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Melinda Cohoon  
*Portland State University*

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**The British-American Imperial Agenda in Iraq: the Oil and Railway line from  
Kirkuk to Haifa, 1920-1932**

by  
**Melinda Cohoon**

**Faculty Mentor:  
Associate Professor Laura Robson**

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## Introduction



During the 1920s, British-American oil and railway developers in the former province of Mosul created burgeoning ethnic divides. Many of the people in the Mosul region disagreed with the province coming under the direct rule of Baghdad as they were discontented with centralization. Yet, they lacked a sense of a nationalist identity. The British considered mineral exploitation more imperative than these anti-centralization sentiments. As a consequence, the British imperial power disregarded the ethnic diversity of Mosul and their objections to becoming part of a united Iraq. This is evident when examining actions of European consortium Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC). Before the finalization of Mosul's inclusion in Iraq, APOC surveyed a pipeline and railway from Kirkuk to Haifa in 1922. Mosul's inclusion in Iraq, where the town of Kirkuk lies, occurred in 1926.

Figure 1: Map of Iraq.<sup>1</sup>

Mineral resources in Iraq also engendered a dispute between British and American oil ambitions. British oil hegemony assuaged the quarrel over oil resources, because U.S. interests determined that aligning with the British imperial power would amount to them obtaining mineral rights. Furthermore, British authority and U.S. ambitions for Iraqi oil coincided with railway expansion, and they were attentive toward the potential Kirkuk-Haifa oil and railway lines. Obtaining mineral and railway concessions was a priority for the U.S. State Department. Nevertheless, the British sought to maintain their predominance over Iraqi oil. In 1925, U.S. Standard Oil Company bought part ownership of the Turkish Petroleum Company (TPC). TPC was the main purveyor of oil after the 1925 Kirkuk-Haifa oil and railway concession, an agreement officially signed between the Iraqi government and TPC in 1928. British and American consortiums such as APOC and TPC were a factor in the Mosul question. Consortium hegemony over mineral resources and railway infrastructure were the dominant themes throughout U.S. correspondence during the 1920s.

## Historiography of Iraq: Oil and Railways

Historical scholars of 1920s Iraq argue that the premise for the founding of the Iraqi state was based on oil: therein lies the dichotomies of the historical scholarship. One argument leans toward how oil influenced ethnic divides, while the other argument does not consider the oil question and insinuates that when Iraq formed, the British took ethnic heterogeneity into account. Another explanation suggests that oil was paramount to the British agenda in Iraq,

<sup>1</sup> Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), xix.

while the British all together disregarded the issue of ethnic heterogeneity when creating the Iraqi state. However, the scholarship lacks a concrete analysis on the connection between oil and railways and how these issues brought to fruition conflict amongst the heterogeneous population of Mosul. Iraqi oil and railways were capitulations granted by the Iraqi government under the discretion of the British Iraqi Administration to British-American oil consortiums, while the British government ignored the impact these capitulations were to have on the heterogeneous population. Before Iraq's creation, the area was made up of semi-autonomous provinces where ethnic lines were blurred.<sup>2</sup> The population in Mosul aligned themselves with more than one ethnicity, and therefore, uniting Mosul, Basra and Baghdad into a single entity led to an "emerging fault-line" amongst the heterogeneous population.<sup>3</sup> Proposed oil and railway lines that cut through the Mosul region was at the expense of Mosul's autonomy. Mosul came under Iraq's wing because of an insistence for exploiting its potential mineral resources.

Peter Sluglett's and William Stivers' scholarship represent earlier historical analyses of Iraq and oil, while demonstrating the importance of oil to the British. However, their scholarship does not establish the connection between ethnic heterogeneity and the Mosul question. Peter Sluglett's *Britain in Iraq: Contriving King and Country* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2007), whose first edition was written in the 1970's, and William Stivers' *Supremacy and Oil: Iraq, Turkey, and the Anglo-American Order, 1918-1930* (1982) address the relationship between the British and the oil companies who wanted concessionary power in Iraq. According to these scholars, Mosul's inclusion into the Iraqi state was a result of oil ambitions. Sluglett uses primary source documentation from the British Foreign Office, Air Ministry, and Colonial office records, including private and publicized documents. Continuing the tradition of using public and private governmental documents, Stivers' scholarship uses the Foreign Office Political Files, but he also includes primary sources pertaining to U.S. foreign relations, several U.S. edited document collections, and personal accounts.

