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BRITISH POLICY IN IRAQ 1918-1920

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PREFACE

The two years immediately following the first world war were crucial to the history of the Arab world. Because Great Britain played the major role in the administration of the post-war Middle East most of the documentary material of the period is on file in London. Parliament recently made public the political records of the war years and beyond until 1922. For this reason I chose an event which took place during that time as a Thesis topic. The Iraqi rebellion against the British administration in Iraq in the summer of 1920 interested me because it is controversial and because so little about it has been published.

I was fortunate through the efforts of Colonel William Kennedy of the American Embassy in Beirut to receive sufficient financial support for a month of research in London. The month proved a very short period in relation to the voluminous records available for search but many people cooperated to make it possible for me to make full use of my time.

As often happens, the facts and circumstances surrounding the event proved more interesting than the event itself. I found it possible to trace the factors in Britain's policy which led to and probably caused the tribes to revolt. What follows is a description of the political flow of the two years preceding the revolt based upon the hitherto unpublished documents and, equally important, the minutes appended to them. Most of these minutes are in the handwriting

of the men who formulated British policy in those few years which were to form a watershed in the history of East-West relations. Many of the names of the participants have become well known to students of the modern Middle East.

Unfortunately, scarcity of time and resources allowed only a brief visit to Baghdad. In order to explore the Iraqi side of the question, some very thorough investigation in that country would be a necessity. I do believe that virtually all of the significant documented material is in London; because of this I was careful to limit my topic to the British policy aspect of the period.

I would like to thank several others who helped me accomplish as much as I did in such a short time, in particular Mr. Kenneth Tymings of the Public Record Office in London. He and his staff were more than courteous. Miss Margaret Franklin, a redoubtable researcher at the Public Record Office, did some valuable "digging" for me prior to my arrival. I must also mention Mr. M.I. Moir and Miss J.C. Lancaster of the India Office Library who helped me fathom their labyrinthine filing system. The British Museum system was easier to comprehend but I also had courteous assistance there.

While in London I was fortunate to be able to talk with Professor Elie Kedourie of the London School of Economics and Political Science. Professors Zeine Zeine and John Batatu of the American University of Beirut also were generous in providing

advice and guidance. Samir Seikali and Ghassan Atiyya, both AUB graduates who are now working on their doctoral dissertations at the University of London, helped orient me in the search rooms at the Public Record Office.

Finally, I must mention Dr. Joseph Malone, my thesis adviser, Dr. Nabih Faris, chairman of the Arab Studies Program at the American University of Beirut, and the University itself; to these I owe a special debt of gratitude.

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CONTENTS

BRITISH POLICY IN MESOPOTAMIA
1918-1920

	Page
PREFACE	
CHAPTER	
I Early Commercial Interests in Mesopotamia . . .	1
II British Wartime Policy	9
III A Postwar Declaration	27
IV From Plebiscite to Stalemate	39
V Indecision Continued	65
VI Events Leading to the Uprising	83
VII The Tribal Uprising	101
VIII Causes and Effects	123
IX Conclusions	154

APPENDICES

A Cox Memorandum on Future of Mesopotamia, May 22, 1917.	
B British Reasons for the Anglo-French Declaration on November 1918.	
C Anglo-French Declaration of November 1918	
D Aide-Memoire Announcing British Evacuation of Syria 1919	
E Map Showing German-Bolshevik Intrigue in Asia	
F Churchill's Reasons for Uprising with List of Tribes Involved.	
G Map of Iraq 1920	

BIBLIOGRAPHY	183
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CHAPTER I

EARLY COMMERCIAL INTERESTS IN MESOPOTAMIA

It was trade which first brought the English to the Persian Gulf and into the Tigris and Euphrates valleys as it had first taken them to India, China and Japan.¹

Until recent years the bellweather of British foreign policy has been the protection of the routes to India. Mesopotamia, like the Persian Gulf, and later the Suez Canal and the Red Sea, was exploited originally because it lay on the communications route between East and West. Until the discovery of oil at the beginning of the twentieth century, the commercial value of Mesopotamia stemmed from the importance of its rivers, which, through the port of Basra, opened onto the Persian Gulf and to India.

British merchants travelled down the Euphrates from Aleppo to Baghdad and on to India as early as 1580. The Englishman, John Newberrie, made the journey overland by way of Aleppo to Basra, and then to the island of Hormuz in the Gulf, returning to London in 1582. Within six months, Ralph Fitch together with Newberrie, William Deedes, and James Story again made the journey from London to Hormuz, this time carrying letters from Queen Elizabeth to the King of Cambay and the Emperor of China. Their route took them from the Syrian port of Tripoli

¹Philip Willard Ireland, Iraq, A Study in Political Development (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), p.31.

first across country and then down the Euphrates to Falluja, to Baghdad, onto the Tigris to Basra and the Persian Gulf.² These early journeys developed the commercial routes to the East and established the English presence in the lower Euphrates and the present port area of Basra. They were also the first of many British investments in the area and the basis for later claims of commercial monopolies there.

The Ottoman conquered Iraq in 1513; the territory remained a part of the Turkish Empire until 1918. Britain's diplomatic relations with Turkey were always maintained with an eye to maintaining her preferential position in the Turkish provinces and guarding against any encroachment by other European powers. Not until the latter half of the nineteenth century did France then Russia, make significant inroads. French influence was based upon support for the Roman Catholic religious orders in Mesopotamia, and that of Russia upon her commercial penetration of Persia and intervention in the perennial Iraqi-Persian border dispute. Later, Belgium, Spain, Sweden, and the United States acquired commercial interests in Mesopotamia and ultimately established consulates in Baghdad. After 1870 Germany, newly unified and with imperialistic ambitions, became the principle threat to British preeminence in Mesopotamia.

²Sir Arnold T. Wilson, The Persian Gulf (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1928), p.133.

Despite the presence of the other powers, England maintained her advantage; the proximity of India gave her further reason to expect Turkish friendship. Indian pilgrims travelled in great numbers to the Shi'ah Moslem Holy Places in Iraq, many to settle permanently there. As commercial opportunities increased, a flow of Indian merchants to Iraq increased as well. The British Resident in Baghdad was the executor for the Oudh Bequest, a monetary benefice which he distributed annually to the Mujtehids of the Holy Cities for further distribution among the Shi'ah population.³

British control of the Persian Gulf required another indirect pressure which helped England maintain an advantage in Mesopotamia. The small independent sheikhdoms were bound by treaty with England. In exchange for British support they agreed to exclude the other foreign powers from trading in the Gulf. A British Indian naval force was stationed within the Gulf to enforce the terms of the various treaties, and, by extension, to guarantee the British position in Mesopotamia.

England's strong influence with the central Ottoman Government in Constantinople was a great help in her negotiations with the ruling Pashas in Baghdad. The role of British

³The Oudh bequest was an arrangement made in 1825 by the King of Oudh, a province of India, and the British Viceroy. The King provided a loan to aid Britain in a war and insisted that the principle not be returned, but that the interest be distributed in the Holy Cities of Iraq. The bequest began in 1847 and 10,000 Sterling annually was paid directly through the British Resident in Baghdad to Shi'ah residents of Kerbala and Najf.

support for the Turkish Empire will be discussed more fully in the succeeding chapters; in brief, the urgency of keeping control of the routes to India out of the hands of Britain's European rivals dominated British eastern policy. The British veto was probably the only reason that the other powers did not force the break up of the Ottoman Empire. As it worked out it was to their mutual advantage for London and Constantinople to maintain the status quo.

Access to the rivers was always a prime British concern; merchant vessels flying the British flag sailed with regularity between Basra and Baghdad under an agreement executed with the Turkish Pasha in 1823, and given force by imperial firman. The English explorer, Chesney, had surveyed the entire Euphrates between 1835-1837 in order to determine whether steam ships could be used to carry the mails from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf. Although this was proved unfeasible, the English used the expedition as a basis for continuing to navigate the Euphrates. Lieutenant Lynch of the Indian Navy commanded a flotilla which patrolled both the Tigris and the Euphrates for several years after 1840.

As the commercial value of the rivers became more obvious there began a struggle between the Baghdad government and the British companies for control of steam navigation. In 1842 the Turkish authorities curtailed British mercantile privileges amid continuous disputes concerning taxation and transit duties.

The situation was alleviated by a formal treaty with the Porte in 1846, authorizing the British to navigate all Mesopotamian waters.

In 1861 the same Lieutenant Lynch, together with his brother, organized the Tigris and Euphrates Steam Navigation Company. Later attempts to extend its facilities were frustrated by the Turkish authorities, who formed their own steamship line in 1867. From the time of Midhat Pasha's rule in Baghdad discriminatory privileges were accorded the Turkish line with the object of driving the British off the rivers.⁴ The Lynch brothers company continued to carry the British mails despite the competition; attempts were made to merge with the Turkish Company, but negotiations failed and were finally abandoned in 1910.

The Porte declared shortly thereafter that navigation of the two rivers was open to Ottoman subjects only. British protests led to talks between the two governments and the "Declaration of London" in 1913 established a joint Anglo-Ottoman Steamship Company with a monopoly on commercial navigation in Mesopotamia.

⁴(1869-1872) Midhat Pasha was the most enlightened Turkish Governor of Iraq in the nineteenth century. He was a man of vision, energy and integrity. In his zeal to improve the government Midhat Pasha was ruthless in his dealings with foreign speculators. Most of the Iraqi reforms of the last quarter of the century were due to his initiative. In his haste Midhat also made mistakes, his river projects for example. The British were able to resume their privileged position on the rivers after his departure because the Turks did not have an administrative and navigational staff adequate to compete.

Railway Development

At the time of Colonel Chesney's expedition the question of a railway line from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf was being discussed in London. As a result of these discussions the Euphrates Valley Railway Company was formed in 1856. It obtained a concession from the Turks to build a railway between Alexandretta and Basra; but British capitalists refused to guarantee the project so nothing further was done. The acquisition of Cyprus by Britain in 1878 was motivated in part by its proximity to the proposed site of the railway.⁵

British relations with Turkey declined steadily during the latter part of the nineteenth century. England began to realize the futility of hopes to reform Turkey and many policy-makers in London hold the opinion that the central administration in Constantinople could not exist much longer.

