on 25 October 1918. For Curzon's pragmatism, see J. Darwin, *Britain, Egypt and the Middle East,* 133-4, and M. MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World*, New York, Random House, 2001, 386.

[92] J. Fisher, '"The safety of our Indian Empire": Lord Curzon and British predominance in the Arabian Peninsula, 1919', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 33, no. 3, (1997), 494-514, (accessed online, 30/01/2012).

consideration when the Armistice was signed on 31 October, 1918, leaving the Eastern Committee unprepared for peace.

The problem, according to Cecil, was that while according to the terms of the Anglo-French Declaration, annexation was out of the question, it appeared that it was not possible to set up a local Arab chieftain as nominal head of state, since according to information he had received from un-named sources who had recently returned from Mesopotamia, Cox's nominee, the Naqib of Baghdad, was now considered to be 'impracticable'.[93] Making his second appearance before the Eastern Committee, T.E. Lawrence suggested that since Hussein had proclaimed himself King of the Arab countries in December 1916, (a title which the British Government refused to recognise) this might be useful at the Peace Conference. According to Lawrence, it would be 'desirable' to have an Arab prince as head of state in Mesopotamia, and there was no family other than Hussein's which could provide one. However, Curzon and Montagu declined to endorse Lawrence's suggestion, pending receipt of the views of the Acting Civil Commissioner.[94] Moreover, according to Shuckburgh, Wilson's arrangement with the Kurdish chiefs appeared to rule out Lawrence's proposal for a 'central Arabo-Kurdish Kingdom'.[95]

Towards the end of November, the Eastern Committee finally set about the task of discussing a future policy in Mesopotamia, from Basra from Mosul, if the French

[93] Curzon Papers, F112/274, f. 156: Eastern Committee minutes, 21 November, 1918.
[94] Ibid, f. 157: Eastern Committee minutes, 21 November, 1918.
[95] Curzon Papers, F112/256, ff. 282-283: 'Kurdistan', Note by the Political Department, India Office, 14 December, 1918.

Government could be persuaded to abrogate the Sykes-Picot Agreement.[96] However, division of opinion on almost every aspect of the policy to be implemented revealed that there were still more questions for the authorities in Mesopotamia. The Committee decided to postpone the discussions, recommending instead that Montagu consult the Acting Civil Commissioner on the following points:

> Do the peoples of Mesopotamia desire a single Arab state from Mosul down to the Gulf? Do they want an Arab ruler to be set up as a titular head of a single Arab State in this area? If so, who is the most available man?[97]

Accordingly, Wilson was to be instructed to conduct a survey of the views of the local population.[98]

In the interim, the Foreign Office Political Intelligence Department circulated a paper introducing a proposal for the British government to administer Mesopotamia as a trustee, under the supervision of a League of Nations.[99] Annexation of territory was definitely ruled out, given that the government did not wish 'to commit … to permanent political and military liabilities of such wide scope'.[100] But while the paper indicated a degree of uncertainty as to the form of the proposed state, Cecil announced that the policy for Mesopotamia had been settled. Yet the policy, according to Cecil, suggested that the period of trusteeship would extend well beyond the twenty-five years which Sykes had proposed

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[96] K. Neilson, '"For Diplomatic, Economic, Strategy and Telegraphic Reasons": British Imperial Defence, The Middle East and India, 1914-1918', in G. Kennedy & K. Neilson, (eds.), *Far Flung Lines: Essays on Imperial Defence in Honour of Donald Mackenzie Schurman*, London, Frank Cass, 1996, 114. Neilson makes the point that the strategic thinking regarding Mosul had not changed since the discussions in the de Bunsen Committee in early 1915.

[97] Curzon Papers, F112/274, f. 161: Eastern Committee minutes, 27 November, 1918.

[98] Curzon Papers, F112/274, f. 161: Eastern Committee minutes, 27 November, 1918. See chapter four for the results and Foreign Office criticism of Wilson's survey.

[99] *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part II, Series I, vol. 11, 171: 'Memorandum Respecting the Settlement of Turkey and the Arabian Peninsula, Political Intelligence Department, Foreign Office, 21 November, 1918.

[100] Ibid.

earlier in 1918. Furthermore, on the subject of a head of state, Cecil declared that Abdullah,

> from all I have heard of him, will do tolerably well if we have the right man to control him. He is a cleverish fellow, I understand, and is thought to be the cleverest of the Sherif's sons.[101]

Montagu opposed the Foreign Office recommendations, at the same time urging that it was 'vital' to make a decision. Exposing the lack of clarity almost one month after the Armistice had been signed, he declared that

> we might perfectly well carry through the Peace Conference a suggestion that we do intend to set up an Arab confederacy, Kingdom, Presidency, Federation, or something, but that we are not yet prepared with the right solution and we will discuss it.[102]

The India Office Political Department's contribution to the debate revealed that while there may have been differences over the extent of British control to be exercised, India Office officials envisaged a similar solution. Reiterating that the annexation of territory or the declaration of protectorates was precluded by the declarations made during the war, they did not preclude indirect British control 'exercised through an indigenous administration'. [103] As was evident in these memoranda, the rationalisation of the meaning of 'self-determination' assisted in overcoming the hurdles provided by those war-time pledges and declarations. To prove his point, Hirtzel exaggerated the threat to British interests in the Persian Gulf in order to buttress his case for maximising British gains. A resurgent Germany, he charged, in search of raw materials would, by commercial and political penetration and the dissemination of anti-British propaganda, necessitate the deployment of troops to

[101] Curzon Papers, F112/274, f. 165: Eastern Committee, 39th minutes, 27 November, 1918.
[102] Curzon Papers, F112/274, f. 166: Eastern Committee, 39th minutes, 27 November, 1918.
[103] Curzon Papers, F112/277, f. 149: 'Indian Desiderata for Peace Settlement', (Note by Political Department, India Office), 4 December, 1918.

defend British interests. German warships would appear in the Gulf 'and all the predisposing causes of an international quarrel would be reproduced'.[104] In laying out his case, Hirtzel revealed his adherence to pre-war imperial thinking, changed political circumstances notwithstanding, and together with his refusal to consider Abdullah as a future head of state, signalled the desire of Indian authorities to keep Mesopotamia a place apart from Hussein's influence.[105]

Troubled by the lack of clarity regarding the post-war policy for Mesopotamia, Jan Smuts suggested in early December that the solution rested in the establishment of a League of Nations, explaining to the Committee how he believed a system of mandates might operate.[106] But there was little interest. Curzon merely asked if the system could be applied to Mesopotamia, before the Committee moved on, over the course of the next two meetings, to lengthy and inconclusive discussions regarding the post-war distribution of the remaining Ottoman territories which would best serve British interests in the Middle East and India.[107]

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[104] Ibid.

[105] *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, part II, series I, vol. 11: 'Settlement of Turkey and Arabian Peninsula', (Note by India Office on Foreign Office Memorandum), A. Hirtzel, 30 November, 1918, 74.

[106] Lt.-General J.C. Smuts, South African Defence Minister, represented his country at the Imperial Conference in London in 1917. Subsequently, he was invited to remain, and became South African representative on the Imperial War Cabinet. He was also a member of the Eastern Committee from its establishment in spring 1918. His pamphlet, *The League of Nations: A Practical Suggestion*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1918, embodying the ideas discussed at the Eastern Committee, was circulated on 18 December 1918. G.W. Egerton, *Great Britain and the Creation of the League of Nations*, 104, argued that in view of the question of sovereignty which an international system implied, the Conservatives in the Coalition government viewed Smuts' ideas with grave misgivings.

[107] Curzon Papers, F112/274, ff. 178, 180-192: shorthand notes of the Minutes of the Eastern Committee, 2 December, 1918, and ff. 194-203: shorthand notes of the Minutes of the Eastern Committee, 9 December, 1918. For further analyses of these discussions, see E. Goldstein, 'British Peace Aims and the Eastern Question', 424-7, 432-3; K. Neilson, '"For Diplomatic, Economic, Strategy and Telegraphic Reasons": British Imperial Defence, The Middle East and India, 1914-1918; in G. Kennedy & K. Neilson, (eds.), *Far Flung Lines*, 115-117; K. Jeffery, *The British Army and the crisis of empire 1918-1922*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984, 33-34, and J.S. Galbraith, 'British War Aims in World War I: A Commentary on Statesmanship', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. XIII, no. 1, (Oct., 1984), 25-45.

At the same time, Curzon appeared to have accepted the mandate concept. Uncharacteristically adopting a liberal approach, he expressed the hope that if the system was adopted Britain's role as mandatory power over Mesopotamia would be brief, otherwise he concluded, 'it would break us down.'[108]

In mid-December, the Committee approved the Civil Commissioner's arrangements with the tribal leaders in southern Mosul province, providing that no 'definite assurance' was given that the Kurds would remain under British control.[109] At the meeting held on 18 December, Curzon informed the Committee that due to the impending arrival of President Wilson, the War Cabinet had decided to hold a series of Imperial War Cabinet meetings in order to 'arrive at decisions among ourselves', regarding the establishment of the League of Nations, and issues concerning Syria, Palestine, Constantinople and Mesopotamia.[110] That said, he produced a set of resolutions for the area currently occupied and administered in Mesopotamia, from Basra to Mosul, which he invited the Committee to consider.[111] Given the conflicts and strained relations between members of the Committee, it was something of a triumph for Curzon that his resolutions were approved, with only minor textual modifications.

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[108] Curzon Papers, F112/274, f. 195: Minutes of the Eastern Committee, 9 December, 1918. J. Fisher, *Curzon and British Imperialism in the Middle East*, 202, argued that Curzon believed a league of nations, if established, would not survive, leaving the field clear for extending British predominance in the Middle East.

[109] Curzon Papers, F112/274, ff. 264-266, Minutes of the Eastern Committee, 14 December, 1918.

[110] J.G. Darwin. *Britain, Egypt and the Middle East*, 161. A separate body, the British Empire Delegation, which was assembled to present the British case at the peace conference, considered the Eastern Committee's recommendations. However, according to a communication from Hankey to the Prime Minister, Lloyd George and Balfour were to be left 'to do the best they can' in Paris.

[111] Curzon Papers, F112/274, ff. 229-231: Minutes of the Eastern Committee, 18 December, 1918. While the secret conversation between Lloyd George and the French premier Clemenceau on 1 December, during which Clemenceau ceded Mosul to Britain were not revealed to the Foreign Office or the Eastern Committee, the inclusion of Mosul may have been in anticipation of the French government agreeing to the abrogation of the Sykes-Picot Agreement. See D.K. Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East 1914-1958*, 59.

Predictably, there would be no annexation of territory, or the declaration of a British protectorate, but rather, the establishment of an Arab government or governments. While it was recognised that 'educated opinion' in the area concerned was still being consulted, the support and protection of a Great European Power was still viewed as 'indispensable [and] … the responsibility should be accepted by Great Britain.'[112]

Notes exchanged between the India Office and Foreign Office in December demonstrate that a gulf still existed on the subject of Arab nationalism, and that the India Office continued to resist what it perceived as interference in its domain in Mesopotamia.[113] Moreover, all attempts to centralise control had proved unsuccessful. Cecil's efforts to create a separate Middle Eastern Department in the Foreign Office along the lines he contemplated had failed, according to the account of Busch, the victim of internal Foreign Office conflict and India Office obstruction.[114]

Conclusion.

As an arbiter between departments with different criteria and overlapping responsibilities, the Eastern Committee demonstrably failed in its purpose. As an executive authority it was unsuccessful, lacking the resources to function adequately in administrative matters. What

[112] Curzon Papers, F112/274, f. 227: Eastern Committee minutes, 18 December, 1918.
[113] FO371/3386/206913: A.G. Toynbee, .Memorandum on Telegrams Nos. 10973 and 11109 from the Chief Political Officer, Baghdad, undated, with Sir Arthur Hirtzel's response, 'Remarks on Foreign Office Memorandum regarding telegram no. 10973 and 11109 from Civil Commissioner, Baghdad', also undated.
[114] B.C. Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs*, 451. According to Ephraim Maisel, however, Cecil and Hardinge settled their differences over the future head of the department, and the India Office did not oppose its establishment. However, the department was never established; instead, the old pre-war Foreign Office Eastern Department, closed upon the outbreak of hostilities in 1914, was resurrected in early 1919. E. Maisel, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1919-1926*, 210-212. See also J. Fisher, 'Lord Robert Cecil and the formation of a Middle East Department of the Foreign Office', 375. See also Z. Steiner & M.L. Dockrill, 'The Foreign Office Reforms, 1919-1921', 131-156.

it came to most resemble was a focus group; discussing ideas, but deciding very little. Its recommendations for the War Cabinet prior to the Peace Conference envisaged some form of Arab administration under British control, but there was no clarity on the level of British control to be exercised, the choice of a head of state, or indeed, the territorial extent of the proposed Arab state.

Together with inter-departmental friction, ideological differences and personal jealousies played a part in the Eastern Committee's incompetence as a policy-making body. The veneer of civility apparent in the records of the committee meetings concealed the extent of the tension between Curzon and Cecil, which is apparent in their private correspondence.[115] In addition, the Conservatives Balfour and Curzon disliked the Liberal, Montagu, [116] while Balfour's sporadic attendances at meetings appear to have been more distracting than helpful. But given that at his request, records were not kept of portions of Balfour's contributions to debates, the rest is conjecture. Many historians place the blame on Curzon for the deficiencies of the committee system. Arguably, some of this criticism is misplaced; for example, Goldstein's critique of Curzon's prolixity misses the point that his dissertations at the opening of each meeting, if perhaps over-long, were probably necessary, given that collectively, the Committee's knowledge of the East, and Mesopotamia in particular, was limited to each member's area of jurisdiction.[117]

[115] R. Warman, 'The Erosion of Foreign Office Influence in the Making of Foreign Policy, 1916-1918', 153, clarifies Cecil's position, explaining that his attacks on the Eastern Committee were motivated by the fear that Foreign Office influence in the Middle East would be reduced by its existence, but he was prepared to compromise by working within the committee in order to preserve Foreign Office influence in that forum.
[116] S.D. Waley, *Edwin Montagu,* 129-30, 169-71, 175, 178; D. Gilmour, [1993], *Curzon: Imperial Statesman*, London, John Murray, 1994, 483.
[117] E. Goldstein, 'British Peace Aims and the Eastern Question', *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 23, 1987, 423-4., (accessed on-line, 23/03/2013).

The interdepartmental 'war', waged mainly on paper, is less evident in the minutes of the Committee's proceedings, given that not all the papers and memoranda submitted to the Committee reached the discussion stage. Unreliable or insufficient communications with the periphery also played a part. But for all its shortcomings, the records of the Committee's proceedings provide an insight into the development and formulation of policy in the polycratic system, the rationalisation of the meaning of self-determination in order to reconcile imperial aims within the framework of Wilsonian liberal idealism, and finally, the dependence of officials in London on influential proconsuls for the management of empire.[118] Paradoxically, on all sides involved in the inter-departmental hostilities, the argument was over means rather than ends. But as long as the question of centralisation of control remained unresolved, the development of a coherent policy remained a remote possibility.

The demise of the Eastern Committee was prompted by a complaint from Sir Maurice Hankey at the end of December 1918 that the committee had become too large, and its business entailed too much extra work for the Cabinet Secretariat.[119] At the same time, Cecil and Smuts resigned from the committee in order to join the British Empire Delegation to the peace conference in Paris.[120] At the 49th meeting of the Eastern Committee on 7 January 1919, the only members remaining, Montagu and Shuckburgh from the India Office, and Maj.-Gen. W. Thwaites, the Director of Military Intelligence, agreed to Curzon's suggestion for the dissolution of the committee, and its replacement by an inter-

[118] For proconsular autonomy in the Middle East see E. Kedourie, *England and the Middle East,* 131; L. Rose, 'Britain in the Middle East: Design or Accident?', PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, Ann Arbor, Xerox University Microfilms Inc., 1969, 290; J. Nevakivi, *Britain, France and the Arab Middle East 1914-20*, 107, and J. Townsend, *Proconsul in the Middle East.*
[119] Curzon Papers, F112/273, ff. 20-21: M.P.A. Hankey, 'confidential', to Curzon, 31 December, 1918.
[120] F.P. Walters, *A History of the League of Nations*, 27.

departmental conference to deal with questions of policy where departmental responsibilities overlapped. [121] Thus, in 1919, the Inter-Departmental Conference on Middle Eastern Affairs, again chaired by Lord Curzon, Acting Foreign Secretary in Balfour's absence, took on the unfinished business of the unlamented Eastern Committee.

[121] Curzon Papers, F112/274, f. 272: Eastern Committee minutes, 7 January, 1919.

Chapter Four:

The Fruits of Victory, part I: Divided Councils, 1919-1920.

The Inter-departmental Conference on Middle Eastern Affairs proved no more successful than its predecessor in the formulation of Mesopotamian policy, or indeed, in settling the interdepartmental 'war' over its administrative control. Adding to Curzon's frustration, the Conference lacked the executive powers of its predecessor, serving only as an advisory body. Moreover, meetings were held on an irregular basis, according to the availability of personnel, who were, during this period, shuttling back and forth between London and Paris, San Remo, and Geneva. Decisions were often postponed because of disagreement between Ministers or experts.[1] Indeed, while debates occurred within set parameters, by mid-1920 there was no clear policy or centre of policy production for Mesopotamia.

It was widely assumed in government circles that the terms of the Ottoman Peace Treaty would be settled quickly, however those negotiations were delayed in favour of the putatively more important task of settling the peace in Europe.[2] Negotiations were further delayed by the United States' retreat into isolation in 1919, and friction with the French government over Syria and Mosul.[3] Moreover, towards the end of February, the India Office was informed that the British case regarding the future of the Ottoman

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[1] E. Monroe, *Britain's Moment in the Middle East*, 54-5.

[2] D. Lloyd George, *The Truth About the Peace Treaties*, vol. II, London, Victor Gollancz, 1938, 1001; P. Kennedy, *The Realities Behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy, 1865-1980*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1981, 219; A. E. Montgomery, 'The Making of the Treaty of Sèvres of 10 August 1920', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. XV, no. 4, (1972), 876. (Accessed online 23/02/2010).

[3] E. Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, 177-8; J. Nevakivi, *Britain, France and the Arab Middle East 1914-1920*, 116-171; P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 29; J. Fisher, 'Syria and Mesopotamia in British Middle Eastern Policy in 1919', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 34, no. 2, (1998), 129-148. (Accessed online 20/05/2011).

Empire had not yet been prepared.[4] As a result, according to Darwin 'the exercise of British authority in the Middle East was shaped more by local circumstances than by the dictates of a coordinated strategy.'[5]

At the fifth plenary session of the Peace Conference, on 28 April 1919, the Supreme Council[6] was presented with the draft Covenant of the League of Nations. Article 22 of this document stated that

> [c]ertain communities formerly belonging to the Turkish Empire have reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognised subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone.[7]

Article 22 of the Covenant was incorporated into the Treaty of Versailles, signed on 28 June, 1919, thus setting the parameters within which future British policy for the Middle East would be framed. A number of ministers expressed early doubts concerning the operation of the mandates, the Foreign Secretary in particular, who expressed concern regarding the 'necessity of creation of machinery of inspection, which would cause friction between the Mandatory Power and the League of Nations.'[8] During the delay, the slippage between professed aims and *realpolitik* remained. When the Treaty of Versailles was signed, Mesopotamia remained under military occupation; the only

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[4] L/P&S/10/755, P.4722/1918, part 1, register no. 1144/1919: Foreign Office to the Under-Secretary, India Office, 25 February, 1919.

[5] J. Darwin, *Britain, Egypt and the Middle East*, 170.

[6] Initially designated the Council of Ten, in early 1919 the Supreme Council was composed of the prime ministers and foreign secretaries of Britain, France, Italy and the United States, together with two representatives from the government of Japan. Established to deal with the post-war peace treaties, the Supreme Council was not dissolved until 1923, but from 1920, it was a fairly selective group, consisting of the prime ministers and foreign secretaries of Britain, France and Italy. F. P. Walters, *A History of the League of Nations*, 81, 94, 167-8.

[7] The Avalon Project, Lillian Goldman Library, Yale University Law School: 'The Covenant of the League of Nations.' http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20thcentury/leaguecov.asp. Accessed 23 February, 2015.

[8] FO608/242/1152, W.C.P. 42, A.J. Balfour to Foreign Office, 27 January, 1919. Balfour's concerns were echoed by Milner and Montagu in March: W.C.P. 211, Lord Milner, 'Mandates', 8 March, 1919, and W.C.P. 224, E.S. Montagu, 'Mandates', 10 March 1919, an early signal, perhaps, that other ways would be found to secure British interests in Mesopotamia.

certainty was that while Britain was determined to hold on to its war time territorial acquisitions, in real terms, there was little clarity on precisely what this would entail.

The search for a head of state for Mesopotamia continued for a brief time in early 1919, prompted by an enquiry from Balfour in Paris, regarding the selection of Abdullah as possible titular Amir of Mesopotamia, a proxy ruler who would not seek to interfere in the administration of the country, according to imperial practices elsewhere.[9] Curzon countered that the Political Officer in Baghdad had reported 'growing hostility' among the local population to Sharif Hussein and his sons, and indeed, owing to racial and religious divisions, opposition to a single Arab head of State. Gertrude Bell, whose opinion counted in London, was reportedly also 'strongly against' a Sharifian head of state.[10] On 3 February, the Foreign Office received a reply from Cairo in response to a query regarding Abdullah's leadership qualities, together with the results of Wilson's survey of the views of the local population, both of which boded ill for Abdullah's chances in Mesopotamia. In Orientalist tones, Kinahan Cornwallis, the director of the Arab Bureau, reported that while he believed Abdullah to be 'the cleverest and strongest of the brothers with considerable political flair', he was also

> unscrupulous, oriental in thought and actions, and versed in the Constantinople school of intrigue … extravagant, fond of display and flattery, and very ambitious, he might not long be content to be mere figurehead or remain effective in titular position.[11]

Furthermore, the results of Wilson's survey revealed that while a number of those consulted opted for a continuation of British rule, local opinion on a single Arab state and a head of state was divided, the interviewees in Baghdad expressing the strongest desire

[9] FO371/4148/13298: A.J. Balfour, (Astoria), telegram no. 121 to Foreign Office, 23 January, 1919.
[10] FO371/4148/13298: Curzon to Balfour, 26 January, 1919.
[11] FO371/4148/20262, Sir M. Cheetham (Cairo), telegram no. 180, to the Foreign Office 3 February, 1919.

for a single state with a Sharifian ruler.[12] The method of extracting the information contained in the survey was criticised by the Foreign Office. While Wilson's transactions with the Kurdish chiefs in December 1918 had been approved by the Eastern Committee, for Curzon, this example of proconsular autonomy was a step too far.[13] Nonetheless, a minimalist form of consultation had been undertaken, which Cox had advised in April 1918 would be a worthless exercise. [14]

A portent of the obstacles in the path to a future policy for Mesopotamia as perceived by the authorities in Baghdad, was embodied in a missive received in Cairo from the Iraq (Society) Committee, a group of Mesopotamian ex-Ottoman officers serving with Feisal in Damascus, announcing that Iraq was to be an independent state under one of the sons of Hussein, albeit relying on the aid of Great Britain.[15] Hubert Young[16] noted that whilst serving with Feisal's forces in 1918, he had spoken with Nuri es Said,[17] who had complained about the treatment he had been accorded in 1914. According to Young's account, Nuri told him the authorities in Mesopotamia 'tried to tie them down

[12] FO/371/4148/15406, India Office to Foreign Office, 28 January, 1919. For the most thorough analysis of Wilson's methods and intentions regarding the survey see P.W. Ireland, *Iraq*, 166-175.
[13] FO371/3386/206923: Political, Baghdad to India Office, 14 December, 1918. According to the instructions issued to the Divisional Political Officers by the Acting Civil commissioner, unfavourable opinions were not to be recorded. B.C. Bush, *Britain, India, and the Arabs*, 280. However, many of the sheikhs and notables consulted were either the beneficiaries of British subsidies, or at least benefited from the British occupation in other ways. See K.C. Ulrichsen, 'The British Occupation of Mesopotamia, 1914-1922', 367-368.
[14] L/P&S/10/666, register no. 1499, E.C. 173, P.Z. Cox, 'Future of Mesopotamia', 22 April, 1918, 5.
[15] FO371/4148/18974, Sir M. Cheetham (Cairo) to Foreign Office, telegram no. 172, 31 January, 1919.
[16] Young, an officer in the Indian Army, spent two years as a political officer in the civil administration in Mesopotamia, before his appointment as liaison officer with Feisal's forces attached to the Egyptian Expeditionary Force in 1918. See Sir Hubert Young, *The Independent Arab*, London, J. Murray, 1933.
[17] On his return from India, Nuri took part in the Arab Revolt in 1916, thereafter commanding a column of Arab troops attached to the Egyptian Expeditionary Force on the march to Jerusalem and Damascus, to which Young was attached as liaison officer. Nuri remained on Feisal's staff in Damascus, following his appointment as military governor of Occupied Enemy Territory A, and subsequently accompanied Feisal to Paris in 1919.

prematurely to a definition of their future attitude if we were to assist them to attain independence rather than to occupy Mesopotamia ourselves.'[18]

Given Cox's request to announce the annexation of Basra in December 1914, and the attitude of the political authorities to the establishment of an Arab movement in Mesopotamia, the disingenuousness of this statement is striking, but it is not clear if the misrepresentation lay with Nuri or Young. A staunch supporter of Feisal, Young declared that the Anglo-French Declaration would have given the Mesopotamian ex-officers in Syria cause to assume that there would be no direct British rule in Mesopotamia. Therefore, he said, when they returned home, they would be 'the first to cause difficulties if they think that we are not acting up to our pledges.'[19] The Foreign Office warned against giving assurances to the Mesopotamians in Damascus, gloomily reflecting that

> [o]ur experience of doing so in the past does not seem encouraging … our promises either conflict with something that has been promised to somebody else or that subsequent developments make it impossible to fulfil them.[20]

While the question of a head of state for Mesopotamia was discussed at intervals during the proceedings of Curzon's Interdepartmental Conference, no decision was ever reached.

At the same time, the question of a controlling agency for the Middle East arose again, as a result of an enquiry from the War Office as to what the future policy for Mesopotamia was to be, and who was to be responsible for its formulation. The Army Council stressed the urgency of reaching a decision on this matter, due to the post-war

[18] FO371/4148/18974: H.W. Young minute on Sir M. Cheetham, Cairo, to Foreign Office, 4 February, 1919.
[19] Ibid.
[20] FO371/4148/18974: George Kidston minute on Sir M. Cheetham to Foreign Office, 6 February, 1919.

demobilisation of forces,[21] and the impending transfer of military departments to the civilian administration.[22] However, the Foreign Office had no answer. In early February, Kidston noted that the recently re-established Foreign Office Eastern Department was not equipped for the purpose. Furthermore, a suggestion for a Commission to be sent out to Mesopotamia to examine the situation first-hand was again dismissed by Curzon, on the grounds that nothing of that nature could be contemplated until the mandate had been awarded. [23] So they waited, allowing situations to develop, and other parties to grasp the initiative.

From Paris, Lord Derby, the British Ambassador, expressed frustration at the lack of progress towards the settlement of the terms of the Ottoman peace treaty, complaining to Curzon

> [i]t appears to me that we have got no settled policy on any single subject, and discussion follows discussion without any result being arrived at … At the present moment it is a policy of drift which I think is perfectly fatal.[24]

While presumably the Cabinet or Curzon's Committee should have been responsible for overseeing future policy for Mesopotamia, Montagu delegated the responsibility to the Acting Civil Commissioner to work out the details of the vague policy principles the India Office provided.[25] Wilson was instructed to inform the India Office of

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[21] British Library, Add Mss 51077, Cecil of Chelwood papers, ff.154-160: Lord Curzon to A.J. Balfour, 20 August, 1920. Curzon estimated the number of British and Indian troops in the Middle East, excluding Egypt, as 225,000.
[22] FO371/4148/15813, B.B. Cubitt, Army Council, to Foreign Office, 28 January, 1919.
[23] FO371/4148/15813: Kidston, Graham and Curzon minutes, dated 2 February, 1919.
[24] Liverpool Record Office, Derby Papers 920DER (17), Derby to Curzon, 1 March, 1919.
[25] FO371/4148/27510: copy of Secretary of State for India to the Civil Commissioner, Baghdad, 14 February, 1919. Darwin contends that the cryptic nature of the instructions gave Wilson freedom to interpret them as he wished; implying, therefore, that the India Office was remiss in not making the instructions clearer. J. Darwin, *Britain, Egypt and the Middle East*, 193. However, at that date, policy was in flux awaiting the decisions of the peace conference, and it is likely that with Curzon's constant reminders that nothing in the

his proposal for an Arab state or group of states, which would provide for Arab participation 'in an increasing measure as time goes on', with the object of preventing 'Arab Nationalism from being drawn into permanent opposition to British control.' Accordingly, Wilson was advised that the constitution should be 'flexible' enough to give 'full play to the different elements of the population … recognising and incorporating local peculiarities and idiosyncrasies'. Montagu conceded that while his vague instructions would probably be of little assistance, they would at the very least, give him an indication of the government's intentions. [26] Given the views Wilson had expressed a few months previously, it is somewhat surprising that Montagu would expect him to make recommendations which would be acceptable to the government in London, or indeed, to the League of Nations.

In February, Stanley Baldwin, financial secretary to the Treasury, expressed alarm at a proposal by the War Office to outlay funds for the construction of houses and railways in Mesopotamia.[27] This provoked a dispute between the War and India Offices over which department was responsible for expenditure on civil projects. Curzon speedily vetoed a proposal by the War Office for the Foreign Office to assume control of civil expenditure, and ultimately it was agreed that the military authorities in Mesopotamia were to be instructed that undue funds were not to be expended on civil projects.[28] While the men on the spot continued to act on the belief that public order, security, and future development depended on a continued British presence, Mesopotamia was costing the

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way of constitutional or other development should be attempted in Mesopotamia until the peace treaty was signed, there was little more that Montagu could do.

[26] FO371/4148/27510: copy of Secretary of State to Civil Commissioner, Baghdad, 14 February, 1919.

[27] Curzon Papers, F112/275, f. 18: minutes of the Interdepartmental Conference on Middle Eastern Affairs, 17 February, 1919.

[28] Curzon Papers, F112/275, f. 19: minutes of the Interdepartmental Conference, 17th February, 1919.

British taxpayer millions of pounds annually. Yet during the period when the departments of state argued over the future administration of the country, it seems none were willing to pay for it.

This and other questions relating to administrative and political matters were among the subjects proposed for discussion with Colonel Wilson in London in January. While expressing reluctance to leave Mesopotamia, he decided that if he did not state his case in person, due to its isolation, Mesopotamia might be overlooked in favour of matters relating to Egypt and Syria.[29] Thus, following his attendance at the peace conference in Paris, Wilson travelled to London, and in early April, formulated a list of the large number of subjects which awaited a firm direction from London; for example, finance, air policy and the possibility of reducing the garrisons, railway policy, colonisation and immigration policy, the cost of maintaining refugees, irrigation policy, the perennial question of a civil service for Mesopotamia, and the future constitution of the Arab state.[30]

Shuckburgh discussed some of the difficulties confronting the political authorities in Mesopotamia, with regard to finance and the transfer of 'quasi-civil' military departments to the civil administration. The transfer of the departments of Local Resources, Inland Water Transport, Port Directorate, Labour and Public Works, Railways,

[29] FO371/4148/21857: Political Baghdad, telegram no. 112, 28 January, 1919. According to Wilson's later account, when he was in Paris Montagu informed him that he (Wilson) would be responsible for making 'specific proposals', since he would obtain no guidance in Paris, but that Curzon in London might be of assistance in formulating a policy for Mesopotamia, or at least was likely to endorse Wilson's proposals. A.T. Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917-1920: A Clash of Loyalties: A Personal and Historical Record*, London, Oxford University Press, 1931, 116-117.

[30] Curzon Papers, F112.256, ff. 297-300: A.T. Wilson note, 2 April, 1919.