The difference between Sluglett's and Stivers' arguments lie in their elucidation of British and American oil ambitions. For instance, Sluglett argues that the British authorities set up the Iraqi government in a way that was to best serve British interests, with concerns for "its communications with India, the Empire air route, and the protection of the Persian and Iraqi oilfields."<sup>4</sup> Like Sluglett, Stivers explains British involvement in Iraq as a strategic move in maintaining control over India as well as Iraqi oil.<sup>5</sup> However, Stivers argues that British control over Iraq served American interests because stability in the region meant tranquil conditions for U.S. investment and trade.<sup>6</sup> Charles Tripp's *History of Iraq* (2000) and Toby Dodge's *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied* provides a broader context for the formation of the Iraqi state. Tripp argues that the British owned a substantial stake of TPC, and therefore, these British authorities saw Mosul as an opportunity for revenue and the possibility of removing Iraqi part-ownership of oil concessions.<sup>7</sup> Tripp, Stivers, and Sluglett mainly use British government documents in their historical work, while other scholarship uses

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<sup>2</sup> Arbella Bet-Shlimon, "Group Identities, Oil, and the Political Domain of Kirkuk: A Historical Perspective," in *Journal of Urban History*, vol. 38: 2012, 916, accessed: February 10, 2014. DOI: 10.1177/0096144212449143

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 915.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq: Contriving King and Country* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 6/7.

<sup>5</sup> William Stivers, *Supremacy and Oil: Iraq, Turkey, and the Anglo-American World Order, 1918-1930* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982), 18.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 192.

<sup>7</sup> Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 60.

a diverse subset of primary sources ranging from newspaper articles to poetry in addition to government correspondence.

While Stivers' and Sluglett's main goal throughout their scholarship is to show British and U.S. imperial concerns for oil, another theme throughout the literature establishes how imperial mineral ambitions affected the ethnic heterogeneous population of Iraq. Arbella Bet-Shlimon in her work "Group Identities, Oil, and the Local Political Domain in Kirkuk: A Historical Perspective" (2012) argues that to consider Kirkuk's oil as merely a commodity denies the historical realities that oil produced for the population such as oil urbanization, which "created ethnic identities and rivalries."<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, Guiditta Fontana's "Creating Nations, Establishing States: Ethno-Religious Heterogeneity and the British Creation of Iraq in 1919-23" (2010) argues that "establishment of nation-states was complicated by the existence of a variety of minorities and rival ethno-religious groups," and that "British policymakers took these factors into account in 1919-20."<sup>9</sup> Though Guiditta's work does not consider oil, her view is starkly contrasted to Bet-Shlimon's scholarship when concerning the effect of the British on Iraq. Guiditta states that there were pre-existing ethnic rivalries throughout Iraq, while Bet-Shlimon implicates that oil ambitions created the ethnic conflict within Kirkuk. Both scholars use Colonial office records, and other governmental documents; however, Bet-Shlimon uses poetry to accentuate the tumultuousness of oil urbanism during the 1950's for Kirkukis.

One of the main themes throughout the scholarship on Iraq focuses on ethnic identities and rivalries, and how oil and the British were factors in creating new issues after the formation of Iraq. Another dichotomy within the literature concerns itself solely with the British and U.S. oil interests in Iraq. The gap appears to lie within uniting both U.S. and British oil interests relative to the central issue to the Mosul question of ethnic divides, while also correlating oil and railways as a unifying factor of interest for the imperial ambitions. The literature on railways is inherently scarce, as the most recent scholarship on 1920s Iraqi railways is Edward Mead Earle's *Turkey, the Great Powers, and the Bagdad Railway: A Study in Imperialism* (1923), and other historical scholarship tends to focus on the Baghdad railway prior to the creation of Iraq such as Sean McMeekin's *The Berlin-Baghdad Express: the Ottoman Empire and Germany's Bid for World Power* (2010). Throughout this work, it will be argued that the British-American concern for oil and railways created burgeoning ethnic rivalries in the Mosul region during the interwar period, and that these imperial powers were backing Anglo-Persian Oil Company and Turkish Petroleum Company without concern for the ramifications of having Mosul governed by a Sunni Arab elite in Baghdad.

### **Iraqi Railways and the Anglo-Persian Oil Company: General Imperial Interests and its Relationship with the Iraqi Government**

During the 1920s, British imperial interests encompassed Iraqi railway infrastructure and oil resources. While the British were in charge of the Iraqi mandate, the U.S. placed consulates in Baghdad to build a cordial relationship with the Iraqi government. The U.S. consulates of

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<sup>8</sup> Bet-Shlimon, "Group Identities, Oil, and the Political Domain of Kirkuk: A Historical Perspective," 915.