After the construction of a railway between Berlin and Constantinople in 1888, a German syndicate secured extensive railway concessions in Syria and Mesopotamia. The Baghdad Railway Convention signed in Constantinople in 1903 established Germany as Britain's chief competitor in Asia Minor. The Convention gave the German company permission to extend its line to Baghdad and Basra.

⁵This is described in a handbook entitled Mesopotamia prepared by the Historical Section of the Foreign Office for confidential use by diplomats during World War I. Foreign Office file 373, Box 5; Booklet No. 92, pp. 29-31.

In 1911 the British persuaded the Ottoman Government to retract its concessions to the Germans. England had invested heavily in the development of Basra as an entrepot center for the Gulf area and would not tolerate the German intrusion. The Germans surrendered the right to construct a line from Baghdad to the Gulf, but with the proviso that a suitable Ottoman company would do so. An Anglo-German accord was signed in London on June 15, 1914, giving Britain exclusive foreign interest in the Basra port development in exchange for allowing the Germans a share in river navigation.

Oil Interests

The London Accord of 1914 also settled Anglo-German differences concerning oil concessions in Iraq. In 1901, a German expert had identified valuable oil-bearing districts around Mosul and Baghdad. The Baghdad Railway Convention of 1904 had given a two year option for oil development to the German Anatolian Railway Company. Meanwhile a British subject, Mr. William Knox D'Arcy had received promises from two Grand Viziers in Constantinople that the concessions would be transferred to him. Based upon these promises D'Arcy formed the Ottoman Petroleum Syndicate.

The Young Turk revolution in 1908 explicitly negated all previous oil and railway concessions, a fact which prompted

bilateral talks between London and Berlin. The 1914 Accord authorized a joint Anglo-German company called the Turkish Petroleum Company Limited, and the Ottoman Government agreed to lease to it exclusively the oilfields in the Mosul and Baghdad areas. D'Arcy was allotted half the capital stock of the new company. Although the convention was never ratified, both countries notified their ambassadors in Constantinople and the Grand Vizier, Sa'id Halim Pasha, signed a letter on June 28, 1914, which granted the concessions agreed upon.

The 1914 agreement which would have allowed Germany a share in what had been a British sanctuary in Mesopotamia was never ratified. The outbreak of World War I in August 1914 eliminated Germany as a contender. The foreign secretary, Lord Grey, said that the Ottoman Empire committed suicide when it declared war on England in November 1914; it also ended the German adventure in the Middle East. For England, the long expected breakup of the Empire became a necessity, and a new policy was required for those areas previously under Ottoman control. The Mesopotamian aspect of this policy is discussed in the succeeding chapters.

CHAPTER II

BRITISH WARTIME POLICY

The policy of one country towards another is, at best, a makeshift thing. It is usually conceived in the heat and urgency of affairs and, as Elie Kedourie says, "Directed as it is to the attainment of advantage and the security of interest, policy is heedless of things as they are, provided the advantage is attained and the interest secured."⁶

In the latter half of the nineteenth century England had realized that the Ottoman Empire was beyond saving. Lord Salisbury, who became Foreign Secretary in 1878, was one of the first to see the need to re-evaluate traditional policy toward the Turks; he felt that the sooner the Ottoman behemoth was dismembered the better for everybody. "I feel convinced," he had written to Lord Sytten in March 1877, "that the old policy--wise enough in its time-- of defending English interests by sustaining the Ottoman dynasty has become impracticable and I think that the time has come for defending English interests in a more direct way by some territorial rearrangement."⁷ Salisbury believed that the peaceful partition of the Ottoman Empire would solve the Middle Eastern problem about which the

⁶Elie Kedourie, England and the Middle East (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1956), p.9.

⁷Lady Gwendolyn Cecil, Life of Robert, Marquis of Salisbury (London: Colins and Sons, 1921), Vol. II, p.79.

European powers had schemed and quarreled so long. He also felt that a partition would require the help of the western powers because the local inhabitants were not capable of governing themselves.

Lord Salisbury's policy had a good deal of support in His Majesty's Government even at that time; the question was how to distribute the parts of the Empire, particularly the straits and Constantinople itself. Lord Curzon, as Viceroy of India, said in 1892 that, "Baghdad, in fine falls under the category of the Gulf ports, and must be included in the zone of undisputed British supremacy."⁸ He enlarged upon this in the House of Lords in 1911:

It would be a mistake to suppose that our political interests are confined to the Gulf. They are not confined to the Gulf; they are not confined to the region between Basra and Baghdad, they extend right away up to Baghdad.⁹

Neither the British nor the Indian government considered the acquisition of territory either on the Tigris or in Basra before the invasion of Mesopotamia on November 6, 1914. There is no evidence before or during World War I that England had any clear plan for her share of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰ Nearly

⁸ Lord Curzon, Persia and the Persian Question, Vol. II, p.578, cited in Ireland op. cit., p.49.

⁹ Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, 5th S., Vol. III, (1911), p.586, cited in Ireland, ibid.

¹⁰ Zeine Zeine, The Emergence of Arab Nationalism, (Beirut: Khayats, 1966), p.120.

five months after the opening of hostilities, Sir Edward Grey, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, told the French Ambassador, M. Cambon: "The Cabinet here has not yet had time to consider our desiderata... (concerning the Turkish possessions in Asia)."¹¹ In fact, the decision to invade Mesopotamia was universally unexpected. It was only after lengthy negotiations between London and Delhi during August, September and October 1914 that the decision was reached.

In London the Cabinet and the General Staff wanted to concentrate on the Western front. Delhi also had reasons to oppose invasion plans, based principally on Moslem ties. Longrigg states that a great deal of weight was given to the recommendation of Sir Percy Cox, then Foreign Secretary in India, who had previously served for twelve years in the Gulf. Cox felt that the mobilization of the army in Iraq under German auspices posed a threat both to the Persian oil fields at Abadan and also Mohammerah (now Khoramshahr), at the confluence of the Shatt-al-Arab and the Karun rivers.¹²

The invasion of Mesopotamia began November 6, 1914 at Fao at the mouth of the Shatt-al-Arab; Basra and its environs were taken with little difficulty. The initial successes of the expedition misled British planners into thinking that the Turkish

¹¹Edward Grey, *Twenty Five Years*, Vol. II, Dispatch of Sir Edward Grey to Sir F. Bertie dated March 23, 1915 (New York: Fred A. Stokes Company, 1925), p.236.

¹²Stephen Hensley Longrigg, *Iraq, 1900-1950* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p.77.

defense would continue to fall back steadily and ultimately collapse in Mesopotamia. Sir Percy Cox who accompanied the expedition as political officer was among those who urged further advances as each objective was attained. It was inevitable that the decision to occupy Baghdad would be made. However, Turkish military resistance in Mesopotamia did not collapse; on the contrary, it stiffened, and the Turks fought the British on even terms for over two years.

Original British policy had been to play down the Arab role in the campaign for fear of a reaction among the Indian Moslems. For the same reason, the negotiations which were going on between the Sharif of Mecca and Sir Henry McMahon were handled very slowly but not rejected. The Sharif offered to lead an Arab revolt against the Turks in exchange for territorial guarantees after the war.

Foreign Secretary Grey, alarmed by the possibility that the Germans would do what the British deemed inadvisable; that is, arming the Arabs as an irregular force, decided to act first. The Turkish Sultans' earlier call for a holy war (jihad) against the allies had been largely ignored, but Turkish successes in Mesopotamia greatly increased the possibility of an Arab uprising, particularly by the Syrians who feared and detested French territorial designs in the Levant. Grey therefore, instructed McMahon to agree to

Husain's terms and arranged the talks in London which led to the Sykes-Picot agreement with the French and Russians. Grey agreed to the Husain pact because he feared an Arab rising in favor of continued Ottoman domination, and the tripartite Sykes-Picot in order to pin down the French and Russian territorial claims in the Middle East.

Sir Mark Sykes was completely aware of the McMahon-Husain correspondence when he negotiated the Anglo-French agreement in December 1915. Early in the war, even before the Sharif made his first formal approach to Britain asking for recognition of Arab Independence, Sykes had submitted his ideas on the partition of Syria. As a member of a special cabinet sub-committee Sykes had helped prepare a secret report for the partition of Turkey in Asia. While preparing the report Sykes had discussed the Syrian and Mesopotamian questions with prominent Arabs in Damascus and Cairo. In brief, the report recommended that Britain acquire Iraq up to Mosul and those parts of Syria south of a line running from the Khabur-Euphrates to Palmyra, then to Damascus and Acre on the Mediterranean.¹³

Sykes had discussed the implications of the British ambitions with Sultan Kamil Husain and other Arabs in Cairo including Aziz al Misri, founder of Al Ahd, the Iraqi nationalist society, Dr. Faris Nimr a prominent Syrian nationalist, Said

¹³F.O. 371/3384, doc.180234.

Shuqair Pasha, and Rashid Rida. The last named was perhaps the most extreme arab nationalist, Sykes considered him a radical. What Sykes was trying to get from individual Syrians was agreement first to British, and then to French, control over portions of their country. Sykes also strove for agreement between France and Britain regarding their respective claims in Syria.

On July 14, 1915, the very day the Sharif's first letter to McMahon seeking British recognition of Arab independence was received in Cairo, Sykes revealed to Sir R. Wingate and McMahon, the sub-committee's secret report which had been submitted to the Cabinet on June 30.¹⁴ Sykes subsequently discussed his report in relation to the Sharif's request for recognition of the boundaries of Arab independence with McMahon and others in Cairo. He also had conversations with Lieutenant Muhammad Sharif al-Faruqi, an Arab officer in the Turkish army who had deserted to the British in Gallipoli and had been sent to Cairo. Al-Faruqi was an Iraqi member of Al Ahd who claimed to be the official spokesman for Husain. There is reason to doubt al-Faruqi credentials to speak for Husain, but Sir Henry McMahon accepted him because al-Faruqi's views coincided with British desiderata.