Telegraphs, and Medical directorates all presented problems, given the lack of available staff post-war. During the war, these departments had accounted for 1,452 British officers, more than 13,000 'other ranks', and 130,000 Indian 'followers', approximately half of whom were employed for the duration, the remainder on contract for fixed periods.[31] Given Treasury predictions of a deficit in local revenues for the coming year, along with the loss of half his available labour force, Wilson's concerns were more than justified. However, the discussions of the Interdepartmental Conference at the first of two meetings he attended demonstrated that not all of the questions for which he sought advice were raised, let alone settled. Rather, consideration of his concerns was postponed on the basis that nothing could be done until after the mandates had been distributed.[32] In his memoir, Wilson claimed that Curzon was 'little disposed' to listen to his views; at the meeting, Curzon had put aside his proposals for development 'with the remark that such interesting speculations were premature, and therefore unprofitable.'[33] However, on the constitution of the new state, the Conference approved his proposal for the creation of locally-run provincial, divisional and municipal councils, and he was authorised

> to take steps for the creation of five provinces … for Iraq proper, and of an Arab province of Mosul, surrounded by a fringe of autonomous Kurdish States under Kurdish chiefs, with British political advisers.[34]

While a Commission of Inquiry had been vetoed earlier, frustrated by the lack of any further direction from London, Wilson requested the services of 'some officer of

[31] Curzon Papers, F112/275: J.E. Shuckburgh, Political Department, India Office, 'Mesopotamia: Civil Administration', 2 April, 1919.
[32] Curzon Papers, F112/275, ff. 51-56: minutes of the Interdepartmental Conference, 10 April, 1919. Major Hubert Young took on the duties of Secretary of the IDCE in April. In his later memoir Young stated that while recording Curzon's utterances faithfully, the contributions of the other members present 'did not matter so much.' Sir Hubert Young, *The Independent Arab*, 285.
[33] A.T. Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917-1920: A Clash of Loyalties*, 43-44, 119.
[34] Curzon Papers, F112/275, f. 59: minutes of the Interdepartmental Conference, 17 April, 1919.

reputation and of experience' to visit Mesopotamia to obtain the views of the population, particularly those of 'the notables and officials of all classes', on whether they could form an administration. Sir Walter Lawrence was suggested, as Wilson believed he would also be able to offer advice on financial policy in Mesopotamia, given his previous experience in Palestine and Syria.[35] While Shuckburgh and Hirtzel supported the request, Hirtzel noted that Wilson's administration was receiving criticism from the British authorities in Syria, and from the military chief, Lieut.-Colonel Sir George MacMunn, 'who thinks he could do it a great deal better himself'. Hirtzel expressed some sympathy with Wilson's request for an enquiry, given that he believed it was essential that officials in London were aware of conditions in Mesopotamia 'before its mandate is drawn up'.[36] Significantly, Hirtzel's note revealed, perhaps unconsciously, the loose control exercised by the India Office over its men on the spot and the jurisdictional confusion which contributed to the situation he now faced. However, after communicating with the Foreign Office, Shuckburgh noted that Curzon considered any further investigations should be postponed until after the mandate had been awarded.[37]

Curzon's response may have related to the fact that at the time of these discussions, Sir John Cowans, the former Army Quartermaster-General, in company with two 'experts' from Shell were conducting geological surveys for potential oil

[35] L/P&S/10/686, P.2571/1917, register no. P.4142/1919: Political Baghdad, telegram no. 8106, to the Secretary of State for India, 19 July, 1919. Sir Walter Lawrence, 1857-1940, a member of the Indian Civil Service 1879-95; Curzon's private secretary, 1899-1903 (resigned); a member of the Council of India, 1907-9; toured Syria and Palestine in 1919 in order to report to Curzon on the fiscal problems of the British administrations of the occupied territories. Katherine Prior, *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, on-line service. http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3441,(accessed 10/01/2014).
[36] L/P&S/10/686, P.2571/1917, register no. P.4142/1919: Hirtzel minute, 3 August, 1919, on Political Baghdad telegram no. 8106 to Secretary of State, 19 July, 1919.
[37] Ibid, J.E. Shuckburgh note, 11 August, 1919.

exploration.[38] At the same time, American oil companies were pressing for similar rights through their embassy in London.[39] In December, Curzon repeated his strictures on development when the unpublished Trade Commissioners' Report of 1918 was discussed once more, stating that he viewed with some unease 'a premature launching out into operations which might well prove a source of embarrassment vis-à-vis the future Government of Iraq, or with other Powers.'[40] It is not entirely clear whether Curzon's strictures related only to the search for Mesopotamia's oil, but given American concerns, it seems likely.

The question of oil aside, criticism of Wilson's administration from Syria received the same response. According to Montagu, Mesopotamia was not ready for the 'purely national government' the Mesopotamian ex-officers desired, but which at the same time they recognised 'would have to be supported by the army of occupation.' Thus, in spite of his approval of Wilson's recommendations, Montagu adopted Curzon's approach, recommending that the Mesopotamians in Syria should be advised that until the Peace Conference decided upon the mandatory power for Mesopotamia, it would be 'premature to attempt constitutional experiments.'[41] At the same time, concerned with Wilson's 'heavy-handed' administrative style, Hirtzel pressed for the immediate recall of Cox from Teheran.[42]

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[38] FO371/6345/E13886: 'Standard Oil Company's Activities', memorandum by L. Weakley, December 1921, f. 161.
[39] P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 69.
[40] L/P&S/10/368, P.1283/1913, register no. 8379: Foreign Office to Secretary of State for India, 22 December, 1919.
[41] Ibid, Secretary of State for India to Foreign Office, 31 July, 1919.
[42] L/P&S/10/755, P.4722/1918, part I, register no. 4208: Shuckburgh note 24 July, 1919; Hirtzel minute, 28 July, 1919. See Montagu Papers 122, Trinity College Cambridge, E.S. Montagu to Lord Curzon, 14 August, 1919, and Curzon to Montagu, 9 September, 1919: In private correspondence, Montagu pleaded with Curzon to release Cox from his duties in Teheran. But while recognising that Wilson's administration was

Hirtzel's concerns signalled that he and Shuckburgh had parted company over support for Wilson. Criticising Wilson's April scheme, Hirtzel described the establishment of provincial and district councils as 'a British protectorate' rather than an Arab state.[43] For his part, Shuckburgh chafed at the local effect of the ongoing delay regarding the form of the Arab administration to be installed in Mesopotamia. Against a backdrop of civil unrest in Egypt, India, Malta, and Ireland, war on the North-West Frontier of India, and tribal unrest in Mesopotamia,[44] Shuckburgh stated

> We must either govern Mesopotamia, or not govern it. There is no *via media* that I can see. Feisal and his friends (not all of them Arabs) want us not to govern it. They may be right, but if we decide not to govern, we ought at least to inform our Civil Commissioner of our decision, and let him make his dispositions accordingly.[45]

Hirtzel countered that 'everyone knows we are not going to "govern" Mesopotamia; my complaint against Col. Wilson … is that he does not seem to comprehend the fact, although he has been here and seen and heard for himself.'[46] But what did he see and hear? The Interdepartmental Conference which had approved his steps towards constitutional development, but failed to address most other points upon which he sought advice. Moreover, it seemed to have slipped Hirtzel's mind that four months had passed since Wilson had 'seen and heard for himself', yet the officials at the India Office remained paralysed and divided, awaiting Cox's return from Persia. Private correspondence between Montagu and Curzon during August and September revealed that while Montagu also sought Cox's early return to Mesopotamia, ultimately he

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becoming 'Indianised', he refused Montagu's request, observing that it was vital that Cox remained in Teheran.

[43] L/P&S/10/755, P.4722/1918, part I, register no. 4019, Hirtzel note, 8 August, 1919.

[44] J. Darwin, *Britain, Egypt and the Middle East*, 30; K. Jeffery, *The British army and the crisis of empire 1918-1922*, 155.

[45] L/P&S/10/756, P.4722/1918, part 2, register no. 4265, Shuckburgh minute, 9 August, 1919.

[46] Ibid, Hirtzel note, 11 August, 1919.

deferred to Curzon, who declared that it was 'vital' that Cox remain in Teheran until the following year in order to complete negotiations for the Anglo-Persian Treaty.[47]

If authorities at the India Office were confused and divided, the Foreign Secretary in Paris was no less so. Considering the contradictions inherent in the pledges made to Hussein, the Sykes-Picot Agreement, the Anglo-French Declaration, the Covenant of the League of Nations, and the directions to an American-sponsored commission of inquiry in early 1919, Balfour declared there was 'no clear-cut policy'. He concluded that 'where the Covenant of the League of Nations is in contradiction with the Agreement of 1916, it is presumably the Covenant which must be held to represent our policy.'[48] Balfour's confusion was echoed by Curzon in London, who wrote,

> AJB is in Paris pursuing one policy. I am here pursuing another … No-one … knows what might be done and meanwhile of course nothing is done and we go on getting deeper and deeper into the mire.[49]

Curzon was not referring solely to Mesopotamian policy perhaps, but to wider issues relating to decisions made by the peacemakers in Paris which he sensed would result in difficulties in the future: for example, the question of Armenia, the decision of the Supreme Council in May to allow the Greek army to occupy Smyrna, and his concerns relating to the difficulty of reconciling Zionist aspirations with Arab rights in Palestine.[50]

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[47] Trinity College Library, Cambridge University, Montagu Papers, 122: Montagu to Curzon, 14 August, 1919; Curzon to Montagu 9 September, 1919; Montagu to Curzon 10 September, 1919. While in 1918, Montagu and Curzon violently disagreed on Montagu's scheme for devolution of power in India, during the period under review here, Montagu deferred to Curzon on almost every point regarding Mesopotamia. For that dispute see D. Waley, *Edwin Montagu,* 163-181.

[48] *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part II, series B, vol. I: 'Memorandum by Mr Balfour respecting Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia', 11 August, 1919, 99-100.

[49] Curzon Papers F112: Curzon to Lady Curzon (Paris), 19 August, 1919.

[50] British Library, Add. Mss.51077, Cecil of Chelwood Papers, ff. 154-160: Lord Curzon to A.J. Balfour, private, 20 August, 1919. On the Greek landing in Smyrna in May 1919, see M. Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill,*

Of more significance, Walters asserted that Balfour and Curzon were working at cross purposes due to Curzon's reluctance to base British foreign policy on the Covenant.[51] On a more practical level, in response to criticism of military expenditure from Liberal and Labour members of Parliament, Churchill insisted that Army Estimates could not be reduced merely on the basis of the security promised by the League of Nations.[52]

In October 1919, President Wilson was incapacitated by a stroke, and subsequently, the United States withdrew from the influential role in the Middle East which the British government had anticipated.[53] As one correspondent to *The Times* noted,

> [t]o each and every suggestion that was made about the future of Mesopotamia the stereotyped reply was given, "Nothing can be done until the future political status of the country has been determined and this awaits the decision of the Peace Conference". The decision of the Peace Conference waited on America, and a whole year was lost.[54]

The withdrawal of the United States, while a cause for concern regarding the existence of the League of Nations,[55] was not the sole reason for the delay. By October, Curzon was expressing frustration concerning the interminable conflict with the French government over the Sykes-Picot Agreement.[56] Also impatient with the delay, and viewing the

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vol. IV, 1916-1922, London, Heinemann, 1975, 472, 479-80, 487-8; M. Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian Vision: Greece in Asia Minor 1919-1922*, London, Allen Lane, 1973, 79-89.

[51] F.P. Walters, [1952], *A History of the League of Nations*, 116. For further analyses of the attitudes of politicians and permanent officials to the League of Nations see P. Kennedy, *The Realities Behind Diplomacy,* 244, and A.P. Thornton, *The Imperial Idea and its Enemies*, 285.

[52] *Hansard*, Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, Army Estimates Committee, 3 March 1919, vol. 113, c. 182.

[53] M. MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 441. For the British government's responses to the U. S. government's failure to ratify the Treaty of Versailles see G.W. Egerton, 'Britain and the "Great Betrayal"', 885-911.

[54] *The Times*, 'Mesopotamia: some causes of unrest: Legacy of Turkish Misrule', (from a correspondent), 6 September, 1920, 9.

[55] See *The Times*, 12 November, 1919, p. 20. Speaking at a rally organised by the League of Nations Union on the previous day, Balfour stressed that the League would not succeed unless all the Great Powers bore 'an equal share of the burden'.

[56] Liverpool Record Office, Derby Papers, 920DER(17): Curzon, private, to Derby, 16 October, 1919.

situation in Mesopotamia with increasing unease, the India Office dismissed Curzon's 'waiting for the mandate' excuse, informing the Foreign Office that

> Mr Montagu assumes that, whatever may be the decision of the Peace Conference in regard to other parts of the Ottoman Empire, there can be no doubt that the "Mandate" for Mesopotamia will be entrusted to Great Britain …This being the position it ought not to be impossible to make some pronouncement which would ease the local situation by reassuring the people of Mesopotamia as to the permanence of British influence, without contravening the spirit of previous declarations or the general policy of the Allied Powers.[57]

Montagu had effectively exposed the tension between stated and unstated aims. There was a solution, however, based on Balfour's rationalisation of the meaning of 'self-determination' in April 1918. Montagu requested Curzon to consider whether Wilson should be authorised to publish a statement, based on the Anglo-French Declaration, to the effect that

> the inhabitants of Mesopotamia having pronounced in favour of the British connection, H.M.'s Govt. regard it as clearly incumbent on themselves to afford to the local administration to be created there the "support and effective assistance" contemplated in the Declaration.[58]

Curzon rejected Montagu's proposal because of wider international considerations,[59] provoking a furious response from Shuckburgh:

> The letter is a most unsatisfactory document; extremely curt and indeed barely civil in tone. We are told that Lord Curzon considers our proposal as "inadvisable" but no reasons are given for H.L.'s view. Considering the terms of our letter, and the importance which we attached to finding a solution of what is a very real difficulty, we have every ground for complaint at the summary and contemptuous fashion in which the F.O. have treated us. I am much tempted to submit a controversial rejoinder, but I fear it would be no good.[60]

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[57] L/P&S/10/757, P.4722/1918, part 3, register no. 4264: Secretary of State for India to Foreign Office, 19 August, 1919.
[58] Ibid.
[59] L/P&S/757, P.4722/1918, part 3, register no. 5962, Foreign Office to Under-Secretary of State, India Office, 26 September, 1919.
[60] L/P&S/10/757, P.4722/1918, part 3, register 5962, Shuckburgh note, 6 October, 1919.

It is perhaps no coincidence that after this exchange, Montagu wrote to Curzon privately, requesting that the India Office be relieved of direct responsibility for Mesopotamia.[61] At the same time, the Foreign Office forwarded to Hirtzel a letter from T.E. Lawrence to Curzon, in which he criticised the Mesopotamian administration, and suggested that in order to convince Feisal to accept a French mandate over Syria, the British Government should issue 'an assurance that our pledges with regard to the Arab character of the Government of Mesopotamia hold good.'[62] Furthermore, Lawrence insisted that in order to relieve tensions in Mesopotamia, Cox should return immediately, thereby relieving Wilson of his post. Hirtzel's response revealed that divisions remained in the India Office over future policy for that country, and that his distrust of Lawrence, and suspicions regarding Sharifian ambitions expressed in 1918 remained.[63] Hirtzel recognised that while the government was pledged to establish a predominantly Arab government in Mesopotamia, under the mandatory regime the administration of the country would initially amount to a 'camouflaged' British government, that is, a little more than indirect rule. Incensed that Feisal and Lawrence were interfering in the matter of Wilson's employment, and disinclined to support the creation of a an Arab state in the Middle East for the benefit of Hussein and his sons, Hirtzel declared 'Feisal's wishes have nothing to do with it.' [64]

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[61] Trinity College Library, Cambridge University, Montagu Papers 122, Montagu to Curzon, private, 28 October 1919. Montagu's timing was inappropriate, given the uncertainty prevailing at that point, and while his request was not acted upon at the time, it was a signal that the interdepartmental debate over responsibility for Mesopotamia would be resumed at a later time.

[62] L/P&S/10/757, P.4722/1918, register no. 6262, T.E. Lawrence to Curzon, private, 25 September, 1919.

[63] B.C. Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs*, 361.

[64] L/P&S/10/757, P. 4722/1918, part 3, register no. 6262: Sir A. Hirtzel to E.S. Montagu, private, 4 October, 1919. Hirtzel's distrust of Lawrence was clear in a note written in early 1919, in which he recorded 'the F.O. made a bad mistake when they handed themselves over to him – showed him all their letters and admitted him to their most secret discussions.' B.C. Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs*, 274, 361, states that Hirtzel deeply distrusted Lawrence and the Sharifians, and opposed Cairo's plans for the creation of an Arab State for Hussein.

Pressure for a statement of policy was also emanating from another source. Following a conversation between Hubert Young and Nuri es Said in London in October 1919, during which they discussed the Mesopotamian administration and the ambitions of the Mesopotamian officers in Feisal's administration, Young wrote that he had been convinced that Wilson's administration was heading in the wrong direction. As a result, he urged the government to decide on a definite policy, 'to preclude the possibility of direct British administration being forced upon the country against the wishes of its inhabitants.'[65] Meanwhile, pressure from the Mesopotamian and British officers in Feisal's regime in Syria for a resolution to the Mesopotamian problem continued, but was again dismissed by Hirtzel. Regarding the administration, he quoted from private correspondence with Wilson, in which the perceived faults of the administration were attributed both to the extravagance of the local military authorities, and the reluctance of the War Office to transfer the remaining 'quasi-civil' departments to the civil administration.[66] He concluded that it was time for the government to make the decision to create a central Government in which the sovereignty of Mesopotamia would be vested, 'and in which there will be from the first at least one Arab representative'.[67]

Hirtzel's idea was a small step forward from Wilson's April proposals, which he had criticised as little more than a protectorate, yet a central government with one Arab representative was also not an Arab government. When Hirtzel's paper was discussed by the Interdepartmental Conference a week later, Curzon, probably at Hubert Young's

[65] L/P&S/10/757, P.4722/1918, part 3, register no. 6876: record of a discussion between Hubert Young and Nuri es Said at the Foreign Office, 19 October, 1919.
[66] L/P&S/10/757, P.4722/1918, part 3, register no. 2766, 'Note by Sir A. Hirtzel', 3 November, 1919.
[67] Ibid.

instigation, declared that the meeting had been called to discuss 'the degree to which the British administration in Mesopotamia had been developing in a wrong direction.' While he admitted that Wilson's administration had done well, he complained that it was 'inordinately expensive' and he would welcome its demise.[68] While there was general agreement that only Sir Percy Cox could save the situation, Curzon noted that in private correspondence, Cox had expressed his unwillingness to return to a position of subordination to the military commander. Rather, he stated that he would not return to Mesopotamia until the mandate had been allocated, and only as high commissioner, with ultimate control over the administration of the country.[69]

Unable to decide whether to emphasise the civil rather than the military nature of the administration, or alternatively, bring the whole administration to an end, Curzon decided to consult Cox again.[70] Based on the information he received from Wilson in Baghdad, Cox assured Curzon that the local population was content with the British administration, and there was therefore no cause for anxiety. Furthermore, he doubted whether the principles embodied in the Anglo-French Declaration provided a 'practical basis' for the administration of Mesopotamia. As to the question of his return, Cox reiterated the views he had expressed to Curzon previously, adding cryptically that he would consider returning once the peace treaty was signed 'or His Majesty's Government get free hand by some other means.'[71]

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[68] Curzon Papers, F112/275, f. 92: minutes of the Interdepartmental Conference, 10 November, 1919.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid, f.93.
[71] L/P&S/10/757, P.4722/1918, part 3, register no. 7755: Sir P. Cox, Hamadan, to Lord Curzon, 23 November, 1919.

Yet the prospect of a peace treaty seemed as remote as ever. In December Lloyd George announced that as all hope of American co-operation appeared to have been lost, it was time for Britain and her European allies to deal with the Turkish peace treaty.[72] More time was lost, however, as the British and French members of the Supreme Council, unable to agree on the terms, resorted to bickering over the location for forthcoming meetings.[73]

Regarding Curzon's criticism of Wilson's administration, there was a distinction between political and administrative questions. On the administrative side, despite his nineteenth century mind-set, Wilson was obliged to meet demands from the Army Council for the reduction of military expenditure by hastening the transfer of the quasi-civil military departments to the civil authorities. He also had to consider Treasury concerns regarding the question of liability for the capital value of British assets in Mesopotamia.[74] Sluglett argued that Wilson believed that if an indigenous government was not acceptable to the local population, the country would fall into anarchy, tax revenues would cease, the administration would face bankruptcy, and the value of the assets transferred to the civil administration would be lost.[75] While this may have been an exaggeration, Wilson's direct concerns related to the fact that unless there was a drastic reduction of military expenditure, the cost of retaining Mesopotamia would be too high

[72] *Hansard*, Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, vol. 12, 18 December, 1919, cc. 727-728.
[73] Liverpool Record Office, Derby Papers 920DER (17): Derby to Curzon, 19 November, 1919. The British government won that battle: when the Supreme Council reconvened in February 1920, the meeting was held in London. Following that meeting, the British refused to return to Paris, hence the decision was made to hold the next meeting in San Remo in April. See A.E. Montgomery, 'The Making of the Treaty of Sevres of 10 August 1920', 780.
[74] FO3714151/156563: G. L. Barstow, Treasury, to the Secretary, War Office, 25 November 1919; B.B. Cubitt for the Army Council to the Under-Secretary, India Office, 1 December, 1919.
[75] P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 31-32.

to sustain.[76] He later defended the administration, which he believed had been developing on 'sound' lines, and noted that his despatch had been sent as a warning to the government of the difficulties which lay ahead, and a request to grant him latitude in making the administrative adjustments necessary during the transfer of departments.[77]

There was an indication in this despatch, however, which should have alerted the home officials to the tendency towards pro-consular autonomy which existed under India Office control, in his statement that

> the disadvantages arising from subaltern action on the spot are, under existing conditions, less serious than dangers which delay involved in reference to London must often necessarily involve.[78]

As if to allay anxieties at home, he reported in November that he believed all was well in Mesopotamia: the landowners and notables who benefited from the British occupation accepted the idea of permanent British rule, while reports from the Political Officers in the outlying areas revealed that the inhabitants appeared to be losing interest in the idea of an independent Arab state. Furthermore, he asserted, reports from Syria regarding Feisal's administration 'strengthen feeling in favour of maintenance of effective British administration'.[79] But while describing the collection of revenue in outlying

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[76] L/P&S/11/172, P.3535/1920, register no. 10762: Civil Commissioner, Baghdad, telegram no. 3576 to Secretary of State for India, 20 March, 1920. See A. Nassibian, *Britain and the Armenian Question 1915-1923*, London, Croom Helm, 1984, 159-160: by September 1919, aside from the extra expenditure in Mesopotamia, there were over 900,000 military personnel remaining in the Eastern zones.

[77] L/P&S/10/755, P.4722/1918, part 1, register no. 487, Civil Commissioner, Baghdad, telegram no. 751, to India Office, 18 January, 1920.

[78] L/P&S/10/755, P.4722/1918, part I, register no. 487: Civil Commissioner, Baghdad, to India Office, 18 January, 1920. This sentiment is little different to that expressed by Cox in 1917 in less direct terms, however, it serves to reinforce Klieman's theory that the differences between Cox and Wilson were more 'procedural than substantive.' A.S. Klieman, *Foundations of British Policy in the Arab World: The Cairo Conference of 1921*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press 1970, 61. For a similar conclusion, see J. Fisher, *Curzon and British Imperialism in the Middle East*, 244.

[79] FO371/4151/155637: copy of Civil Commissioner, Baghdad, telegram no. 13998, to India Office, 20 November, 1919.

districts as exceeding expectations, the unexpected bounty was achieved in some cases by punitive measures, including bombing the recalcitrant into submission.[80]

Wilson's optimism was not shared by officials at the India Office, where it was noted that as a result of increasingly anti-British sentiment in the Middle East, immediate action was required in order to secure Britain's position in Mesopotamia.[81] However, the military authorities remained opposed to civil administration in a territory under military occupation, and in an increasingly hostile environment in Whitehall, Shuckburgh objected to the fact that the Army Council addressed its concerns to the Foreign Office.[82]

Divisions of opinion at the India Office concerning Wilson's administration widened after C.C. Garbett, a secretary in the Political Department, noted that Wilson and Gertrude Bell held opposing views on future policy for Mesopotamia. Following a visit to Syria in October, Bell recommended that the intentions expressed in the Anglo-French Declaration should form the basis of British policy, but Wilson disagreed. Shuckburgh continued to support Wilson, believing that his policy of good government was preferable to the chaos expected under an indigenous administration, as appeared to be the case in Syria. However, rather than addressing the issue raised by Garbett, Hirtzel and Shuckburgh elected to do nothing, other than to 'hint to the F.O. the desirability of getting on with Sir P. Cox's visit'.[83] It appears that the India Office's reliance on Cox to

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[80] P. Satia, 'The Defence of Inhumanity: Air Control and the British Idea of Arabia', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 111, no. 1, February 2006, 6, (accessed on-line 15/02/2010). http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/aahr/111.1/satia.html

[81] L/P&S/10/757, P.4722/1918, part 3, register no. 115, Garbett note, 12 December, 1919.

[82] Ibid, J.E. Shuckburgh note, 17 January, 1920.

[83] L/P&S/10/755, P.4722/1918, part 1, register no. 8253/19, Political, Baghdad, to India Office, 15 November, 1919; Garbett minute, 4 January, 1920; Shuckburgh minute, 14 January, 1920; Hirtzel minute, 15 January, 1920, Montagu note, 18 January, 1920.

solve Mesopotamia's problems was in itself part of the wider problem generated by the delay in coming to terms with the French government on the Ottoman peace treaty. By placing their confidence in Cox to save the situation, Curzon and officials at the India Office masked their irresolution over future policy, and extended the gulf between Whitehall and its subordinate on the spot. Wilson reported again in February that all was well in Mesopotamia, noting that Gertrude Bell had been

> entering into friendly relations with some of more advanced politicians in Baghdad … [and] is of opinion that there are indications of a general increase in friendly feeling in Baghdad itself and that the political attitude of the people who count must be regarded as encouraging.[84]

The illusion of tranquillity, if indeed it existed, was merely temporary. On 8 March 1920, a General Syrian Congress in Damascus proclaimed Syria an independent state, and appointed Feisal as king. Shortly thereafter, a self-appointed 'General Iraqi Congress' proclaimed Mesopotamia an independent state, appointed Abdullah as king and Zeid, his youngest brother, as regent, and according to the India Office, issued a *fatwa* against service in the British administration.[85] Curzon informed Lord Derby, the British ambassador in Paris, that the government could not endorse this action, and indeed, questioned the right of that body to make decisions regarding Mesopotamia.[86]

Darwin argued that following the resumption of normal Cabinet procedures in October 1919, and the appointment of Curzon as Foreign Secretary, [87] Winston Churchill, Secretary of State for War, emerged as the chief critic of government policy for

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[84] L/P&S/10/755, P.4722/1918, part 1, register no. P.1027: Civil Commissioner, Baghdad, telegram no. 1485, 3 February, 1920.
[85] L/P&S/10/7/755, P.4722/1918, part 1, register no. P.2617, C.C. Garbett note, 14 April, 1920.
[86] *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part II, Series B, vol. 1, [E1595/2/44], Curzon to Derby (Paris), no. 901, 13 March, 1920.
[87] S. Roskill, *Hankey: Man of Secrets, vol. II, 1919-1931*, London, Collins, 1972, 127. Roskill records that the decision to dissolve the War Cabinet was made following a conference between Lloyd George, Andrew Bonar Law and Winston Churchill.

Mesopotamia.[88] However, before Churchill entered the debate, H.H. Asquith led a revolt in the House of Commons by Liberal members of parliament, arguing against continued responsibility for the area under military occupation given the state of the national economy. Asquith demanded the immediate withdrawal of British troops to the area surrounding Basra, the only region where he considered war-time expenditure was likely to be recouped, leaving the remaining territory to a 'native, indigenous administration with assistance and advice' from Great Britain. The Prime Minister's response illustrated the uncertainty of the moment, and at the same time, one of the reasons for remaining. While conceding that complete evacuation of the country remained a possibility, he rejected Asquith's demand, given the great potential of Mosul's 'rich oil deposits'.[89]

At the same time, Shuckburgh informed Sir William Duke, the Under-Secretary of State for India, of a discussion with Philip Kerr, the Prime Minister's private secretary, who had stressed that the establishment of a 'genuine' Arab State forthwith, offered the 'only practicable solution of the Mesopotamian question' in view of the fact that Parliament was unlikely to consent to the outlay of further expenditure in Mesopotamia for an extended period.[90] The ever-practical Hirtzel pointed out that

> the minds of the Prime Minister and his entourage should be disabused of the idea that by immediately setting up an Arab State we can at once cut down our liabilities wholesale … what the high authorities should be brought to realise is that, if what the Government are (avowedly) out for is oil and other commodities, they cannot have them without public security, and that they cannot have public security under an Arab or any other Govt. without paying for it.[91]

[88] M. Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill, vol. IV*, 481-2; J. Darwin, *Britain, Egypt and the Middle East*, 170-171.
[89] *Hansard*, House of Commons, series 5, vol. 127, cc. 639-717: Army Estimates Committee, 25 March, 1920.
[90] L/P&S/10/757, P.4722/1918, part 3, register no. 2244, Shuckburgh to Under-Secretary of State, 31 March, 1920.
[91] Ibid, Sir A. Hirtzel to Secretary of State for India, 31 March, 1920.

Churchill provided a solution to that difficulty when he joined with the Treasury in stressing the need for economy, which gave him an opportunity to introduce for the first time, a scheme for utilising the services of the Royal Air Force for ensuring the internal security of Mesopotamia in place of a large military force.[92] According to its architect, Air Marshal Sir Hugh Trenchard,[93] the principal advantages of the scheme included the increased capacity for surveillance of large areas from the air, rapid mobilisation for punitive action and pacification, the deployment of armoured cars instead of ground troops for 'mopping up' following an air attack, the development of air transport for the rapid movement of troops and weapons, and most importantly, in relative terms the scheme was cheap.[94] However, when the scheme was discussed by the Interdepartmental Conference, Curzon declared that he was 'rather nervous about … the idea of force being summoned solely for the purpose of destruction'.[95] As a result, an opportunity to relieve the burden of the Treasury was missed when further discussion of Trenchard's scheme was postponed, in part due to inter-departmental conflict over the future of the Royal Air Force.[96]

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[92] *Hansard*, Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 5th series, vol. 126, 11 March, 1920, col. 1625.

[93] Hugh Trenchard served in the army air arm during the war, commanding the Royal Flying Corp. He was knighted in January 1918, and appointed Chief of Air Staff. He resigned three months later, but was reappointed by Churchill in March 1919. Appointed First Marshal of the Royal Air Force in January 1927, Trenchard retained the position of Chief of Air Staff until January 1930. *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, on-line service, January 2011. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/36552, (accessed 22/02/2015).

[94] British Library, Curzon Papers F112/281, ff. 8-11: 'C.P. 1320, 'A Preliminary Scheme for the Military Control of Mesopotamia by the Royal Air Force', H. Trenchard, Chief of Air Staff, 12 March 1920. It was contemplated that 10 squadrons of aircraft would be required, together with 350 officers and 3,100 men, 800 of whom would be native forces. For discussions regarding the RAF scheme in 1919, see M. Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill, vol. IV*, 199-204, and *Companion* volume, part 2, 823-824, 833, 837-8, for correspondence between Churchill and Trenchard.

[95] Curzon Papers, F112/275, f. 124: minutes of the Interdepartmental Conference, 13 April, 1920.

[96] B.C. Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs*, 374-375.

Meanwhile, in April 1920 the outstanding issues which had paralysed British policy for Mesopotamia were finally settled at a meeting of the Supreme Council at San Remo. The terms of the Ottoman peace treaty were settled, and the mandates were allocated: Syria to France, and as expected, Palestine and Mesopotamia, including the province of Mosul, to Britain.[97] The French were compensated for the loss of Mosul by the San Remo Oil Agreement, which awarded the French Government a share in the profits of the suspected oil reserves in that region.[98] However, while the decisions reached at San Remo may have been a step towards an end to the vacillation over British policy for Mesopotamia since the Armistice, the road to the Sharifian solution, eventually adopted by the government in March 1921, was littered with potholes.

John Darwin argued persuasively that the mandate 'sat well enough with their intention to exert British influence through a patchwork of client states.'[99] This is supported by the fact that before it was awarded, Montagu expressed a desire to dispense with the mandate and set up an independent state with which the government could enter into a treaty relationship, a proposal with which Curzon agreed.[100] Later expanding upon his idea of indirect control, Montagu illustrated how a treaty relationship

[97] CAB24/104, C.P. 1168, 'Treaty of Peace with Turkey: Mandate', M.P.A. Hankey to Foreign Office, 24 April 1920, informing the Foreign Office of the award of the mandates for Palestine and Mesopotamia to Great Britain. The U.S. government was represented by an 'observer'. See J. Nevakivi, *Britain, France and the Arab Middle East*, 241-250; M. MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 405-406, and D. Lloyd George, *The Truth About the Peace Treaties*, vol. II, chapters XXI-XXIII.

[98] Cmd. 1226, Miscellaneous no. 1:'Correspondence Between His Majesty's Government and the United States Ambassador Respecting Economic Rights in Mandated Territories', February 1921.By the terms of the Cadman-Berthelot Memorandum of Agreement signed at San Remo on 24 April, 1920, the French Government was to receive the 25 per cent of the net output of crude oil from the Mesopotamian oilfields formerly allotted to German interests in the Turkish Petroleum Company, when or if they were developed by the British Government. If developed by a private company, the French Government was to receive a 25 per cent share in the company, which was to remain under permanent British control.