<sup>9</sup> Guiditta Fontana, "Creating Nations, Establishing States: Ethno-Religious Heterogeneity and the British Creation of Iraq in 1919-23," in *Middle Eastern Studies*, 46:1, 2, (Feb 12, 2010), accessed February 10, 2014, DOI: 10.1080/00263200902760535.

Baghdad sent correspondence to the Department of State commenting on British affairs, with an opportunistic eye for U.S. investment for Iraqi oil and railways. Prior to the Iraqi mandate, American commercial enterprises had limited contact with Ottoman provinces: dates and licorice root were their main imports, while the main export was oil into Iraq by Standard Oil Company of New York.<sup>10</sup> By the 1920s, the Iraqi oil question concerned the U.S. Standard Oil Company (Socony) and the U.S. State Department. A mutual attraction to oil linked the U.S. State Department and Standard Oil together for “profit-seeking ambitions.”<sup>11</sup>

However, British imperial ambitions comprised of more than Iraqi oil and railway infrastructure, because different philosophies for Middle Eastern policy were dependent on the division of authority. The Colonial Office, Foreign Office, War Office and India office, were each given a piece of power, which “ensured that visions for the territorial and political organization of the occupied areas became a source of bureaucratic infighting.”<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, the premise for British post-war policy on Middle Eastern petroleum was a desire for mineral resource hegemony.<sup>13</sup> Once the British received the Iraqi mandate, a major shift in the political realities of the inhabitants accumulated into hostility that led to the June 1920 revolt.<sup>14</sup> Because of the insurgents’ destruction of the railway lines, it was necessary to reconstruct the line and shut down the route between Basra and Baghdad. The stability of the railway system throughout Iraq required a grant to replace unsafe timber bridges with permanent lines.<sup>15</sup> This resulted in an economic deficit for British authority between 1921 and 1922, due to railway infrastructural development and the high cost of oil per ton. According to the Foreign Office report by the High Commissioner on the Finances, Administration and Condition of Iraq, the requirement necessary for capital investment was to ensure that the railways up to a “moderate standard of equipment and to provide access to Karbala and Najaf.” Otherwise, the railways were not up to a standard of use for achieving their commercial potentialities.<sup>16</sup>

As a public utility, the Iraqi railways were unprofitable; therefore, the British considered potential buyers. Correspondence between the American Consulate of Baghdad and the U.S. Department of State pondered on whether the Iraqi government was to run the Mesopotamian railways. The Iraqi railway question was due to the British Disposal and Liquidation Commission contemplating the transfer of the Iraqi railways to the Iraqi government, in 1922. Furthermore, the commission also reviewed the possibility of permitting the Iraqi government to sell or lease railway properties to private companies.<sup>17</sup> However, the British determined it may prove more beneficial to concede railway and oil to the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) than to sell the railways to the Iraqi government. That year, APOC took over the Hillah to Basra rail line, to use the line’s materials for constructing a railway from Tikrit to Mosul by

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<sup>10</sup> Stivers, *Supremacy and Oil*, 108.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 113.

<sup>12</sup> Fontana, “Creating Nations, Establishing States: Ethno-Religious Heterogeneity and the British Creation of Iraq in 1919–23,” 2.

<sup>13</sup> Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 68/69.

<sup>14</sup> Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 43.

<sup>15</sup> Foreign Office, “Report by His Majesty’s High Commissioner on the Finances, Administration and Condition of the ‘Iraq for the period from 1<sup>st</sup> October 1920 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 1922 [FO 371/8998],” in *Iraq Administration Reports, 1914-1932*, vol. 7, 1920-1924, ed. Robert L. Jarman (Melksham and Oxford: Redwood Press Ltd. and Green Street Bindery, 1992), 64/65.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>17</sup> NAUS, RG59, M1370, reel 26, 890g.77, “Telegram received,” Harvey to the Secretary of State, Washington, February 11, 1922./ NAUS, RG59, M1370, reel 26, 890g.77/oug, “Telegram Sent,” Fletcher from the Department of State of Washington to the American Consulate of Baghdad, February 14, 1922; 1.

way of Kirkuk and Erbil.<sup>18</sup> Heading the prospect was Sir AT Wilson, former British civil commissioner of Baghdad from 1918-1920 and Resident Manager of APOC, who in 1922 was “looking over the survey of the proposed railway and pipeline to the Mediterranean.”<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the Iraqi government still hoped to purchase the railways.