On November 5, 1915, the date of the Sharif's third

¹⁴Ibid.

letter to Sir Henry McMahon, Sir Mark Sykes and al-Faruqi discussed the question of British priority of economic enterprise and administrative assistance in Mesopotamia, and of a similar position in Syria for France. No one really questioned British rights in Mesopotamia; in his private telegram to Sir Edwin Grey, McMahon had reported that, October 8, 1915 "with regard to Basra vilayet Faroki (sic) accepts the fact that special measures of British control will be necessary, in view of Great Britain's interest there."¹⁵

In their reply the Foreign Office answered on October 20, 1915: "In view of the special interest in the Baghdad Province and area actually in our occupation, the proposed sphere of British control, namely, the Basrah vilayet, will need extention."¹⁶

The idea of a "special British interest" in Basra and Baghdad Provinces was mentioned by McMahon to Husain on October 24, 1915, and by Husain who agreed in his letter of November 5, 1915 "to leave under British administration those districts that are now occupied by British troops..."¹⁷

It is unfortunate that Britain's agreement or, as what is termed, "pledge" to Husain was never set down in the form of a formal document; it is contained only in the correspondence

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

between Sir Henry McMahon and Husain. The substance of the agreement was thereafter interpreted differently by His Majesty's Government and King Husain. However, at the time Sir Mark Sykes entered into negotiations with Picot in November 1915, he knew exactly what had taken place between His Majesty's government and the Arabs. What Sykes intended was to gain French corroboration for what Britain had agreed to with Husain.

Lord Grey probably intended to give the Arabs much more than they realized after the war; in March 1915 he wrote to the British ambassador in Paris, "When Turkey disappears from Constantinople and the straits there must, in the interests of Islam, be an independent Moslem political unit somewhere else. Its center would naturally be the holy places, and it would include Arabia, but we must settle what else should be included."¹⁸

Until midway in the war, not even within the India Office was there an agreement about Mesopotamia. Once Basra was occupied the India Government considered the port separate from the rest of Mesopotamia. It was generally understood that Basra would be annexed or at least under British control. But for the rest, opinion was divided. Lord Chelmsford, the wartime Viceroy of India, said in a private letter to Lord Curzon in October 1916

¹⁸A.L. Tibawi, "Syria in the McMahon Correspondence," Middle East Forum, XLII, No. 4 (1966), p.12.

that he did not want direct control of Mesopotamia by India, but rather an indirect control with its own internal government, dependent upon India as Sudan was upon Egypt.¹⁹ In the same correspondence, Sir Thomas Holderness of the India Office political department recommended that the detachment be complete.²⁰ Sir Arthur Hirtzell of the India Office agreed with Holderness but recommended that His Majesty's Government occupy Basra completely and establish some sort of protectorate over Baghdad. Hirtzell also wrote that the power which replaced Turkey made itself morally responsible for the reclamation and development of that territory and "could not leave it to its own devices."²¹

Lord Grey, Mr. Asquith's Foreign Secretary, made it clear that England's European alliances were of paramount importance and that the Sykes-Picot agreement was made in order to get French approval for England to deal directly with the Arabs, at the same time trying to establish what were the limits of French interests in the Middle East.²²

When David Lloyd George replaced Herbert Asquith as Prime Minister in 1916 he brought new ideas and new faces to the government; he also brought if not an extensive knowledge at least an academic interest and understanding of the Middle East

¹⁹I.O. 10.2, doc. B 246.

²⁰Ibid, p.3.

²¹Ibid, p.4.

²²Grey, op.cit., p.235-237.

which his predecessor did not have. Unfortunately, he did not reduce the number of agencies advising the war cabinet of Eastern affairs. The War Office, the Foreign Office, the India Office and the Arab Bureau still all had a duty to advise the Eastern committee of the war cabinet. A further complication arose with the entry of America into the war which imposed new principles upon those for which England was fighting; the most significant addition was the guarantee of self-determination.

The excessive number of responsible agencies was not the real fault with British policy making procedure during the war, it was rather the wide difference in personnel and motivation of the different agencies. Generally speaking, the Arab Bureau in Cairo was closer to the Arab side; the India Officer thought in strategic terms of controlling the accesses to India; while the Foreign Office, particularly during the first two years under the Asquith Government, thought in terms of European interests.

Even if Lord Grey had the purest of motives toward the Arabs, he was not free to act without French concurrence and therein lay the problem. Sykes attempted in November 1915 to confront the French with the urgency of getting Arab support in a theater of war which was the responsibility of Britain, but of vital importance to the overall allied cause. The

French were intransigent; neither Picot nor M. Cambon, the ambassador, would agree to anything near what the British wanted to promise Husain. Finally on December 21, the French agreed to considerably less than the British had asked. In effect, the terms left nothing of Syria for the Arab State except, by implication, the lands east of the Jordan River and the interior district from Damascus to Aleppo. Sykes and Picot worked out the details of the agreement which was signed formally six months later, after Russia agreed to the division of the spoils.

It is easy to understand why the Sykes-Picot was treated as a secret document until the Bolsheviki revealed its contents in late 1917; it did not even consider the Sharif or the Arabs, and was certainly inconsistent with the promises made by McMahon. From that time on British policy in the Middle East was hobbled.

Though Britain had the implicit agreement of the Arabs that her interests in Basra and Baghdad gave her special rights in that area, she was reluctant to make a public announcement of her intentions there. The reason was not because she feared Arab reaction, but because the French would have seized the opportunity to assert their own demands in Syria. When Sir Percy Cox asked for authority to make an announcement in December 1914 stating that the occupation of Basra was in fact

permanent, His Majesty's Government in London demurred. The grounds for refusal were that such an announcement would be regarded as a definite breach of the understanding between the allies, and that a final settlement must await the end of the war.²³

When the British Expeditionary Force finally captured Baghdad on March 11, 1917, the aforementioned secret agreements were the sole basis for British policy in the Middle East. After the troops occupied the city, the commanding general, Sir Stanley Maude, was instructed to issue a proclamation, the text of which was written in London by Sykes.²⁴ The proclamation promised that the Turkish order was finished and under no circumstance would the Turkish administration return to Mesopotamia. Maude also promised that the British had no wish to impose any foreign institutions and that the people of Mesopotamia had earned the right to administer their own civil affairs... "so that you may unite with your kinsmen in the North, East, South and West in realizing the aspirations of your race."²⁵

Maude's proclamation was argued over item by item, in both the Foreign and India Office, however its principles

²³India Office 10.2.38, doc. B 273, (India Office Records hereafter will be referred to as I.O.).

²⁴Kedourie, op. cit., p.79.

²⁵Text in Gertrude Bell, Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia, (London: His Majesty's Printing Office, 1920), p.32.

were eventually adopted in their entirety as official policy. Although the India Office was responsible for Mesopotamia during the war, it had been decided that at the conclusion of the war the Foreign Office would take over its administration. As it happened, both offices had a voice in the decision to adopt the Maude statement. What Maude said was significant because it promised that the Arabs would participate in governing themselves and that they would have an opportunity to say how the government would be constituted. It was a departure from both the Sykes-Picot and the McMahon-Husain correspondence; it was also a departure from those policies put forward by Sir Percy Cox and the India Office. It was, in fact, a departure from the traditional British policy concerning the Ottoman Empire which had envisioned European control of the Arab lands. It promised self determination.

Shortly after Maude's speech a committee of the War Cabinet laid down in some detail the principles which His Majesty's Government intended to apply in the future administration of Mesopotamia. The following differentiation was made between the status of the Basra Vilayet and that of the Baghdad Vilayet:²⁶

- (1) Basra was to "remain permanently under British administration," its western and northern limits being specifically defined.

²⁶A Turkish word for the political subdivision from a Arabic root meaning approximately "state."

- (2) Baghdad was to be "an Arab State with a local ruler or government under British protectorate in everything but name." Behind its "Arab facade" the Vilayet was to be administered as an Arab province by "indigeneous agency and in accordance with existing laws and institutions as far as possible."²⁷

This policy was criticized by Sir Percy Cox and the Government of India. Cox telegraphed on April 7, 1917, that any attempt to differentiate between the two Vilayets in regard to working principles and details would fail and that the two should be governed alike. He, of course, intended that Baghdad should be brought into line with Basra.

As a result of the controversy Sir Percy was summoned to London to discuss the situation. After preliminary talks with the India Office, he presented a memorandum dated May 22, 1917, to the War Cabinet. They approved his memorandum as official policy and authorized Sir Percy to return to Mesopotamia to establish the administration there in accordance with its provisions.

Sir Percy had mellowed since the early days of the war; his recommendations in May 1917 were tempered by developments later in the war, including the entry of the United States and the revision of the principles upon which Allied war aims were founded. In the memorandum Sir Percy said: "Of these principles [additional since war began] the one which particularly concerns us at the moment requires that the

²⁷F.O. 371/3387.

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Sir Percy had mellowed since the early days of the war; his recommendations in May 1917 were tempered by developments later in the war, including the entry of the United States and the revision of the principles upon which Allied war aims were founded. In the memorandum Sir Percy said: "Of these principles [additional since war began] the one which particularly concerns us at the moment requires that the

²⁷F.O. 371/3387.

peoples of the countries interested or effected should be allowed to form their own form of government.²⁸ Cox felt that if at the end of the war Britain was in a "sufficiently strong position, and in effective administrative control, we should still hope to annex the Basra Vilayet and exercise a veiled protectorate over the Baghdad Vilayet; but it is recognized that the question of annexation has become exceedingly difficult vis-a-vis the President of the United States... Our original proposals must consequently be regarded as a counsel of perfection, and we must be prepared to accept something less."²⁹ The "something less" Cox described as a veiled protectorate in Baghdad with effective British control in everything but name. Cox used the word "Arab Facade" originally coined by the Eastern Committee in its April directive. He felt that emphasis should be placed upon Baghdad and that Basra could be made to conform to it at a convenient juncture. The memorandum stated that "the administration should be under British guidance and the more complete the British control can be, the better for the country."

Another facet of the Cox policy was that there not be the slightest Turkish element admitted in the post-war administration. Referring to a "nominal Arab headpiece," if one should be considered necessary, he thought it best to

²⁸ Sir Percy Cox, The Future of Mesopotamia, F.O. 371/3387

²⁹ Ibid.

find a local candidate and saw not the "least justification or necessity for introducing one of the family of the Sharif of Mecca to play this role."