[99] J. Darwin, 'An Undeclared Empire: The British in the Middle East, 1918-39', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 27, no. 2, (May, 1999), 163. (Accessed 21/01/2009).

[100] Curzon Papers, F112/275, f. 126: minutes of the Interdepartmental Conference, 13 April, 1920.

would provide safeguards for British interests, prevent other Powers from participating in the development of the county's resources, while at the same time embodying the principle of 'free choice' if the local population was consulted on what they desired in return.[101] The flaw in Montagu's proposal, which he later recognised, was that as yet there was no person or body in Mesopotamia with whom to enter into negotiations.[102] While recognising that Abdullah appeared to be the only possible candidate, it appeared that unfavourable opinions of his leadership capacities, expressed by Gertrude Bell in Mesopotamia, and Garbett at the India Office, rendered him an unwise choice.[103] Moreover, Curzon doubted whether he would be acceptable to the local population as ruler of Mesopotamia.[104] However, he left the door open for a Sharifian head of state. When conveying the news of the allocation of the mandates to the authorities in Cairo and Baghdad, it appeared that despite Wilson's assurances to the contrary, Curzon now considered it possible that the local population might opt for one of Hussein's sons.[105]

Simultaneously with the discussions in Curzon's Interdepartmental Conference, almost immediately following the decisions of the Supreme Council at San Remo, the debate over jurisdiction of Britain's empire in the Middle East was re-opened, conducted in Parliament and Cabinet against a background of continuing civil unrest in India,

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[101] Curzon Papers, F112/275, f. 133: minutes of the Interdepartmental Conference, 17 May, 1920.
[102] Ibid.
[103] L/P&S/10/757, P.4722/1918, part 3, register no. 3838: record of a conversation with Hirtzel and Shuckburgh on 19 May, 1920, minute by C.C. Garbett, 20 May, 1920. Abdullah was rejected as a candidate on the grounds that he possessed no administrative ability, and since his recent defeat by Ibn Saud during a Hejaz/Nejd border dispute, he had become 'a laughing stock', and therefore there was no candidate acceptable to the India Office. Following his defeat, Abdullah headed towards Jerusalem, reaching Amman in early 1921. On the border dispute see B.C. Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs*, 322-323; H.V. Winstone, *The Illicit Adventure: The Story of Political and Military Intelligence in the Middle East from 1898 to 1926*, London, Jonathon Cape, 1982, 339-340.
[104] L/P&S/10/757, P.4722/1918, part 3, register no. 3711, Curzon, (San Remo), to Montagu, 16 April, 1920.
[105] L/P&S/10/802, register no. P.3441/1920, Curzon (San Remo) telegram no. 38 to Cairo, 29 April, 1920, repeated to Baghdad, Constantinople and India.

Afghanistan, Egypt and Ireland, and strikes and political protests over post-war economic conditions at home.[106] Under pressure from the Treasury to reduce the disproportionate military expenditure in Mesopotamia, Churchill stressed the urgent necessity to tailor policy according to available funds by reducing the garrisons and removing military personnel from positions in the civil administration. He re-introduced Trenchard's air control scheme, earlier rejected by Curzon, and recommended the transfer of responsibility for the administration of the country to the Colonial Office.[107] Sir Henry Wilson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, disagreed, claiming that it was more likely that the garrisons would require reinforcements, given that the Royal Air Force was not yet in a position to implement Trenchard's scheme.[108] While criticising the War Office for Army extravagance on the 'quasi-civil' departments of the Mesopotamian administration, Hirtzel agreed that Trenchard's 'grandiose' scheme should be shelved for future consideration.[109] Concerned by reports earlier in the year that the Bolsheviks were gaining ground in the Caucasus, Lord Milner, Secretary of State for the Colonies, concluded that it was 'both premature and ill-omened to attempt today to lay down a plan for the administration of Mesopotamia' for, considering the possible effect of Bolshevik propaganda on Persia and Mesopotamia, together with the unsettled state of the whole region, 'in a year there would be no question of our administering

[106] J. Darwin, *Britain, Egypt and the Middle East*, 30.
[107] CAB24/106, C.P. 1320: 'Mesopotamian Expenditure', memorandum by the Secretary of State for War, 1 May, 1920; 'On the Power of the Air Force and the Application of this Power to Hold and Police Mesopotamia', H. Trenchard, Chief of Air Staff, March, 1920, Air Staff memorandum 'Scheme for the Organisation of the Forces of the Crown in Mesopotamia', March, 1920. See also, M. Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill, vol. IV*, 481-2.
[108] CAB24/106, C.P. 1320: Note by Sir Henry Wilson, C.I.G.S., 6 May, 1920; General Staff note, 5 May, 1920.
[109] L/P&S/10/762, P.4722/1918, part 9, register no. 4230: Sir Arthur Hirtzel to John Shuckburgh, 22 May, 1920.

Mesopotamia at all.'[110] Curzon's thoughts led him in a similar direction, but from an entirely different premise. Naturally arguing for Foreign Office control, Curzon mused that if Palestine and Mesopotamia passed 'at a comparatively early stage' to independence, the creation of a new ministry would not, after all, be necessary.[111] However, based on the premise that a new Middle East Office would control relations with the entire region from Egypt and the Sudan in the west, to Persia, Armenia and Kurdistan in the east, including British interests in Syria, Montagu settled for either a new Middle East Department or a re-organised and renamed Colonial Office for administration, together with an inter-departmental committee for the direction of policy.[112] But no decision was reached, the India Office retaining the dubious pleasure of responsibility for the administration of Mesopotamia, amid demands for an elaboration of future policy, an increasingly defiant Civil Commissioner in Baghdad, mounting unrest in Mesopotamia and public anger at home.[113] In May, a group of predominantly Conservative members of Parliament wrote to Lloyd George pressing for the creation of a ministry for the Middle East. More significantly, the signatories evinced a wish for the period of tutelage under the mandate to be as brief as possible.[114]

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[110] Curzon Papers, F112/253: C.P. 1337, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 24 May, 1920.

[111] CAB24/107, C.P. 1434, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 'Future Administration of the Middle East', 8 June, 1920.

[112] L/P&S/10/762, P.4722/1918, part 9, register no. 4230, C.P. 1402, E.S. Montagu, 'Mesopotamia and the Middle East: Question of Future Control', 1 June, 1920.

[113] For example, see *The Times*, 29 May 1920, page 10. In a letter to the editor, the former Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the India Office, Lord Islington, charged that home resources were 'at breaking point'. As a result of expenditure on Mesopotamia, there was no money at home for 'industrial, economic and social reconstruction'. See also *The Times*, 23 June, 1920, 16, 'Public Anger at Waste'; and *Hansard*, House of Lords Debates, 25 June, 1920, vol. 40, cc. 848-94: following the announcement of policy, Curzon was bombarded with accusations of waste relating to the extravagance of the administration in Mesopotamia.

[114] British Library, Curzon Papers F112/281, C.P. 1372: Lord Winterton to the Prime Minister, 26 May, 1920. The signatories were Lord Islington (Liberal), the former parliamentary under-secretary at the India Office, who lost his seat in the 1918 election, J.H. Thomas, M.P. (Labour), and the Conservative M.P.s Lord Lamington, Major-General Sir John Davidson, Major R. Glyn, Major William Ormsby-Gore and Winterton, together with David Hogarth, T.E. Lawrence, H. St. J. Philby, Arnold Toynbee, and Lionel Curtis. A further five

While the debate over a separate Middle East Department continued in Whitehall, Wilson came under further attack when the recommendations of a committee convened in Baghdad, chaired by Sir Edgar Bonham-Carter, the Senior Judicial Officer, were reviewed by Curzon's committee. Along lines similar to the Egyptian system, the institutions of a provisional government would consist of a Council of State with an Arab president and eleven Ministers, six British and five selected from the local population by the High Commissioner, together with a Legislative Assembly with advisory powers but no executive function, comprised of local notables.[115] Montagu gave the recommendations lukewarm approval as 'a generally suitable basis on which to construct provisional institutions as are postulated by mandate'.[116] But he considered that as Cox was returning to inaugurate the new regime, he should be consulted before any further steps were taken.[117] Curzon, however, dismissed the plan outright, describing it as a British government, merely 'infused with Arab elements'. Ultimately, the Interdepartmental Conference rejected the scheme, on the basis that a constitution could not be framed until the League of Nations approved the terms of the mandate.[118]

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signatories were added to the petition on 4 June: the Liberal M.P. Captain W. Wedgewood Benn, and Conservatives Col. Aubrey Herbert, Colonel Walter Guinness, Sir Samuel Hoare, and Captain W.E. Elliot. As their titles suggest, the majority of the petitioners had served in the Middle East during the war. A number of others were appointed to positions in the Foreign and India Offices in 1919 and 1920, including Philby, Gilbert Clayton, Director of Military Intelligence in Cairo during the negotiations with Sharif Hussein in 1914 and 1915, and Kinahan Cornwallis, the last director of the Arab Bureau before its closure in 1920. See T. J. Paris, *Britain, the Hashemites and Arab Rule 1920-1925: the Sharifian Solution,* London, Frank Cass, 2003, 367, and P. Satia, *Spies in Arabia,* 180.

[115] British Library, Curzon Papers F112/275, ff. 132, 135: minutes of the Interdepartmental Conference, 17 May, 1920.

[116] L/P&S/10/757, P.4722/1918, part 3, register no. 3549: Secretary of State for India to Foreign Office, 7 May, 1920.

[117] CAB/24/107: Secretary of State for India, paraphrase telegram no. 4216, to Civil Commissioner, Baghdad, 7 June, 1920.

[118] Curzon Papers, F112/275: minutes of the Interdepartmental Conference, 17 May, f. 134.

The allocation of the mandate was announced in Baghdad in early May. Shortly thereafter, Wilson notified the India Office of increasing unrest in the country following the announcement. He insisted, however, that 'we cannot maintain our position as Mandatory by a policy of conciliation of extremists'. Rather, he believed that regardless of the League of Nations, it would be necessary to maintain direct control 'for years to come' and proceed 'very slowly with constitutional and democratic institutions'. As a result of post-war demobilisation, however, he believed insufficient troops and political officers remained in the country to undertake the task, therefore he advised that the only alternative was to clear out of the country.[119]

Curzon's suspicion that Wilson was not capable of dealing with the situation was confirmed, and he duly requested Montagu to arrange for Wilson's immediate removal. However, after a lengthy discussion, it was decided that since no officer of equivalent experience was available at short notice to replace him, it would be left to Cox to save the situation when he returned to Baghdad.[120] Yet Curzon expressed doubt concerning Cox's willingness to implement the government's policy in Mesopotamia, given that a little over six months previously, he had asserted that the principle of 'free choice' did not provide a practical basis for the administration of Mesopotamia.[121] Observing that the British public were pressing the government to bring an end to the 'policy of muddle', Curzon decided that Cox should be invited to travel to London after completing his mission in Persia, since

[119] L/P&S/10/755, P.4722/1918, part I, register no. 4593: Civil Commissioner, Baghdad, paraphrase telegram no. 6948, to Secretary of State for India, 9 June, 1920.
[120] British Library, Curzon Papers, F112/275, f. 138: minutes of the Interdepartmental Conference, 1 June, 1920.
[121] L/P&S/10/757, P.4722/1918, part 3, register no. 7755: Sir P. Cox (Hamadan), to Lord Curzon, private, 23 November, 1919.

he was unsure whether Cox knew what British policy for Mesopotamia was to be.[122] Nor, it seems, was the government entirely clear. On the following day, when Churchill and Sir Henry Wilson informed Cabinet that the army was unable to provide reinforcements in one theatre without withdrawing troops from another, Ministers decided that the policy was either to create an effective Arab state rather than a camouflaged British protectorate, or evacuate the country completely.[123] The former option was adopted, and on 23 June, the policy was announced in the House of Commons.[124] However, that did not signify the end of the vacillation which had characterised the formulation of post-war policy for Mesopotamia. Moreover, a debate in the House of Commons following the announcement of policy revealed the tension between the ideals of trusteeship and the urgent necessity to reduce military expenditure, a contradiction which was to shape British Mesopotamian policy in the following decade.[125]

The distribution of the mandates at San Remo merely signified recognition of Britain's position in the country by the Allied Powers only. Legalisation of the position depended on the ratification of the Ottoman peace treaty, and while formal recognition of the mandate rested with the League of Nations, in early 1920 the League was still in the process of establishing the institutions through which it would operate, no decision

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[122] British Library, Curzon Papers, F112/275, f. 140: minutes of the Interdepartmental Conference, 16 June, 1920.

[123] CAB/23/22: Conclusions of a Conference of Ministers, 17 June, 1920. The threat of withdrawal was, it seems, another tool in the kitbag of imperialism, used by British authorities in territories under British control in Africa in the late nineteenth century, and was a 'standard response' whenever tensions arose in Egypt and the Sudan. R. Robinson and J. Gallagher, with Alice Denny, *Africa and the Victorians,* 344.

[124] *Hansard*, Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, series 5, volume 130, 23 June, 1920, cc. 2157-8. Montagu explained that the Prime Minister was scheduled to make the announcement at the afternoon session, but given that the details of the policy had already appeared in the morning press, he felt that the House should be officially informed at once.

[125] *Hansard*, Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, Army Estimates Committee, vol. 130, 23 June 1920, cc. 2235-2238.

had been made on the terms of the mandates, or with whom responsibility for framing the terms rested. In the interim, amid ongoing concerns regarding the viability of the League without American participation, Britain's standing in those territories rested on no legal footing as noted by Cecil in June, but it seems such questions were relegated to the background.[126]

Conclusion.

By the middle of 1920, while a policy had been announced, there was no real clarity: there was to be a predominantly Arab State in Mesopotamia, but its constitution awaited Cox's return. Given that there was no obvious contender for the position of head of state, Montagu's proposal for devolution and a treaty to safeguard British interests was shelved. Behind these issues hovered the institutional nightmare of polycratism. Beyond traditional interdepartmental rivalry, the difficulties associated with the system of overlapping jurisdictions infused all the deliberations on policy, resulting in delays occasioned by friction between the departments concerned, exacerbated by a paralysed and divided India Office, apparently unable or unwilling to control its man on the spot. Curzon's Interdepartmental Conference, hampered from the outset by the lack of executive power enjoyed by its predecessors, discussed much but decided little. Over the course of the final six months of 1920, while conflict over the management of British Middle Eastern affairs continued in Whitehall, escalating civil unrest following the announcement of the allocation of the mandate threatened to put an end to the British administration of Mesopotamia.

[126] *Hansard*, Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, series 5, volume 130, 17 June 1920, c. 1542.

Chapter Five

The fruits of victory part II: the conflicting aims of policy and economy, 1920-1921.

The second half of 1920 was characterised by unresolved questions, missed opportunities and misunderstandings directly related to jurisdictional pluralism, and confusion regarding the League of Nations mandate. On the wider international stage, the increasing power of Mustafa Kemal's Nationalist forces as a result of Greek territorial ambitions in Anatolia, fears of a Turko-Bolshevik alliance, and in late 1920, opposition to the mandate from the United States' government impacted on Britain's Imperial aims in Mesopotamia. But in the first instance, the overriding aim for the reduction of military expenditure, sat ill with the policy announced in June and furthermore, the prospects for implementing the policy were less than favourable.

Cox's return to Baghdad was delayed and in the interim, initially unconnected outbreaks of violence against the British administration spread throughout the country. Gertrude Bell reported in early June that the Shammar tribe, led by Sharifian officers from Syria, had killed four British officials at Tal Afar, approximately 40 miles west of Mosul. In early July she reported that the Shi'a tribes east of the Euphrates between Samawah and Diwaniya were 'in open rebellion'.[1]

[1] Gertrude Bell to her father, 7 June 1920 and 4 July, 1920. Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University. Bell recounted that a local Sheikh at Rumaitha on the lower Euphrates, had been imprisoned by the District Political Officer for non-payment of taxes. Members of his tribal group subsequently broke into the place where he was being held in order to release him, and the violence

By August, the unrest had spread to other parts of the country, and Montagu was informed that army headquarters in Baghdad had issued a General Routine Order declaring that 'a state of war exists throughout the country'.[2] Moreover, the infrastructure erected by the British authorities had been severely compromised: railway lines were uprooted, and telegraph lines and bridges destroyed. Wilson reported that due to the violence, revenue collection was becoming increasingly difficult, labourers not engaged in productive work were being sent back to India, and he feared that the British forces would be forced to evacuate the entire Mosul Vilayet.[3] Significantly, when the violence reached a peak in late August, the Royal Air Force was brought in to assist with the suppression of the uprising.[4]

In London, Churchill gloomily pondered the situation, and given that at great expense, a further division of Indian troops had been despatched to Basra,

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quickly escalated into a demonstration against the severity of the British administration. <http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk=id401>

[2] FO371/5229/E10172: copy of Civil Commissioner, Baghdad, no. 9567, to the Secretary of State for India, 9 August, 1920.

[3] CAB/24/110: Civil Commissioner, Baghdad, no. 9751, to Secretary of State for India, 13 August, 1920. On the uprising as a revolution, and the founding myth of the Iraqi state see Eli Amarilyo, 'History, Memory and Commemoration: The Iraqi Revolution of 1920 and the Process of Nation Building in Iraq', *Middle Eastern Studies,* Vol. 12, no. 1, 2014, 72-92, (accessed on-line 7/10/2014).

[4] David E. Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: the Royal Air Force 1919-1939*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1990, 23; and see K.C. Ulrichsen, 'The British occupation of Mesopotamia, 1914-1922', 370-375, for a good assessment of the Mesopotamian revolt, and its contributing causes. He identified four groups which harboured grievances against the British authorities – a number of the tribal groups, the Shia religious communities, the urban notables and intellectuals, and the ex-Ottoman Army Mesopotamians in Feisal's administration in Syria – drawn together by the announcement of the allocation of the mandate. He argued, however, that the risings which occurred between July and September lacked central organisation. See also T. Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 22, and C. Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 39, 41, 44.

concluded that 'all prospect of reduction is at an end.'[5] From the safety of London, however, Cox contended that withdrawal from Mosul would be 'calamitous', given the economic, political and strategic importance of the province. He dismissed the rising on the Euphrates as a 'local affair', generated by intrigue from beyond Mesopotamia's borders, and absolved himself from responsibility for the nature of the civil administration, claiming that it was only since the Armistice that it had become 'much too English and too efficient to be compatible with our undertakings.' However, in confirmation of Curzon's fears, he recommended that consideration of an Arab Emir as head of state should be postponed. In an early signal of Cox's resistance to the mandate, he opined that the state could be established as a republic, and if the League of Nations and the other Powers could be persuaded to agree, the British government would take responsibility for choosing the first president. In the interim, he proposed that as the British representative in Mesopotamia, he should retain supreme authority.[6]

Cox's concerns regarding the effects of civil unrest on commercial development, however, were echoed in Baghdad. As a result of press reports that the government was contemplating withdrawal from the north of the country, two of the largest British enterprises threatened to follow suit by contracting their operations to the Basra area, thus jeopardising their future development plans.[7]

[5] CAB/24/109, C.P. 1646, Secretary of State for War, 'Situation in Mesopotamia', 17 July, 1920.
[6] FO371/5231/13975: 'Appreciation of the Mesopotamia-Persia Situation by Sir P. Cox', 27 July, 1920, circulated to the Cabinet by Lord Curzon, 30 July, 1920.
[7] FO371/5229/E10060: copy of F. Parry, Secretary of the Euphrates and Tigris Steam Navigation Company to the Political Department, India Office, 30 July, 1920. Parry was concerned about the effect of widespread unrest on the company's existing service in the event that the river was affected; and E10061: copy of [signature illegible] Director of David Sassoon and Company Ltd., to the Secretary of State for India, 30 July, 1920. The Sassoon Company was seeking to develop land for

Lack of finance post-war had seen the abandonment of projects begun by the civil and military authorities during the war, yet reports issued from the office of the Civil Commissioner in late 1919 reflected his optimism regarding agricultural development, and the prospect of increasing production further by the use of modern agricultural machinery, fuelled by oil.[8] The prospect of future agricultural development appeared slim, however, while the country was caught in the grip of unrest.

While not immediately apparent, the final settlement of the Mesopotamian muddle drew closer, or so it seemed, when Feisal and his entourage were evicted from Syria by French military forces on 28 July 1920.[9] In May, apparently Wilson had undergone a complete reversal of opinion. Hitherto opposed to the selection of Abdullah as head of state for Mesopotamia, and dismissive of the agitation emanating from the Baghdadis with Feisal in Syria,[10] he enquired if the government would consider the possibility of offering the Emirate of Mesopotamia to Feisal.[11] The Army commander, Lieut.-General Haldane, agreed that the deteriorating situation required 'some drastic diplomatic action' such as suggested by Wilson, but

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cotton-growing and the cultivation of poppies for the opium market in China, and was concerned that if the British troops were withdrawn its existing investments, and the development of the country, would be jeopardised.

[8] L/P&S/10/368, P.1283/1913, register no. 6643: H. St. J. Philby, 'The Cultivation of Cotton in Mesopotamia, Preliminary Memorandum', undated. Appendix VII to 'Conditions of Trade in Mesopotamia', prepared in the office of the Civil Commissioner, Baghdad, by C. Watkins, Chief Collector of Customs, Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force, December, 1919.

[9] For an appraisal of Feisal's reign in Syria, and his eviction by the French see J. Nevakivi, *Britain, France and the Arab Middle East 1914-1920*, 177-80, 190, 196-219; E. Kedourie*, England and the Middle East,* 166-174; B.C. Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs*, 355-377, and the more recent contribution of Ephraim & Inari Karsh, *Empires of the Sand,* 280-287.

[10] L/P&S/10/757, P.4722/1918, part 3, register no. 3899: Civil Commissioner, Baghdad, telegram no. 5803 to Secretary of State for India, 15 May, 1920.

[11] L/P&S/10/919, register no. 5876: Civil Commissioner, Baghdad, telegram no. 9249 to Secretary of State for India, 31 July, 1920.

he stressed that without the good-will of the local population, the only hope of holding the country would entail reinforcing, rather than reducing the British garrisons.'[12] In the context of military considerations, Wilson's change of mind would appear to have been inspired by pragmatic calculations in the face of necessity, rather than a sudden conversion to the Sharifian cause.[13]

A diplomatic breakthrough of sorts was achieved when on 10 August the Ottoman Peace Delegation signed the Treaty of Sèvres. But the influence of the Ottoman regime was fading, while the Nationalist Parliament convoked at Ankara in April, spurred on by Greek and Allied military action in Anatolia, endorsed Mustafa Kemal's appeal for resistance to the Treaty.[14] Nonetheless, with neither the Peace Treaty nor the terms of the mandate ratified, and with ongoing unrest in Mesopotamia, the British government forged ahead with its future plans, albeit not without obstacles.

Instructions for the establishment of a provisional administration for Cox's guidance were drafted by India Office officials and discussed at the Cabinet Finance Committee in August. The draft stated that in principle, the government favoured Wilson's suggestion that Feisal should be offered the Emirate of Mesopotamia, on condition that the people asked for him, that he accept the terms of the draft

[12] L/P&S/10/919, register no. 5876: copy of paraphrase telegram X.9639 from General Headquarters Mesopotamia to War Office, repeated to India Office, 31 July, 1920.
[13] B.C. Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs*, 414, and J. Keay, *Sowing the Wind,* 151, support that conclusion.
[14] M. Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian Vision*, 128.

mandate, and that French opposition to his appointment could be overcome. Further, the instructions continued,

> it is possible that Sherif Feisal, by the light of his experience with the French Government in regard to Syria, may, while accepting the principle of a Mandate and Great Britain as Mandatory, press for the expression of its terms in treaty form. Should this prove the case, His Majesty's Government will be prepared to entertain the proposal.[15]

Cox's instructions were approved by Cabinet, but he was also given discretion to make arrangements as he saw fit in order to implement the policy announced in June.[16] However, as Curzon explained, when the proposal had been put to the French delegates at a recent conference, it had been represented that the French Government would consider Feisal's appointment as head of state in Mesopotamia as an 'unfriendly act.' Yet Curzon optimistically assured Cabinet that in two years 'opinion in Mesopotamia would have coalesced in favour of Feisal', and French opposition to his appointment 'might have died down.' On this assurance, it was decided that Cox should proceed to Mesopotamia as High Commissioner as soon as possible.[17] In deference to the French government, however, five days later Cabinet approved a revised set of instructions, in which there was no mention of Feisal. Rather, Cox was instructed to seek further consultation with the local population regarding their preference for the form of government and head of state.[18]

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[15] L/P&S/10/919, P.5876/1920, register no. 5876: 'Mesopotamia: Appointment of Sir Percy Cox as High Commissioner: Instruction of His Majesty's Government', India Office, 28 August, 1920.
[16] CAB/23/22: Cabinet Finance Committee, 27th minutes, 12 August, 1920.
[17] Ibid.
[18] CAB23/22, 49(20): Conclusions of a Conference of Ministers, 17 August, 1920. See T. J. Paris, *Britain, the Hashemites and Arab Rule 1920-1925,* 75-79, for a detailed analysis of the negotiations between Cox and the Foreign and India Offices, which culminated in Cox receiving a revised version of the original draft instructions.

Given previous resistance to one of the sons of Hussein, it might seem surprising that it was officials at the India Office who devised the programme, but it is likely that the same considerations which motivated Wilson's change of mind were at work, and indeed, Montagu's imprint regarding a treaty relationship was clearly visible.[19] The plan for Feisal in Mesopotamia could not be implemented while unrest continued, however, and certainly not before Feisal had been consulted, but the seed had been sown.

Meanwhile, another opportunity for centralising control in a single department was lost. When Curzon raised the question again,[20] Cabinet postponed discussions, electing to continue with the existing fractious arrangements.[21] As a result, inter-departmental friction continued in London, and in Baghdad the traditional rivalry between military and civil authorities re-emerged. On learning that Cox was returning as high commissioner, General Haldane protested that with the country under martial law, the appointment of a high commissioner was undesirable and would inevitably result in friction similar to the dispute between Cox and Maude in 1917. Rather, he suggested that Cox's appointment should be delayed until November, when it was anticipated that order would have been restored.[22] Haldane may have been mollified by an assurance from the War Office that Cox's responsibilities would not impinge upon those of the military

[19] L/P&S/10/919, P.5876/1920, register no. P.5876: 'Mesopotamia: Appointment of Sir Percy Cox as High Commissioner: Instructions of His Majesty's Government', India Office, 28 August, 1920.
[20] Curzon Papers, F112/281, f. 39: C.P. 1777, 'A Middle Eastern Department', 16 August, 1920.
[21] Cab/23/22, 49(20), Conclusions of a Conference of Ministers, 17 August, 1920.
[22] FO371/5229/10458: copy of G.C.O. Mesopotamia, X.9895, part 1, to War Office, 21 August, 1920. Haldane made no mention of this friction in his memoir, *The Insurrection in Mesopotamia*, Edinburgh & London, Blackwood & Sons, 1922.

commander,[23] but the friction continued in London. While the bureaucrats in the Foreign Office agreed that Cox's appointment should be delayed,[24] ultimately Curzon decided that Cox should proceed to Mesopotamia as soon as possible, in order to ensure Wilson's removal.[25]

In the meantime, inter-departmental friction over Mesopotamia escalated into a bureaucratic 'paper war', possibly sparked by T.E. Lawrence's much-discussed press campaign in the London *Times* in August, denouncing Wilson and lionising Feisal.[26] At the Foreign Office, civil servants trawled through the files in order to demonstrate how often India Office officials had complained about Wilson, and how it was the India Office's indecision over future policy which had led to 'delay and disaster'.[27] Whatever his personal opinion may have been, Montagu supported his man against criticism from the War Office and the Chief of Air Staff. In July, the Army Council joined the chorus, criticising the Mesopotamian authorities for the

> too frequent use of the military for punitive measures combined with promiscuous bombing from the air, which cannot be ensured to punish only the guilty, but will only serve to embitter the population of Mesopotamia against the British Administration.[28]

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[23] FO371/5229/10526: War Office to G.O.C. Mesopotamia, 25 August, 1920.
[24] FO371/5229/10458: C. M. Patrick minute, 22 August, 1920.
[25] Ibid, Curzon minute, 22 August, 1920. Essentially, aside from Wilson's apparent inability to accept the changes wrought by the First World War, the chief difficulty in 1920 lay in the fact that having given the men in Mesopotamia a long leash, the India Office required a firmer hand than Montagu's to bring them to heel. Wilson's contumacy from June to October 1920 has been well documented. See B.C. Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs*, chapters 7 & 8; P.W. Ireland, *Iraq*, 136-221; J. Fisher, *Curzon and British Imperialism in the Middle East*, 244-257; P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 19-34.
[26] *The Times* (London): 'Emir Feisal: Creator of the Arab Army: A Modern Saladin', 7 August 1920, 9; and 'Emir Feisal: The Sykes-Picot Treaty: Impatient Arabs', 11 August 1920, 9.
[27] Curzon Papers, F112/257, ff. 24-28: J.A. Tilley letter to Curzon, 22 August, 1920, f. 21; C.M. Patrick memorandum, 22 August 1920.
[28] CAB/24/109, C.P. 1696: H.J. Creedy for the Army Council to the India Office, 22 July, 1920, circulated to Cabinet by the Secretary of State for War.

More significantly, following Cox's departure for Mesopotamia at the end of August, Curzon's suspicions regarding his intentions lingered. The India Office was informed that

> Lord Curzon considers that the only hope of achieving our object lies in the early association of Arabs with the real government of Mesopotamia. He does not suppose these considerations are absent from the mind of Sir Percy Cox; but it may be well if the I.O. agrees to remind him of these at the outset of the very difficult tasks upon which he is about to enter.[29]

At a meeting of the Cabinet shortly thereafter, Montagu stressed the necessity of settling the differences between the India Office and the War Office regarding Cox's functions. He assumed that Cabinet had given Cox the authority to implement the policy agreed upon immediately upon his return to Baghdad, yet the War Office doggedly insisted that no attempt should be made to set up a provisional administration until order had been restored. But the War Office concerns were dismissed and Montagu was instructed to inform Cox that he was to go ahead as previously instructed.[30] Such was the level of interdepartmental animosity that Shuckburgh celebrated the fact that the India Office had 'defeated [the] WO on [the] status of Cox.'[31]

Given the mounting cost to the British taxpayer for the restoration of order in Mesopotamia, and no apparent action on the policy declared in June, by September, growing public anger was again reflected in the press.[32] However, the worst of the violence had been suppressed by the time Cox arrived in Basra on 5

[29] FO371/5229/10440, C. M. Patrick, Foreign Office, to the Under-Secretary of State for India, 11 September, 1920.
[30] CAB/23/22, 51(20), Conclusions of the Cabinet, 15 September, 1920.
[31] L/P&S/10/802, register no. 6913: J.E. Shuckburgh to Under-Secretary of State, 21 September, 1920.
[32] *The Times*: 2 September, 1920, 9; 6 September, 1920, 9.

October,[33] to the accompaniment of a 17-gun salute. The full colonial ceremonial greeting, reminiscent of Curzon's progress around the Persian Gulf in 1903, was hardly consistent with the government's declared intention to relax the degree of British control hitherto imposed, but rather served to emphasise British prestige and power.[34] The pageant at Basra was followed by a stately procession up-river, where Cox paused at a number of towns on the way for consultations with the local notables, and thence to Baghdad, where he was installed at the Residency as British High Commissioner, the position to which he had aspired since 1917. He later paid a flying visit to Mosul, where consultations with a gathering of local notables also took place.[35]

Cox's report of the discussions was strikingly similar to the results of Wilson's survey two years previously. While stating that there was no unanimity regarding Mesopotamia's future, he expected no difficulty from the residents of Basra, who appreciated the benefits of British control. Moreover, he was confident that those consulted in Baghdad and Mosul, in favour of an indigenous government and less enthusiastic about a continuing British presence in the country 'could be persuaded to accept us'.[36] According to instructions, Cox outlined his plan for the establishment of a provisional Council of Ministers, predominantly Arab, but also including representatives from the Kurdish, Jewish and Christian communities. The

[33] FO371/5231/12757: copy of telegram W.78, Sir A. Wilson to Secretary of State for India, 5 October, 1920.
[34] On the links between prestige and power, see David French, 'The Dardanelles, Mecca and Kut: Prestige as a Factor in British Eastern Strategy, 1914-1916', 45-61.
[35] L/P&S/10/764, P.4722/18, part 12, register no. 304, Paper B.363, 'Mesopotamia: Establishment of Council of State for Iraq', 30 November, 1920.
[36] L/P&S/10/764, P.4722/1918, part 12, register no. 304, Paper B.363, 'Mesopotamia: Establishment of Council of State for Iraq', 30 November, 1920, appendix XII(a), H.E. the H.C., Baghdad to Secretary of State for India, telegram no. 12986, 26 October, 1920.