In February 1923, an interview with the Minister of Public Works Yasin Pasha Al-Hashimi and the American Consulate of Baghdad revealed that “the British were asking 3 ½ millions sterling for the railways which consist of 580 miles, but [al-Hashimi] thought this amount exorbitant, and opposed buying at these figures.”<sup>20</sup> The Iraqi government could only afford to replace the existing railways but could not afford to purchase the 580 miles of railway at war prices. Though the British government in May 1923 transferred provisionally the management of the railways to the Iraqi government’s Minister of Communications and Works, the British relied on other sources for concessionary power, such as APOC, over the Mesopotamian railways.<sup>21</sup> Any power the Iraqi government had over the Mesopotamian railways was inherently limited.

The Iraqi government’s Minister of Public Works al-Hashimi was, however, in an unpopular position with the British. Interestingly, al-Hashimi took advantage of his position to obtain both land and use laws to validate such transactions as well as to enable tax exemption for his behest.<sup>22</sup> U.S. capital investment in railways and oil were an interest of al-Hashimi, which the American consulate of Baghdad stated: “I told him that if American capital participated in the exploitation of oil, I saw no reason why it should not be available for other necessary developments, as soon as the status of the country was definitely determined and there is reasonable hope of security.”<sup>23</sup> al-Hashimi thought that TPC’s claims to oil was weak and disfavored its ratification, while indicating that the Iraqi government was “opposed to giving any concession to the Anglo Persian Oil Company if another can be found [...]”<sup>24</sup>

The crux of al-Hashimi’s argument established a distaste for the control over the railway system and its correlative, oil, for both APOC and TPC. In 1922, the American consulate suspected that APOC was to receive control over the Mesopotamian railways, as it was certain that “the so-called Government of Iraq will not operate them.”<sup>25</sup> This perception came from the apparent connection of APOC to the 1914 D’Arcy concession that gave APOC the ability to build oil wells throughout the Ottoman Empire’s territories.<sup>26</sup> APOC obtained its own route in

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<sup>18</sup> NAUS RG59, M1370, reel 26, 890g.77/3, “Future of Iraq Railways,” American Consulate of Baghdad Thomas R. Owens to the Secretary of State, Washington, March 2, 1922; 1.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> NAUS, RG59, M1370, reel 26, 890g.77/7, “Interview with Yasin Pasha El-Hashimi, Minister of Public Works,” American Consulate of Baghdad to the Secretary of State, Washington, January 19, 1923; 1.

<sup>21</sup> Colonial Office [Colonial No. 13], “Report by His Britannic Majesty’s Government on the Administration of ‘Iraq For the Period April, 1923--December, 1924,” in *Iraq Administration Reports, 1914-1932*, vol. 7, 1920-1924, ed. Robert L. Jarman (Melksham and Oxford: Redwood Press Ltd. and Green Street Bindery, 1992), 685.

<sup>22</sup> Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 64.

<sup>23</sup> NAUS, RG59, M1370, reel 26, 890g.77/7, “Interview with Yasin Pasha El-Hashimi, Minister of Public Works,” American Consulate of Baghdad to the Secretary of State, Washington, January 19, 1923; 2.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> NAUS, RG59, M1370, reel 26, 890g.77/2, “Transfer of the Mesopotamian Railways,” Thomas R. Owens American Consulate of Baghdad to the Secretary of State Washington, February 16, 1922; 1.

<sup>26</sup> Colonial Office [Colonial No. 4], “Iraq. Report on Iraq Administration, April 1922—March 1923 [FO 371/8998],” in *Iraq Administration Reports, 1914-1932*, vol. 7, 1920-1924, ed. Robert L. Jarman (Melksham and Oxford: Redwood Press Ltd. and Green Street Bindery, 1992), 359.