The factions of the population which Sir Percy thought necessary to encourage were first, the Jewish community in Baghdad; he recommended that Dr. Weismann be induced to pay a visit to Baghdad to influence the Jewish community in favor of the British connection; second, Cox considered most useful the "Arab notables and nobility" among the townspeople of Baghdad and Basra; and third, the wealthy landlord element, both Arab and Jew, and the important Sheikhs of the tribal areas. Sir Percy must have been aware at that last stage of the war that referendums and plebiscites were to become the by-words of post war diplomacy; he made a recommendation regarding public opinion that would return to plague his successor in Mesopotamia. He wrote: "If it becomes a question of obtaining public expression of feeling in favor of British control, it can be done; but I think the subject would have to be handled cautiously... It will be understood that the rural population of Iraq as a whole is quite inarticulate and can hardly be consulted. As regards the elements who do count, e.g., the Jews and other denominational communities in the large towns, they could without doubt be squared in some form to give expression to the sentiments

that we desire."³⁰

Shortly after his return to Baghdad in June 1918, Sir Percy Cox was recalled to London for consultations regarding the worsening political situation in Persia. The "temporary absence" lasted more than two years because Cox was posted to Teheran in order to cope with the growing Bolshevik threat there; no one concerned foresaw any great difficulty in setting up the administration in Mesopotamia once the war was over and the Turks gone. In the interim, Cox's assistant, Captain Arnold T. Wilson, was appointed Acting Civil Commissioner.

For the remainder of the war Captain Wilson did little more than carry forward the policies of Sir Percy which were clearly stated in his May memorandum. Wilson also revived an earlier recommendation of Sir Percy's, that a commission be sent from London "to examine the whole administrative problem on the spot." Wilson went further, "What seems to be required is, not to tie down the Commission to particular lines of enquiry, but to give them a free hand to examine and report, in consultation with the local authorities, on the wider aspect of administrative policy in the occupied territories. We want to form a clearer idea in our own minds as to the main lines on which we are to proceed. The lack of a clear-out programme will not only hamper us at the Peace

³⁰ Ibid.

Conference, it is already hampering us in regard to a number of practical questions that arise from day to day."³¹ Wilson could not have stated it more clearly.

The requested commission never materialized, nor did the "clear cut programme;" it is to Wilson's credit that he saw the need for such clarification early in his tenure. The reasons why the request was not honored and the consequences of its refusal will be examined in the succeeding chapter.

³¹Wilson's telegram No. 7725, dated September 15, 1915, quoted in F.O. 371/3387.

CHAPTER III

A POST WAR DECLARATION

The End of The War

An armistice was signed with Turkey on October 30, 1918, marking not only the end of the war with Turkey, but the end of the Ottoman Empire. Britain's paramount occupation for the previous four years had been to win the war. She had made pledges and promises which were impossible to fulfill after the war.

The entry of America into the war, and the role she was expected to play in establishing the peace terms, also altered the situation. President Wilson had made several statements of policy which would have to be considered as a basis for the peace negotiations. On January 22, he had said in an address to the Senate:

No peace can last, or ought to last, which does not accept the principle that Governments derive all their just powers from the consent of the governed, and that no right exists anywhere to hand peoples about from sovereignty to sovereignty as if they were property.³² I am proposing government by the consent of the governed.

Wilson's celebrated Fourteen Points (January 18, 1918) were a concise statement of principles which would have to be considered at the peace settlement. In addition Wilson told Congress on February 11, 1918:

³²"Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1917," Supplement 1, The World War, pp.27 and 29 cited in Zeine Zeine, The Struggle for Arab Independence (Beirut: Khayat's, 1960), p.46.

There shall be no annexations, no contributions, no punitive damage... Self-determination is not a mere phrase; it is an imperative principle of action which statesmen will henceforth ignore at their peril... Every territorial settlement involved in this war must be made in the interest and for the benefit of the population concerned, and not as a part of any mere adjustment of compromise of claims amongst rival States.³³

The British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, had, in Parliament on January 5, 1918, promised that the parts of the present Ottoman Empire would be entitled to a recognition of their separate natural conditions, but said it would be impossible to restore them to their former sovereignty.

These pronouncements led Sir Arthur Hirtzell at the India Office to write on January 11, 1918:

We ought to be getting more definite ideas on this subject... What does natural self-determination mean?... Annexation (e.g. of Basra) is presumably now out of the question, or even the veiled annexation contemplated in the Anglo-French Agreement (Sykes-Picot). The Arab Facade of which the Committee (Eastern Committee) talked, must be something more than a facade. What do we propose?... It is clear that somehow or other we must retain predominating influence in Mesopotamia. By what means?³⁴

On January 25, 1918, Sir Percy Cox, at that time still High Commissioner in Baghdad, sent a telegram to the Foreign Office stating that he did not feel that any additional announcement concerning the Arabs was necessary, that there was

³³ John Maynard Keynes, The Economic Consequences of the Peace, (London: 1919), pp. 57-58, Ibid.

³⁴ F.O. 371/7664, doc. 14564.

no indication of unrest in Mesopotamia such as the High Commissioner in Cairo reported. The telegram read in part: "... as regards Iraq, surely public announcement of our policy made in Baghdad Proclamation sufficient."

Cox's objection to imperial policy as seen by the High Commissioner in Egypt, Sir Reginald Wingate, was that it failed to recognize the problem in Iraq, and Cox objected that it was "treated as a pawn in our negotiation or relations with young Arabs of Egypt and the Sharif."³⁵

In a telegram to the Foreign Office on January 28, 1918, the Viceroy entirely agreed with Cox in discouraging any further announcement regarding the future of Iraq. He continued that any further announcement would prejudice Britain's future there. He suggested obtaining King Husain's agreement to modify "McMahon's unfortunate pledge... We should have the right to continue administration in both Vilayets... Stand might be taken on the facts that the people themselves would welcome this... and that King Husain himself has no claim to these areas where Sheikhs largely predominate."³⁶

Lord Curzon did not agree to asking Husain to modify his claim upon the British Government and notified Mr. Montagu to this effect. Instead he sent a message to Husain which

³⁵F.O. 371/3380, doc. 18462.

³⁶Ibid. doc. 19106.

reaffirmed Britain's pledges--although there was considerable controversy as to what exactly had been promised. In his message, Curzon wrote:

His Majesty's Government reaffirms their former pledge to His Highness in regard to the freeing of the Arab peoples. Liberation is the policy His Majesty's Government has pursued and intend to pursue with unswerving determination by protecting such Arabs as are still under the yoke of the oppressor to obtain their freedom.³⁷

On October 30, 1918, the text of the Sykes-Picot Agreement was communicated to Husain by Sir Reginald Wingate. In a reply to Mr. Balfour, Wingate said that he had informed King Husain in accordance with instructions in Balfour's telegram.³⁸ Husain's reactions were expressed in two telegrams. The tone of the first clearly showed his dislike of the arrangements in liberated territories. The second, sent twenty-four hours later, was stronger: Husain threatened to abdicate, and referring to French claims upon Syria, he said, "As for Islamic world, it is now a case for suicide."³⁹

It should be pointed out that this decision to inform the Sharif was in consequence of Wingate's own secret message to Balfour on September 21, 1918. In it he referred to Husain's anxiety concerning "certain disconcerting indication of a

³⁷ Ibid. doc. 27457. The copy on file is to the Viceroy repeated to Cox telling him the text of that to Wingate. It is dated February 13, 1918.

³⁸ F.O. 371/3380 tel. No. 1240.

³⁹ F.O. 371/3384 doc. 183770.

of a changed policy" and recommended very strongly... "to take King Husain (sic) into our confidence, as far as we can, and to inform him of our intentions in regard to him."⁴⁰

In addition to Wingate, there were other "Sharifians" in Cairo who had influenced British policy throughout the war. Lord Kitchener, who had responded to the Sharifian overtures and had initiated the Arab intrigue, thought in terms of an Arab sovereignty in the Arabian Peninsula only, was not alive to see Husain's letter which used terms such as "Arab World". D.H. Hogarth, Director of the Arab Bureau, and General Clayton, the Director of British Intelligence in Cairo, were, like Wingate, extremely solicitous of the inherent Moslem distrust of the French. The Cairo group were equally afraid of a threat by Husain to abdicate, which Wingate wrote, "would entail consequences little short of disastrous."⁴¹

Actually, the Arabs had learned of the Sykes-Picot Agreement a year earlier when the Bolshevik Russian Government

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹See Wingate's letter Ibid. which shows how Wingate greatly overestimated Husain's influence and the danger of Ottoman reactionary intrigue. At that point the war was almost over, Allenby's army was racing through Syria; the Turkish army had ceased to exist in the sense of the word; the Arab nationalist societies were very pro-British; and Husain was confident that the American guarantees would aid his cause.

published its contents in November 1917. Jamal Pasha, the Turkish Military Governor of Damascus, sent copies of the document to both Husain and his Lieutenant, Ja'far Pasha al-Askari. The King forwarded his copy to Sir Reginald Wingate in Cairo, which in turn brought about the message of reassurance from Curzon on February 8, 1918, which is mentioned above.

The last noteworthy wartime statement of British policy was, perhaps, the most significant and the least understood. It came to be known as the "Declaration to the Seven" and was issued in July 1918.⁴² Comments on the document in the Foreign Office files are few and rather guarded. Sir Thomas Kidston and Arnold J. Toynbee of the Foreign Office imply that the impetus for the statement came from the Arab Bureau in Cairo. The "Declaration" was in answer to petition by seven Syrians who had formed an organization in Cairo called the Party of Syrian Unity.⁴³ The petition was presented to Mr. Osmand Walrand, a British political advisor in the Arab Bureau. Walrand and Wyndham Deedes, also of the Bureau, were aware that not all Arabs wanted to see Husain recognized as their spokesman and that many of them were fearful that he

⁴²Text in J.C. Hurewitz, Documents (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc. 1958), p.29.

⁴³The text and the names of the seven Syrians are given in George Antonius, The Arab Awakening, (Beirut: Khayat's 1958), p.433.

would make some compromise regarding the dividing of the Arab territories under the Sykes-Picot Agreement. Walrand was himself a nationalist and was convinced that a confederation of independent Arab states was the correct solution. He often propounded this theory during and after the war.

The Declaration was a clear statement of policy unlike the vague McMahon correspondence. This document represented the policy the British would have liked to implement after the war- it was not entirely compatible with President Wilson's proclamations, nor the McMahon pledges, nor the Sykes-Picot Agreement; but was a compromise between all three.