Naqib of Baghdad was invited to become the President of the Council, which was to consist of eight members holding portfolios for the existing British-run departments, with the former British heads of department remaining as advisers, all subject to Cox's ultimate control.[37] He incurred Montagu's displeasure however, when the details of his arrangements were received at the India Office. Reluctant to give approval to Cox's scheme, Montagu charged that it amounted to little more than a British protectorate.[38] Hirtzel reminded Montagu that Cox was given the latitude to make his own arrangements, and furthermore, pointed to the fact that Cox was aware that 'if he refers everything for previous sanction he will never get any answers.' [39] Hirtzel's comment suggests that he recognised that the complaints issuing from the Foreign Office regarding the India Office's handling of Mesopotamian affairs were justified. However, given the level of animosity between the two departments, it would never do to admit the fact openly.

Political issues aside, at the end of November, both Cox and Haldane expressed fears regarding a threat to Mesopotamia from a possible Turko-Bolshevik alliance. They believed that if the Greek offensive in Anatolia was successful, it would relieve the pressure on the Turkish Nationalists who would turn their attention to regaining Mosul.[40] At the same time, reports received in London

[37] L/P&S/10/764, P.4722/1918, part 12, register no. 304, High Commissioner, Baghdad, telegram no. 12987 to Secretary of State for India, 26 October, 1920, Appendix XII(b) to Paper B.363: 'Mesopotamia: Establishment of Council of State for Iraq', November, 1920.
[38] L/P&S/10/764, P.4722/1918, part 12, register no. P.8199: High Commissioner, Baghdad, no. 13829, 13 November, 1920; Montagu note, 22 November 1920; Montagu note on Hirtzel minute, 24 November, 1920.
[39] Ibid, Hirtzel minute on Montagu note, 24 November, 1920.
[40] CAB24/117: C.P. 2383, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Mesopotamia, to the War Office, X.767, 'Reduction of the British Garrison in Mesopotamia'. 28 November, 1920; L/P&S/10/919,

suggested that the Russians were providing the Nationalist forces in the Caucasus and Asia Minor with military support and money.[41] While the threat was recognised in London, Ministers seemed to have been preoccupied with the ongoing debate on the centralisation of control.

In December, Churchill tried a new approach, informing Cabinet that given criticism of expenditure on Mesopotamia was increasing daily, even from government supporters, he suggested that the public would favour a policy of military withdrawal from Persia and Mesopotamia, together with the devolution of power to the local administration, assisted by locally-recruited levies in order to reduce the British forces in the country.[42] Furthermore, he emphasised

> the difficulties which inevitably arose when Departments like the War Office had to bear on their Votes the cost of policies over which they had no control. In his own case, the War Office was called upon to provide funds for the development of Palestine and Mesopotamia … a system vicious and difficult to justify.[43]

Alternatively, a suggestion was made, not for the first time, to reduce the area occupied and administered by Britain. Churchill countered that if the British government did not settle with Kemal's Turkish Nationalists, it would be necessary to either evacuate Mesopotamia altogether, or hold it by force of arms. Given the prevailing public sentiment, acknowledged by Churchill, it is doubtful if that solution would have found favour. Rather, while ministers were requested not to sanction

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P.576/1920, register no. 13787, High Commissioner, Baghdad, to the Secretary of State for India, 12 November, 1920.

[41] CAB24/115: C.P. 2138, 'Report of the Cabinet sub-committee consisting of the Secretaries of State for Foreign Affairs, War, and India', 24 November, 1920.

[42] CAB23/23: minutes of a Conference of Ministers, 1 December, 1920. See D. Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control*, 24: by December 1920, there were 17,000 British, and 85,000 Indian troops stationed in Mesopotamia, at an approximate cost of £30,000,000 per annum.

[43] CAB23/23: minutes of a Conference of Ministers, 1December, 1920.

any announcements regarding a reduction of the Mesopotamian garrison before prior consultation with Cox, it was decided that he should be made aware that as a result of public opinion, it was necessary to reconsider the policy for Mesopotamia. However, discussion on what the new policy requirements may have been was postponed.[44] With no decision on future policy, as the year drew to a close the confusion increased.

In mid-December, Churchill informed Cabinet that given that the General Staff were of the opinion that Mesopotamia and Northern Persia were of no importance to the defence of India, he supported their proposal for the withdrawal of British troops to Basra. However, Ministers were informed that the military and political chiefs on the spot disagreed. According to Haldane, if there was an attack from the regions evacuated, the same number of troops would be required to hold Basra alone as those presently holding the entire country. From a political perspective, it was represented that if it was the government's policy to withdraw to Basra, 'the British mandate would be destroyed, the local Arab Government would disappear' and the Bolsheviks and Turks would 'enter into the vacuum thus created.' [45] Further discussion was adjourned until the afternoon sitting of Cabinet, which Sir Arnold Wilson was scheduled to attend.

It was a mark of the general confusion and ignorance in London of conditions on the spot that a man almost universally castigated for his administrative methods, and his reluctance to swim with the new political currents post-war, would be

[44] Ibid.
[45] CAB/23/23, 69 (20), Conclusions of a Conference of Ministers, 13 December, 1920.

consulted by policy-makers adrift in a sea of indecision. Reflecting the sentiments of Indian officials generally with regard to Mesopotamia's oil, Wilson advised that it would be worth the cost involved to hold the entire country,

> because of the immense undeveloped potentialities of Mesopotamia in raw materials, more especially cotton, oil and cereals. Mesopotamia would be able to support the burden of the debt incurred in retaining it, if the oil proved a success.[46]

On the subject of Feisal, he appeared to have retreated from his earlier position, conceding that 'as a last resort' Feisal would do 'for the purpose of forming an Arab Government', but he doubted if Feisal would enjoy the support of the Sunni Muslim Kurds in Mosul province; and their support would be vital, given that two-thirds of the Arab Muslim population of Baghdad and Basra provinces were Shi'a, whereas Feisal was a Sunni and a foreigner to boot. The meeting closed with Cabinet yet again unable to reach a decision on future policy in Mesopotamia.[47] In the interim, while Ministers dithered, Cox was busy developing plans for the future which marked the beginning of the deception and manipulation of local public opinion which accompanied the creation of the state of Iraq.

In late December, Cox informed Montagu that on the subject of a ruler for the new state, he believed that the

> majority would prefer to have the question decided for them, or at any rate that we should give them a lead … if for example, the way is now clear for Faisal, I think, *prima facie*, that the best way to give him an opening would be to inspire a Reuter to the effect that the French had now withdrawn their opposition to Faisal's candidature, and that, if the people of Irak wanted him, His Majesty's Government were prepared to accept him. He would then be able formally to offer himself.[48]

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[46] Ibid.
[47] CAB/23/23, 69(20), Conclusions of a Conference of Ministers, 13 December, 1920.
[48] CAB/24/118: High Commissioner, Baghdad, no. 123 S., to Secretary of State for India, 26 December, 1920. The international news agency Reuters, to which the home newspapers

Moreover, Cox believed that Feisal was preferable to any local candidate. Given his participation in the Arab Revolt, together with the support of the ex-Ottoman Army Mesopotamians in Syria, 'Faisal would be in a position to raise National Army quicker than any candidate from Irak.'[49] In Cox's estimation, the selection of Feisal would solve the two most pressing problems for the British government in Mesopotamia: the cost of maintaining an army of occupation, and at the same time, satisfying the 'nationalists' that their demands were being met.

By the end of the year, while a provisional Arab administration was functioning under Cox's control, and, furthermore, the general lines of future policy for Mesopotamia had been outlined in his despatch, Cabinet remained indecisive. The principle stumbling block was that no decision had yet been taken on the centralisation of responsibility for the Middle East, and until that decision was made, the formulation of a policy which met the requirements of all the departments concerned was well-nigh impossible. So it was that after two years of inertia, the argument for a Middle East Department reached its climax in December, following Montagu's offer to hand over responsibility for Mesopotamia to the Foreign Office. He had originally thought the Colonial Office would be preferable, but after discussing the matter with Cox he stated, 'I am anxious to avoid taking any

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subscribed, was often the first to report news from abroad. Seemingly, 'inspiring a Reuter' was part of Cox's toolbox of deceptive practices.

[49] CAB/24/117, C.P. 2379: High Commissioner, Baghdad to Secretary of State for India, 27 December, 1920.

steps which would look like annexation to the British Empire of mandated territory.'[50]

On the last day of the year, Churchill drew the strands of the two interconnected arguments together in an attempt to nudge the Cabinet into making a decision. He proposed two alternatives: either the General Staff proposal for withdrawal to Basra, or the creation of 'a Department, the Ministerial head of which should be responsible for the policy and for obtaining the money to carry out that policy.' Given the strong arguments presented in favour of both the Foreign and Colonial Offices, the question was put to a vote.[51] The result of the ballot revealed that the majority of ministers preferred the Colonial Office, where it was decided to set up a new Middle East department, and an inter-departmental committee was to be appointed 'to work out details, including the date of transfer'.[52]

Cox's recent proposal was also discussed, and it was pointed out that if Feisal was appointed King of Iraq with the assent of the Arabs, disturbances from Syria and other Arab territories would be unlikely. However, Curzon reminded Cabinet that French opposition had yet to be overcome. Once again, no decision

[50] Curzon Papers, F112/281: C.P. 2348, E.S. Montagu paper, 22 December, 1920.
[51] S. Roskill, *Hankey: Man of Secrets*, vol. II, 202. According to Roskill's account, the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, Andrew Bonar Law, Lord Privy Seal, and five others voted for the Colonial Office; Lord Curzon, Austen Chamberlain, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Edwin Montagu, Viscount Milner, Secretary of State for the Colonies, and H.A.L. Fisher, President of the Board of Education, voted for the Foreign Office. M. Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill, vol. IV*, 507: Milner voted against his own department, since he was planning to resign from the government, and wanted no added responsibilities laid upon his Office in the interim. See also E. Maisel, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy*, 223.
[52] CAB/23/23, 82(20), Cabinet Conclusions, 31 December, 1920.

was made.[53] Cox was informed that while his proposal was under consideration, the Cabinet required more details as to how acceptable Feisal's candidature for the throne would be to the local population, and whether the notables were likely to elect him.[54] The reply from Cox must have come as something of a surprise when it arrived at the India Office. He claimed that he had promoted Feisal under the impression that the War Office proposed to withdraw to the Basra Vilayet. The misunderstanding, or lack of communication, which prompted Cox's response, also revealed that his ideas regarding Basra had not changed since 1918. While reluctant to evacuate the country, he agreed that if the Mosul and Baghdad Vilayets were abandoned, the mandate should be refused, and in that case 'we should hold only the port of Basra under full British administration, with so much of the surrounding territory as is necessary for the protection of the port and oilfields' in south-west Persia. But he added that if, on the basis of his suggestion regarding Feisal, it was decided to accept the mandate, he would prefer that the government take the initiative in his promotion. As to the opinions of the local notables, Cox claimed they could not be consulted, due to their preoccupation with local matters relating to the present provisional government and the elections for the future Constituent Assembly.[55] However, upon receipt of a report of a conversation between the French Prime Minister, M. Leygues, and Lord Charles Hardinge, the British

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[53] Ibid.

[54] CAB/24/118, C.P. 2412, Secretary of State for India, no. 4387, to High Commissioner, Baghdad, 31 December, 1920.

[55] CAB/24/118, C.P. 2412: High Commissioner, Baghdad, no. 148 S., to Secretary of State for India, 2 January, 1921. See FO371/5231/12756: C.M. Patrick to Lord Curzon, 20 October, 1920 on Viceroy, paraphrase telegram no. 7526, to the Secretary of State for India, 15 October, 1920. At the beginning of August, the Civil Commissioner had appointed a committee to review the Ottoman electoral law in preparation for the election of a representative assembly which would be required to promulgate the constitution of the new state.

Ambassador in Paris, which revealed that French opposition to Feisal had not wavered, Cabinet shelved the matter.[56]

According to Timothy Paris, while Curzon did not oppose the Feisal policy, he 'lacked the energy to bring it to fruition'.[57] It can be argued, to the contrary, that during the period while the Middle East Department was being set up, for a short time a vacuum existed as far as policy in Mesopotamia was concerned. It was during this time that Curzon seized the opportunity to initiate the policy which the Colonial Office later pursued. Despite Cabinet indecision, on Curzon's instructions Kinahan Cornwallis, the former Director of the Arab Bureau on temporary assignment to the Foreign Office, met with Feisal who had been residing in London since December, in order to discover if he was in fact willing to accept the position of king of Iraq. Initially Feisal demurred in favour of Abdullah, but during the course of the conversation, signalled his willingness to accept the position so long as he was informed of the type of government contemplated, and Abdullah was suitably compensated.[58] Following the interview, Cornwallis concluded that there were two alternatives: either to arrange for Abdullah to go to Mesopotamia and take his chances, or to 'instruct Sir P. Cox quietly and unostentatiously to engineer the election of Feisal.' The former course, he believed, would be the easier, implying that it would not involve the government in any deception or loss of prestige if

[56] FO371/6349/594: Cabinet Office paper dated 12 January, 1921, with extract from Cabinet meeting 1(21), 4 January, 1921.
[57] T.J. Paris, *Britain, the Hashemites, and Arab rule, 1920-1925*, 367. Furthermore, Paris seems to have overlooked the fact that following the demise of Curzon's committee in 1920, it was not within his purview as Foreign Secretary to implement policy in Mesopotamia while it was still under the nominal control of the India Office.
[58] FO371/6349/583: 'Notice of an Interview with the Emir Feisal', K. Cornwallis, 7 January, 1921.

Abdullah failed to make good. On the other hand, he believed that Feisal was 'by far the better man and would serve us loyally and well.'[59] Montagu reassured Cox that despite Cabinet's indecision, the government was not, in principle, opposed to Feisal's candidature, provided he was acceptable to the local population. However, he expressed concern that the procedure for introducing Feisal into Mesopotamia developed by Cox was not 'sufficiently circumspect for purpose.'[60]

The formulation of policy for Mesopotamia, however, now rested with Winston Churchill,[61] for whom the reduction of military expenditure in Mesopotamia, rather than the question of a head of state, was the principal objective. In fact Churchill knew little about Hussein, his sons, their participation in the Arab Revolt, or the sectarian divisions within Islam.[62] Under Churchill's management, 'swift action, considerable secrecy and a certain disregard of traditional scruples about the means used'[63] became the guiding principles for the formulation and implementation of policy in the Middle East in general and Mesopotamia in particular. Tense communications between Churchill and Cox in January and February 1921 illustrate the contrast in styles of the two Secretaries of State, Montagu and Churchill, particularly in their relations with Cox.

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[59] Ibid, Cornwallis minute, 8 January, 1921.
[60] FO371/6349/E557: copy of Secretary of State for India to High Commissioner, Baghdad, 9 January, 1921.
[61] While Churchill's appointment as Colonial Secretary was not formalised until 14 February, from the beginning of January, while still Secretary of State for War, it is clear from correspondence with Cox, that he was making suggestions on future policy for Mesopotamia, rather than Montagu. For a thorough analysis of Churchill's appointment see M. Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill, vol. IV*, 507-530, and for the documents and correspondence for the period January to 14 February, see the *Companion* volume, part 2, 1289-1292, 1295-1301, 1308-13, 1347-1348.
[62] W.R. Polk, *Understanding Iraq*, New York, Harper Collins, 2005, 80.
[63] P. Kennedy, *The Realities Behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy, 1865-1980,* London, Allen & Unwin, 1981, 171.

Pending Churchill's formal appointment as Secretary of State for the Colonies, Cox was essentially serving two masters. However, he was accustomed to the generally relaxed oversight of the India Office, and as he had in 1917, twice offered his resignation because he objected to Churchill's penchant for making unilateral decisions. The tension escalated following Cox's receipt of a communication from Churchill, outlining his plan to employ a temporary Imperial Police Force, recruited from the local population, to support the Indian military units until the Arab army developed the strength and capacity to defend the country. Together with the implementation of Trenchard's air control scheme, Churchill hoped to reduce the cost of military occupation. Otherwise, he threatened, withdrawal to Basra would be 'inevitable'.[64] Cox, apparently no longer contemplating withdrawal to Basra, maintained that without a significant number of troops to maintain order, the Government would be forced to refuse the mandate. Furthermore, he stated that if the plan sketched by Churchill was government policy, he was not prepared to associate himself with it, and would therefore be forced to tender his resignation. Churchill countered that neither Cabinet nor Parliament would consent to the retention of a large garrison for at least two years for a country 'which we only hold under the League of Nations and are pledged to return to the Arabs at the earliest possible moment'.[65]

[64] L/P&S/11/936, P.3795, part 1, register no. P.160/21: W.S. Churchill, personal and secret telegram no. 1 to High Commissioner, Baghdad, 8 January, 1921.
[65] L/P&S/11/936, P.3795, part 1, register no. P.5559/21: W.S. Churchill to High Commissioner, Baghdad, personal and secret, 16 January, 1921.

In an effort to bolster his argument, Cox turned to Montagu, informing him that reports of the withdrawal of British troops from Northern Persia were creating anxiety in the commercial community, to the extent that certain Baghdad merchants were shipping their stocks to Basra.[66] Later in the month, Cox again threatened to resign, because he believed that the government intended to evacuate Mosul as soon as the withdrawal of the remaining British troops in northern Persia was completed.[67] His threat was unnecessary, however; on the last day of January, the inter-departmental committee appointed at the behest of Cabinet on 31 December submitted its report. [68]

The Committee recommended that the Colonial Office should be responsible for all British Middle Eastern affairs except the Hejaz, where communications would remain with the Foreign Office. On the Arabian littoral of the Persian Gulf, the Government of India would be 'confined to administrative and purely local matters', politically significant matters to be referred to the Colonial Office for concurrence, while relations with Ibn Sa'ud would be handled by the Colonial Office through the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf. During the transition period, the War Office and Air Ministry would act as agents for the Colonial Office in order to put an end to 'the present unsatisfactory system of divided responsibility'; the War Office to

[66] FO371/6349/E886: copy of High Commissioner, Baghdad, to Secretary of State for India, 15 January, 1921.
[67] L/P&S/11/936, P.3795, part 1, register no. 642: High Commissioner, Baghdad, no. 2735, to Secretary of State for India, 26 January, 1921.
[68] Comprising Chairman, Sir James Masterton-Smith, Under-Secretary, Ministry of Labour (on Churchill's recommendation); Sir Herbert Creedy, War Office; Sir Herbert Read, Colonial Office; Mr Russell Scott, Treasury; Mr J.E. Shuckburgh, India Office; Major H.W. Young, Foreign Office, the Committee commenced its deliberations on 11 January and delivered its recommendations on the last day of the month.

eventually 'divest itself of responsibility for military policy in the Middle East'. [69] While the recommendations may have signified a certain measure of centralisation, jurisdiction in the Persian Gulf remained divided.[70] Furthermore, a recommendation for the high commissioner to assume the titular rank of commander-in-chief with ultimate responsibility for military affairs conflicted with the assurances given to the Army Commander in August.[71]

The report also contained an interesting note regarding the organisation of the Middle East Department, stating that any estimate of numbers required depended on policy for the Arabian sphere, 'and the measure of control that it is proposed to exercise from London over the actions of the authorities on the spot.'[72] In that context it is worth noting that prior to the conference scheduled to be held in Cairo in March, Churchill informed Cox that if he could not see his way clear to absenting himself from Mesopotamia for approximately one month, he would make the necessary decisions on the new ruler, the 'size, character and organisation of the garrison … [and the] extent of territory to be held and administered'.[73]

The Colonial Office Middle East Department was established in February 1921. On 8 February, Sir Arthur Hirtzel declined Churchill's request to consider taking the post as head of the new department, preferring to remain at the India

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[69] CAB/24/126: 'Report on the Middle East Conference held in Cairo and Jerusalem', March 12th to 30th, 1921, Appendix I: 'Report of the Inter-departmental Committee under the Chairmanship of Sir James Masterton-Smith', 31 January 1921, 4.
[70] E. Maisel, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1919-1926*, 225.
[71] Ibid, 7.
[72] Ibid, 11.
[73] Curzon Papers, F112/281, ff. 70-71: C.P. 1257, 'Middle Eastern Affairs', Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War, 10 February, 1921, appendix: 'Mesopotamia: Private Telegrams', W.S. Churchill, no. 81, to High Commissioner, Baghdad, 7 February, 1921.

Office. However, on his recommendation, J.E. Shuckburgh was appointed head of the Middle East Department, and Permanent Assistant Under-Secretary of State.[74] The Colonial Office Middle East Department soon set to work preparing an agenda detailing the procedures and timetable for Feisal's introduction into Mesopotamia which formed in large part the future political policy for Mesopotamia.[75] The circulation of a paper by the War Office General Staff, supporting the selection of Feisal for the Mesopotamian throne, signalled that at least the warring Departments of State agreed on the future head of state.[76] All that remained was for authorities from London and the Middle East to gather in Cairo to devise 'an immediate programme for reducing the Army of Occupation'.[77]

The debates over centralisation of control and future military policy revealed that in the fractious polycratic system, the differences of opinion were not over the ends of imperial policy, but rather, the means by which Britain could retain its hold on Mesopotamia at the lowest possible cost. After three years of fruitless debate, Cabinet was forced into making a compromise decision to centralise control in the

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[74] M. Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill, vol. IV*, 524, 582, 633, and the *Companion* volume, part 2, 1347-8: W.S. Churchill to Sir James Masterton-Smith, 13 February, 1921, c/f Churchill Papers 17/15: Churchill set out his preference for the other appointments one week later, all of whom were duly appointed. Major Hubert Young was appointed head of the political and administrative branch; T.E. Lawrence became adviser on Arabian affairs, and R.V. Vernon, from the Board of Education, was appointed to head the Finance branch. Other appointments included Reader Bullard, formerly of the Mesopotamian civil administration, and John Hathorn Hall, transferred from the Revenue Department of the Egyptian administration. In April, Richard Meinertzhagen, the chief political officer in Palestine and Syria, 1919-1920, was appointed as Military Adviser. See also P.W. Ireland, *Iraq*, 310-11.

[75] CAB/24/126: 'Report on the Middle East Conference held in Cairo and Jerusalem, March 12th to 30th, 1921', Section I, Appendix 2: 'Memorandum drawn up in London by the Middle East Department prior to the Cairo Conference'.

[76] FO371/6349/E2279: General Staff, War Office, 'The Proposed Kingdom of Mesopotamia', 17 February, 1921.

[77] CAB/24/126, C.P. 3123: Report on Middle East Conference held in Cairo and Jerusalem, March 12th to 30th, 1921, 'Agenda for Discussions on Mesopotamia', Appendix 5, 36.

Colonial Office largely as a result of Churchill's persistence. But during the period of vacillation, there were hints that the future, according to the plans of the peacemakers in Paris, was not the future some of the policymakers envisaged. Furthermore, exogenous factors impinged on Mesopotamian policy stemming from the decisions of the peacemakers in Paris, ongoing misgivings regarding the League of Nations, and the rise of Mustapha Kemal's Turkish Nationalists in Angora, determined to claim territory lost during the war. Moreover, Russia reappeared in the east in a different guise, not as an ally, but as an ideological and perceived military threat, and an ally of the Turkish Nationalists. Despite misgivings regarding the League of Nations, it is clear that by accepting the mandates for Mesopotamia and Palestine, the League was to be used as leverage to secure British interests. Moreover, the mandates system appeared to offer a means by which the difficulties associated with constructing a predominantly Arab state, which could survive the transition from direct to indirect control, could be managed at little cost to the empire, while at the same time, safeguarding British interests, traditional and newly-acquired. Nonetheless, the mandate presented fresh challenges to British policy-makers.

The Mesopotamian Mandate:

The architects of the mandates system did not set a time frame for the period of tutelage. However, the 'A' class categorisation applied to the mandates for Palestine, Mesopotamia and Syria indicated that those states would be the first

to attain independent status.[78] As noted earlier, Balfour anticipated that the 'machinery of inspection' which the League of Nations would require, would be a source of possible conflict between the League and the Mandatory power.[79] Furthermore, together with the hopes expressed in Winterton's petition to Lloyd George in June 1920, there were early indications that some ministers also hoped that the period of mandatory control would be brief. During debates on the centralisation of control in June 1920, Montagu expressed his hope that the government's obligations as a mandatory power would be 'transitory and diminishing'.[80] Montagu's aim to hasten the transition from direct to indirect British control in Mesopotamia was consonant with his preoccupation with constitutional reform in India, and his concerns regarding the effect of the Ottoman settlement on India's Muslim population.[81] Somewhat surprisingly, Curzon too, hoped that the mandated territories would achieve independence 'at a comparatively early stage', obviating the necessity for the establishment of a new department.[82] There was also early confusion in London over responsibility for formulating the terms by which the mandates were to be exercised. At the

[78] See Curzon Papers, F112/288, ff. 97-100: 'Report Presented by the Belgian Representative, M. Hymans, and adopted by the Council of the League of Nations, meeting at San Sebastian on the 5th August, 1920'. The categories of the mandates were decided by a committee in Paris in early 1919, headed by Lord Milner. The 'A' class was applied to the former Ottoman territories, given that in Article 22 of the League Covenant, they had been recognised as provisionally independent.
[79] FO608/242: W.C.P. 42, A.J. Balfour note, 27 January, 1919. Flinders University Library, 'Peace Conference: Original Correspondence, 1919-1920', (microform), The Australian Joint Copying Project. The Prime Ministers of New Zealand, Australia, Canada and South Africa, awarded the mandates for the former German territories south of the equator, opposed the system altogether, resulting in heated debates among the members of the British Delegation in Paris. See C.L. Upthegrove, *Empire by Mandate,* 15.
[80] Curzon Papers, F112/281, ff. 22-23: C.P. 1402: E.S. Montagu, 'Mesopotamia and the Middle East', 1 June, 1920.
[81] S.D. Waley, *Edwin Montagu,* 239-243.
[82] Curzon Papers, F112/281, ff. 25-26: C.P. 1434, Lord Curzon, 'Future Administration of Mesopotamia, 8 June, 1920. Curzon's hopes may have related to the fact that he was, at that time, arguing for Foreign Office control of British Middle Eastern affairs, and communications with an independent Iraq would naturally fall to the Foreign Office.

beginning of July, Lord Robert Cecil, now serving as a British representative to the League Assembly, complained that there were three different statements from three members of the government.[83] Some of the confusion was resolved in August, when the Council of the League adopted the recommendations in a report submitted by Paul Hymans, the Belgian representative. Accordingly, responsibility for defining the terms of the mandates and the delimitation of the frontiers between the mandated territories rested with the Allied Powers. Only after the draft terms had been submitted to the League, would the mandates be formally recognised.[84]

The issue of sovereignty over the mandated territories, however, remained unclear. The Council adopted Hymans' recommendation for 'double' sovereignty, to be held by the League and the Mandatory power, governing in the name of the League.[85] W.R. Louis observed that while the British government objected to the implication that authority to govern the mandates ultimately rested with the League, the Council's decision was reluctantly accepted.[86]

The terms of the mandates for Palestine and Mesopotamia were drafted in August and September 1920, by officials from the Foreign and India Offices in

[83] *The Times*, 1 July, 1920, 12: Lord Robert Cecil, 'Mandates'. According to Cecil, Balfour had stated that the Peace Conference would decide the terms; Lloyd George had stated that the government would submit the terms to the League of Nations, while Curzon had stated that according to article 22 of the Covenant, members of the League could decide amongst themselves without reference to the League.
[84] Curzon Papers, F112/288, ff. 97-100: 'Report presented by the Belgian Representative, M. Hymans, and adopted by the Council of the League of Nations, meeting at San Sebastian on the 5th August, 1920'.
[85] Ibid.
[86] W.R. Louis, 'The United Kingdom and the Beginning of the Mandates System, 1919-1922', *International Organization*, Vol. 23, no. 1, (Winter, 1969), (73-96), 76, accessed 26/09/11.

consultation with the local authorities, and reviewed by Curzon's Interdepartmental Conference.[87] Based on Article 22 of the Covenant, and Article 132 of the Treaty of Sèvres, in which the Ottoman government renounced sovereignty over the three Vilayets, the draft terms defined the obligations and responsibilities of the mandatory power in relation to the League of Nations and Mesopotamia.[88] The mandate concept accorded with Britain's intention to rule Mesopotamia indirectly, however during the drafting process there were signs that some of the policy makers objected to the nature and extent of the obligations to which the draft committed the British government.