Iraq in 1922, a line constructed from Ali Gharbi and maintained as a private tramline for the company's use only.<sup>27</sup>

In 1923, the British government granted APOC control of an Iraqi railway line in Khanakin City, which gave APOC exclusivity for that particular line of 27½ miles in length.<sup>28</sup> According to Sluglett in *Britain in Iraq*, the Iraqi government concluded that more liberal control over the Iraqi railways may lead to a more amicable relationship with Britain. The Iraqi governments "only hope for amelioration lay in tinkering with the details of the Anglo-Iraqi relationship, and trusting that Britain might eventually be persuaded."<sup>29</sup> By August 31, 1929, the Iraqi government's desire to purchase the Iraq railways, along with the port of Basra, from the British had not occurred because the Iraqi government considered the asking price more than what the properties were worth.<sup>30</sup> Further speculation in November 6, 1929 on the issue of Iraqi railways proved unfruitful since "the King's speech at the opening of Parliament did not touch on the [Iraqi] Government's program regarding the taking over of the Iraq Railways. Rumored that a mission was to be sent to London to negotiate but as yet no date of departure has been set."<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, the British wanted to maintain and extend railways while furthering its oil prospects. A purported railway project envisaged by the British was to parallel the route of the Mosul pipeline under both British and French discretion, and indirect U.S. control.<sup>32</sup>

### **The Kirkuk-Haifa Line to the Mediterranean: The Implications of Oil and the Mosul Question**

The Mosul pipeline and railway concession was a settled matter by 1928 between the Iraqi government and TPC consortium. However, the question of dominion over the Mosul region was a separate dispute, entwined with the concern for oil. The British placed elites into positions of authority within the Iraqi government that aligned themselves with British policymaking. Some historians have suggested that the British- Iraqi government relationship constituted a hybrid culture that enabled "the constant fusion and mutual synthesis between the cultures of the colonizer and the colonized and their representation as "self" and "other" become impossible to maintain."<sup>33</sup> While the hybrid relationship between "colonizer" and "colonized" may apply to the Sunni elite and the British, and was a strategy the British tended to use in other parts of Iraq, the theory does not reflect how much of the population within Iraq lacked an amicable relationship with Britain and a voice in the main governmental body of Baghdad.

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<sup>27</sup> NAUS RG59, M1370, reel 26, 890g.77/13, "Future of Iraq Railways," Thomas R. Owens American Consulate of Baghdad to the Secretary of State, Washington, Copy letter form High Commissioner of Baghdad, March 2, 1922; 4.

<sup>28</sup> NAUS, RG59, M1370, reel 26, 890g.77/13, "Latest Information About Iraq Railways: Political, Commercial, and Construction Plans," John Randolph American Consulate of Baghdad, December 26, 1923; 5.

<sup>29</sup> Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 64.

<sup>30</sup> NAUS, RG59, M1370, reel 26, 890g.77/30, "Document File Note, See: 790g.91/10, For: #951," From Baghdad, Name: Randolph, August 31, 1929; 1.

<sup>31</sup> NAUS, RG59, M1370, reel 26, 890g.77/31, "Document File Note, See: 890g.032/8, For: #1008," From Baghdad, Name: Brown, November 6, 1929; 1.

<sup>32</sup> NAUS, RG59, M1370, reel 26, 890g.77/32, "Document File Note, See: 890g.6363 T 84/393, For: #262," From Beirut, Name Brandt, December 3, 1929; 1.

<sup>33</sup> Bashkin, *The Other Iraq*, 3.

Baghdad was the central authority of the Iraqi government, led by a Sunni Arab elite; yet, Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul consisted of a diverse population. On a religious level, according to Guiditta Fontana, there were a significant number of Christian and Jewish minorities present in an urban setting.<sup>34</sup> Whereas many of the Shi'a Arabs lived in the former *vilayets* Baghdad and Basra, along with a considerable number of Sunnis in Baghdad.<sup>35</sup> While Shi'as constituted the majority of the Iraqi population like the other ethnicities, at the time they were not a single community.<sup>36</sup> In Northern Iraq, there were ethnic groups such as Turkmen, Kurds, Arabs, with a smaller population of Chaldo-Assyrian Christians, and a larger Sunni population.<sup>37</sup> However, Turkmen, Kurds, and Arabs were a blurred ethnic concept to those who presided in the area particularly because "an individual's or family's self-identity often stemmed from a combination of their preferred language and social status rather than their ancestry."<sup>38</sup> Therefore, the concept of nationalism was not prevalent during the 1920s amongst the ethno-heterogeneous population of Iraq. On the other hand, the British and the U.S. consulate were averse to nationalist sentiments, as they were concerned with maintaining control and stability over the region for resource exploitation. After all, "America's silent partnership with British power" hinged itself on the mandate system's "responsibility for bringing order to the underdeveloped territories taken over from the defeated states."<sup>39</sup>