In the Declaration, the British differentiated between (1), Arab lands independent before the war, (2) those captured during the war by "Arab forces," (3) those occupied by Allied Forces, and (4) areas still under Turkish control at the end of hostilities. For the first two categories, "His Majesty's Government recognized the complete and sovereign independence of the Arabs inhabiting these areas and supports them in their struggle for freedom."⁴⁴ As for the third category, it referred to General Maude's proclamation in Baghdad and another which General Allenby made in Jerusalem when the British captured that city in December 1917. The last category, lands

⁴⁴Hurewitz, op. cit., p.29.

still under Turkish control, was the most intricate problem, but the solution was postponed until after the war. Even at that late stage no one expected the extent of Allenby's final triumph and the amount of territory which would be captured in the last few months of the war by Allenby's Egyptian Expeditionary Force and the Mesopotamian Force under General Marshall.

The Declaration was not in agreement with the Sykes-Picot because it was not only possible but probable that Faisal's force would capture areas specified in that document as in a French Zone. Nor did it agree with Husain's version of the McMahon promises which were exorbitant. The "Declaration of the Seven" was seldom referred to after the war; which indicates that it failed to satisfy anyone. A month after it was published, Husain began to press Sir Reginald Wingate for a new statement of policy by His Majesty's Government.

A few days after the war ended, the British issued another statement, this one in conjunction with the French and with the approval of President Wilson. It was the "Anglo-French Declaration" of November 7, 1918, and it was to be the basis for future British policy in Mesopotamia. The fallacy in these successive announcements, although they were reasonable in that they were intended to conform to the changing situation, was that Britain failed to secure the concurrence of the other

contracting parties for the abrogation of previous pledges. This is not to imply naivete on the part of the British; on the contrary, they must have realized the impossibility of getting such concurrence from either the French or Husain.

On October 23, the Foreign Office telegraphed to the British Ambassador in Washington that a modus vivendi had been reached with the French. Districts recognized by the Sykes-Picot Agreement as having a special interest for the French would be in the hands of French officials acting as General Allenby's political advisers. The message also stated that the provisions of the Sykes-Picot Agreement were no longer suitable in all respects to present conditions and that the question should form the subject of fresh conversations.

It has become essential to make some public declaration in order to allay the misgivings and suspicions of the Arabs and Syrians which may be dangerously exploited by our enemies. It has therefore been decided to publish an Anglo-French declaration outlining the policy which the two wish to pursue in the territories in Syria and Mesopotamia delivered from the Turkish yoke...⁴⁵

The Anglo-French Declaration was published jointly in all the Allied capitals on November 7, 1918, and in Baghdad on November 8. In essence it stated that the object of French and British policy was:

... The complete and definite emancipation of the peoples so long oppressed by the Turks and the establishment of national governments and administrations

⁴⁵F.O. 371/3384 doc. 180425. See Appendix B.

deriving their authority from the initiative and free choice of the indigenous populations.⁴⁶

Issued after the armistice of Mudros on October 30, 1918, the Declaration was accepted by the rest of the world as a definite pronouncement of policy. The previous pledges and agreements concerning the partition of Turkey were made under wartime pressure. They had been made secretly or with the knowledge of agreements which were secret, and without the additional pressure of President Wilson's views. This latest pronouncement was made after Turkey had surrendered with the concurrence of the four nations who would dictate the peace terms. Moreover, it had the tacit approval of the Arabs. Yet the Declaration did not meet with universal approval. The Times stated that application of the Declaration in Mesopotamia was a bad bargain for England with little hope that the Arab will accept the British, nor that the anticipated profit would offset the high cost of administration. It cited the example of India and said that Pan-Turanian and Pan-Arab sentiments, both strong and largely analogous would finally unite to oppose British rule. The article said that the British were "asking the Arab to exchange his pride and independence for a little western civilization."⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Full text in Hurewitz, op. cit., p.30.

⁴⁷ The Times, November 11, 1918.

A.T. Wilson, the acting Civil Commissioner in Mesopotamia, considered the Declaration a "disastrous error, the perpetration of which was forced upon the Allied Powers by President Wilson...⁴⁸ He said in a telegram dated November 17, 1918, that:

I should not be doing my duty if I did not first of all record my conviction that the Anglo-French Declaration of November 8th, in so far as it refers to Mesopotamia, bids fair to involve us in difficulties as great as Sir Henry McMahon's early assurances to the Sharif of Mecca.

It is for the representative of His Majesty's Government on the spot to make the best of the situation created by this Declaration... The Declaration involves us here on the spot in diplomatic insincerities which we have hitherto successfully avoided... If the future status of this country is to be dealt with successfully it must, I am convinced, be treated independently of Arab problems elsewhere... The average Arab... is clear-sighted enough to realize that he would lose rather than gain in national unity if we were to relinquish effective control... The Arabs are content with our occupation... I, submit, therefore, that our best course is to declare Mesopotamia to be a British Protectorate...⁴⁹

In a minute to this on November 20, 1918, J.E. Shuckburgh, Assistant Under-Secretary of State for the India Office, wrote... "the Department is in full sympathy with the views expressed in Captain Wilson's telegram. It has never felt the smallest enthusiasm for the 'Arab States' policy."⁵⁰

The Foreign Office comments were far from agreement with Wilson. Their views were perhaps best expressed by A.J. Toynbee. He wrote:

⁴⁸ Arnold J. Wilson, Mesopotamia 1917-1920, (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), p.103.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.104.

⁵⁰ F.O. 371/3384 doc. 180528.

The Chief Political Officer, Baghdad, is deliberately making the worst of the situation created by the Joint Declaration. The Mesopotamian authorities are really adamant in their refusal to take account of the general policy of His Majesty's Government.⁵¹

⁵¹F.O. 371/3385 doc. 192144.

CHAPTER IV

FROM PLEBISCITE TO STALEMATE

Arnold T. Wilson's reactions to the Anglo-French Declaration were, as Philip Ireland wrote, "natural to one of his background, training, and experience." He was only thirty-three years old when he assumed the duties of acting Civil Commissioner, yet he had served for over ten years as an officer in the Indian Army. His postings in Persia and in the Persian Gulf had convinced him that the welfare of India was synonymous with that of the British Empire. Writings of those political officers who worked for Wilson portray him as a man of driving energy and self-confidence, loyal to his task and to those who assisted him. They also picture him, as do his own books, as a man who was confident in his own ability and, like many who spend their lives in foreign service, suspicious of the decisions of superiors who were removed from the problem. Wilson virtually formulated British foreign policy in Iraq in 1918-1920; he did not have the authority to do so, but those people in London who should have been responsible were reluctant to make the necessary decisions.⁵²

⁵²In a conversation with the author on December 3, 1961, Elie Kedourie used the word "afraid to make decisions." He said that, in his opinion, a lack of courage on the part of policy makers in London led to post-war troubles in the Middle East. In particular, he thought that they let Wilson become the scapegoat.

A telegram Wilson sent to the India Office, and repeated to the Foreign Office and Tehran, demonstrated his feelings.

In part he stated:

Occupation of Mesopotamia during the war drove a wedge into the Mahometan (sic) world and prevented a possible Mahometan combination against us in Middle East. I submit that under peaceful conditions we should see to it that Mesopotamia remains as a wedge of British controlled territory, not politically assimilated to the rest of the Arab Mahometan World, but remain as far as may be, a model to the rest.

Above arguments, if they are accepted as sound, tend to emphasize the need for British Protectorate in Iraq with interest of peace of Europe and Middle East...

We shall encounter some opposition from politicians in Baghdad whose views are theoretical and who are far less in touch than we are with country as a whole and never take its interests in consideration...⁵³

Wilson never believed that the Anglo-French Declaration of November 1918 would be applied literally; but in order to pay lip service to it, he promoted the idea of a plebiscite, confident that it would be favorable to a British administration. The following are excerpts from a series of telegrams he sent shortly after the Declaration was published:

Educated opinion is being widely canvassed and considerable interest has been aroused...

I have not yet been authorized authoritatively(sic) to ascertain public opinion throughout the country...

So far as is possible under the above limitations to gauge it in Baghdad, educated opinion is running along the following lines:

⁵³F.O. 371/3386 doc. 206396.

1. Idea of restoration of Turkish rule is rejected by all.
2. Idea of Arab Kingdom without British advice, assistance, or control is likewise put aside.
3. Formal annexation by British Government is desired by none.
4. Arab State under an Arab Amir, including Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul is considered an ideal solution by all.
5. British High Commissioner and British Advisors in all the Ministries of the Arab State and throughout the country are unanimously desired.
6. All agree in wishing Sir P. Cox to be the first incumbent of the post. This feeling is general to my personal knowledge all over Iraq, particularly Najaf and Karbula and in the country districts, where his name carries the greatest weight.
7. All agree that opinion of the country must be taken before any decision can rightly become to, and on the clear understanding of which the inhabitants of the country themselves rely, that a protectorate will in due course be declared and that for the present military administration will continue, I am prepared to arrange for this in a manner consonant with educated opinion and not inconsistent with the maintenance of public order. I do not doubt that our confidence will be justified by results.
8. None agree as to the Amir to be chosen.

Colonel Wilson won his point.⁵⁴ Mr. Montagu gave him permission to conduct a plebiscite. He said that the Declaration "was intended primarily to clear up present situations in Syria created by Arab suspicions of French intentions. Ultimate

⁵⁴When the war ended Wilson moved from Basra to Baghdad as Acting Civil Commissioner and was promoted to the rank of Brevet Colonel. It should be remembered that Mesopotamia remained under martial law during the entire time that Wilson was in charge of the civil administration.

status of all Arab provinces will be settled at the peace conference. This should be understood by all concerned.

In particular we are anxious to have authoritative statement of local population in the various areas affected on the following points:

1. Are they in favor of a single Arab State under British tutelage from Northern boundary of Mosul Vilayet to Persian Gulf?
2. In this event do they consider that a titular Arab head should be placed over this new state?
3. In this event whom do they prefer as head?⁵⁵

Mr. Montagu went on to state that the India Office attached great importance to obtaining a genuine expression of local opinion on the three points so that it could be placed fairly before the world as an unbiased pronouncement by the people of Mesopotamia.

But not everyone was convinced that a plebiscite was the correct approach. T.E. Lawrence was adamant that even a remotely accurate survey of Arab public opinion was impossible. Those who argued against a poll felt that the variance of social, religious, racial and economic factors would preclude any validity whatsoever.