Montagu argued that the draft mandate was 'disastrous': the cost of maintaining peace during the transition to independence would place a burden on the Treasury which would be unacceptable to the British taxpayer. Consistent with his earlier insistence on a treaty relationship, Montagu informed Curzon that he wished to form an Arab government at once in order to relieve the government of responsibility for the country as quickly as possible.[89] On the other hand, Curzon believed that in order to create the 'rudiments' of an independent state, at the outset it would be necessary to exercise the full powers afforded by the draft

[87] B.C. Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs*, 419. In December, the British and French Governments agreed on the boundary between the Syrian and Mesopotamian mandates. L/P&S/10/911, P.4917/1920, register no. P.12/1921: copy of *Convention: Franco-Britannique signee a Paris le 23 Decembre 1920*, signed by M. G. Leygues and Lord Hardinge of Penshurst.
[88] CAB24/115: C.P. 2130, 'Declaration Constituting the Mandate for Mesopotamia', 29 November, 1920.
[89] L/P&S/10/911, P.4917/1920, register no. 7851: E.S. Montagu, 'The Mesopotamian Mandate', 11 October, 1920.

mandate. Nonetheless, he expected no opposition from Geneva or Baghdad if some powers were formally relinquished to the local government if it proved capable.[90]

Curzon's vague assurance received a jolt, however, when it became clear that there was significant opposition to the terms of the mandates. While the German government objected to the Council's decision for the mandatory powers to determine the terms of their mandates, the Japanese government objected to the lack of a guarantee for freedom of trade in the draft mandates.[91] Of more concern, Curzon was informed by Bainbridge Colby, the American Secretary of State, that his government questioned the validity of the Turkish Petroleum Company's pre-war concession, and opposed the provision in the San Remo oil agreement that if a private company was to develop Mesopotamia's oil resources, it would be under permanent British control. This, the American government charged, constituted a British monopoly which ran counter to the ideal of equal opportunity. Furthermore, Colby insisted that as an Associated Allied Power, the United States government retained the right to consider the terms of the mandates prior to their submission to the League.[92] In response, Curzon pressed for the League to pass the mandates promptly,[93] and Balfour requested Sir Eric Drummond, the Secretary-General of the League, to draw the Council's attention to the 'advisability of

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[90] Curzon Papers, F112/288, ff. 30-39: Curzon, private, to E.S. Montagu, 7 October, 1920.
[91] Q. Wright, *Mandates Under the League of Nations*, 51.
[92] CAB/24/120: Enclosure in C.P. 2626: Bainbridge Colby, U.S. Secretary of State, to Lord Curzon, 20 November, 1920. See P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 69-70. Sluglett argues convincingly that the United States' objections initiated the 'long struggle in the post-war years for control of Mesopotamia's oil resources. See also Command Paper 1226, Miscellaneous no. 1, February 1921: 'Correspondence Between His Majesty's Government and the United States Ambassador Respecting Economic Rights in Mandated Territories'. The University of California, Los Angeles, Internet Archive. https://www.archive.org/stream/jismajestyscorresp00grearich/hismajestyscorresp00grearich_djvu.txt, accessed 20/10/14.
[93] CAB/24/114: 'Mandates A', memorandum by Lord Curzon, 30 November, 1920.

bringing to a close the temporary arrangements currently in force.'[94] Accordingly, the draft terms were submitted to the Council on 7 December 1920.[95]

There were, nonetheless, further hurdles to overcome. Curzon was notified by the British High Commissioner in Constantinople that attempts to come to terms with the Turkish Nationalists had failed, [96] and later in the month the Foreign Office informed the French Embassy in London that the Italian Government was opposed to the entry into force of the mandates pending ratification of the Treaty of Sèvres.[97] R. Marrs, assistant secretary in the India Office Political Department, noted that 'technically, [the] Italians are correct, but for the peace of the Middle East, perhaps it is necessary to anticipate a ratification which we and they know may not occur.'[98] Apparently the French Government shared those sentiments, for in January, Sir Charles Hardinge, British Ambassador in Paris, informed the Foreign Office that while the French Government was anxious for the League Council to accept the draft mandates at once, the territories in question remained under Ottoman sovereignty. As the Ottoman government was, in the interim, not bound by the League of Nations Covenant, or by the decisions of the Supreme Council at San Remo, the mandate for Mesopotamia had no legal

[94] Curzon Papers, F112/288, f. 173: B.E.D. 67, A.J. Balfour, British Delegation, Geneva, to Sir E. Drummond, Secretary-General, League of Nations, 6 December, 1920.
[95] CAB/24/114: 'Mandates A', memorandum by Lord Curzon, 30 November, 1920.
[96] *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part II, Series B, vol. 1: Sir Horace Rumbold, High Commissioner, Constantinople, to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 17 December, 1920, 381.
[97] L/P&S/10/911, P.4917/1920, register no. P.331: copy of Foreign Office to M. de Fleuriau, 31 December, 1920.
[98] L/P&S/10/911, P.4917/1920, register no, P.9073, R. Marrs minute, 4 January, 1921 on copy of Foreign Office letter to Signor Preziczi, *charge d'affaires*, Italian Embassy, 28 December, 1920.

standing.[99] As a way of resolving what was in effect, an issue of sovereignty, Hardinge suggested that if the League Council could be persuaded to issue the mandates provisionally, pending ratification of the Treaty of Sèvres, 'the position of the mandatory would, in the opinion of HMG be rendered more stable from a legal point of view'.[100]

To add further to the confusion, after reading the terms of the mandates in the morning papers, Feisal protested to Lord Curzon, claiming, quite rightly, that they did not coincide with the undertakings made to his father in 1915.[101] It is unlikely that Curzon was influenced by Feisal's protest. However, the India Office was informed that Curzon had changed his mind. He now wished to postpone consideration of the mandates by the League, since he believed that the Council was likely to receive further objections to various provisions in the terms. He suggested that the British representative to the Council take the line that a conference of Allied foreign ministers, to be held in London to consider modifications to the terms of the Treaty of Sèvres, coincided with the next scheduled League Council meeting. As a result, the Council would be unaware of any modifications to the treaty when considering the mandates. In any case, Curzon did not believe that a postponement would inconvenience the local authorities.[102] A week later, an interdepartmental conference decided that since Churchill was preparing to travel to Egypt, and needed time to consult with the British

[99] L/P&S/10/911, P.4917/1920, register no. P.331: Hardinge (Paris), no. 87 to Foreign Office, 10 January, 1921, signed L. Oliphant.
[100] Ibid.
[101] FO371/6283/1761, Emir Feisal to Lord Curzon, 6 February, 1921.
[102] L/P&S/10/911, P.4917/1920, register no. P.837, D.G. Osbourne, Foreign Office, to Under-Secretary of State for India, 10 February, 1921.

representatives in Palestine and Mesopotamia, it would be preferable to defer the attempt to secure formalisation of the British mandates to a subsequent Council meeting.[103]

The Cairo Conference, 12-22 March 1921:

A gathering of military, political and Treasury officials from London, Cairo and Baghdad, met for two weeks in Cairo to decide the future shape of the Middle East. It is almost universally recognised by historians that future British policy for Mesopotamia, and Abdullah's compensation as military governor of Transjordan, had been settled prior to the conference.[104] It was the details of the military and financial retrenchments which constituted the principal purpose of the conference, a process which could only be completed in a short space of time by consultation with the authorities on the spot. The political programme for Mesopotamia, developed by the Middle East Department prior to the gathering in Cairo, was approved, and after other potential candidates for the throne had been discussed and rejected, only Feisal remained.[105] Significantly, at the third meeting of the Political Committee, the Middle East Department's timetable for Feisal, which included a proposal to modify the mandate into the form of a treaty, was considered. Aaron Klieman asserts that it was not discussed 'directly', however, the minutes of the meeting record that there was general agreement on the timetable

[103] CAB/24/120, C.P. 2604: 'League of Nations: Summary of a Conference, 17/2/21 to discuss certain questions connected with "A" and "B" mandates'. Members of the conference were A.J. Balfour, Curzon, Churchill, Sir Cecil Hurst, chief legal counsellor to the Foreign Office, Sir H. Lambert, Assistant Under-Secretary, Colonial Office, and J.E. Shuckburgh, Secretary, Political Department, India Office.
[104] B.C. Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs*, 465-466; M. Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill,* Vol. IV, 537; J. Darwin, *Britain, Egypt and the Middle East*, 218; E. Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, 207; P.W. Ireland, *Iraq*, 318.
[105] CAB/24/126: Report on Middle East Conference, Appendix 6: First meeting of the Political Committee, 12 March, 1920, 39-41.

for Feisal's passage to Mesopotamia, which included the possibility of a future treaty relationship.[106]

More importantly, matters including the introduction of Trenchard's air control scheme, the recruitment of local levies to serve as a temporary Imperial police force to supplement the British garrison until an Arab Army was established, and financial arrangements relating to the transfer of assets were discussed and approved. In other words, the recommendations of the conference represented a comprehensive programme of military contraction, reduction of expenses, and devolution of responsibility for the administration of the country, pivoted on the election of Feisal as king of the new state of Iraq.[107] As Lloyd George reminded Churchill, however, Feisal's appointment was conditional on his acceptance of the terms of the mandate.[108]

It is clear that some of the innovations which formed the policy recommendations of the conference at Cairo were not, in fact, new ideas. The settlement resembled in form, if not in geographical scope, the plan for an Arab state under indirect British control conceived by the authorities in Cairo in late 1914. More significantly, Churchill's Sharifian solution was foreshadowed by the

[106] CAB/24/126: Report on Middle East Conference, Appendix VI: 'Timetable': Annexure to Report the minutes of the third meeting of the Political Committee, 14 March 1921, 44-5. A. S. Klieman, *Foundations of British Policy in the Arab World*, 162-3.

[107] Abdullah's compensation prize of Trans-Jordan was, in terms of the future of the Middle East, one of the only successful outcomes of the programme devised at the Cairo Conference. However, there were flaws in the Sharifian solution, predicated as it was on the good behaviour of Hussein, Feisal and Abdullah. T.J. Paris argues that there was 'little in the way of family affinity' to suggest that the programme would be successful. See T.J. Paris, *Britain, the Hashemites and Arab Rule 1920-1925*, 366.

[108] CO730/1/4449: cypher telegram no. 193 to Lord Allenby, Cairo, for Mr Churchill from the Prime Minister, 22 March, 1921.

partition of the Ottoman provinces envisaged in the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916. The air control scheme was another example where the recommendations for the future defence of the country matched almost exactly with Churchill's proposals which had prompted Cox to offer his resignation in January. It seems, however, that the tension between Churchill and Cox was resolved during their time together in Cairo, temporarily at least.

The final report of the Conference report provided an apt coda to the previous years of confusion, conflict and delay, noting that

> [q]uestions which would normally have involved protracted correspondence between Departments in London were settled in a few hours' friendly discussion. The experiment was amply justified by its results.[109]

Significantly, while Cabinet subsequently approved the recommendations of the Cairo Conference, it was decided to defer consideration of a treaty.[110]

Conclusion.

In spite of the fact that a future policy had finally been formulated, and amid concerns relating to the mandate, further questions remained: whether the local population would accept Feisal's candidature for the throne; whether the other aspirants could be persuaded to withdraw their claims, and more importantly, whether Feisal would prove to be a compliant king following the switch from direct to indirect control.

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[109] CAB/24/126: Report on Middle East Conference, part VI: Conclusion, 12. Interestingly, during the discussions of the Political Committee, it was revealed that the Government of India, still paying an annual amount of 60,000 rupees for the strip of foreshore in Kuwait, recommended the termination of the lease. 'Minutes of a Sub-Committee on the Question of Subsidies', annexure to the 6th meeting of the Political Committee, 18 March 1921, 191.

[110] CAB/23/24: Cabinet Conclusions, 14(21), 22 March, 1921.

There was much to be done before the mandate was secured, but in the meantime, the imposition of the Sharifian solution on Iraq, and the decision to quit the mandate early involved authorities in London and Iraq in even greater acts of deception than the rationalisation of self-determination. During the next decade, in an effort to escape from the obligations of the mandate, already foreshadowed in the recommendations of the Cairo Conference, the targets of the deception were the Iraqi people and the League of Nations. But in contriving a solution to the legal and political dilemmas associated with the mandate in 1921, the policy-makers were asking for trouble.

Chapter Six

Asking for trouble: the League of Nations Mandate, 1921 – 1932.

During a discussion on British policy in Iraq in December 1925, Lord Robert Cecil stated prophetically,

> [y]ou must be careful in instituting a policy, in beginning it, because it is the consequences of what you do that really binds your action in the future.[1]

Unlike in previous years, polycratism was not the primary influence on the formulation of policy during the 1920s. Indeed, from early in the decade, the policy for Iraq was remarkably consistent. Inter-departmental rivalry was less apparent following the introduction of the Royal Air Force defence scheme in October 1922, when responsibility for the defence of Iraq was transferred from the War Office to the Air Ministry.[2] The occasional clashes which occurred between the Foreign and Colonial Offices related primarily to their responsibilities to the League of Nations. From 1922, the Foreign Office assumed responsibility for relations with the League, and the defence of British policy against opposition at Geneva. On the other hand, with responsibility for the administration of the mandate, the Colonial Office dealt directly with Feisal and the Iraqi government through the High Commissioner. Accordingly, the principle challenges for policy-makers during this

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[1] *Hansard*, Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, 21 December 1925, vol. 62, c. 1701. Cecil served as the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in Stanley Baldwin's Conservative administration from 1924 to 1927. Simultaneously, he served as President of the influential pressure group, the League of Nations Union, from 1923 to 1945. For a recent account of Cecil's political life see Gaynor Johnson, *Lord Robert Cecil: Politician and Internationalist*, Farnham, Surrey, Ashgate, 2013.

[2] There were instances, however, when minor disputes reached the level of high farce. A dispute between the Colonial and Foreign Offices over the spelling of 'Iraq', which Foreign Office officials consistently spelled as 'Irak', dragged on for several years. The hostile correspondence between the two departments attests to the nature of interdepartmental relations whereby Foreign Office officials perceived the Colonial Office as a junior partner. In this particular dispute the Foreign Office finally conceded defeat in 1926. See CO730/72/3730 and CO730/84/9886 for the heated exchanges in 1926, and for an analysis of this dispute see Jeffery Rudd, 'Irak or Iraq? The Problem of Geographical Nomenclature in British Official Use', in A. Susser & A. Schmuelevitz, (eds.), *The Hashemites in the Modern Arab World: Essays in honour of the late Professor Uriel Dann*, Abingdon & New York, Frank Cass, 1995, 111-138.

period were the conflicting aims and priorities of the League of Nations, the French, the Turks, and Feisal, and the tension between the mandate ideal and the desire of policy-makers to revert to a less formal method of imperial control.

Ultimately, the ideals of the Mandate were dropped in favour of reducing costs, securing British interests, and making an early exit from the obligations and responsibilities of the mandate. While cost and negative public opinion go some way towards explaining this decision, it will be argued that there was an equally compelling motivation which underscored the calculations of the policy-makers during the 1920s, arising from a distrust of the League of Nations, and a reluctance to submit British policy to international scrutiny.

1921-1923: Defining a Policy: international and domestic influences.

Curzon's fears of opposition to the terms of the draft mandate were compounded when the United States government addressed its concerns regarding the mandates directly to the League of Nations in February 1921.[3] As a result, the Foreign Office was informed that some of the members of the League Council were reluctant to proceed with the passing of the 'A' mandates.[4] To add to Curzon's frustration, neither the Turkish nor the Greek

[3] FO371/6363/E2472: Sir A. Geddes, Washington, to Foreign Office, 25 February, 1921.The British Ambassador to Washington informed the Foreign Office that the United States' government had forwarded the note from Colby to Curzon, dated November 1920, to the League Council on 21 February. The correspondence between Lord Curzon and the United States government from May 1920 to February 1921 is preserved in Cmd 1226, Miscellaneous no. 10, (1921): 'Correspondence between His Majesty's Government and the United States Ambassador respecting economic rights in mandated territories'. UCLA Internet Archive, https://archive.org/stream/hismajestyscorresp00grearich/hismajestyscorresp00grearich_djvu.txt Accessed 24 October, 2014.

[4] FO371/7050/W6918: 'The United States and the Mandates', R.H. Campbell, Western Department, Foreign Office, 4 July, 1921. Campbell noted that the French government had taken fright, given the implications of the United States' demand in respect of the mandate for Syria, and it was expected that the Spanish, Italian and Chinese representatives on the League Council would also refuse to consider the mandates. For further analysis see Wm. Roger Louis, 'The United Kingdom and the Beginning of the Mandates System, 1919-1922', 87-88.

representatives accepted the revisions to the terms of the Treaty of Sèvres recommended by the Allied foreign ministers at a meeting in London in March.[5]

H.W.Malkin, a member of the British delegation at Geneva, noted that from a legal perspective, the United States' government had no right to demand consultation, given the Senate's refusal to ratify the Treaty of Versailles, and therefore the Covenant of the League. At the same time, he outlined Britain's ambiguous legal position in Mesopotamia, where

> in strict law the Mandatory has only the rights of the occupying belligerent; [but] it has been impossible in practice to confine the necessary administrative action to what is within the powers of an occupying belligerent, and both France and England are taking action every day for which a strictly legal justification is impossible to find.[6]

Less confident than Hardinge had been of the ability of the government to persuade the League to formalise the mandates, Malkin concluded that if the Council postponed consideration of the draft terms indefinitely, Britain's position would become 'impossible'.[7]

The inconclusive discussions of a conference of Ministers revealed that there was no unanimity when it came to the question of proceeding without formal approval. Despite the implementation of the policy designed in Cairo, the debate had progressed no further than those of the previous year. Churchill's proposal to abandon the Mandate and withdraw all British troops immediately was countered by Curzon, who stated that it would be 'difficult in practice, however desirable in theory to withdraw from Palestine and Mesopotamia and

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[5] In a memorandum written in December 1921, Curzon vented frustration over his inability to bring the Treaty of Sèvres to fruition. Curzon Papers, F112/292, ff. 129-30: 'Memorandum of Proposals for Discussion at the Conference of Allied Foreign Ministers on the Revision of the Treaty of Sèvres', 30 December, 1921. For an account of the conference in March 1921, see M. Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian Vision*, 180-197. The Greek delegation was headed by Nikolaos Kalogeropoulos, Prime Minister of Greece from February to April, 1921. The representative of the Ottoman government, Tewfik Pasha, was replaced by Bekir Sami, the Foreign Minister of the Ankara government. See also, Curzon Papers, F112/292, ff. 129-30: 'Memorandum of Proposals for Discussion at the Conference of Allied Ministers on the Revision of the Treaty of Sèvres', 30 December, 1921, which gives an indication of Curzon's frustration over his inability to bring the Treaty to fruition.

[6] British Library, Curzon Papers F112/287: Memorandum by H.W. Malkin, 1 June, 1921, ff.313-315.

[7] Ibid.

hand those countries over to anarchy'.[8] Following this discussion, suggestions to offer the mandates to the United States government in order to counter opposition from that quarter were vetoed by Lloyd George.[9] Later in the month, in order to forestall American interference, the League Council advised the governments concerned to come to an arrangement regarding participation in the development of Mesopotamia's oil resources by direct negotiation.[10] However, given the ambivalent attitude of the policy makers to the processes set in train in 1918, discomfort with the League's definition of sovereignty and indeed, concerns that the League would survive without the participation of Germany and the United States,[11] it is clear that there were grave concerns relating to Britain's anomalous legal position in Mesopotamia.

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[8] FO371/7050/6562: C.P. 3028: 'Notes of a Conference held at the Foreign Office', 1 June, 1921. Chaired by the Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon; the principal attendees were A.J. Balfour, Lord President of the Council; Winston Churchill and H.A.L. Fisher, President of the Board of Education. Also present were Sir C. Hurst, legal counsellor to the Foreign Office, and Sir Eric Drummond, Secretary-General of the League of Nations.

[9] FO371/7050/W6563: Sir Eric Drummond, Secretary-General of the League of Nations, Geneva, to A.J. Balfour, 2 June 1921. A member of the British Delegation to the Peace Conference, Drummond was appointed Secretary-General of the League of Nations in April 1919. A similar proposal, first mooted by Lloyd George, was met with enthusiasm by Winston Churchill. M. Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill, vol. IV*, 592. However, Lloyd George quickly disassociated himself from the proposal. see Curzon Papers, F112/287, ff241-242: copy of a letter from Lloyd George to Churchill, 11 June, 1921. Sir Maurice Hankey's biographer notes that Churchill's offer was probably made 'tongue in cheek'. S. Roskill, *Hankey: Man of Secrets*, Vol. II, 203. See also G. Wheatcroft, 'Churchill's Zionism', in Wm. Roger Louis, (ed.), *Ultimate Adventures with Britannia: Personalities, Politics and Culture in Britain*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2009, chapter 14, 185-201. During that period Churchill also proposed reviving the Ottoman Empire, coming to terms with Mustafa Kemal, and evacuating Palestine. His erratic and inconsistent stance on the Middle East has been well documented; see for example, a collection of essays by A.J.P. Taylor, R.R. James, J.H. Plumb, Basil Liddell Hart and Anthony Storr, [1968], *Churchill: Four Faces and the Man*, New York, Dial Press, 1969.

[10] CAB24/125: G. da Cunha, Acting President of the Council of the League of Nations, Geneva, to the Foreign Secretary, 15 June, 1921. In 1922, Churchill proposed that American oil companies should be offered a minority holding in the Turkish Petroleum Company. CAB24/134: C.P. 3832, Secret, 'Iraq Oil', memorandum by W.S. Churchill, 13 March, 1923. In 1923, American interests were provisionally allocated 25 per cent of the Company's share capital. While American participation in the Turkish Petroleum Company put an end to the United States' objections to the violation of the League Covenant's 'Open Door' provision, the arrangement in fact, signified American participation in a monopoly. See P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 71; Wm. Roger Louis, 'The United Kingdom and the Beginning of the Mandates System, 1919-1922', 88.

[11] Curzon Papers, F112/307, ff. 28-34, 64-65: 'Stenographic Notes of a Meeting of the Representatives of the United Kingdom, the Dominions, and India', 6th meeting, 24 June 1921, and 20th meeting, 8 July, 1921. Lloyd George's concerns related to the endurance of the League without the participation of the U.S. and 'half the rest of the world'. For Smuts, the League was weakened by the ongoing existence of the Supreme Council, which he believed was making decisions on matters which should have been dealt with by the League Council. See R.B. Henig, (ed.), *The League of Nations*, Edinburgh, Oliver & Boyd, 1973, 4, 14-15: Henig stated that Britain only remained in the League because of the overwhelming public support for it. However, it is clear

Given the indecision in Whitehall, Churchill sought the views of the High Commissioners for Mesopotamia and Palestine.[12] Cox immediately took the opportunity to revive the Middle East Department's proposal for a treaty relationship with Feisal. Dismissing the findings of Wilson's survey in late 1918, he reiterated the proposal made six months previously, that the government reveal hitherto covert plans by announcing that the majority of the public favoured one of the sons of Hussein as head of state, that Feisal had 'responded to call[s] from Iraq and that he would, if he made good, have the support of His Majesty's Government'. Furthermore, he advised Churchill that in order to deflect opposition from Geneva, the League Council should be informed that Mesopotamia was progressing more quickly than anticipated towards 'National Government', rendering some of the provisions of the draft mandate obsolete. As a result, he believed converting the mandate into a treaty would provide the best solution.[13]

Churchill's decision to consult Cox revealed that despite the apparent unanimity during the Cairo Conference, differences between Cox and the Colonial Office remained. With Feisal due to arrive in Baghdad imminently, the Colonial Office considered it would be 'highly inconvenient' if the mandate terms, and therefore, Britain's policy for Mesopotamia, were under challenge at Geneva.[14] While accepting that a treaty relationship would serve to avoid local opposition to the mandate, officials in the Middle East Department objected to

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from the discussions at the Imperial Conference that despite some reservations, the senior members of the coalition government accepted that, for the safety of the empire, working within the League offered the best chance.

[12] CAB24/125, C.P.3040: Secretary of State for the Colonies to High Commissioners for Mesopotamia and Palestine, no. 129, 1 June, 1921.

[13] CAB24/125: High Commissioner, Mesopotamia to Secretary of State, no. 156, private and personal, 4 June, 1921.

[14] Curzon Papers, F112/287, ff. 236-237: C.P. 3040: 'Note on Palestine and Mesopotamian Mandates', Middle East Department, Colonial Office, 8 June 1921.

the implication in Cox's proposal that the treaty would replace the mandate, stressing, as others had, that the mandate was the only avenue by which Britain's position in Mesopotamia could be secured.[15]

The activities of the High Commissioner and his staff prior to Feisal's arrival in Mesopotamia at the end of June, and in the period before his accession to the throne in August, and the deception required to achieve this end have been well documented.[16] One week before his coronation was scheduled to take place the Colonial Office was informed that Feisal refused to accept the mandate, one of the conditions for his acceptance of the throne.[17]

Cox's efforts to placate Feisal included an extreme suggestion to follow the precedent set when Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan 'demanded and were accorded independence' in 1919. He advised the government to consider dropping the mandate and secretly preparing a treaty along the lines of the Anglo-Persian Agreement, followed by a declaration of Mesopotamia's independence.[18] Seemingly, Cox was seeking to encourage

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[15] Ibid.

[16] See for example, Gertrude Bell's correspondence with her family, available online from the University of Newcastle archive at http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk; P.W. Ireland, *Iraq*, 332-4; H.V.F. Winstone, *Gertrude Bell*, 235; M. Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill,* 798, 804, B.C. Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs*, 293; K.C. Ulrichsen, 'The British Occupation of Mesopotamia, 1914-1922', 368.

[17] L/P&S/10/919, P.5876/1920, register no. P.3763: copy of paraphrase telegram, High Commissioner, Baghdad, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, no. 396, 16 August, 1921.

[18] CO730/2/32882: High Commissioner, Baghdad, paraphrase telegram no. 246, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 30 June, 1921. Given the United States government's opposition to the San Remo agreement, and the terms of the Anglo-Persian Agreement which guaranteed the Anglo-Persian Oil Company a monopoly over the development of Persia's oil resources, Cox's suggestion for a similar agreement in Iraq appears absurd. See Homa Katouzian, 'The campaign against the Anglo-Iranian Agreement of 1919', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 25, no. 1, (May, 1998), 5-46, (accessed online, 2/12/2014). Moreover, by 1921, the three independent nations mentioned by Cox had been overrun by Russian troops and incorporated into the Soviet Union. See G. Lenczowski, [1952], *The Middle East in World Affairs*, 4th edition, London, Ithaca, 1980, 71, 108-109. For British policy relating to Armenia, see Akaby Nassibian, *Britain and the Armenian Question 1915-1923*, London, Croom Helm, 1984.

the growth of a pro-British 'moderate' Iraqi nationalism in order to silence the so-called 'extremists', agitating for independence from British control. Following the appointment of an interdepartmental committee to discuss the terms of the proposed treaty, however, Churchill clarified the position, testily informing Cox that the treaty was not designed to replace the mandate, given that

> [w]e must be in a position to show that in making the Treaty we are still legally in position to discharge and are not seeking to evade the responsibilities we have assumed towards the League of Nations.[19]

A plan was conceived at that meeting, the kernel of which can be traced back to Curzon, in correspondence with Montagu in October 1920. Following consultation with the Foreign Office, Cox was informed that Churchill intended to carry on with the fiction embodied in his original treaty proposal at the beginning of June. According to the plan, A.J. Balfour, the British representative on the League Council, was to be instructed to take the line at the Council meeting at the beginning of September that

> Iraq has advanced so far towards being able to stand alone that we are in a position which enables us to carry out our obligations to the League and foreign powers by means of a treaty. Possibly, they will agree that it can satisfactorily be left to Feisal himself to carry out certain of the provisions which we have inserted in our draft mandate. Regarding others the responsibility towards the League and other Powers must for some time remain with us.[20]

[19] CO730/4/41616: W.S. Churchill to Cox, personal and secret, 20 August, 1921.

[20] CO730/4/41616: Secretary of State for the Colonies to High Commissioner, Baghdad, no. 336, 20 August, 1921. Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 20, and a more recent offering, have misrepresented Churchill's intentions in this telegram. See U. Natarajan, 'Creating and Recreating Iraq: Legacies of the Mandate System in Contemporary Understandings of Third World Sovereignty', *Leiden Journal of International Law*, Vol. 24, no. 4, December 2011, 808, (accessed on-line 08/08/2014). Churchill did not go to the League of Nations to gain approval for withdrawing 'ultimate power' from the High Commissioner, as is argued. Rather, he was proposing a line which the British Representative to the League Council might take. As later events would prove, Cox retained the authority to exercise full power for the remainder of his tenure in Iraq.

Balfour, however, refused to comply.[21] The League Council was not informed of the government's intentions. Nonetheless, Feisal was crowned King of Iraq on 23 August, before the mandate came into force. At the beginning of October, the President of the League Council requested the British government to carry on administering the territories concerned in the 'spirit' of the draft Mandates[22], signifying in principle acceptance of the San Remo allocation. As a result, Churchill gave formal approval for the commencement of treaty negotiations with Feisal in Baghdad.[23] The League Council was eventually informed of the government's intentions in November, when the British representative, H.A.L. Fisher, made the announcement to which Balfour had objected. Fisher stressed, however, that the treaty was merely a device through which to regulate relations between the British and Iraqi governments, while Britain's obligations and responsibilities to the League, according to the draft Mandate remained.[24]

In his work, *Imperial Quest for Oil*, Helmut Mejcher contended that the treaty served as camouflage for the mandate, to placate Feisal and his adherents in Baghdad.[25] While that was certainly the case, the treaty served more than one purpose. Ministers and officials in London and Baghdad were well aware that Britain's legal position in Mesopotamia, and

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[21] British Library, Curzon Papers, F112/287, ff. 306-307: C.P. 3440: A.J. Balfour, Geneva, to Winston Churchill, 8 September, 1921.
[22] *Hansard*: Austen Chamberlain, House of Commons Debates, vol. 153, 10 April, 1922, cc20-1.
[23] CO730/5/51690: Secretary of State for the Colonies, despatch no. 457, to High Commissioner, Baghdad, 19 October, 1921.
[24] Curzon Papers, F112/287, ff. 319-323: C.P. 3486: Note by the Cabinet Secretary, Thomas Jones, 15 November, 1921, with Fisher's draft statement enclosed. P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 47, states that Cox was shocked when he was informed of Fisher's statement, and that he preferred a treaty 'unhampered by the mandate'. However, he appears to have conflated two despatches sent from Baghdad on different days. In the first despatch, Cox expressed surprise that he had not been informed of the government's intentions before the League was informed. In the second despatch, sent nine days later, Cox warned Churchill that a 'normal treaty relationship unhampered by the mandate would mean letting in America who would doubtless also seek to make a treaty.' See CO730/7/57854: Cox to Churchill, no. 699, 20 November 1921, and Cox to Churchill, no. 704, 29 November 1921.
[25] H. Mejcher, *Imperial Quest for Oil,* 80.

indeed Feisal's, rested on slender foundations. During treaty negotiations in Baghdad, Feisal highlighted the position when he asked why the treaty had been based on the unratified Treaty of Sèvres.[26] More importantly, the government's willingness to enter into a treaty relationship with Feisal with such alacrity was also no doubt a reflection of the intention to revert to a looser form of indirect control than that envisaged in the terms of the draft mandate. As Churchill had assured the House of Commons in June, a treaty relationship would allow for further disengagement from the 'burdens and responsibilities of these embarrassing regions'.[27]

Given Churchill's confidence in the Cairo Conference programme, the year 1921 ended badly in terms of policy for Iraq. A constitutional monarch occupied the throne of a state with ill-defined borders and no constitution; Turkish nationalist forces were reported to be penetrating into northern Mosul province, attempting to win over the Kurds,[28] and with continuing tribal unrest in the province, Churchill's programme of troop reductions was not taking place at the rate originally contemplated. To complete the gloomy picture, *The Times* reported renewed calls for the 'bag and baggage' evacuation of Iraq.[29] However, having installed their protégé on the throne, and with imperial interests to secure, it would

[26] CO730/8/60457: High Commissioner, Baghdad, paraphrase telegram no. 756, to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 4 December, 1921, enclosing extracts from a letter from Hubert Young to Shuckburgh, dated 19 November, 1921. See Curzon Papers, F112/292, ff. 244-249: 'Near East Conference: speech by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in the House of Lords', 30 March 1922: Despite several attempts to revise the terms of the Treaty of Sèvres to the satisfaction of the Greek and Turkish Nationalist governments, in March 1922, Curzon announced that all hope of reviving the Treaty had been abandoned. See also M. Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian Vision*, 241.

[27] *Hansard*, Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, vol. 143, 14 June 1921, c. 282.

[28] CO730/8/63464: High Commissioner, Baghdad, paraphrase telegram no. 821, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 20 December, 1921.

[29] 'Mesopotamian Mystery part II: Economy of Evacuation', from special correspondent in Teheran, *The Times*, 28 December, 1921, 7, and part III: 'Anglo-French Relations: Economy of Evacuation', 29 December, 1921, 7.

have not been in the British government's interest to evacuate, leaving the mission incomplete.

Early in 1922, Sir Cecil Hurst, the Foreign Office legal adviser, noted the complete lack of progress in Geneva towards formalising the mandate. Moreover, he anticipated difficulty in obtaining acceptance of the treaty by the Secretariat of the League Council, 'gentlemen whom I know by experience to be extremely pernickety and apt to be tiresome if not obstructive.'[30] The formulation of the terms of the treaty proved equally problematic. After three months' debate, the departments concerned agreed on all the articles in the draft treaty except that which related to the control of Iraq's foreign relations.[31]

The subsequent Cabinet debate clearly illustrated the different priorities of the Colonial and Foreign Offices. Churchill and his Colonial Office 'experts' were prepared to allow Feisal to assume wider powers than those envisaged in the draft mandate in order to raise an Arab army, thereby facilitating the reduction of the British garrison. On the other hand, Curzon stressed that the draft mandate specifically stated that that the British government was responsible for Iraq's foreign relations. Furthermore, he stated, Hurst had advised that any radical differences between the terms of the mandate and the treaty could not be justified to the League. In any case, Balfour believed that the French government would block the proposal in the League Council. Ultimately, a decision was postponed,

[30] CO371/7770/E700: Memorandum by C.J. Hurst, 12 January, 1922.
[31] FO371/7770/E2069: C.P. 3748: 'The Iraq Treaty', memorandum by Secretary of State for the Colonies, 17 February, 1922.

pending receipt of Cox's views, subject to which Churchill was authorised to proceed with treaty negotiations.[32]

A week later, Cox reported that Feisal and the Naqib continued to insist on the abrogation of the mandate. Despite the deletion of all references to the word 'mandate' in the draft treaty, they refused to continue with the negotiations. They had, it seems, discovered that the treaty was merely camouflage for the mandate. Cox reverted to his earlier suggestion, entreating the government to decide if it was in a position to inform the League that Britain's mandatory responsibilities had been fulfilled for three years, and that the best way of securing the good-will of the Iraqis would be to give them what they wanted: a treaty of alliance between two independent states. If they subsequently failed to make good, it would not then be the fault of the British government. [33] Presumably it would not have been the fault of the High Commissioner either, who seemed to have given no consideration to the likely response from Geneva.[34] While the Foreign Office eventually prevailed on the question of foreign representation, a meeting of 'experts' requested by Churchill following receipt of Cox's despatch, appeared to show that the policy-makers remained at a loss over how to proceed.[35] In the interim, the government's policy came under fire in the House of Lords. Prophetically, the Liberal peer, Lord Sydenham warned that the treaty/mandate arrangement 'may land us in difficulties of all kinds which we cannot now entirely foresee'.[36]

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[32] FO371/7770/E2103: extracts from Cabinet 12(22), 21 February, 1922.
[33] FO371/7770/E2621: copy of High Commissioner, Baghdad, despatch no. 163, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 27 February, 1922.
[34] FO371/7770/E2621: Secretary of State for the Colonies, despatch no. 131, to High Commissioner, Baghdad, 2 March, 1922.
[35] FO371/7770/E2621: Record of a meeting at the Colonial Office, 14 March 1922. Present at the meeting were Churchill, Balfour, H.A.L. Fisher, and Cecil Hurst, with R.J. Lindsay, Foreign Office, acting as Secretary.
[36] *Hansard*, Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, 24 July, 1922, Vol. 51, cc.697-703.

Following the resumption of treaty negotiations, it appeared that Cox's endeavour to nurture a pro-British moderate Iraqi nationalism had not succeeded. Furthermore, the British authorities in Baghdad were losing confidence in their protégé. Hitherto a supporter, Kinahan Cornwallis, appointed as Adviser to the Ministry of the Interior in early 1921, noted that Feisal had proved a 'disappointment'. According to Cornwallis, Feisal was forging links with 'extremists', interfering in administrative appointments, and refusing to take Cox's advice.[37] Cox admitted that given the optimistic accounts he had received from Churchill's advisers prior to Feisal's arrival in Iraq, he too was 'completely disillusioned'.[38] Seemingly, by choosing Feisal and electing to exercise mandatory relations by way of a treaty, British policy for Iraq depended upon his co-operation.[39] Ultimately, however, it was not required.