While factors such as the complex ethno-religious heterogeneity of the former Ottoman provinces of Basra, Mosul, and Baghdad, perhaps were considerations of the British policymakers in 1919-20, the British opted for "strategic rather than ethnic arguments" for defining the frontiers of Iraq.<sup>40</sup> This was specifically evident in how the British conducted its agreements, or rather lack thereof, with the Kurds. A group of elite Kurds advocated for autonomy, sending a representative to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 and leading to further discussions at the Conference of London and the San Remo Conference of 1920, this discussion was not a prevalent theme amongst the general Kurdish population. The San Remo Conference amounted to Article 62 in the Treaty of Sèvres, signed in August 1920 that called for "local autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish areas."<sup>41</sup> Additionally, Article 64 detailed that such regions included those neighboring Mosul. However, the British found that promises based on creating ethno-homogenous states were inconvenient; after all, money and manpower to enforce such a policy was not lucrative, and to add to matters, the Higher Commissioner Sir Percy Cox advocated for the Kurdish fusion into the Iraqi state.<sup>42</sup> The relationship between the policy of incorporation and the issue of Iraqi oil and railways may seem unclear. Before the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, the British and French petroleum ministers, Long and Bérenger, established a provisional covenant which amounted to "making over Deutsche Bank's former 25% share in the TPC (confiscated during the war by the Custodian of Enemy Property) to French interests" in exchange for a former agreement of the

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<sup>34</sup> Fontana, "Creating Nations, Establishing States: Ethno-Religious Heterogeneity and the British Creation of Iraq in 1919-23," 2.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 3.

<sup>37</sup> Bet-Shlimon, "Group Identities, Oil and the Local Political Domain in Kirkuk: A Historical Perspective," 914.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Stivers, *Supremacy and Oil*, 119.

<sup>40</sup> Fontana, "Creating Nations, Establishing States: Ethno-Religious Heterogeneity and the British Creation of Iraq in 1919-23," 2/3.

<sup>41</sup> Holden, *A Documentary History of Modern Iraq*, 74.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

French to hand over Mosul to Britain back in 1918.<sup>43</sup> Formalization of these arguments came to their crux during the San Remo Oil Agreement of 1920. After obtaining stock in TPC, the French was to have partial influence over the Kirkuk-Haifa line of 1928.

In the town of Kirkuk, there were those who identified as Kurdish that, along with other Kirkukis, who opposed Mosul's inclusion in Iraq.<sup>44</sup> However, Kurdish nationalism was not a dominant sentiment during the 1920s.<sup>45</sup> The issue of the "Mosul Question" came to the forefront during Iraqi centralization from 1918 to 1926. As "the seat of an Ottoman administrative subdivision within the province of Mosul," including Basra, it fell under Baghdad's authority during the Mandate period.<sup>46</sup> Even after the British received the former Ottoman *vilayet* of Mosul from the French, where a large Kurdish population resided, Mosul was still a disputed territory because of Turkish claims to Mosul. However, as a result of "the exigencies of creating the Iraqi state outweigh[ing] special claims of Kurds," Britain took an additional step by to inviting them to endorse or "vote" in favor of a constitutional monarchy of King Faisal.<sup>47</sup> In July 1921, Faisal's election was at a "suspiciously high 96 percent" approval rate from Iraqis.<sup>48</sup> To further support this propaganda, according to one source, the Kurdish regions in Mosul and Erbil Divisions "twice declared their intention of uniting with the Iraq, once in June, 1921, before the arrival of the Amir Faisal, and again in August, [...] they swore allegiance to him as King."<sup>49</sup> However, the Kirkuk Division asked for the postponing of the decision and had not sworn allegiance to the King.<sup>50</sup>

A political fault line emerged in Kirkuk between those "who wished to cooperate with Anglo-Iraqi centralization and those who opposed it," while some elite families and tribes pandered to both political sides of the Mosul question.<sup>51</sup> For instance, one elite patriarch 'Abd al-Majid Beg obtained a relationship with the British authorities within Kirkuk and obtained a position as governor.<sup>52</sup> Despite these symbiotic relationships on a local level between the British and the elites of Kirkuk, the British imperial agenda focused on the capital side of the Mosul question specifically with regards to oil concessions and railway expansion. American consulate of Baghdad John Randolph to the Secretary of State in Washington DC on July 10, 1924 reported that construction begun on the railway extension from Kingerban to Kirkuk. Consulate Randolph explained that the Kingerban-Kirkuk line was to be finished by November of that year, and noted that there was not an existing petroleum concession. Allegedly, the British negotiated the Kirkuk concession with the Turkish Petroleum Company (TPC).<sup>53</sup> Meanwhile, the U.S. sought to influence the British positively by aligning with the imperial power, in hopes of gaining oil rights in Iraq. It was Standard Oil's partnership with TPC in 1925 that instituted U.S. involvement in matters of oil in Iraq.