Colonel Wilson must have reasoned that a poll so soon after the departure of the Turks would surely be favorable to the British administration. On the other hand, if the people were

⁵⁵371/5227 doc. 7459.

carefully selected, no matter how small a percentage of the total population was represented, a vote of public confidence would be a valuable tool in the hands of the English peace delegation in Paris. It would at least be justification for proceeding with the establishment of a British administration ad interim.

In his instructions to his political officers who would take the poll, Colonel Wilson took no chances on an unfavorable verdict. The instructions were in part:

You should... ascertain... what the trend of public opinion is likely to be, and inform me accordingly.

When public opinion appears likely, under the guidance of the persons you have consulted, to take a definitely satisfactory line, you are authorized to convene an assembly of leading notables and Shaikhs with a view to placing before them the above questions, informing them that their answers will be communicated to me for submission to government. When public opinion appears likely to be sharply divided or in the unlikely event of its being unfavorable, you should defer holding a meeting and refer to me for instructions.

In such cases, it may be anticipated that the favorable verdict of neighboring districts will tend to have a favorable effect in forming public opinion.

When opinion is favorable it is desirable it should be reduced and signed by as many as possible.⁵⁶

When the text of his instructions reached London, even Colonel Wilson's friends in the India Office were angry. J.E. Shuckburgh, usually a supporter of Wilson's methods, wrote that Wilson's phrase about a definitely satisfactory

⁵⁶The instructions and all minutes are found in India Office Records (hereafter referred to as IO) file 4722, part 1, 1918.

line was "not a happy one" - and that the whole paragraph gave too much the impression of an attempt to manipulate public opinion. Shuckburgh made excuse for Wilson because he was in Mesopotamia and therefore the best qualified to judge.

Lord Hardinge, the Permanent Under-Secretary of State, was not so charitable; he said that he could not defend Colonel Wilson quite to the extent proposed by Mr. Shuckburgh. He felt that Wilson's instructions were very unwise in a document of the kind, and that he was not sure but that certain opinions should be disregarded.

At the Foreign Office the minutes were even less restrained. J.A.C. Tilley composed a letter to the India Office for Lord Curzon. In it he said:

Lord Curzon is of the opinion that (Colonel Wilson's) memorandum (is) not calculated to elicit an expression of public opinion which can be accepted as fulfilling these conditions... We desire respectfully to point out that his action was not in agreement with the orders of His Majesty's Government which it was incumbent upon Colonel Wilson to obey.⁵⁷

The Inter-Departmental Committee of the Cabinet,⁵⁸ however, was so impressed with even the fragmentary results, that an announcement was made on 16 January that decisions regarding

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ During the War Lord Asquith had formed the Eastern Committee of the War Cabinet to deal with exclusive Middle Eastern matters; in the post-war cabinet the Interdepartmental Committee performed the same function.

Mosul, Baghdad and Basra were then being determined, but that all reports received thus far indicated that there would be an Arab State in which the help of a great European Power would be indispensable and that if, under the principles of self-determination the inhabitants wanted Britain, she would accept. The committee also said that all reports indicated a "universal repugnance" to the King of Hejaz as temporal sovereign.⁵⁹

Colonel Wilson showed no signs of slowing the process of establishing a British administration superimposed over the farcical local councils. In the spacious and affluent days before the war England had been able to administer colonies on a low scale budget acceptable to the government at home; but England after World War I was in tight financial straits, and all policy had to be considered in terms of cost.

Only Cromer in Egypt had been able to make colonial administration largely self-supporting. ~~By~~ Wilson's administration of post-war Mesopotamia was extremely costly. The majority of the jobs were held by British or Indian hands. More and more of the military were detailed to administrative jobs. It will be seen later that of the 80,000 troops in Iraq in 1920, only 25,000 were available for military use

⁵⁹19. 4722 part I, 1918.

when the rebellion broke out in summer of that year.

At this stage, no one in England resented Colonel Wilson nor even his administration per se; it was the amount of money being spent which aroused the cost-conscious electorate who responded to every charge of government extravagance. The War Office sent Sir John Hewett, an old Foreign Service hand to determine whether military funds or facilities had been or were being used for long-range civilian benefits. Wilson was angry with the intrusion, but he cooperated with Hewett; the resultant report was harmless enough and accomplished little one way or the other⁶⁰ It did not deter Colonel Wilson, who continued recruiting and expanding; his policy was to employ as many British nationals as possible.⁶¹

An example of Colonel Wilson's "expansionist" tendencies was his decision to send a political officer to the town of Dair Ez Zor far up the Euphrates. Dair was in the French sphere of influence according to the Sykes-Picot Agreement, but this did not deter the civil commissioner. In a telegram to the India Office Wilson said that the entire districts of Dair Ez Zor and Albu Kamal had applied for a Political Officer to be dispatched to them. After listing the commercial values

⁶⁰ Sir John Hewett, Report etc. The report and a commentary were published in The Times, 31 Dec. 1918, p.10.

⁶¹ See appendix C. A chart showing the number and nationalities of those employed in the civil administration.

of these places, Wilson wrote that he was sending an especially qualified young officer to proceed to Albu Kamal with orders to continue to Dair if possible in order to take over district administration.

The India Office was apprehensive and advised the Foreign Office that they were reluctant to authorize the action and that the acting civil commissioner had been instructed on November 5, 1918, to confine his activities to the British Zone described in the Sykes-Picot Agreement. Yet, on 16 December, the India Office telegraphed permission to send the Political Officer to Dair Ez Zor. The Foreign Office reaction was typified by Mr. Kidston in a memo to Lord Curzon. "Wilson has gained his point in sending a political officer into the French sphere."⁶²

Wilson's policy of sending political officers to every section of Mesopotamia regardless of ethnic grouping also involved him in a controversy with Mr. A. J. Toynbee, who was then a political assistant in the Foreign Office. Wilson considered Kurdistan as an integral part of Mesopotamia despite the ethnic difference between Kurd and Arab. Toynbee argued that a separate Kurdistan was the only practical solution for governing Mesopotamia, preferably under a different mandatory power. He wrote:

⁶²P.O. 371/3384 dec. 206398.

Wilson's proposal to annex the settled area directly to Iraq evidently runs contrary to Kurdish aspirations, and is one among many indications of the difficulty the British authorities in Mesopotamia find in adapting themselves to the general policy of His Majesty's Government.⁶³

Toynbee made a further distinction between Kurds in the high mountainous area and those of the semi-settled plain. He believed both should be separate from southern Kurdistan which contained mostly Arabs, and religious and racial minorities including the Assyrians.

Wilson was never one to beat a hasty retreat. Taking up the issue with Toynbee he stated in a later telegram:

This course [annexing all of Kurdistan] will save His Majesty's Government, the Kurds, and the representatives of His Majesty's Government on the spot from being rushed with a premature decision on subjects in regard to which local opinion is still uninformed.

I would like consent of Kurdish inhabitants to be included therein to be tacitly assumed...

Toynbee wrote on 12 December that "It may fairly be said that the CPO [Chief political officer] is apt to consider policy from an exclusively Mesopotamian point of view, and to ignore our interests in the Hejaz and Syria."⁶⁴ Toynbee recommended that the whole file on the subject be sent on to the Peace Conference.

⁶³P.O. 371/3385 doc. 195535.

⁶⁴Wilson, A Clash of Loyalties, op. cit., p.129.

The divergence of opinion between the Foreign Office and the India Office as the year 1918 ended is typified by an exchange between Mr. Toynbee and Sir Arthur Hirtzell. Toynbee maintained that Britain had a debt to King Husain and that encouraging the Pan-Arab movement was the best way to discourage Pan-Islamism.

Hirtzell, speaking for the India Office, denied that England had any debt to Husain or that there had been any Arab movement since the war. The movement was now divided into many smaller ones and that to encourage any one was to encourage Pan-Islamism. He said:

It is useless to pretend that Islam is not essentially a political force; it is, moreover, a supra-national political force...

But in normal times the view of the India Office and of the government of India has been that a strong Arab State, if it were conceivable, would be a greater danger than the Ottoman Empire.⁶⁵

⁶⁵F.O. 371/3386 doc. 206913.

Stalemate

For British foreign policy in general, and its policy towards Mesopotamia in particular, the year 1919 was a year of Stalemate. The peace conference opened on January 18th and the by-word of the political officers in London was "wait until the peace conference decides."

Faisal and the French, armed with British wartime pledges, came to claim their share of the war spoils. Britain no longer considered the Sykes-Picot treaty binding; she also recognized that there was wide variance between His Majesty's Government and King Husain as to what exactly had been promised in the McMahon correspondence. By her reassurance to King Husain in January, 1918 and the "Declaration to the Seven" made in Cairo in May of the same year, Britain had served notice that these differences would be reconsidered and reinterpreted. Lloyd George expected that with the help of President Wilson at the conference and the good faith shown by France in signing the Declaration on November 8th, he could resolve the differences with France and repay Britain's debt to the Arabs. It was with this expectation that Britain placed her Eastern policy in abeyance.

At the India Office Mr. Shuckburgh wrote in a minute dated January 4th: "It is generally agreed that we must not

go through the official pantomime known as 'declaring a protectorate'; but it is not clear that this desirability need limit to any appreciable extent the practical control we are to exercise over Mesopotamian affairs.⁶⁶

Later, in response to several telegrams from Wilson which gave partial results of the plebiscite, Shuckburgh wrote that he recognized that the results were "inconclusive... but is not the whole question really one of finding a decent pretext for letting us go our way, of course on the understanding that our ultimate goal must be one of Mesopotamian autonomy."⁶⁷

In the draft of this same telegram Shuckburgh made a notation which evidenced a lack of frankness on the part of the India Office toward Wilson. It was, at the same time, an indication that the India Office felt it necessary "to be careful" with Wilson. The occasion for Shuckburgh's marginal note was a sentence to the effect that nationalist feeling was strong in Baghdad, while separatist tendencies and a predilection for local government prevailed in other parts of Mesopotamia. Shuckburgh struck out sentences and wrote "I'm afraid Wilson will think we are already afraid of Baghdad 'nationalists'-- as we are afraid of 'nationalists' almost everywhere else in the world. We must be careful not

⁶⁷Ibid., tels. No. 1076 and 1077, dated 26 January.

to prejudice Wilson's decisions in these matters."⁶⁸

Meanwhile the peace conference had not gone well. After four months Britain was squarely in the middle between irreconcilable demands by the French and by Faisal. The French were adamant, as well as confident, that Britain would have to decide in favor of her European ally. Faisal also depended upon Britain, but only because he had no alternative.