Agitation against the treaty in the summer of 1922, supported by Feisal and his followers, the Shi'a *ulema* and Iraqi nationalists, culminated in a confrontation between Feisal and Cox. In August, when Feisal became seriously ill, Cox was advised to 'keep him out of action on medical grounds' and given authority to re-impose direct control.[40] Three

[37] CO730/34/45078: High Commissioner, Baghdad, despatch no. 608, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 22 August, 1922, relaying Cornwallis's views.
[38] CO730/34/45078: High Commissioner, Baghdad, private and personal, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 24 August, 1922.
[39] H. Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba'athists, and Free Officers*, London, Saqi Books, 2004, 325-6; J.G. Darwin, Britain, *Egypt and the Middle East*, 228.
[40] CO730/34/45078: Secretary of State for the Colonies, despatch no. 492, private and personal, to High Commissioner, Baghdad, 29 August, 1922. Toby Dodge showed some sympathy for Cox on this occasion, stating that by reimposing direct control, he suspended the institutions he had been carefully 'nurturing' for two years. T. Dodge, 'International Obligations, Domestic Pressure and Colonial Nationalism: the birth of the Iraqi State under the mandate system', in N. Meouchy & P. Sluglett, (eds.), *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspective*, 150.

weeks later, Cox persuaded the Naqib of Baghdad, President of the Council of Ministers, to sign the treaty on Feisal's behalf.[41]

Article 1 of the treaty referred to Iraq's 'national sovereignty', albeit the territory over which that sovereignty extended was still unclear, and control of foreign relations, one of the touchstones of sovereignty, remained with the British Government. By the terms of article 4, Feisal was to accept the High Commissioner's advice on all matters relating to finance; and article 6 pledged the British Government 'to secure the admission of Iraq to membership of the League of Nations as soon as possible'.[42] A comparison of the draft mandate and the treaty illustrated that while the two documents were not identical, the main provisions of the mandate were reproduced in the draft treaty, as was intended.[43]

The more important subsidiary military and financial agreements stipulated that the Iraq government was to devote 25 per cent of annual revenue to the maintenance of the army, and take full responsibility for internal order and external defence at the earliest possible date. The Iraq Government was also to bear the entire cost of the administration of the country, the maintenance of the British Residency, and Iraq's share of the Ottoman Public Debt. The railways, the port of Basra and other works undertaken during the military occupation would be handed over to the Iraq government at a later date, but paid for, with interest.[44] Harsh terms perhaps, but it was an axiom of British imperial policy that

[41] CO730/34/45078: High Commissioner, Baghdad, despatch no. 643, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 10 September, 1922.
[42] Cmd. 1757: 'Iraq: Treaty with King Feisal, 10 October, 1922'.
[43] FO371/7775/E78: 'Iraq: Mandate compared with Treaty', received at the Foreign Office, 2 January, 1922, together with other papers relating to the first draft of the Treaty.
[44] British Library, Curzon Papers F112/286, ff. 73-76: Draft Financial and Military Agreements, annexure to C.P.167(23), IRQ: Final Report of the Iraq Committee, 23 March, 1923. For an early analysis see E. Main, *Iraq: From Mandate to Independence*, 82-83.

dependencies should pay for themselves as far as possible.[45] The signature of the Anglo-Iraq Treaty may have marked a stage in relations between the two governments, however, exogenous events, and changes of government in both London and Turkey were to have a significant impact on British policy for Iraq.

In September 1922, the Greek forces in western Anatolia were routed by Mustafa Kemal's Turkish Nationalist army, which then turned its attention to the British garrison defending the Straits, culminating in a confrontation at Chanak.[46] While a crisis was averted, the Conservatives abandoned the coalition, and on 19 October, Lloyd George resigned the premiership.[47] At the same time, Mustafa Kemal's Grand National Assembly at Ankara abolished the Caliphate, and on 4 November, declared that the Ottoman government no longer existed. Problematically for the European powers, it also laid claim to the province of Mosul.[48]

In London, parliament was dissolved and Churchill's period as Colonial Secretary came to an end.[49] The subsequent election campaign was fought along the lines of 'peace and retrenchment', and the platform upon which the campaign was fought demonstrated that for some of the leading members of the government, traditional Liberal and

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[45] R. Adelson, *London and the Invention of the Middle East: Money, Power and War, 1902-1922*, New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 1995, 212; W.R. Louis & R. Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Decolonization', 50.
[46] Michael Llewellyn Smith, *Ionian Vision*, 162-168, 316 - 381; M. Kent, 'Great Britain and the End of the Ottoman Empire, 1900-23' in M. Kent (ed.), *The Great Powers and the End of the Ottoman Empire*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1984, 192-3; Peter K. Jensen, 'The Greco-Turkish War, 1920-1922', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 10, no. 4, (Nov., 1979), 564-5, and more recently, T. Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 23 - 24.
[47] F.P. Walters, *A History of the League of Nations,* 167-8, states that the fall of Lloyd George ended the 'active existence' of the Supreme Council, which had been dealing with issues relating to the peace treaties, but which he argued, had been a rival and an obstacle to the League of Nations.
[48] J.C. Hurewitz, [1956], *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East, Vol. II, 1914-1956*, 119.
[49] Churchill was replaced at the Colonial Office by the Duke of Devonshire. A former diplomat, Victor Cavendish, the ninth Duke, served as Governor-General of Canada from 1916-1921.

Conservative Party attitudes to empire were merging, given that a number of Conservative Party candidates based their campaigns on withdrawal from Iraq.[50]

Going against the grain of his Liberal instinct to withdraw from costly imperial engagements, Churchill circulated a paper setting out a comprehensive case for the inclusion of Mosul in the Iraq state, a question upon which he advised Cabinet to make an immediate decision, together with a decision on the question of Britain in Iraq generally.[51] In terms of demographics, Churchill argued that rather than being Turkish, the population of the province was predominantly Arab and Kurdish, together with a significant number of Christians, including approximately 20,000 Assyrians, settled by the British authorities near Amadia in the north of the province in 1921.[52] Strategically, due to the geography of the region, he argued that it would be impossible to hold Baghdad without Mosul; and economically, the province provided the best prospects for agricultural development, together with the 'oil-bearing districts … upon which the future prosperity of the country so largely depends'.[53] Finally, from a political perspective he posited that the Arab state constructed by the British would collapse without Mosul. While admitting that Mosul was

[50] G. Bennett, 'Lloyd George, Curzon and the Control of British Foreign Policy 1919-1922', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 45, no. 4, 1999, 469; P. Kennedy, *The Realities Behind Diplomacy,* 267; P.W. Ireland, *Iraq*, 377; The Rt. Hon. the Earl of Ronaldshay, *The Life of Lord Curzon: being the authorised Biography of George Nathaniel, Marquess Curzon of Kedleston*, Vol. III, London, Ernest Benn, 1928, 32. Lawrence John Lumley Dundas, the earl of Ronaldsay, second marquess of Zetland from 1929, was a Conservative MP and author, Governor of Bengal, 1917-1922, and Secretary of State for India, 1937-1940. Philip Woods, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* online edition, January 2001.

[51] CO730/34/54489: C.P. 4303: W.S. Churchill, 'The Question of Mosul', 10 November 1922.

[52] Orthodox Christians from the Hakkiari region in south-eastern Anatolia, the Assyrians fought with the Allies during the war. Unable to return to their homes, they made their way to Mesopotamia, where they were cared for by the British authorities in a refugee camp near Baghdad. As mountain people, the Assyrians' fighting abilities were hailed by the British, who recruited them into the local levy force where they served under British officers. For a discussion on imperial perceptions of the fighting qualities of 'hill people' see V.G. Kiernan*, Lords of Human Kind: European Attitudes to the Outside World in the Imperial Age*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972, 55; In *A Search for Sovereignty,* 225, 235, Lauren Benton wrote of an earlier period in the history of empire, illustrating how imperial perceptions of mountain people were drawn into the discourse of Orientalism.

[53] CO730/34/54489: C.P. 4303: W.S. Churchill, 'The Question of Mosul', 10 November 1922.

not specifically mentioned in the treaty, according to Churchill the Iraqis understood that the treaty applied to the area currently administered by the Baghdad authorities.[54]

On the departmental level, the strategic and political aspects of oil revealed that the Admiralty and the Colonial Office were thinking along similar lines. While both departments agreed that holding the territory was more important than the negotiations between oil companies then in progress, the Colonial Office believed that if Mosul reverted to Turkey, the rights of British oil interests could possibly be maintained. Similarly, the Admiralty argued that if Mosul remained within the Iraqi state, the supply of oil could then be controlled at the source. In that case, 'the composition of the Company or Companies which work the oilfields is a matter of less importance'.[55]

The general election in Britain resulted in a victory for the Conservative Party by a significant majority, heralding another departure from the structure of government during the Lloyd George coalition. Communications with the League of Nations, hitherto conducted by the Cabinet Office, were transferred to the Foreign Office in November 1922.[56] Shortly thereafter, the newly-elected Prime Minister, Andrew Bonar Law, informed Curzon that he contemplated a complete withdrawal from Iraq.[57]

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[54] Ibid.

[55] CO730/27/60792: P.E. Marrack, for the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 7 December, 1922; CO730/53/61243: IRQ3: 'Cabinet: Committee on Iraq', Note by the Middle Eastern Department, Colonial Office, 11 December, 1922. Among the extensive literature which foregrounds oil as the principle influence on British policy for Iraq and the Middle East more generally, see the previously mentioned H. Mejcher, *Imperial Quest for Oil*; P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*; M. Kent, *Moguls and Mandarins,* and E. Black, *British Petroleum and the Redline Agreement.*

[56] D.N. Chester & F.M.G. Willson, *The Organization of British Central Government*, 187, 290, 291.

[57] British Library, Curzon Papers F112/282, ff. 11-13: Bonar Law to Curzon, personal, 7 December, 1922.

In preparation for negotiations for the Turkish peace treaty, Curzon was advised by the Cabinet to refuse to discuss the Turks' claim to Mosul on the grounds that the territory was part of the Arab state of Iraq. At the same time, however, Curzon was advised to 'avoid committing the British Government more deeply than they are already committed to continued responsibility for Iraq.' Given Bonar Law's stated aim was to withdraw from entanglements abroad, he appointed a Cabinet Committee to consider if the government should ratify the Anglo-Iraq treaty and, before negotiations at Lausanne were completed, whether Britain should continue to administer the mandate for Iraq.[58]

The Committee on Iraq met eight times between December 1922 and March 1923.[59] Following the second meeting, Curzon was informed that a number of the members of the committee were likely to recommend a complete withdrawal from Iraq, and that as a result, there was no consensus on ratifying the treaty. Rather than polycratism, however, the lack of agreement reflected malaise. The question was eventually decided by vote, a majority by the narrowest of margins deciding in favour of ratification.[60] Significantly, in a scathing account of the committee's proceedings, Leo Amery, First Lord of the Admiralty, advised

[58] TNA: CAB23/32, Cabinet 67(22), conclusions of Cabinet meeting, 16 November, 1922.
[59] The Duke of Devonshire chaired the Committee, which included the Earl of Derby, Secretary of State for War; L.S. Amery, First Lord of the Admiralty; E.R.L. Wood, M.P., President of the Board of Education; Sir Samuel Hoare, Secretary of State for Air; Viscount Peel, Secretary of State for India; Sir Philip Lloyd-Greame, President of the Board of Trade; Viscount Novar, Secretary of State for Scotland; General the Earl of Cavan, Chief of the Imperial General Staff; Air Chief Marshal Sir H.M. Trenchard, Chief of the Air Staff; Ronald McNeill, M.P., Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Foreign Office and Sir E.A. Crowe, Permanent Under-Secretary, Foreign Office; Sir John Shuckburgh, Assistant Under-Secretary, Colonial Office, and R.V. Vernon, Financial Adviser, Colonial Office. William Ormsby-Gore, Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Colonial Office, was appointed to the Committee on 12th December; in February 1923, on his return from Lausanne, Curzon replaced McNeill, and Stanley Baldwin, Chancellor of the Exchequer, attended the sixth and seventh meetings.
[60] British Library, Curzon Papers F112/286, f. 49: E.A. Crowe to Curzon, Geneva, private correspondence, 15 December, 1922.

Curzon that 'the best chance of a really reasonable conclusion would be if one or more members of the Cabinet went out and looked at the thing on the spot.'[61]

The Colonial Office would have preferred that Cox was not informed of the committee's proceedings until their recommendations had been considered by Cabinet.[62] However, in mid-January Bonar Law decided to invite Cox to travel to London to enable the committee to hear his views.[63] While revealing that his position regarding Basra had changed little since 1918, Cox's responses to the question of withdrawing or remaining were contradictory, and would have been of little assistance. He believed that if the decision was made to withdraw, Basra should be retained in order to recover the value of the assets created by the British authorities during the war. Furthermore, he argued, withdrawal from Iraq would prejudice Britain's predominance in the Persian Gulf. On the other hand, he stated that giving up half Britain's responsibilities under the Mandate would be morally indefensible.[64] When responding to a question relating to a possible demand from Feisal for modifications to the terms of the treaty, however, he provided the committee with a solution, pointing out that article 18 of the draft treaty provided for periodic revision of the terms.[65] Shortly thereafter a protocol was appended to the treaty, reducing the period of the Mandate and treaty to four years from the date of the ratification of the Turkish peace treaty, with provision for a fresh agreement at the end of the four years if both parties

[61] British Library, Curzon Papers F112/294: L.S. Amery to Curzon, private correspondence, 8 December, 1922. The significance of Amery's comment lies in the fact that none of the members of the Committee had any recent first-hand experience in Iraq.
[62] CO730/65/10861: J. Masterton-Smith, W. Ormsby Gore, and Devonshire minutes, 19 December, 1922, on Cox to Devonshire, no. 882, 16 December, 1922.
[63] Curzon Papers F112/286: Cabinet Committee on Iraq, 18 January, 1922, f. 60.
[64] CO730/53/6851: IRQ30, 'Committee on Iraq: Reply by Sir Percy Cox to Committee's Questionnaire', Colonial Office, 5 February, 1923.
[65] Ibid.

agreed: a compromise between the 'scuttlers' and those who wished not to withdraw from Iraq.[66]

While negotiations at Lausanne stalled over the question of Mosul, Curzon's refusal to surrender the Mosul vilayet finally settled the issue.[67] The final report of the committee stated that it would be 'impossible for His Majesty's Government to surrender … the territory which they have just declined to give up.'[68] It was recognised, however, that no matter what decisions were made in London, British policy depended on acceptance by the League of Nations.[69]

Toby Dodge erroneously argued that the conclusions of the Iraq Committee marked 'a decisive shift in British policy. The Mandate "ideal" was dropped in favour of Britain exercising an advisory role, strictly limited by the time and money that could be expended on it'.[70] As Malcolm Yapp suggested, however, given the priorities of the policy formulated in Cairo, and the premise on which the treaty was based, it would appear that the mandate 'ideal', according to Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, had been

[66] The text of the Protocol is contained in CO730/48/27551: Foreign Office to the Secretary-General, League of Nations, Geneva, 17 May, 1923. See also P.W. Ireland, *Iraq*, 378; and Leo Amery's diary entry for 26 April, 1923, in J. Barnes & D. Nicolson, (eds.), *The Leo Amery Diaries, Vol. I, 1896-1929*, London, Hutchinson, 1980, 325.

[67] P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 72-73, found it strange that during a speech at Lausanne in January, Curzon claimed that the British government's case for the retention of Mosul was not influenced by the possible existence of oil. This, Sluglett argued, was at variance with statements he made earlier during a conversation with one of the Italian negotiators, in which he made a vague promise to allow the Italians a share of the oil once the Mosul issue was settled in Britain's favour. It is unlikely, however, that Curzon would reveal his government's intentions in a public speech, given the attitude of the United States' government.

[68] British Library, Curzon Papers F112/286: C.P. 167(23), IRQ41, 'Cabinet Committee on Iraq: Final Report', 23 March, 1923, f. 1.

[69] Ibid.

[70] T. Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 25.

abandoned well before 1923.[71] With the signature of the protocol in May,[72] the main lines of British policy had been set, the chief objective being to divest the government of responsibility for Iraq as quickly as possible. In the interim, exogenous and endogenous factors combined to delay the date of withdrawal beyond the four years contemplated in the protocol. Primarily, the Mosul issue remained unresolved. The Treaty of Lausanne, signed on 24 July, provided for negotiations within a period of nine months, for the settlement of the frontier between Turkey and Iraq; failing agreement, the dispute would be referred to the Council of the League of Nations.[73]

Cox's last official duty in Iraq was to oversee the signing of the protocol by King Feisal. He left the country for the final time in May 1923, to be replaced by Sir Henry Dobbs, initially designated as Acting High Commissioner.[74] Crucially, when Dobbs was officially appointed High Commissioner for Iraq on 15 September,[75] the instructions issued by the Colonial Office regarding his executive role demonstrate that the level of autonomy enjoyed by Cox had been reined in and, possibly with his predecessor in mind, Dobbs was reminded that the formulation of policy was the responsibility of the British government.[76]

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[71] M.E. Yapp, *The Near East Since the First World War: a History to 1995*, London & New York, Longman, 1996, 70.

[72] CO730/39/21834: High Commissioner to Secretary of State, no. 260, 1 May, 1923.

[73] World War One Document Archive: Treaty of Peace with Turkey signed at Lausanne, 24 July, 1923. *The Treaties of Peace 1919-1923, Vol. II*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1924. <http:www.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Treaty_of_Lausanne> (accessed 10/07/14). For an analysis of the Anglo-Turkish diplomatic wrangling over Mosul, see P.J. Beck, '"A Tedious and Perilous Controversy": Britain and the Settlement of the Mosul Dispute, 1918-1926', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 17, no. 2, (Apr., 1981), 256-276, accessed 26/01/16.

[74] Dobbs served as Revenue Secretary in the Civil Administration in Mesopotamia during the war; in 1921 he served as a representative on the British mission to Kabul following the third Afghan war, to restore relations with the Amir, and oversee negotiations for the Anglo-Afghan Treaty signed on 22 November 1921. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* online service, J.E. Shuckburgh, 'Sir Henry Dobbs', revised entry by P. Sluglett, October 2004. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/32842, accessed 25/05/15.

[75] CO730/42/48109: Intelligence Report No. 18, Baghdad, 'Iraq: Internal Affairs' p. 8, 20 September, 1923.

[76] CO730/40/46982: 'Draft Instructions to the High Commissioner for Iraq: Revise of July, 1923', Colonial Office, 20 September, 1923.

Soon after his appointment Dobbs was confronted with difficulties. The establishment of the permanent institutions of state depended upon the promulgation of the Organic Law by an elected, but temporary, Constituent Assembly. However, elections for that body had been delayed by Cox due to tribal unrest, Turkish activities in Mosul, and uncertainty regarding the participation of the Kurds in the elections.[77] According to Dobbs Feisal was aware that he depended on British support, but failed to recognise that 'the British will not accept responsibility without authority.'[78] As a result, he predicted a crisis, believing that Feisal would attempt to fill the Assembly with 'extremists' who would refuse to pass the treaty. In that event, Dobbs proposed to threaten Feisal with 'bag and baggage' evacuation unless the treaty and agreements were passed within a reasonable period of time. In other words, by executing the treaty, the British government had given Feisal a lever by which to demand more than it was willing or able to concede. Moreover, by the terms of the protocol, Feisal had good reason to expect that the British would leave the country within four years; no doubt the reason for his eagerness to introduce compulsory conscription. After all, Churchill's motive for choosing Feisal was due to his perceived ability to raise an army.[79]

In early October, Dobbs reported that the elections had been completed, the Constituent Assembly would be ready to meet by 1 December, at which time the treaty,

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[77] CO730/48/28506: Secretary of State for the Colonies, paraphrase telegram no. 261, to Acting High Commissioner, Baghdad, 7 June, 1923.
[78] British Library, Curzon Papers F112/286: Sir H. Dobbs, private and personal, to Sir J. Shuckburgh, 2 August, 1923, ff. 85-91.
[79] See P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 94-104. Until 1927, British authorities consistently opposed the introduction of conscription, fearing that if the Iraqi government passed a law for compulsory military service, British troops would be required to enforce it.

protocol and subsidiary agreements would be tabled for ratification.[80] With the mandate still awaiting formal approval by the League, ratification of the treaty would at least allow for a reduction in the cost of defence. However, there were hurdles yet to overcome once ratification of the Iraq treaty had been obtained, not the least of which was the acceptance of the treaty by the League of Nations.

1924 – 1926: Defining the State: Treaty, Mandate and Mosul Frontier.

In January 1924, a Labour Government was elected in Britain. J.H. Thomas was appointed Colonial Secretary, and was almost immediately confronted with the detritus left by previous governments. The Mosul frontier negotiations ended in deadlock in mid-June, coinciding with the date the British government had planned to present the treaty, protocol and agreements to the League Council as the 'instrument' defining its mandatory relationship with Iraq.[81] However, the Constituent Assembly refused to ratify the treaty, objecting primarily to the terms of the subsidiary agreements. Dobbs' proposals, aside from modifying the terms of the treaty and agreements, ranged from offering the Baghdad vilayet to the Turks, to withdrawing to the Basra vilayet provided that Britain retained a civil air base near Baghdad and consuls for the protection of the Christian population, to reimposing direct rule over the whole country indefinitely. [82]

[80] CO730/42/48343: High Commissioner, Baghdad, paraphrase telegram no. 561, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 10 October, 1923.
[81] CO730/44/59550: correspondence in this file between the Foreign Office, Colonial Office, and Baghdad, reveals that discussions relating to the final act of camouflaging the mandate had been proceeding since the second half of 1923.
[82] CO730/58/112946: Dobbs, secret, to J.H. Thomas, 5 March, 1924.

While Shuckburgh rejected Dobbs' proposals, he noted that the Colonial Office should at least have a provisional policy if the Iraqis rejected the Treaty.[83] On the other hand, Thomas informed Dobbs that he would have liked to recommend that Cabinet consider informing the League that if the Iraq government rejected the Treaty, it would be regarded as releasing the British government from all responsibility for Iraq. He was prepared to make minor concessions, given the effect a breakdown of negotiations in Iraq would have on the frontier negotiations then in progress in Istanbul.[84] Yet discussions during an interdepartmental conference at the end of April revealed that while the Air Ministry proposed to ignore the Assembly and 'carry on as at present,' the Colonial Office had no policy, provisional or otherwise.[85] Dobbs was merely informed that the question was still under consideration.[86]

In the interim, the Iraqis held firm, demanding a declaration of complete independence, control of their financial affairs free from 'interference' by the High Commissioner, and revision of the military agreement, reducing British control over the Iraqi army.[87] Thomas warned Dobbs that if the treaty was not ratified before 11 June, the League Council would be requested to give its authority to 'alternative arrangements'.[88] Thomas' 'alternative arrangements' included abandoning the treaty, dissolving the Assembly, and re-establishing the provisional government, thereby eliminating the king. As a last resort, if the

[83] CO730/58/18229: J.E. Shuckburgh to Lord Arnold and the Secretary of State, 15 April, 1924.
[84] CO730/58/18229: Thomas to Dobbs, private and personal, priority no. 176, 16 April, 1924.
[85] CO730/65/22074: Shuckburgh note to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 30 April, 1924. The conference included representatives from the Colonial Office, Air Ministry, Foreign Office, and Sir Percy Cox.
[86] CO730/58/20566: High Commissioner, Baghdad, no. 266, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 29 April, 1924; and Secretary of State for the Colonies, no. 190, private and personal, 1 May, 1924.
[87] CO730/65/25650: High Commissioner, Baghdad, no. 260, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 21 May, 1924.
[88] CO730/65/25650: Secretary of State for the Colonies, no. 218, to High Commissioner, Baghdad, 19 May, 1924.

local notables failed to co-operate, he considered re-imposing direct rule for the remainder of the four years.[89] Indicative of the prevailing assumptions, Shuckburgh considered that the Assembly's reluctance to ratify the treaty was due to

> the hesitation of Orientals, inexperienced in questions of policy and administration, to incur responsibility, intensified by uncertainty as to the future of the Mosul Vilayet and to the well founded apprehensions felt by the representatives from that part of Iraq as to their own fate in the event of the territory being handed back to Turkish suzerainty. [90]

At the same time, Shuckburgh again revealed the real importance of the treaty from the perspective of the British government, for without it, given that the mandate had not been formalised by the League, and the Treaty of Lausanne had not yet come into force, there was no legal basis for the continuing occupation of the country by British troops.[91]

Peter Sluglett concluded that the conversion of the draft mandate into a treaty was designed to induce the Iraq Assembly to ratify the treaty.[92] He seems, however, to have overlooked the original purpose for the treaty in 1921. Furthermore, as Shuckburgh's memorandum suggested, the desperation to obtain ratification of the treaty went beyond merely camouflaging the mandate. The British government was in a weak position from both a legal and political perspective, because the documents which constituted the 'instrument' were implicitly based on Iraq as a state which included the Mosul province which was, at that stage, still in dispute. If the treaty/mandate arrangement was accepted by the League, however, it would place the British government in a stronger position with both the Iraqis and the Turks, because by virtue of that acceptance, the League would also

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[89] British Library, India Office Records, L/P&S/10/919, P.5876/1920, register no. P.2360/24: copy of paraphrase telegram from Secretary of State for the Colonies, no. 225, to High Commissioner, Baghdad, 24 May, 1924.
[90] CO730/65/25650: J.E. Shuckburgh, 'Policy in Iraq', draft memorandum to Cabinet, 31 May, 1924.
[91] Ibid.
[92] P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 60.

have accepted that Mosul was to be part of Iraq. Alternatively, if the League refused to accept the instrument, or if the Iraq Constituent Assembly failed to ratify the treaty, if Britain was to remain in Iraq the only security lay in the almost universally despised draft mandate, provided the League was prepared to formalise it. It was a risky strategy, given the anticipated local effect if that were to have been the outcome.

The Treaty of Lausanne came into force in August 1924, and fortuitously, Feisal was able to induce the Assembly to ratify the treaty documents in time for their presentation to the League in September.[93] As a *quid pro quo*, the Constituent Assembly added a proviso to the effect that 'this treaty and its subsidiary agreements shall become null and void if the British Government fail to safeguard the rights of Iraq in the Mosul Vilayet in their entirety.'[94] Thomas countered that the Iraqi government should be informed that since the matter had been referred to the League of Nations, responsibility for settling the issue no longer rested with the British government.[95]

The documents formally approved by the Council of the League on 27 September, stated that by virtue of the Treaty of Alliance, the British government recognised Iraq's 'independent government'.[96] While that may have heartened Feisal and his supporters, Britain's mandatory obligations to the League were confirmed in the Council's draft declaration, which stated that responsibility for terminating the mandate rested with the

[93] 730/65/36484: 'The Events leading up to the acceptance of the Anglo-Iraq Treaty by the Constituent Assembly', memorandum by J.H. Hall, 29 July, 1924.
[94] J.H. Thomas, Secretary of State for the Colonies, *Hansard*, Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 14 July, 1924, series 5, vol. 176, cc18-19.
[95] CO730/66/29037: Secretary of State for the Colonies, no. 249, to High Commissioner, Baghdad, 16 June, 1924.
[96] CO730/65/36604: 'Draft Instrument to Replace Mandate', Colonial Office, 21 July, 1924.

League Council.[97] But by describing the Iraqi government as 'independent', it gave Feisal and his supporters an inflated sense of their actual independence, leading to a demand for control of the country's foreign relations, giving cause for concern in London.[98] In fact, at the time the League Council accepted the 'instrument', the Iraq administration was by no means independent of British control. Moreover, with the future of Mosul unresolved following the breakdown of negotiations in Istanbul, the League appointed an independent Commission to investigate conditions on the spot, and seek the opinions of the inhabitants of the Mosul vilayet.[99]

After less than 12 months, the British public voted the minority Labour government out of office in late 1924, returning the Conservative Party to power. The confusion and uncertainty during Thomas' time as Colonial Secretary was swept away with the appointment of the exuberant imperialist, Leo Amery, to the office of Colonial Secretary. Having regained a seat in Parliament standing as a Conservative Party candidate, Churchill also returned to Cabinet as Chancellor of the Exchequer.[100] Making good on his suggestion

[97] CO730/65/36604: copy of 'League of Nations: Draft Declaration by the Council of the League of Nations', 30 July, 1924. Article 4 of the Declaration stated that His Majesty's Government's obligations towards the League in respect of Iraq could not be terminated without the consent of the Council.

[98] CO730/84/881: Foreign Office to Colonial Office, 6 January, 1925; J.E. Shuckburgh to Sir H. Lambert and William Ormsby-Gore, 8 January, 1925. The Colonial Office rejected the Iraqi demand, given that it would mean opening direct diplomatic relations between the Iraqi government and the Foreign Office to which the Colonial Office would not necessarily be made privy. The Foreign Office objected to the demand on the basis that by the terms of the mandate, the conduct of foreign relations was the responsibility of the mandatory power.

[99] S.H. Longrigg, *Iraq, 1900 to 1950,* 153; J.C. Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East*, 143.

[100] R.R. James argued that by 1924, Churchill shared the Conservatives' fear of socialism and Bolshevism. Given the decline of the Liberal Party as a political force in the 1920s, he argued, Churchill's return to the Conservative Party was a 'natural event'. R.R. James, 'The Politician', in *Churchill: Four Faces and the Man*, 86-89. For Churchill's hatred of Bolshevism/socialism, and his support for the anti-Bolshevik forces in 1919, see M. Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill, Vol. IV*, 219-506. A Unionist, Amery served as First Lord of the Admiralty from 1922 to 1924. In his diary entry dated 5 November 1924, Amery claimed he was informed that Stanley Baldwin had selected him for the position of Colonial Secretary over the claims of Churchill and F.E. Smith, the first Earl of Birkinhead, who was appointed Secretary of State for India. J. Barnes & D. Nicholson, (eds.), *The Leo Amery Diaries*, 390.

two years previously, Amery visited Iraq to witness conditions there first-hand. Accompanied by Sir Samuel Hoare, Secretary of State for Air, and officials from the Colonial Office and Air Ministry, Amery arrived in Iraq shortly after the departure of the Frontier Commission. During discussions with Dobbs, he was informed that the Commission would recommend the award of Mosul to Iraq, provided the period of the mandate was extended for 25 years.[101]

It is not clear if Dobbs' disclosure influenced Amery's thinking, however, on returning to London he declared that it would be 'utterly impractical' to terminate the British connection in 1928, concluding bluntly:

> [t]here is no chance whatever that Iraq will be able to stand alone so soon … We shall have to make the British taxpayer realise that he must continue to incur some expenditure in Iraq (not necessarily on Iraq) for a good many years.[102]

For Amery, the expenditure was justifiable on imperial grounds. Iraq provided 'a splendid training ground' for the Royal Air Force, and Baghdad was likely to become a vital link in the air route to India and the southern Dominions.[103] Essentially, Amery was expressing the long-held desiderata for an overland route by new means as technology advanced. His argument for the retention of Mosul was based upon the supply of water to the southern provinces. This was a familiar argument, and not necessarily camouflage for Mosul's oil reserves, given the importance placed on agricultural development and the expectation that oil revenues would assist in that endeavour.

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[101] L. Amery, *My Political Life, Vol. II, War and Peace, 1914-1929*, London, Hutchinson, 1953, 308.
[102] CO730/82/22162: C.P. 235(25), 'Draft Report', Secretary of State for the Colonies, 15 May, 1925.
[103] Ibid.

As predicted, in December 1925 the League Council awarded Mosul to Iraq, provided the mandate was prolonged for twenty five years, and the character of the Kurdish areas within Iraq was preserved by appointing Kurdish personnel in the administration and schools, and ensuring that Kurdish would be the official language. In order for the League's decision to be binding, however, the British government was required to submit a new treaty within six months, to allow for the prolongation of the mandate.[104]

When the League's Mosul award was debated in the House of Commons, Liberal and Labour members, opposed to the extension of mandatory responsibilities for a further twenty-five years, accused Amery of influencing the Council's decision when he presented the British government's case at Geneva. However, the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, assured the dissenters that despite the conditions attached to the League's award, the government was not committed to remain in Iraq beyond 1928.[105] The treaty, signed in January 1926, reflected Baldwin's assurance; it was merely an extension of the terms of the 1922 treaty with provision for a review of the situation at four-yearly intervals, and a stipulation that if modifications to the arrangements in force were contemplated, the consent of both parties would be necessary.[106] By the terms of the protocol to the 1922 Treaty, the first review was due in August 1928.