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<sup>43</sup> Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 70.

<sup>44</sup> Bet-Shlimon, "Group Identities, Oil, and the Local Political Domain in Kirkuk: A Historical Perspective," 917.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 916.

<sup>47</sup> Holden, *A Documentary History of Modern Iraq*, 74.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Colonial Office, "Iraq. Report on Iraq Administration, April 1922—March 1923 [FO 371/8998]," 32.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Bet-Shlimon, "Group Identities, Oil, and the Local Political Domain in Kirkuk: A Historical Perspective," 916/917.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 917.

<sup>53</sup> NAUS, RG59, M1370, reel 26, 890g.77/17, "Negotiations for Irrigation, Agricultural and Petroleum Concessions In Iraq (Mesopotamia)," American Consulate of Baghdad John Randolph to the Secretary of State, Washington, July 10, 1924; 1/2.

Since 1922, the Kirkuk-Haifa rail line was in a state of negotiation. It seemed like the line was going to be built by APOC under the discretion of AT Wilson. As Resident Manager of APOC, Wilson's association to the Haifa-Baghdad line, which was to connect to Kirkuk and Erbil, was as a contributor to the surveying force for the potential railway and pipeline.<sup>54</sup> According to Wilson, Iraq needed improved communications "which are essential if its agricultural and mineral resources are to be developed."<sup>55</sup> TPC received the Kirkuk line concession instead of APOC in a 1925 agreement.

TPC was a consortium of oil companies originating prior to the First World War that had an existing agreement with the Ottoman Empire for Mesopotamian oil prospecting. However, as a result of the British being on the winning side at the end of the war, the German and Ottomans surrendered their shares of TPC to "Allied interests."<sup>56</sup> By the late 1920s, the forfeited areas formerly owned by Germany and the Ottoman Empire were "owned jointly by the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (23.75 per cent), Royal Dutch Shell (23.75 per cent), Compagnie Française des Pétrole (23.75 per cent), a US-based consortium, later shared equally between Standard Oil of New Jersey and Mobil, and Gulbenkian (5 per cent)."<sup>57</sup> TPC negotiated an oil concession agreement with the Iraqi government by March 1925. The TPC concession agreement also marked a turning point in American involvement in Iraq. In 1925, Standard Oil was able to participate in any projects TPC obtained. By 1928, the concession agreement between TPC and the Iraqi government allowed Standard Oil to benefit from its relationship with TPC.<sup>58</sup> This meant a pipeline was to be built near the Kirkuk neighborhood, which led to an oil urbanized city.<sup>59</sup>

Evidently, the American Consulate to the Secretary of State explained that TPC was creating a pipeline from the oilfields in the Kirkuk area.<sup>60</sup> The pipeline, estimating to be 700 miles long, was intended to reach the Mediterranean Sea at a Syrian port, and led "through a country where there are many wells which would mean probably an important saving on water transportation for the different pumping stations."<sup>61</sup> One consideration for the pipeline was for TPC engineers and geologists to create the line from the Kirkuk oilfields via the Hit-Rutba-Hauran-Haifa route near the Hejaz Railway for an estimated 800 miles long.<sup>62</sup> According to Sluglett, by 1930 the compromise on the pipeline was to be above Rutba, with one part to Haifa and another to Tripoli, which was formally agreed upon with TPC as the Iraq Petroleum Company in March 1931.<sup>63</sup>

The relationship between Kirkuk and TPC was evident in terms of the 1925 agreement between the Iraqi government and TPC. TPC and the Iraqi government's agreement allowed

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<sup>54</sup> NAUS RG59, M1370, reel 26, 890g.77/3, "Future of Iraq Railways," American Consulate of Baghdad Thomas R. Owens to the Secretary of State, Washington, March 2, 1922; 2.

<sup>55</sup> NAUS RG59, M1370, reel 26, 890g.77/3, "Clipping from "the Bagdad Times" dated February 17, 1922," in "Future of Iraq Railways," American Consulate of Baghdad Thomas R. Owens to the Secretary of State, Washington, March 2, 1922; 3.