France had reason to be confident; she knew Britain wanted certain concessions in both Mesopotamia and Palestine. Clemenceau had agreed to British occupation of the Mosul district, with its proven oil deposits and to modification of the territorial limits of Palestine which had been earmarked as the "national home for the Jews." Later, Clemenceau was careful to point out that Britain could not refuse to permit France to do in her zone exactly what Britain proposed to do in hers, that is, establish a protectorate.

A.T. Wilson was called to Paris in February 1919 to present his plan for forming a constitution in Iraq in keeping with the terms of the Anglo-French agreement. While there he met with Balfour, Lloyd George, Edwin Montagu and Sir Henry Wilson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff. Miss Gertrude Bell, Wilson's very able advisor on Arab affairs was

⁶⁸Ibid.

also in Paris at the time and attended the meetings. Later Arnold Wilson went on to London and met Lord Curzon and other members of the Foreign Office staff. He also had an audience with King George and was given the opportunity to present his views to the Inter Departmental Committee for Eastern Affairs.⁶⁹

Wilson presented optimistic reports concerning his plebiscite and received the permission of the committee to proceed with his plans for dividing Mesopotamia into five divisions, all coming under Baghdad for administration. He was also authorized to appoint divisional and provincial councils in each of the divisions. Wilson planned to appoint those men from the educated and enlightened class.

It is ironic that at the very moment Colonel Wilson was telling the committee in London about the placid situation in Mesopotamia and how willing the Iraqis were to be governed by Britain, there were ominous political rumblings in Baghdad. Deputations of the same notables for whom Wilson showed such preference were petitioning for an increased share in the government of Iraq. In addition, several shooting incidents had occurred in Kurdistan. Lt. Colonel E.B. Howell, Wilson's assistant, cabled him in London that public opinion was

⁶⁹This was formerly the Eastern Committee of the War Cabinet.

responding to Turkish propoganda and might easily assume an anti-British spirit. He asked Wilson "to ascertain the lengths to which His Majesty's Government was prepared to go and to have a definite program in your pocket when you return."⁷⁰

The cable arrived the day after Wilson had left London for Baghdad. It is not likely that the warnings of trouble in Baghdad would have deterred Colonel Wilson. As it was, the contents were forwarded to Lord Allenby in Cairo who gave the message to Wilson enroute back to Baghdad. Wilson never acknowledged the cable; if it had arrived while Wilson was in London it may have made a difference with the members of the committee and may have altered their decision to give Colonel Wilson what amounted to a carte blanche.

Wilson had said to the committee in London:

I am of opinion that the legitimate demand for active participation in actual government and administration can best be met not by creating central legislative and deliberative councils, but by giving carefully selected Arabs of good birth and education belonging to Iraq by birth from the very outset positions of executive and administrative responsibility.⁷¹

The Divisions which Wilson planned were Basra, Baghdad, Euphrates, (to include Dair Ez Zor), Mosul, and Kurdistan. The divisional councils were to be composed of members

⁷⁰PRO FO 371/4145 doc. 66448.

⁷¹Wilson Clash of Loyalties, op. cit., p.118.

selected by committees which were in turn appointed by Colonel Wilson. His proposal was in lieu of a constitutional arrangement which had been earlier suggested by the Foreign Office.

Although the councils were Wilson's own idea he never completed their formation. As long as five months after he returned from London he replied to a query from London that only two had been established, in Basra and Baghdad, and that these had little active function. This should have indicated that Colonel Wilson was a determined individual who was perfectly capable of charting his own course in spite of contrary instructions from a higher authority. The minutes in the Foreign Office show that people there were well aware of this; it now began to show plainly in the minutes of the Eastern Committee meetings as well.

The reason Wilson did not rush ahead with forming councils and attempting to have them serve some political function was one which would plague him thereafter and which would be a large contributing factor to the insurrections of 1920--the political propaganda and anti-British agitation of the Al Ahd (the Covenant) society in Syria. Serving Amir Faisal in his infant government in Damascus were a group of Mesopotamian officers who were vociferous in their demands that Colonel Wilson should turn over some responsibilities to Arabs. Among

these officers were many who had defected from the Turkish side and had joined Faisal's Arab Revolt which performed such valuable service for the British after 1916. Most of them had been officers or non-commissioned officers in the Turkish Army, and some were from prominent Mesopotamian families.⁷² The Iraqi members had taken an oath while Faisal was besieging Maan (now southern Jordan) that they would work for Mesopotamian independence. The Al Ahd had actually been organized in Constantinople to combat the Turks prior to 1908. It died out when the Young Turks were successful in overthrowing the Sultan, but became active again in Cairo just prior to the war.

The demands of these men for immediate complete independence unnerved Colonel Wilson. He guessed that the emasculated councils which he had described to the Inter-departmental Committee might provide a sounding board for the nationalist demands of this extremist organization.

Immediately after the war most of the Arab officers with Faisal were pro-British; they realized that Mesopotamia would require financial and technical help after the war,

⁷²There were probably more than 300 of these officers. A criticism by Wilson's administration was that less than ten were actually from Baghdad although they called themselves the Baghdadi officers. Many were members of influential Iraqi tribes, a fact which operated against the British later, during the tribal revolt.

and like most Arabs felt that Britain would be more acceptable than France as a protector. They also felt close to the British because Faisal's army was directly under General Allenby in the Palestine Campaign and had been well treated by him. These British officers such as Lawrence, Cornwallis and Young who advised the Arab Army during the war did a great deal to win over the Iraqi officers.

Faisal sent a letter to General Allenby in Cairo, setting forth the demands of his Baghdadi Officers and pointing out that Britain was taking too long in turning over the administration to the Arabs. Faisal realized the futility of the peace conference as far as Arab aspirations were concerned and he asked that the British show good faith by granting some autonomy in Mesopotamia. He suggested that the British discuss the definition of the future constitution with the Iraqi notables in order to "show the Arabs that their aspirations are to be realized and dissipate all doubts in their minds as to the intentions of Great Britain."⁷³

The Arabs had reason to be cynical. The idealistic principles which mooted from 1917 on, concerning self-determination with supervision by an advanced European State were to them ambiguous and open to suspicion. The new notices were not clear to the nations who propounded them let alone to the Arabs who were just emerging from four centuries of

⁷³FO 171/4181 doc. 89871.

Ottoman domination. A disturbing and not too distant memory was that of the European seizure of Arab North Africa. The "temporary occupation" of Egypt which began in 1882 had become permanent when a protectorate was declared in 1914, a history hardly reassuring to the Arabs. Now that the Turk was gone there were indications that the British had little intention of turning over even a share in the government in the other Arab countries.

Shortly after Faisal's letter to Allenby a petition signed by three prominent members of the Al Ahd was forwarded to Cairo by Major Brayne, the British Liaison Officer at Aleppo. The officers who signed were Jaafar al Askari, Mevhed Djevdet, and Naji Suweidi. The petition requested that Britain keep its promise of November 8, 1918, and that it release certain Iraqis who had been deported by Colonel Wilson and allow them to return to their own country.

Major Hubert Young, now at the Foreign Office had served with many of these Iraqi officers while he was a wartime advisor with Faisal. He and others such as Colonel Lawrence had prevailed upon Colonel Wilson, while he was in Paris, to agree to the return of the Iraqi officers to Mesopotamia. After Wilson's departure from Paris, Lawrence forwarded a letter giving His Majesty's Government's permission for their return. The letter went through General Clayton, in Cairo, to Faisal. In part the message read that: "His Majesty's

Government agrees to your officers going to Mesopotamia, where they may say what they like so long as it is not contrary to police regulations."⁷⁴

Now, less than two months later, Colonel Wilson had changed his mind. Wilson's telegrams contended that the Baghdadi officers were responsible for anti-British agitation in Mesopotamia, although he could not produce evidence that this was true when he was asked to do so by the India Office. In one telegram Wilson said that the "notables say not to have any dealings with Baghdadi officers who are totally out of sympathy with present inhabitants of Baghdad...

"I concur with their (the notables) views and recommend that General Officer Commanding, Egyptian Forces, be asked to inform them that they cannot be permitted at present to return to this country."⁷⁵

Colonel Wilson never again acquiesced to the Baghdadi officers' coming to Iraq although they often crossed the border in disguise and travelled extensively. Hubert Young commented that it was pathetic that these men who had fought side by side with the British were now "forced to sneak into their own country."

The Baghdadi officers were not consulted in Wilson's plebiscite and they rapidly became the main cause of disturbance

⁷⁴FO 371/4145 doc. 76018, 79634.

⁷⁵Ibid.

within Iraq. Their propaganda campaign gained momentum as the year wore on. They saw that Faisal's chances of setting up a government in Syria were becoming more remote, and so was any chance they themselves had for advancement in Syria. Their opposition was formidable; they were well-organized; they had a source of income;⁷⁶ and they were able to communicate their views to London and Paris through Faisal and the British officers in Syria, many of whom were in sympathy with the Baghdadi group. Among them were Colonel Cornwallis, Colonel Ealing, Major Shayne and, of course Colonel Lawrence to name just a few. All of them were arabists who had been with Faisal in the war or had been members of British Intelligence in Cairo. At that time none of them was in a more influential position than Major Hubert Young, who had been posted to the Foreign Office in January 1919.⁷⁷

⁷⁶Ironically they were paid by the British themselves, Wilson cited many cases where Baghdadi officers brought funds into Mesopotamia from Syria for distribution to anti-British tribes. Zeins cites a specific example of a Faisal contribution in The Struggle for Arab Independence, op. cit., p.145.

⁷⁷A.J. Toynbee had been sent to Paris in order to accompany the planned International Commission to Syria. Young was a capable replacement and no less vehement in his opposition to Colonel Wilson's tactics in Mesopotamia. He had spent three years in the Middle East and was the only British officer employed in an administrative capacity under the political and later under the military authorities in Mesopotamia. He was also on the Staff of Sharif Faisal and later under General Allenby's direct orders in Syria. Young's posting was indicative of the mood of the Foreign Office at the turn of the year 1919. He was by all odds, a "Sharifian" and his recommendations were always well constructed and well considered by Lord Curzon. Young was also secretary to the Inter-Departmental Committee. His opposition to the British administration in Mesopotamia hardened as the year 1919 passed and in 1920 he was instrumental in changing British policy there.