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[104] The National Archives, Kew, *Parliamentary Papers*, Cmd. 2562, Miscellaneous no. 17, (1925): 'League of Nations: Decision relating to the Turco-Iraq Frontier', Geneva, 16 December, 1925. For analyses of the Kurds within Iraq see Sarah Shields, 'Mosul Questions: Economy, Identity and Annexation', in Reeva S. Simon & Eleanor H. Tejirian, (eds.), *The Creation of Iraq 1914-1921*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2004, 50-60; N. Fuccarro, 'Minorities and Ethnic Mobilisation: the Kurds in Northern Iraq and Syria', in N. Meouchy & P. Sluglett, (eds.), *The British Mandates in Comparative Perspective*, 579-595; and for the development of Kurdish identity during the last years of the British Mandate, see D. MacDowell, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, London, I.B. Tauris, 1996, 151-83. For a history of the Assyrians in Iraq, who received no specific guarantees in the Mosul Award, see R.S. Stafford, *The Tragedy of the Assyrians*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1935.

[105] *Hansard*, House of Commons Debates, series 5, vol. 189, 21 December, 1925, c. 2082.

[106] CO730/92/C2026: copy of Cmd. 2587: 'Treaty with King Feisal signed at Baghdad, 13th January, 1926, with Explanatory Note'.

The transfer of sovereignty over Mosul was formalised by treaty between Britain, Turkey and Iraq in June 1926. The Turkish government was compensated for its loss by a provision in the treaty that the Iraq government would surrender to the Turkish government ten per cent of the royalties received from the Turkish Petroleum Company for 25 years.[107]

With the Mosul issue finally settled, Dobbs predicted that the Iraqis would press for immediate admission to the League, and warned Amery to expect 'virulent agitation' if the British government rejected their demands.[108] During conversations at Geneva earlier in June, Dobbs had taken a different approach, suggesting that the government announce support for Iraq's application for admission to the League in 1928, while at the same time, quietly making it known in Geneva that a rejection of the application would not be opposed.[109] John Hall, the shrewdest of the civil servants in the Middle East Department during the 1920s, objected to Dobbs' proposal, noting that

> apart from the fact that it would be discreditable, it would, in order to be successful, demand on the part of the British representatives concerned, a skill in dissimulation and deceit which is happily foreign to our national character, and on the part of other members of the League a degree of benevolent discretion for which it would be extremely unwise to look.[110]

Given previous deceptions, Hall's comment possibly related to his frustration with Dobbs' lengthy and often contradictory despatches, but more importantly, it represented a further acknowledgement that the British government did not have the power to make unilateral decisions on policy for Iraq. Moreover, release from the obligations of the mandate

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[107] L/P&S/11/265, register no. P.172/1926: copy of Cmd. 2912, Treaty Series no. 18 (1927): 'Treaty between the United Kingdom and Iraq and Turkey regarding the settlement of the Frontier between Iraq and Turkey, signed at Angora, 5 June, 1926.'
[108] CO730/107/62/C13619: extracts from Sir Henry Dobbs, demi-official, to Sir J. Shuckburgh, 23 June, 1926.
[109] CO730/107/73/C23907: Memorandum by J.H. Hall, 29 December, 1926.
[110] Ibid.

depended in the first instance on the judgement of the members of the Permanent Mandates Commission as to Iraq's progress. The first annual reports, as stipulated in the terms of the mandate, were reviewed by the Commission in 1926. While the members found little to criticise, there was no indication in the report that the British government contemplated escaping from its mandatory responsibilities in two years' time.[111]

1927 – 1929: The unintended shortcomings of the Treaty arrangement.

Sluglett argued that the years between 1927 and 1929 represented a period of impotence for the Iraq government in the face of Britain's refusal to meet their wishes for greater autonomy.[112] While that may have been the case, in terms of British policy there was a sense that the positions were gradually being reversed. Strategically, Feisal and the Iraqi nationalists had gained the upper hand. As a result of the decision to regulate relations by way of a treaty, the Colonial Office had placed the British government in a weak position when the time came for reviewing and revising the treaty and agreements, given that again, seemingly no consideration had been given to the steps to be taken should the two parties fail to agree.

In early January 1927, Amery sought Dobbs' views on the release of Iraq from mandatory control when the treaty and agreements were due for review in 1928. William Ormsby-Gore, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, noted that most

[111] League of Nations, *Permanent Mandates Commission*, C.632.M.248, 1926, VI, Geneva, 1928: 10th session, seventh meeting, 8 November, 1926, 'Iraq: Examination of the Annual Reports for 1923-24 and 1925: General Statement by the Accredited Representative', 44-51. The High Commissioner, Sir Henry Dobbs, presented the Annual Reports in 1926. C. Upthegrove, *Empire by Mandate*, 127 stated it was the practice for the High Commissioner for Iraq or his deputy to appear before the Permanent Mandates Commission as the Accredited British Representative.

[112] P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 112.

members of parliament, including many Conservatives, were anxious to hasten Iraq's entry into the League, but at the same time he recognised that 'we are not the sole judges on the point of time.'[113] In response to Amery's request, it appeared that Dobbs had changed his mind, and now supported Feisal's demands for the government to consider pressing for Iraq's admission to the League in 1928.[114] However, the local reaction Dobbs anticipated if the date was deferred provided Amery with evidence, if he chose to use it, against an early release from mandatory responsibilities. He predicted a scenario in which the Iraqi Army would 'waver' when confronted with the assassinations, anarchy and chaos which would follow an announcement to that effect, requiring the redeployment of British troops, or in the last resort, complete withdrawal from Iraq.[115]

Ormsby Gore's confidence was shaken, however, when interdepartmental correspondence in the wake of Dobbs' despatch revealed that the Ministers most directly concerned in the management of the mandate opposed Iraq's early release from mandatory control, nor were they convinced by Dobbs' dire predictions of the effect in Iraq if the date was deferred.[116] Furthermore, the Foreign Secretary, Austen Chamberlain, did not believe that the League would accept an application for membership until the British government was able to satisfy the League that Iraq could stand alone.[117]

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[113] CO730/119/10, no. 40299, part I: minute by William Ormsby-Gore, 14 March, 1927, on Dobbs paraphrase telegram no. 50 to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 24February, 1927.
[114] CO730/119/10, no. 40299, part I: High Commissioner, Secret 'C', to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 24 March, 1927. Provisions which were, incidentally, embodied in the Anglo-Iraq Treaty of 1930, after almost three years of confusion and delay.
[115] CO730/119/10, no. 40299, part I: High Commissioner, Secret 'C' to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 24 March, 1927.
[116] CO730/120/1, no. 40299, part II: Sir Samuel Hoare to Amery, private, 12 April, 1927; draft letter from Amery to Foreign Office and Air Ministry, 20 May, 1927. CO730/119/10, 40299, part I: record of a conversation between Sir Samuel Wilson, permanent Under-Secretary, Colonial Office, and Sir H. Trenchard, 28 June, 1927.
[117] CO730/119/10, no. 40299, part I: L. Oliphant, head of the Foreign Office Eastern Department to the Under-Secretary of State, Colonial Office, 1 June, 1927.

On the other hand, Cecil did not believe the members of the Council 'had any clear idea in their own minds as to how long it would take before Mesopotamia [sic] was fit for membership of the League'. [118] He supported Amery's suggestion for a Commission of Inquiry, confident that the Commission would report that the Iraqi administration was capable of governing the country without British assistance. Therefore, he stated

> there is no necessity out of regard for the susceptibilities of the League for us to postpone supporting the entry of Iraq beyond 1928.[119]

However, Cecil seemed to have been inspired more by criticism of the government in the press, and concern for the prospects of the Conservative Party at the next election, than by any considerations pertaining to Iraq.[120]

Together with Chamberlain's concerns, a memorandum circulated by Amery may have been pivotal to the decision by Cabinet in July to delay Iraq's admission to the League.[121] He offered a compromise between satisfying 'reasonable' public opinion in Iraq, and overcoming probable opposition at Geneva, by proposing that the government announce that

> if all goes well in Iraq in the interval, His Majesty's Government will be prepared to support an application by Iraq for membership of the League in 1932.[122]

The intervening five years, according to Amery, would give the government time to make arrangements for securing imperial interests beyond Iraq's admission to the League.[123]

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[118] CO730/120/1, no. 40299, part II: 'Entry of Iraq into the League of Nations', memorandum by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, 17 June, 1927.
[119] Ibid.
[120] CO730/120/1, no. 40299, part II: 'Entry of Iraq into the League of Nations', memorandum by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, 17 June, 1927.
[121] CO730/120/1, no. 40299, part II: extracts from the Conclusions of the Cabinet, 38(27), 4 July, 1927.
[122] CO730/119/10, no. 40299, part I: C.P. 178(29), 'Entry of Iraq into the League of Nations', L.S. Amery, 9 June, 1927.

The Cabinet's decision to defer Iraq's admission to the League was not, however, influenced primarily by progress in that country, but rather, by how a recommendation for early release would reflect on the government, given the provisions attached to the League's decision on the frontier. Furthermore, Chamberlain's opposition to Iraq's early release was influenced by anticipated opposition from the French government, and the possible effect on negotiations currently in progress for an Anglo-Egyptian treaty.[124]

Feisal was informed in July that Amery was prepared to consider revising the 1926 treaty and agreements in accordance with the Cabinet decision.[125] This set in motion a train of events not anticipated when in 1921, the government opted to conduct Britain's mandatory relations with Iraq by means of a treaty. Exposing the tension between British imperial aims and responsibilities to the League, Hall noted that it was Amery's wish to meet Feisal's demands for the relaxation of British control without leading the League Council 'to suppose that our control was being appreciably relaxed'.[126] However, Chamberlain continued to express 'serious doubts' concerning Iraq's fitness to stand alone in four years' time. He accused the Colonial Office of withholding information contained in recent despatches from Baghdad, which revealed that Feisal continued to interfere with government appointments, and as a result of tensions between Sunni and Shi'a politicians,

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[123] Ibid.

[124] CO730/120/5, no. 40299B: L. Oliphant, Foreign Office, to the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, 9 November 1927. The Colonial Office was informed that the Chargé d'Affaires at the French Embassy, M. de Fleuriau had informed Chamberlain that his government considered it impossible that the League would consider admitting a state under a mandate as a member state. For an account of the negotiations between the Foreign Office and the Egyptian Prime Minister see P. Mansfield, *The British in Egypt*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971, 256-7. See also J. Darwin, 'Imperialism in Decline?', 669, 671.

[125] CO730/120/1, no. 40922, part II: B.H. Bourdillon, Acting High Commissioner, to H.M. King Feisal, immediate and secret, D.O. no. R.O. 213, 22 July 1927.

[126] CO730/120/1, no. 40922, part II: J. H. Hall minute, 12 August, 1927, on Dobbs, secret, to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 29 July, 1927.

the government was in disarray.[127] Therefore, he charged, Cabinet had not been fully informed when the decision was made.[128] The Colonial Office dismissed the reports of Feisal's meddling as 'exaggerations', assuring Chamberlain that Amery was not disturbed by Dobbs' pessimistic reports.[129] Yet Amery's confidence cannot have been as complete as the assurance to Chamberlain implied.

As a result of the tension in Baghdad, it was suggest that Feisal might find it convenient to visit Europe for the summer, where coincidentally, he would be closer to London for discussions relating to the revision of the treaty and agreements.[130] At the same time, Amery arranged for Dobbs to take leave in England, believing that with 'the two protagonists out of the country we feel confident that the atmosphere will become calmer.'[131] On his way to Europe, Feisal announced his intention to abdicate if the treaty did not provide for a significant relaxation of British control,[132] a threat he repeated one month later during informal talks with Shuckburgh and Hall in Switzerland.[133]

At the end of October, negotiations commenced in London, which Feisal anticipated would result in a new treaty marking a step towards meeting his demands for greater

[127] CO730/120/1, part II, no. 40299: Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies to Captain Hardinge, Sandringham, 3 November, 1927. For a detailed account of the Sunni/Shi'a tensions in 1927 see P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 101-105.
[128] CO730/120/1, no. 40299, part II: copy of 'Minute by the Secretary of State', Austen Chamberlain, 22 July, 1927.
[129] CO730/120/1, no. 40922, part II: William Orsmby-Gore, Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Colonial Office, to Sir Austen Chamberlain, 4 August, 1927.
[130] CO730/120/1, no. 40299, part II: B.H. Bourdillon, Acting High Commissioner, Baghdad, Secret, D.O. No. R.O. 213, to HRH King Feisal, 22 July, 1927.
[131] CO730/120/1, no. 40299, part II: W. Ormsby-Gore, parliamentary Under-Secretary, Colonial Office, to the Foreign Secretary, 4 July, 1927.
[132] CO730/120/1, no. 40299, part II: extract from Sir Ronald Storrs, private, to William Ormsby-Gore, 10 August, 1927. On his way to Europe, Feisal visited his father living in exile on Cyprus, where his message was given to the British Governor, no doubt in the expectation that it would be sent on to London.
[133] CO730/120/1, no. 40299, part II: 'Iraq: Report by Sir John Shuckburgh on Conversation with King Feisal at Aix-le-Bains, 5th-7th September, 1927', 12 September, 1927.

autonomy.[134] While he recognised that British military assistance would be required beyond 1928, negotiations soon broke down over his demand for treaty recognition of the 'complete independence' of Iraq, and no agreement had been reached on the right of the British Government to tender advice to the Iraqi Government an 'all important matters'.[135] Ormsby-Gore feared that if negotiations failed, there would be no chance of securing a treaty which would, with minor modifications, regulate relations 'for an indefinite period' following Iraq's emancipation from the mandate.[136] Cabinet concluded, however, that a new agreement which met all Feisal's demands would be 'impracticable'.[137] But at a luncheon with Government Ministers five days later, Feisal's resistance was silenced by a casual assurance from Chamberlain, and negotiations recommenced.[138]

The treaty was signed three weeks later, and Feisal returned to Baghdad shortly thereafter.[139] The ambiguously phrased preamble recognised Iraq as an 'independent sovereign state', subject only to Great Britain's obligations to the League. Article 8 bound the British Government to support Iraq's admission to the League in 1932, provided all went well in the interim.[140] As the preamble illustrated, the government had placed itself in a difficult position. According to the terms of the mandate, Britain's obligations and responsibilities to the League remained, but according to the terms of the new treaty, the

[134] CO730/120/2, no. 40299A, part I: 'Iraq: Suggested Treaty Revision', Middle East Department, Colonial Office, 28 September, 1927. Drafted by J.H. Hall, the treaty was based on the Foreign Office draft Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of Friendship and Alliance, dated July 1927.
[135] CO730/120/3, no. 40299A, part II: C.P.288/27: Acting Secretary of State for the Colonies, William Ormsby-Gore, 'Iraq: Negotiations for Treaty Revision', 21 November, 1927.
[136] Ibid.
[137] 730/120/3, no. 40299A, part II: extract from Cabinet minutes 57(27), 23 November, 1927.
[138] CO730/120/3, no. 40299A, part II: J.H. Hall note, 28 November, 1927. See P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 108. Sluglett stated that at the luncheon, Chamberlain assured Feisal that if the Iraqi government encountered difficulties as a result of following British advice, 'Britain would not fail to do what was necessary'.
[139] CO730/125/13, no. 40626B: J.E. Shuckburgh to Under-Secretary of State, Foreign Office, 15 December, 1927.
[140] The National Archives, Parliamentary Papers, Command Paper 2998: 'Treaty between the United Kingdom and Iraq, signed at London, 14 December 1927'.

League Council would have grounds for suspecting that the British government was shirking its responsibilities.

While Feisal may have been persuaded to accept the treaty, ratification depended on the Iraqi government's acceptance of the subsidiary agreements. However, negotiations over the agreements also broke down.[141] One of the principle stumbling blocks was the demand by Churchill, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for the Iraqi government to pay the difference between the cost of stationing the Royal Air Force in Iraq and at home.[142] The stalemate generated confusion in the Colonial Office, which had no contingency policy for the situation now facing the government. Dobbs proposed to inform the Iraqi government that the British government was 'indifferent' to the fate of the draft agreements, and was quite content to carry on with those currently in force.[143] As an indication of the quandary confronting the Colonial Office, however, one of the Middle East Department officials suggested bypassing the treaty altogether, and reverting to the mandate.[144] While the effect in Iraq would have been counter-productive, a reversal of policy of that nature would almost certainly have aroused suspicions in Geneva.

[141] CO730/139/2, no. 68015, part I: C.P. 103(29), 'Political Situation in Iraq', memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 28 March, 1929.
[142] CO730/134/12, no. 58400: High Commissioner, Baghdad, secret 'A', to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 9 May, 1928.
[143] CO730/134/12, no. 58400, part I: High Commissioner, Baghdad, Secret 'A', to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 9 May, 1928. In July an interdepartmental conference was informed that the Iraqi government had been assured that the British government did not intend to ask the Iraqi government to pay the excess cost until it was in a financial position to do so. CO730/129/8, no. 58108: Record of an Inter-Departmental Conference at the Colonial Office, J. H. Hall, 25 July, 1928.
[144] CO730/134/12. No. 58400, part I: W.J. Bigg minute, 9 May, 1920, on High Commissioner, Baghdad, Secret 'A', to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 9 May, 1928.

When informed that according to the protocol to the 1922 treaty, the current agreements would automatically expire in December 1928, [145] Shuckburgh warned Treasury that this

> entirely alters the position … The tactical advantage is … no longer with His Majesty's Government but with the Iraq government, who, once they appreciate the position, as they eventually must, will not be slow to press home that advantage.[146]

Pitching his argument in terms of imperial requirements, he explained that apart from the defence requirements of Iraq, it was essential to retain British forces in the country to protect purely British interests. However, given ratification of the treaty depended on the Iraqi government's acceptance of the agreements, the legal position of the British troops remaining in the country after that date would depend on the 'good-will' of the Iraqi government. Again exposing the tension between imperial aims and the obligations of the mandate, Shuckburgh recognised that the Iraqi Government could not be persuaded to consent to the agreements by threats or intimidation. In any case, a threat to withdraw British forces from the country would be pointless unless the Government was prepared to act upon it. On the other hand, he stressed that

> any attempt to carry it into effect would involve the risk of creating a situation which the present reduced British garrison might be incapable of controlling.[147]

By October, however, while the stalemate continued, a new factor had arisen to test the resolve of the Colonial Office.

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[145] CO730/134/12, no. 58400, part I: Law Officers' Department, Royal Courts of Justice, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 3 August, 1928.
[146] CO730/134/12, no. 58400, part I: Sir John Shuckburgh to Treasury, 20 August, 1928.
[147] CO730/134/12, no. 58400, part I: J.E. Shuckburgh to Treasury, 20 August, 1928. By April 1928, the RAF presence in Iraq had been reduced from eight squadrons to five, together with six sections of Armoured Cars. By early 1929, there were no British or Indian ground troops in the country, while the Levies had been reduced to two battalions. CO732/40/9, no. 69067: Memorandum by J.E. Shuckburgh prepared for Mr Churchill, 23 January, 1929.

B.H. Bourdillon, the Acting High Commissioner for Iraq, appeared before the Permanent Mandates Commission in October 1928. Dobbs later informed Amery that the members of the Commission had criticised some of the claims in the Annual Report regarding Iraq's progress.[148] As a way of countering the contradictions inherent in the treaty/mandate arrangement, and a further reflection of the Colonial Office attitude to the League, Hall suggested that in future relations with the Commission,

> [a]ll that is needed is administrative "camouflage", something to satisfy the busybodies at Geneva, i.e. the maximum of apparent control with the minimum of real interference.[149]

In January 1929, as part of a general critique of the government, the Conservative press resumed the attack on expenditure in Iraq, demanding that Britain withdraw from the country immediately.[150] Shuckburgh shrugged off the criticism, noting that the "scuttle" press unintentionally played 'a rather helpful part', by creating the impression

> that there really is an important section of English public opinion that favours immediate severance of all connection with Iraq. This is apt to have a salutary effect on Iraqi "nationalists" … and to make them hesitate to push their opposition to us too far.[151]

On this occasion, Shuckburgh may have been a little too sanguine, given that on the previous day the Iraqi government had resigned, suspecting Britain's 'good faith' regarding

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[148] CO730/134/12, no. 58400, part I: Dobbs, secret 'B', to Amery, 20 October, 1928.
[149] CO730/135/2, no. 58417, J.H. Hall note, 17 January, 1929. An outline of the techniques of neo-imperialism following decolonisation almost fifty years later are clearly visible in this statement. See W.R. Louis & R. Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Decolonization', 49-79, and K. Nkruma, *Neocolonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*, London, Heinemann, 1965, 'Introduction', ix, xi.
[150] CO730/139/2, no. 68015, part I: press cuttings from the *Sunday Pictorial*, 19 January, 1929, p. 3 and the *Daily Express*, 22 January, 1929.
[151] CO730/139/2, no. 68015, part II: J.E. Shuckburgh to Sir Samuel Wilson, Under-Secretary of State, 22 January, 1929.

the proposal to support Iraq's admission to the League.[152] Amery reminded Dobbs that his proposal had only been made on the proviso that

> the "present rate of progress in Iraq is maintained and all goes well in the interval". Spectacle of serious breakdown of administrative machine … or of prolonged failure on part of [the] Iraqis to maintain properly constituted Government could not but produce a most unfortunate impression on those who will have to determine when time comes whether condition mentioned above has been duly fulfilled.[153]

That is where matters stood when Dobbs' successor, Sir Gilbert Clayton, arrived in Baghdad in early March 1929.[154] Soon after arriving, Clayton informed the Colonial Office that the only conditions under which Feisal believed a new Ministry could be formed included scrapping the 1927 treaty, prolonging the expired agreements in order to 'regularise' the position of British forces in Iraq, and giving an unconditional assurance that the government would support Iraq's admission to the League in 1932.[155] Clayton was informed that the government would consider Feisal's proposal.[156]

However, Amery was unable to provide a solution to ease the political deadlock in Baghdad. Given he considered it improbable that any Ministry could be formed which would accept Britain's terms, he fleetingly considered reimposing direct rule. While uncertain if

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[152] CO730/139/2, no. 68015, part I: High Commissioner, Baghdad, despatch no. 35, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 21 January, 1929.
[153] CO730/139/2, no. 68015, part I: Secretary of State for the Colonies, despatch no. 25, to High Commissioner, Baghdad, 22 January, 1929.
[154] Clayton served with Kitchener's forces in the Sudan prior to the war, and while serving in the Military Intelligence Department in Cairo, was directly involved in negotiations with the Arabs in the early war years. Post-war, he served as an adviser to the Egyptian administration, and from 1922-1925, served as civil secretary to the Palestine administration. From 1929-1927, Clayton was the British envoy to Ibn Saud, and in 1928, was appointed High Commissioner to Iraq. He died in office on 11 September 1929. M.W. Daly, 2004, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* on-line service, http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/ref.odnb/32440. Accessed 17 October, 2014. See also P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 114. He described Clayton as an 'old friend' of Feisal's.
[155] CO730/139/4, no. 68015, part III: High Commissioner, Baghdad, telegram no. 110, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 14 March, 1929.
[156] CO730/139/3, no. 68015, part II: Secretary of State, paraphrase telegram no. 108, to High Commissioner, Baghdad, 25 March 1929.

constitutional government and parliamentary institutions were suited to Iraq, he concluded that the experiment could not be abandoned. Furthermore, for Amery, the reimposition of direct rule would be a humiliating admission of failure, and from an imperial perspective, would result in a serious loss of British prestige in the East.[157]

As a result, when Clayton again sought an unconditional promise from the British government to support Iraq's admission to the League in 1932, Amery again insisted that the proviso could not be scrapped since the Government could not commit to support Iraq's candidature in three years' time 'without regard to what may happen in the interval.'[158] Furthermore, Shuckburgh informed Amery that the Foreign Office, every wary of French opposition, opposed any 'watering down' of the conditions for Iraq's admission to the League.[159] At a subsequent Cabinet meeting, Chamberlain reinforced that view, expressing reluctance to agree to the undertaking to support Iraq's admission in 1932, and he claimed, several other ministers agreed with him.[160]

The Conservative Government was voted out of office in early June 1929. The consensus in the literature is that the advent of the Labour Government, ideologically opposed to imperial ventures, signalled a real change in Anglo-Iraqi relations.[161] On the departmental level, however, while the Colonial Office was prepared to make minor concessions to the Iraqis, the Foreign Office resisted, and for a short time in the late

[157] CO730/139/4, no. 68015, part III: C.P. 103(29), 'Political Situation in Iraq', memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 28 March, 1929.
[158] CO730/139/2, no. 68015, part I: High Commissioner, Baghdad, paraphrase telegram no. 144, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 11 April, 1929; Secretary of State for the Colonies, no. 132, to High Commissioner, Baghdad, 19 April, 1929.
[159] CO730/139/2, no. 68015, part I: J.E. Shuckburgh note to Amery, 15 April, 1929.
[160] CO730/139/4, no. 68015, part III: extracts from the minutes of Cabinet 17(29), 17 April, 1929.
[161] See for example, P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 119, and S. Pedersen, 'Getting out of Iraq – in 1932', 981-982.

summer of 1929, the different priorities of the two departments came more sharply into focus.

Before Lord Passfield assumed the office of Colonial Secretary on 7 June, a despatch drafted by Hall in May, and approved by Amery on 3 June, was sent to Baghdad. Clayton was informed that if the Iraqi government wished, Amery was prepared to omit the proviso from the statement to be made to the League when proposing Iraq's admission.[162] It was not the unconditional pledge Clayton had requested, however given the attitude of the Foreign Office, there was little more the Colonial Office could do. In the interim, the Labour Cabinet postponed consideration of future policy for Iraq.

In response to rising unemployment in Britain as a result of the global economic depression at the end of the 1920s, the government appointed a Committee to consider colonial development projects. At the beginning of July, when considering proposals for the construction of a railway line from Baghdad to Haifa, and an extensive irrigation project in Iraq, the committee decided that before considering those projects for inclusion in the scheme, Cabinet should discuss the government's policy for Iraq.[163] The Colonial Office resurrected and updated the previous Labour government's 1924 memorandum, 'Policy in Iraq', in order to show that essentially, the policy had not changed.[164] In a covering memorandum, Passfield indicated his belief that

[162] CO730/139/3, no. 68015, part II: Secretary of State, telegram no. 189, to High Commissioner, Baghdad, 7 June, 1929.
[163] CO730/147/13, no. 68394: Inter-Departmental Committee on Overseas Development and Migration, O.D.M.(29), third conclusions, 1 July, 1929. The Committee, under the chairmanship of J.H. Thomas, Lord Privy Seal, included representatives from the Works Department, Treasury, Ministry of Labour, the Colonial Office, the Dominions Office, the Department of Trade, Board of Trade, the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Sir Oswald Mosley.
[164] CO730/148/1, no. 68403: draft 'Policy in Iraq', Middle East Department, Colonial Office, 8 July, 1929.

> a "scuttle policy" is not called for by any considerations existing today, and, so far as I can see, would do grave damage to our prestige and our trade, without bringing us any compensating advantage, except the saving of some portion of the £500,000 annually which we now have to find.[165]

Echoing Amery's thoughts two years previously, while the period for setting affairs in order had been reduced, for the Middle East Department the value of the three years lay in the fact that it would give the government time to convince the League of Iraq's ability to stand alone.[166] At the same time, reviving the argument proffered in 1918 following the publication of the Anglo-French Declaration, the memorandum declared that

> the soberer elements in the population do not really wish us to go and realise that, if our assistance and support were withdrawn, their house of cards would be in serious danger of collapse.[167]

Despite the apparent urgency to discuss future policy for Iraq, however, Cabinet adjourned discussions until Thomas' committee had completed their deliberations.[168] In the meantime, conflict again arose between the Colonial Office and the Foreign Office, following the receipt of a despatch from Baghdad in early September.

Clayton reported that the Iraqi Prime Minister had resigned and Feisal's preferred candidate had refused to take his place. An upsurge of nationalist agitation followed the publication of the terms of the revised Anglo-Egyptian Agreement, and there were doubts in Baghdad regarding Britain's 'real' policy. According to Clayton, the Iraqis argued that after the 'Egyptian conversations' the people would expect any government taking office to

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[165] CO730/148/1, no. 68403: C.P. 214, 'Our Position in Iraq', memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 18 July, 1929. For the Labour Party's imperial 'pride' see S. Mahajan, *British Foreign Policy 1874-1914*, 4, and P.J. Marshall, 'Imperial Britain', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 23, no. 2, (1995), 379-394, (accessed on-line 17/08/2011).
[166] CO730/148/1, no. 68403: draft C.P.214: 'Policy in Iraq', Middle East Department, Colonial Office, 8 July, 1929.
[167] Ibid.
[168] CO730/147/13, no. 68394: extracts from CAB/30(29): minutes of the Cabinet meeting, 24 July, 1929.

request a definite assurance from the British government to support Iraq's admission to the League in September 1931. He raised the spectre of a widespread uprising if their demands were not satisfied, but given that there were insufficient British forces in Iraq to deal with the unrest, Clayton urged the government to advance on 'generous and liberal lines', or face a situation in which military reinforcements would be required.[169] While the Colonial Office was willing to make concessions to Feisal's preferred 'moderate' Prime Ministerial candidate in order to thwart the demands of the 'extremists', a Middle East Department official believed it would be difficult to persuade the Foreign Office to agree to Clayton's request.[170]

The response from the Foreign Office clearly indicated that the two departments were working at cross purposes. Alexander Cadogan, a Foreign Office counsellor, accused the Colonial Office of 'cynically disregarding' the obligations undertaken in 1926, following the League Council's frontier decision. Furthermore, he wrote, Clayton's proposal for Iraq's admission to the League in 1931

> will expose us to a considerable amount of reproach on the part of foreign governments and may place us in a very difficult position before the Council of the League.[171]

While Clayton's proposal was not accepted, in early September the Cabinet finally agreed to scrap the 1927 treaty, and draft a new agreement based on the Anglo-Egyptian Agreement of 1929.[172] Clayton died suddenly before receiving the news that his efforts had

[169] CO/148/8, no. 68444, part I: High Commissioner, Baghdad, despatch no. 299, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1 September, 1929.
[170] Ibid. O.G.R. Williams minute, 2 September, 1929.
[171] CO730/148/8, no. 68444, part I: 'Minute Sheet', A. Cadogan, Foreign Office, 6 September, 1929. In a note to Shuckburgh Hall wrote that he believed Cadogan was exaggerating the difficulties likely to be encountered at Geneva.
[172] The National Archives, CAB23(61), Cabinet Conclusions, 9 September, 1929, 5. The full text of the proposed Anglo-Egyptian Agreement, announced on 7 August, 1929, was published in *The Times* on 8 August, p.1. The

been partially successful. He was succeeded by Sir Francis Humphrys, who held the post of High Commissioner for Iraq until 1932.[173] On this occasion, however, the High Commissioner was to take no part in the drafting of the treaty until the departments in London and Cabinet agreed on the terms.[174]

1930 – 1932: Diplomacy and Deception: the 'novel experiment' abandoned.

Inter-departmental conflict, primarily over the future role of the Royal Air Force in Iraq, delayed the drafting of the new treaty.[175] When a new Iraqi Ministry was installed in March 1930, with the pro-British Prime Minister, Nuri es-Said, equally as anxious for the British to leave as they were to dispense with the obligations of the mandate, negotiations proceeded rapidly. The Anglo-Iraq Treaty of Alliance, to come into force upon Iraq's admission to the League of Nations, was signed in June and ratified by the Iraqi government in November.[176]

Article 1 prescribed 'consultations' on foreign policy; British advisers were to remain in the country, with existing immunities and privileges to continue, and the British

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National Library of Australia, http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/1010885. (accessed 15/06/2014). The terms included support for candidature for membership of the League of Nations; bilateral aid in the event of war; British forces were to be accorded the use of all facilities including forts, aerodromes and communications; foreign military instructors and officials were to be British; and the treaty provided for modification of the terms after 25 years. However, negotiations broke down and the Agreement was abandoned in late 1930. P. Mansfield, *The British in Egypt*, 260.

[173] Peter Sluglett, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* online edition, 2006. A colonial administrator, and deputy foreign secretary in the Government of India in 1921, in 1922, Humphrys was appointed by the Foreign Office as British Minister to Kabul, where he remained until 1929. Http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/37582, (Accessed 25/05/2015).

[174] CAB/23(61): Cabinet Conclusions 9 September, 1929, 5.

[175] CO730/148/10, no. 68444, sub-file 'A': Report of an Inter-departmental Conference held in the Secretary of State's room, 6 December, 1929. Departmental officials from the Colonial Office, Air Ministry, Foreign Office and Treasury debated the future role of the Royal Air Force in Iraq, and again, the question of foreign representation. Remarkably, the debate descended to a squabble over the location for the treaty negotiations with the Iraqis, and by whom the negotiations would be conducted.