<sup>56</sup> Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 60.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Stivers, *Supremacy and Oil*, 130.

<sup>59</sup> Bet-Shlomon, "Group Identities, Oil, and the Political Domain of Kirkuk: A Historical Perspective," 915.

<sup>60</sup> NAUS, RG59, reel 26, 890g.77/21, "Pipeline to Mediterranean: Route to be Studied: Haifa Route Preferred for Pipeline and Railroad," John Randolph American Consulate of Baghdad to the Secretary of State, Washington, January 17, 1928; 1.

<sup>61</sup> NAUS, RG59, reel 26, 890g.77/21, "Pipeline to Mediterranean: Route to be Studied: Haifa Route Preferred for Pipeline and Railroad," John Randolph American Consulate of Baghdad to the Secretary of State, Washington, January 17, 1928; 2

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 139.

the company control of particular areas of Iraq. For instance, the terms of the previous concession agreement was for TPC to continue as a British-registered company and granted exclusive rights of exploration in all of Iraq, not including the former *vilayet* of Basra.<sup>64</sup> It was under this agreement that put into motion the ratification of the tripartite Anglo-Turkish-Iraqi Treaty by Iraqi parliament, which settled the Mosul question in July 1926.<sup>65</sup> TPC had a fixed period to select a number of land plots and to commit itself to begin drilling for oil within a few years. For each metric ton of oil that TPC produced, they were to pay an agreed sum to the Iraqi government. Meanwhile, the British relationship with TPC concerned itself with not only the pipeline but also a railway to connect the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf in order for the British Empire to have a developed line of communication as well as a way of guarding the mineral resources and railroad infrastructure “to be fought for in case of future wars.”<sup>66</sup> This venture was in the works by the British since APOC planned to create a pipeline to the Mediterranean as early as 1922, suggesting that an undertaking and attentiveness toward the Kirkuk area preceded the TPC concession of 1928.

## Conclusion

By 1931, IPC recognized Kirkuk as a beneficial center of industry and labor, which many Kirkukis relied upon for their livelihood.<sup>67</sup> However, the concern for oil in Kirkuk preceded the



TPC concession of 1928. A decision to build a line from Kirkuk to the Mediterranean was in deliberation since 1922. U.S. involvement in the negotiations of the Kirkuk-Haifa line was a result of Standard Oil’s (Socony) part ownership of TPC.

Figure 2: Oil wells and camp of the Iraq Petroleum Company.<sup>68</sup>

Despite Iraq gaining its independence from the British by 1932, the conditions of British authority remained. Many of the British officials and advisers were present in Iraq and IPC’s control over oil in Kirkuk was unabated.<sup>69</sup> The U.S. preferred Iraq under longer guidance by the British. This was because the U.S. wanted to maintain their capitulations, while the British government instituted an initially *de jure* Iraqi independence to lessen any imposing financial burdens that it had on Britain.<sup>70</sup> Meanwhile, the

<sup>64</sup> Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 60.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> NAUS, RG59, reel 26, 890g.77/21, “Pipeline to Mediterranean: Route to be Studied: Haifa Route Preferred for Pipeline and Railroad,” John Randolph American Consulate of Baghdad to the Secretary of State, Washington, January 17, 1928; 4.

<sup>67</sup> Shlimon, “Group Identities, Oil, and the Local Political Domain in Kirkuk: A Historical Perspective,” 920.

<sup>68</sup> American Colony (Jerusalem), Photo Department, photographer, “Iraq. Oil wells and camp of the Iraq Petroleum Company. (5 miles S. of Kirkuk). Hauling of I.P.C. pipe line sections to lay across the desert to Haifa, port of outlet on eastern Mediterranean,” Photograph (1932), Library of Congress, URL: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/matpc.16256/>, accessed: February 1, 2014.

<sup>69</sup> Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 77.

<sup>70</sup> Stivers, *Supremacy and Oil*, 136/137.

U.S. wanted Iraq to remain stable in order to protect its capital projects and its “open door” policy. After all, the U.S. Wilsonian principle of “self-determination” was in fact married to the idea of free and open markets. Therefore, preventing nationalistic sentiments amongst Iraqis was imperative to U.S. oil ambitions, as in their mind, this would have brought instability within the region. As long as the British authority preserved such stability, the U.S. enjoyed an open market and avoided the expense of maintaining dominion.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 193.

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