[176] FO371/14509/E6209: copy of High Commissioner, Baghdad, paraphrase telegram no. 552, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 16 November, 1930.

ambassador was to take precedence over the diplomatic representatives of other countries. While the Iraqi Government was to take responsibility for internal order and external defence, the British Government retained the right to station forces at two air bases in Iraq, and the right to move British troops through the country in the event of war. A separate Financial Agreement, signed later in London, provided for the ownership of the Iraqi railways, and the property of the port of Basra to be transferred to the Iraqi government, the railways to be administered by a corporation, and the port by a trust until the outstanding debt, calculated on their value, had been repaid to the British Treasury. [177]

With interests secured, the principle objective of the British government was to convince the League and the members of the Permanent Mandates Commission that Iraq was indeed fit for emancipation from mandatory control. At the November 1929 session of the Permanent Mandates Commission, the members had expressed 'a good deal of well-bred surprise, and even incredulity', at Dobbs' claim that Iraq would be fit to enter the League by 1932.[178] A year later, they expressed outright hostility towards the British government's plans for Iraq's early emancipation.[179] In anticipation of further obstruction, the secretaries in the Middle East Department turned their attention to developing strategies to hoodwink the Permanent Mandates Commission.

[177] Cmd. 3627: 'Treaty of Alliance between the United Kingdom and Iraq signed at Baghdad, 30 June, 1930, together with Notes Exchanged'; and Cmd. 3675: 'Notes Exchanged', dated September 1930, containing the Financial Agreement.
[178] CO730/148/9, no. 68444, part II: extracts from Report by Mr Clauson on 16th session of Permanent Mandates Commission: Iraq Report, received at the Colonial Office, 28 December, 1929.
[179] CO730/152/7, no. 78076: J.H. Hall to J.E.W. Flood, 21 November, 1930; H.W. Young, Geneva, to J.H. Hall, private, 11 November, 1930. Due to the recent arrival of Clayton's successor, Hubert Young, the interim Acting High Commissioner, was given the task of defending Britain's Iraq policy before the PMC in November 1930.

Toby Dodge argued that of the three pressures on the British government – Iraqi demands for greater autonomy, domestic public opinion, and the judgements of the Permanent Mandates Commission - that body was the weakest of the three, and the easiest and safest to attempt to deceive.[180] The lengthy discussions on tactics recorded in the Colonial Office files, however, suggest otherwise. Furthermore, in 1926, Chamberlain had complained of the Permanent Mandates Commission's tendency 'to extend its authority to a point where the government will no longer be vested in the mandatory power'.[181] One year later, Passfield expressed similar sentiments.[182] Arguably then, while it was not easy to deceive the Permanent Mandates Commission, it was imperative in order to escape from the responsibilities and obligations of the Mandate, and accountability to the League of Nations, a position with which British policy-makers were never entirely comfortable.

In order to deflect criticism from Geneva, and prevent the possibility of the League appointing a Commission of Inquiry to investigate conditions in Iraq, Hubert Young, the target of the Commission's hostility in 1930, suggested that the authorities in Baghdad assemble a comprehensive review of Iraq's progress over the previous ten years.[183] Compiled in Baghdad, the first two sections of the report were commended as 'a fine piece

[180] T. Dodge, 'International Obligation, Domestic Pressure and Colonial Nationalism: the birth of the Iraqi state under the mandate system', 158. See also, S. Pedersen, 'Getting out of Iraq – in 1932', 987-991, for the attitudes of the German, Italian and French members of the Permanent Mandates Commission to Iraq's early emancipation.
[181] The League of Nations, *Official Journal*: Minutes of the 41st session of the Council, 3rd meeting, 3 September, 1929, 1233. http://.heinonline.org.ezproxy.flinders.edu.au/HOL/index?index=journals%2Fleagon&collection=journals (accessed 04/07/15).
[182] CO730/148/9, no. 68444, part II: J.E. Shuckburgh to the Under-Secretary of State, Foreign Office, 9 January, 1930.
[183] CO730/152/7, no. 78076: J.H. Hall to J.E.W. Flood, 15 December 1930.

of work' when they were received at the Colonial Office.[184] However, there was criticism from the Foreign Office and British officials in Baghdad, for very different reasons. Cadogan ridiculed the Report when it was received at the Foreign Office, describing it as an apologia for Britain's role as the mandatory power.[185] On the other hand, Kinahan Cornwallis, adviser to the Ministry of the Interior in Baghdad, criticised it for obscuring the true state of affairs, citing daily instances of maladministration.[186] In June 1931, following a thorough questioning on the complete report, the High Commissioner, Sir Francis Humphrys, informed the Permanent Mandates Commission that the British government would accept 'moral responsibility' if Iraq failed to live up to the (largely fictitious) state of affairs portrayed in the report. Just what 'moral responsibility' implied was not clearly defined, but it was enough apparently, to convince the members of the Commission to consent to Iraq's emancipation.[187]

Humphrys may have soothed the concerns of the Permanent Mandates Commission, but when the terms of the 1930 treaty were published, the document was the target of criticism in London, and petitions flooded in to the League from Iraq's minority groups, for whose protection no provision had been made.[188] In a reversal of Ottoman era policy, the

[184] FO371/15318/E1476: J.E.W. Flood, Middle East Department, Colonial Office, to the Under-Secretary of State, Foreign Office, 23 March, 1931 with enclosure: *Special Report by His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland to the League of Nations on the Progress of Iraq 1920-1931*.
[185] FO371/15318/E1476: A. Cadogan minute, 2 April, 1931, on J.E.W. Flood to the Under-Secretary of State, Foreign Office, 23 March, 1931.
[186] CO730/167/14, no. 88231: K. Cornwallis to H.W. Young, Acting High Commissioner, Baghdad, 22 March, 1931.
[187] CO730/173/1, no. 96378: extracts from the unedited minutes of the Permanent Mandates Commission, Twentieth Session, 9-27 June 1931. See S. Pedersen, 'The Impact of League Oversight on British Policy in Palestine', in R. Miller, (ed), *Palestine, Britain and Empire: The Mandate Years*, London, Ashgate, 2010, 39-65. Pedersen observed that following the Assyrian massacre in 1933, several of the members of the PMC regretted that decision.
[188] *Hansard*, Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, Series 5, vol. 255, 23 July, 1931, 'Colonial and Middle Eastern Services Committee' cc 1819-1823: Thomas Drummond Shiels, the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, produced an approximate assessment of Iraq's largest minority groups: 88,000 Jews, 500,000 Kurds,

Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, Dr Thomas Drummond Shiels, shrugged off responsibility for Iraq's minority groups, offering the feeble excuse that in a treaty of alliance between two independent states, the British Government had no right to insist on the inclusion of a clause of that nature, as it would be interpreted as interference in Iraq's domestic affairs.[189] A lead article in *The Times,* also criticised the government for the omission, expressing doubt as to the Iraqi government's capacity, or indeed willingness, to control its officials in the areas where the minority populations predominated.[190]

To be sure, Iraq's minority groups, specifically the Kurds and Assyrians, presented complex and difficult problems which successive British governments had neither the will nor the funds to resolve.[191] Rather, the question was left to the League to resolve. The Council's assent to Iraq's emancipation from the Mandate depended on the signature of certain guarantees by the Iraqi government, including a declaration for the protection of the rights of Iraq's minority groups, signed by Nuri in May 1932.[192] When petitions from the Assyrians were submitted to the League, demanding the creation of an autonomous region within Iraq, it seems the Foreign Office was prepared to take risks. The British representative was instructed to inform the Council that there was no land available, and furthermore, the British government was unable to consider anything which might

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40,000 Assyrians, and 25,000 Yezidis, the latter three groups primarily residing in the Mosul province. For details of the petitions see S. Pedersen, 'Getting out of Iraq – in 1932', 993.

[189] Ibid, col. 1825. Interestingly, during the debate William Ormsby-Gore, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies in the previous government, complained that members of Parliament were largely ignorant of the Colonial Office's 'doings' regarding the Permanent Mandates Commission's discussions on Iraq.

[190] *The Times*, 'Iraq Minorities', 6 July, 1931, 13.

[191] Similarly, with regard to the Armenian refugees in Iraq post-war, Akaby Nassibian contends that their protection may have been one of the 'principles of British policy, but it never became a British interest'. A. Nassibian, *Britain and the Armenian Question*, 134.

[192] CO730/173/4, no. 96378, part 4: copy of League of Nations C.440.1932.VI, Geneva, May 7th, 1932: 'Annex to the Report of the Council Committee, May 7th, 1932: Draft Declaration by the Iraqi Government.'

jeopardise Iraq's admission to the League.[193] The League Council unanimously agreed to Iraq's admission to the League of Nations in October 1932.[194] Yet while Iraq may have been the first of the mandated territories to attain independence, it was, as Pedersen suggested, a 'neo-imperial definition of independence'.[195]

Historians have alluded to the 'impressive record' of state-building in Iraq during the mandate period.[196] Yet it seems form mattered more than substance, and only a few seem to have recognised the dangers inherent in a hastily-constructed system followed by the rapid devolution of power.[197] Kinahan Cornwallis' concerns have been mentioned; at the same time one of his colleagues expressed despair at the system the British had created in Iraq, the first passage of his lament applying equally well to the policy-makers in London:

> It is asking for disaster for *ronds-de-cuir* who do not know provincial conditions or tribal mentality to sit on their office stools and give orders without mastering the facts of their cases … The Government is – I suppose, inevitably – in the hands of a limited oligarchy composed essentially of educated, Sunni, Arab, townsmen representing really a very small minority of the country. It is therefore easy for any agitator to play on the racial, religious or personal prejudices of anybody who is not an Arab, or a Muslim, or if a Muslim not a Sunni, or a townsman, or educated …

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[193] FO371/16035/E4874: 'Brief for the British Representative at the Council of the League of Nations: Assyrian Petitions', 17 September, 1932. For further analysis see F.P. Walters, *A History of the League of Nations*, 573-575. For British policy relating to the Assyrians during the 1920s, see P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 152-155.

[194] F.P. Walters, *A History of the League of Nations*, 573.

[195] S. Pedersen, 'Getting out of Iraq – in 1932', 999. As discussed earlier, Darwin, and Louis and Robinson highlighted the continuities with mid-Victorian 'empire on the cheap' in the informalisation of empire during the inter-war years. J. Darwin, 'Empire in Decline?', 678; W.R. Louis & R. Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Decolonisation', 50.

[196] H.J. Mejcher, *Imperial Quest for Oil*, 105; J. Yaphet, 'The View from Basra: Southern Iraq's Reaction to War and Occupation, 1915-1925', in R. Simon & E. Tejirian, (eds), *The Creation of Iraq 1914-1921*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2004, chapter 5, 33.

[197] See Usha Natarajan, 'Creating and Recreating Iraq: Legacies of the Mandate System in Contemporary Understandings of Third World Sovereignty', 799-822, and for a similar conclusion see David Cannadine, 'Colonial Independence', in W.R. Louis, (ed), *Ultimate Adventures with Britannia*, chapter 10, 229, and K. Holsti, *The State, War and the State of War*, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 1997, 41-60. On a similar theme, see Abbas Kelidar, 'States without Foundations: The Political Evolution of State and Society in the Arab East', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 28, (1993), 315-339, in which the author predicted the situation which confronts the Middle East at the present time: Islamic fundamentalists and radical nationalists 'conducting a war of attrition' against the states constructed in the Middle East in an endeavour to replace them with 'alternatives in accordance with their respective ideals.' (p. 330).

> Whatever the outward democratic form of Government may be, in Iraq the Administration is in fact almost all powerful.[198]

Conclusion:

In considering the factors which influenced the British government's decision to 'quit' Iraq, there are several points to consider. Just as oil was not the sole motive for the occupation of Basra in 1914, it was no barrier to an early release from the Mandate. As the discussions in 1923 illustrated, influence over the territory where oil deposits were suspected to exist was the principle requirement, and the League of Nations Mosul award in 1925 secured that aim. While the cost of occupation was a compelling influence on the decisions of the Iraq Committee in 1923, by 1929, as Passfield pointed out, expenditure on Iraq had been reduced to £500,000 annually. Given the economic situation in 1929, this was not an inconsiderable sum, however it was miniscule in comparison to the hundreds of millions of pounds expended on Iraq since 1914. Seemingly the imperial visions of Passfield and Amery vis-à-vis Iraq were almost identical.

Edmond's lament in 1931 would seem to have ruled out the prospect of a strong nationalist movement developing momentum in a state characterised by racial, linguistic and religious divisions, and a wide disparity between urban and tribal societies.[199] However, while cost and local resistance to British rule cannot be discounted completely, there was another factor relating to the attitudes of the policy-makers to the processes set in train in

[198] FO371/15324/E5732: copy of memorandum by C.J. Edmonds, British Adviser on the staff of the Ministry of Interior, 10 October, 1931.

[199] See Abbas Kelidar, 'States without Foundations'. He argued that in the early stages, Arab nationalism was a preoccupation of the urban political elites rather than a widespread movement. See P. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 214. He agrees that in the racially and ethnically divided state, nationalist ideology was predicated on the Sunni vision of an Arab-Islamic world.

1919, specifically relating to the mandates system. Trusteeship had long formed part of the liberal justification for empire. International scrutiny of British policy and actions in the mandated territories, on the other hand, was an entirely new experience, and as this chapter has demonstrated, policy makers were uncomfortable with that aspect of the system, and would have preferred a less formal arrangement in order to retain Iraq as an autonomous imperial space, an ambition which was achieved by the terms of the 1930 Treaty.

Despite the mandate, however, there was little that was novel in British policy. Indeed, the policy settled upon in 1921 remained relatively unchanged throughout the period, consisting of three principle tenets: the reduction of responsibilities and therefore expenditure, the establishment of an administration which would function with the minimum of string-pulling by British advisers, and withdrawal from the country once essential interests had been secured. Given the consternation in 1921 regarding Britain's legal position in Iraq, culminating in the treaty, and the premise on which that document was based – that Iraq possessed a national government and had progressed further than anticipated towards self-government – it is reasonable to argue that from the time of the Cairo Conference, the British Government had no intention of carrying out the 'civilising mission' embodied in Article 22 of the League Covenant. Arguably, such an approach was asking for trouble. In the first instance, there was never a contingency policy for the times when Feisal and the Iraqi Government threatened to upset those arrangements. Moreover, in order to re-institute direct control, the British government would have had to abandon whichever treaty was in force. However, that would have required the consent of the

League of Nations, and the questions which policymakers sought to evade would almost certainly have been raised.

The British government was trapped in a dilemma largely of its own making, and with the expiry of the agreements in 1928, found itself in a weak position vis-à-vis the Iraq government. Eventually it was realised that intimidation, in the form of constant threats to withdraw from the country, was a tactic which had lost its effect. Not wanting to stay, but unable to leave without securing its interests, the only way out was to find the formula for a treaty which would give the Iraqis almost all they wanted, while at the same time, securing British interests, and then develop a strategy to convince the League of Nations that Iraq was able to stand alone.

Having overcome the paralysing effects of domestic polycratic rule over Iraq, during the 1920s Britain found itself competing for competency with the League of Nations, France, and for a short time, the United States. The chaos that had characterised internal decision-making had been displaced to the international arena. The deception required to secure British interests without formal imperial institutions speaks largely of the processes of imperialism recalibrated by policy-makers for the circumstances in which for the first time, British actions in Iraq were subject to the scrutiny, and opposition, of the member-states of the League of Nations.

Conclusion

This thesis began by arguing that Britain's attempts to rule Iraq were plagued by polycratic decision-making which eroded the capacity of the government to formulate a clear line of policy. As this thesis has shown, this was apparent in a number of periods of effective policy blockage, most notably between 1917 and 1920. As these incidents demonstrated, several institutional players demanded policy primacy, whether in the service of the Government of India, the central government in London, or in the places in between, namely Cairo and Baghdad. This emphasis on polycratic imperial rule has cast light on some of the problems in previous studies of Britain in Iraq. Most notably, this study of Mesopotamia, later Iraq, is of particular importance in terms of the management of empire and techniques of imperial control. Within one generation, Mesopotamia passed from informal British influence, to direct control under military occupation, to internationally-recognised indirect control under the League of Nations mandate for Iraq, back to informal imperialism.

Rather than focussing on oil as the primary influence on British policy, however, this thesis has posited that there were other factors, such as the strategic location of Iraq, and the perceived commercial and developmental prospects the country offered. It has also scrutinised more closely than before, the attitudes of the Foreign and Colonial Offices towards the League of Nations during the term of the mandate, and most importantly, the role of departmental civil servants as policy innovators, and the unintended consequences of hasty decisions.

To summarise, this thesis has closely examined the final expansion of the British Empire in the Middle East during the First World War, with a focus on policy-making for Mesopotamia/Iraq, the interdepartmental rivalries, and the factors which influenced British policy from the mid-nineteenth century to 1932. It has revealed that the decentralised nature of the British Empire, in which jurisdiction in the Persian Gulf region was divided between the central government and the government of India is important. During the nineteenth century, the institutional structures in place severely hampered the development of a clear and constant British policy for Mesopotamia. Prior to the First World War, the friction between the various arms of empire stymied the development and implementation of policy. During the war, however, when the stakes were much higher, the internal contradictions between the competing agendas became critical.

The division of control between the governments in London and India formed one dimension of the overlapping and conflicting responsibilities of the Foreign and India Offices in the Middle East; the different approaches to Arab participation taken by British officials in Egypt and Mesopotamia formed another. Furthermore, in 1916 the War Office entered the crowded space, while the demands of the Treasury had always to be considered. The diffusion of power following the establishment of the War Cabinet regime in December 1916 provided yet another institution to complicate the formulation and co-ordination of policy for the Middle East in general and Mesopotamia in particular.

The establishment of a Cabinet inter-departmental sub-committee, the Mesopotamian Administration Committee, for the formulation of policy for Mesopotamia in 1917 may have been an attempt to overcome the structural blockages resulting from

polycratism. However, by its very nature, that committee, and its successors in the years between 1918 and 1920, merely provided an arena for inter-departmental conflict. Before Cabinet ended the institutional chaos in December 1920, the principal impediment from a policy perspective was not only the slippage between the visions of rule and techniques of control of the authorities in Cairo and Baghdad, but more importantly, the inability of Ministers and officials in London to negotiate the hazards of a bureaucracy at war with itself for control of British Middle Eastern affairs.

The changed international climate following the entry of the United States into the war in 1917 required a reassessment of the means by which long term strategic and material interests could be secured. With the degree of sovereignty to be handed over to the Iraqis hotly contested, the League of Nations mandates and the rationalisation of the meaning of 'self-determination' provided the justification for Britain's continuing presence in Mesopotamia, whilst crucial discussions over how to secure British interests in the region continued.

Few scholars have studied British policy-making for Iraq in the period between 1921 and 1932, and the point of origin for ideas and innovations which were eventually translated into policy. The partition of the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire, embodied in Churchill's Sharifian solution for Iraq and Transjordan in 1921, resembled in form, if not in geographic scope, the early war plans for an Arab State under indirect British control conceived by British officials in Cairo. However, the haste with which Churchill's compromise was attained, and the subterfuge necessary to achieve it, attests to the ad hoc, reactive nature of British policy for the Middle East. Moreover, given the recommendations

of the Cairo Conference, it is clear that the ideals of trusteeship embodied in Article 22 of the League of Nations Covenant were of secondary importance to the immediate reduction of British military and financial commitments in Iraq. The decisions made in 1921 were pivotal to understanding British policy for Iraq for the term of the mandate, a period characterised by uncertainty and indecision at the higher levels of government, exacerbated by misgivings regarding the role of the League of Nations. Essentially, according to the League's definition of sovereignty, Iraq remained a divided space: authority to administer the Mandate was to be shared by the League and the mandatory Power, acting on behalf of the League, a situation with which successive British governments were never entirely comfortable.

This thesis has argued that the key to the initial decision to regulate relations with Iraq by means of a treaty lay in the uncertain legal status of the British in Iraq. Later, however, the treaty provided the framework for the subsidiary agreements which enabled the British Government to administer the mandate at the least possible cost. Rather than easing concerns, the treaty signed in 1922 compounded the self-imposed difficulties which subsequently plagued policy-makers as they sought to balance the contradictions inherent in the treaty/mandate arrangement.

In that regard, most of the policy ideas and innovations were conceived of by the permanent bureaucrats in the Colonial Office Middle East Department, largely as a result of the interplay between London and the High Commissioner in Baghdad. From a higher altitude on the pyramid of power, the documents reveal that the Secretary of State rarely intervened in this process, merely endorsing policy proposals before presenting them to

Cabinet for discussion. The sharp exchanges between the Foreign and Colonial Offices may have been partly due to traditional rivalry. As this thesis has shown, however, they were largely the product of their responsibilities to the League of Nations. More sensitive to criticism from Geneva, particularly from the French government, seemingly the Foreign Office was less willing to take risks. The accusation by the Foreign Secretary, Austen Chamberlain, that the Colonial Office was concealing the true state of affairs in Iraq from the Cabinet may have been well-founded. When the Foreign Office assumed responsibility for the British government's relations with the League of Nations in 1922 its officials were largely reliant on the information regarding Iraq provided by the Colonial Office. Parliament was even less well informed, given that changes of policy were generally not announced until after the fact.

As this thesis has shown, 'government' does not necessarily imply that all Ministers agreed on a particular policy, or that decisions were based on Party ideology. This was clearly evident at the time of the 1922 general election, during which a number of Conservative candidates, including Andrew Bonar Law, the future Prime Minister, based their campaigns on withdrawal from Iraq, while the Liberal, Winston Churchill, presented a strong case for remaining. Yet in comparison to the confusion and conflict prior to 1921, the mandate period was remarkable for consistency regarding the general policy for Iraq laid down in early 1923. The slippage between stated policy objectives and the ideals of trusteeship became even clearer when it was decided to reduce the period of the treaty to four years after the ratification of the peace treaty with Turkey. Ultimately, that was not a decision which the British government possessed the power to make unilaterally, given that according to the terms of the mandate, the final decision on Iraq's ability to stand alone

rested with the League of Nations. That compelled the Foreign Office to take a more cautious approach to resistance to Britain's policy in the League Council, from the French government in particular.

Managing local resistance to the mandate was largely the concern of the local British authorities. As noted previously, the concerns of the Subaltern Studies group resonated in the case of Iraq, where the voices of Iraqi resistance were weakened by racial and religious heterogeneity. Those below the level of the elites resorted to sporadic acts of violence, and in 1920, participated in the widespread revolt against British rule. On the other hand, the voices of the 'elites' were for the most part mediated through British interlocutors to produce the desired responses. While Dobbs' reports of unrest in 1927 were dismissed by the Colonial Office as exaggerations, it is fair to say that during the last years of the mandate, the Arabs increasingly had a voice which the British listened to and acted upon, if their aims coincided.

Arguably, Iraqi nationalist pressure was not the principal reason for the British government's determination to rid itself of the responsibilities and obligations of the mandate. Rather, this thesis has argued that the British were motivated to press for Iraq's admission to membership of the League of Nations in 1932 by two main objectives. Firstly, the disinclination to submit British policy and actions to the scrutiny of the League of Nations; and secondly, the desire to disengage from the responsibilities of the mandate as quickly as possible, while at the same time retaining Iraq as a self-governing imperial space at minimal cost to the British taxpayer. The latter objective was provided for in the 1930 Treaty. The creation of autonomous imperial spaces was the mid-Victorians' preference for

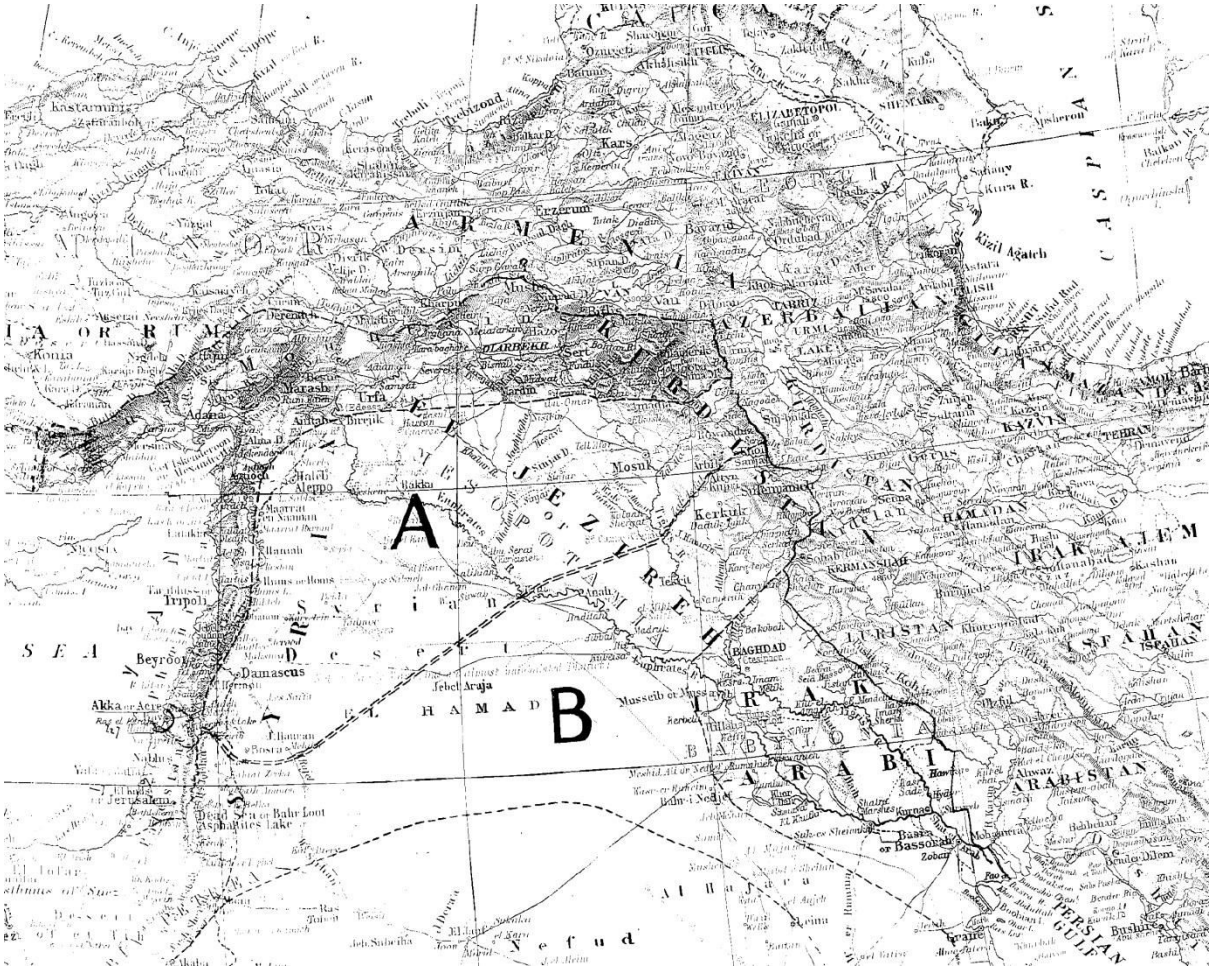
extending informal imperialism by collaboration with local rulers. Such was the protean nature of informal imperialism, however, that in the collaborative bargains, different degrees of autonomy applied. Generally, as the terms of the treaties struck with the Persian Gulf chiefs in the nineteenth century showed, the imperial power assumed control of foreign relations in order to prevent foreign powers from gaining a foothold. Similar techniques were adapted for Iraq. Ostensibly a self-governing independent state, one of the benchmarks of sovereignty, namely control of external relations, was restricted by the terms of the 1930 Anglo-Iraq treaty. The creation of an autonomous imperial space in Iraq antedated the 'imperialism of decolonisation' as defined by Louis and Robinson by almost thirty years. Yet when Britain began the process of decolonisation in the 1950s, it is clear that, as in Iraq, the terms of the collaborative bargains struck with the local rulers in order to maintain British influence and secure imperial interests, also harked back to mid-Victorian forms of informal imperialism.

History shows that while the bargain embodied in the 1930 Anglo-Iraq treaty secured Britain's imperial interests for the long term, as Edmonds had predicted in 1931, the outcome for Iraq and its people was disastrous. Lacking popular support, the Iraqi administration soon became dependent on the power of the military, and the rapid and incomplete devolution set Iraq on the path to future problems. Furthermore, Arnold Wilson's prediction in 1918 that the creation of small states in the Middle East would result in a new Balkan problem was remarkably prescient. The partition of the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire, foreshadowed in the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, and brought to fruition in Churchill's Sharifian solution, has left a legacy of military coups, political violence, western intervention, and war.

Britain's lack of a coherent approach to securing imperial interests in Mesopotamia, and then Iraq, led to enormous problems, both during and after the war. Arguably, many of the mis-steps reflect the reality that without a strong line of policy to guide them, policymakers vacillated on issues of central importance. This was not merely a question of Conservative, Liberal, or Labour Party ideological differences. Rather, it was a reflection of the fact that if Britain sought to divide and rule its imperial territories, its own internal divisions complicated its ability to rule at all.

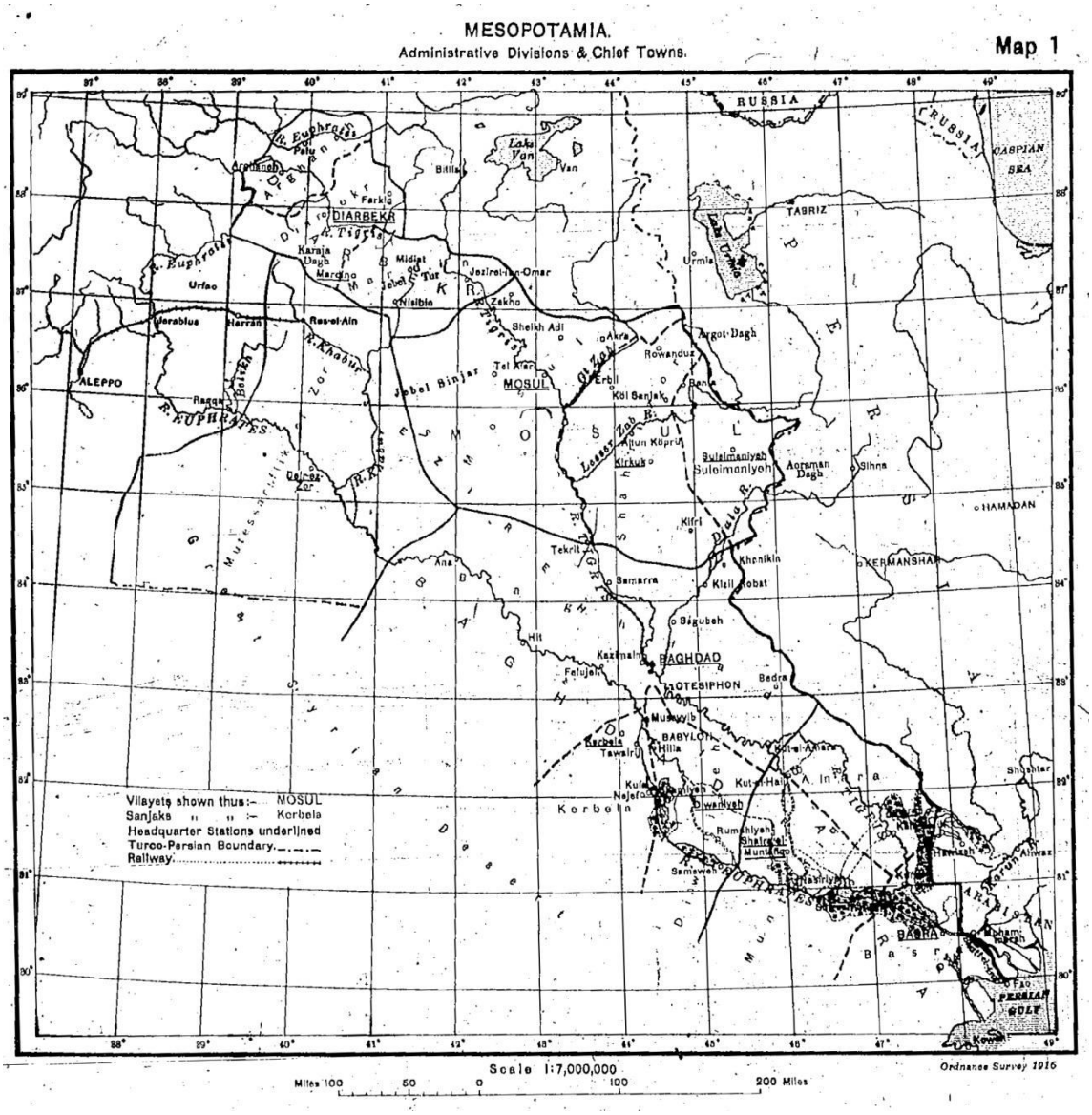
Maps

The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 for the Partition of the Middle East



Source: Stanford's, London, from India Office Records, Eur. Mss. Curzon Papers, F112/279, f.4

Mesopotamia: Administrative Divisions and Chief Towns



India Office Records, Eur. Mss. Curzon Papers F112/286, f. 30; Map 1 appended to Secret, P48: 'Peace Conference: Memorandum Respecting Mesopotamia', Sir E. Richards, November 1918.

Modern Iraq

Source: Nations Online Project: http//:www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/Iraq_map.htm (Accessed 12/08/2015)

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