An example of how the Baghdadi officers influenced the Middle Eastern situation can be seen in connection with the scuttling of the International Peace Commission which had been proposed by President Wilson. The intent was for the Commission to survey the wishes of the people of Syria as to their own desires concerning independence.⁷⁸ The Baghdadis in Damascus assumed that the Commission would go to Mesopotamia and Palestine as well. Wilson, in a telegram dated 4 June, said:

I have received copies of letters circulated broadcast by Yasin Pasha, Chief of General Staff of the Arab Army in Syria, to tribal Chiefs in Mesopotamia announcing impending arrival of International Commission and calling on the recipients of letters to canvas public and make them demand complete independence as one nation, with the assistance, if needed, of a single civilized power. Letter ends with call to all sects and creeds to unite to attain national ambitions on this unique occasion.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ The Commission which was an American proposal never materialized because of French opposition. The British were willing to go along and nominated a delegation but the plan was scuttled by the French and Italians. The American "King-Crane" commission went to Syria and Palestine to sound out opinions. Its findings and recommendations were never seriously considered. The commission apparently failed to satisfy anyone and should have indicated that a valid plebiscite was well-nigh impossible in the Middle East at that time.

⁷⁹ FO 371/4181 doc. 91372.

The India Office in forwarding Wilson's telegram added that Faisal's subsidy was being used to finance anti-British tendencies and that the British should use the subsidy as a means of pressuring him. Mr. Montagu, Secretary of State for India, in forwarding the telegram stated that the proposed international commission was dangerous and that British officers stationed in Syria were not informed of His Majesty's Government policy in Mesopotamia. Montagu suggested that they should be so instructed and also directed to discourage "aspirations for the immediate establishment of an uncontrolled Arab government in that country."⁸⁰

In a later message Montagu protested "that His Majesty's Government can seriously contemplate presenting to the inhabitants of Mesopotamia the appearance of submitting their policy and administration in this country to the inquisition of any other Power whatsoever, as if admitting that the vote [Wilson's plebiscite] which has already been cast in favor of a British Mandate is susceptible of revision by outside Powers."⁸¹

In this same letter Montagu spoke of the nationalist agitation of Sharifian agents which has already necessitated military operations in southern Kurdistan and seems likely

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid. doc. 91374.

to involve serious trouble in Iraq also.

The British committed a second serious error in its administration of Mesopotamia. The first had been the plebiscite itself which provided a false basis for British policy concerning Mesopotamia. The second was the decision to limit the plebiscite and the councils to the Shaikhs and notables so that nationalist elements such as the Baghdadi officers were excluded.⁸² Their exclusion robbed the administration of a potential source of political talent which instead became a united and dangerous enemy. The Turkish policy had been to divide the Shaikhs and keep them weak and quarreling among themselves, totally subservient to the central administration. The British on the other hand selected the leading tribal candidates and supported them by whatever means possible in exchange for their allegiance. The Shaikhs were taken by surprise when the British suddenly asked for their ideas in 1918 about how they themselves should be governed. In addition, many of them were apprehensive about a Turkish return, yet did not want to insult the British who represented the government in power. Men like Nuri Sa'id, Yasin Pasha, Naji Bey Es Sweidi, Jafar al-Askari, were

⁸²The policy to execute the administration through the leading Shaikhs was an adaptation of that developed by Sir Robert Sandeman in Baluchistan in 1875. For a detailed description of the Sandeman Plan, see reference cited in Ireland, *op. cit.*, p. 90 fn.

determined to be part of the government of Mesopotamia;
until after 1920 their part was one of clandestine and
undermining agitation.

CHAPTER V

INDECISION CONTINUED

For Mesopotamia the last half of the year 1919 was-- like the first-- a time of indecision, British policy remained unchanged except for two developments; a stiffening of opposition to Colonel Wilson in the India Office and the Foreign Office, and British's decision to abandon Faisal.

Opposition to Arnold J. Wilson

The acting civil commissioner was called to Paris and London in the spring of 1919 to discuss plans for a constitution and some means to settle the Kurdish problem in Mesopotamia. It has been noted that Mr. Toynebee disagreed vehemently with Colonel Wilson regarding the incorporation of Kurdistan into the Mesopotamian Mandate.⁸³ Toynebee arranged that the question be referred to the Interdepartmental Committee which occasioned the summoning of Wilson.

In December 1918 Wilson had signed an agreement with Shaikh Mahmud, a prominent Kurdish tribal leader. By the terms of the agreement Britain recognized Mahmud's right to lead a confederation of Kurdish tribes in Mesopotamia and promised the "moral support of the British Government in controlling" almost all of Iraqi Kurdistan from the Greater

⁸³See Chapter IV, Supra.

Zab to the Diyala River. It further promised British assistance and protection to any tribe (other than those from Persia) who freely accepted the leadership of Shaikh Mahmud.⁸⁴ This was Colonel Wilson's method of establishing British claim to an area whose boundaries had never been clearly delineated. The border between Persia and Mesopotamia had for centuries been disputed by the Persians and Turks-- the Kurdish tribes ignored the boundary except when it was necessary to seek refuge on one side or another.

Mahmud proved an extremely poor choice; many of the Kurdish tribes would have nothing to do with him. A man of weak, if not unstable, mental makeup, Mahmud became incensed because the British would not enforce his authority over the recalcitrant tribes and because the British would not accept the fealty of the tribes from Persian Kurdistan. Mahmud attacked Sulaymania on May 20, 1919, captured the town and took eight British officers as hostages. Mahmud's insurrection could easily have become a general uprising.

A month earlier a group of dissident Kurds had murdered Captain Pearson, a political officer posted at Zukka. Pearson was killed on April 4 in a season when it was impossible to send a punitive expedition because the passes were still blocked with snow. The snow was the cause but a related reason was that the military could not find adequate transport for the arduous trek into the northern high mountains. When

⁸⁴Wilson, *Loyalties op. cit.*, p.129.

Wilson heard the news of Pearson's death he was arguing in the committee against Toynbee's recommendation for an independent Kurdistan. Wilson returned to Baghdad on May 10 so he was in Iraq when Mahmud defected. He should have ascertained several facts from the attack: first, the looseness of Britain's hold on the northern tribes and secondly, the difficulty of dealing with them by military force. Wilson, although on good terms with General MacMunn, the general officer commanding the Mesopotamian force, was angry because the military could not make their dispositions to suit the dispersed location of the political officers. The hostages from Sulaymania were not rescued until June 17 and then only after severe fighting.

Throughout the summer, tribal defections were widespread in the north; yet the civil commissioner refused to pull in his outposts. Two months after Pearson's death, Captain Willey was sent as political officer to Amadiyya accompanied by Captain H. MacDonald and Sapper R. Tramp. Amadiyya is over 300 miles from Baghdad, in the most inaccessible part of Iraq. Considering the recent murders, the dispatch of these officers without adequate protection was a tragic error in judgment. Their instructions were to raise and equip local gendarmes. The Aghas,⁸⁵ fearful of infringement upon

⁸⁵Local Kurdish chieftain, usually tribal as opposed to village or town leader.

their rights, conspired to murder the officers and their native non-commissioned guards. On July 14 the plan was carried out. The military was able to send a punitive force right away because the summer season allowed easier passage. The criminals were punished and other attempts to incite the tribes were put down throughout August.

The murder of the officers in Amadiyya created a furor in England. Wilson was held responsible and was reprimanded by the India Office for the dispatch of the officers, although he claimed that Colonel Gregson, his assistant, did it without his knowledge. The facts were that the military had withdrawn its force from Amadiyya in May over Colonel Wilson's strong objections so he was well aware that the area was not protected. Furthermore, he corresponded with Colonel Leachman and Captain Willey after the officers were sent so he knew they were actually in the area. After their murder, Wilson accepted responsibility for their retention in Amadiyya, but claimed that he did not send them there. The India Office blamed Sir Arnold for his poor judgment in the matter.

The incident alienated even those in the India Office who had been supporters of Colonel Wilson's policies-- Arthur Hirtzell's notes showed a hardening of his own opinion towards Colonel Wilson. Mr. Montagu was more guarded in his criticisms, but he was never as strong after this in his defense of Colonel Wilson as he had been in the past. The rapport between Wilson

and Montagu diminished after this time; Wilson later wrote that Mr. Montagu was unable to deal with Mesopotamia either in the House or elsewhere. Montagu claimed, according to Wilson, that he was only thinking of cabinet solidarity and he did not want to provoke Lord Curzon who, because of his long and distinguished experience in the East, was considered the authority on that area.⁸⁶

Another incident which alienated Wilson's friends in the India Office was when he asked them to endorse as official policy a speech he had made in Baghdad. In spite of repeated instructions from London to avoid any statement of policy which would prejudice decisions regarding the mandate, Wilson made such a statement of policy in an after dinner speech. Over a month later he telegraphed to the India Office: "I should be glad to know if speech made by me on Kuji Kutbak (31 May 1919) (copies sent to you on 10 June) met with the approval of His Majesty's Government."⁸⁷

Briefly, the speech described the Arab role in the new government as only advisory. He said that any complicated matter would have to be solved by British personnel. Wilson concluded by saying that all positions requiring expert direction and control would be filled by British officers.

⁸⁶Wilson, A Clash of Loyalties op. cit., p.313. Curzon had written the only definitive works on Persia up to that time.

⁸⁷IQ. File 4228, part 2.

Arthur Hirtzell took exception, stating that: "Colonel Wilson has never realized that he has got to have an Arab State... It is unusual for His Majesty's Government to be asked to approve after dinner speeches-- after delivery-- and I do not think we ought to tie ourselves to every phrase... I think our reply to Colonel Wilson should be very cautious."⁸⁸

J.E. Shuckburgh, who had been the most stalwart in his defense of Wilson, wrote on September 9 in a note to Mr. Montagu what should have been obvious advice in 1919 and certainly less painful than it would be in 1920:

We must either govern Mesopotamia or not govern it. There is no via media that I can see. Faisal 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.⁸⁹

When he saw Shuckburgh's minute, A.H. Hobbes, Assistant Secretary of State for India, wrote that he "thought everyone knew that we are not going to "govern" Mesopotamia in the sense in which I understand Mr. Shuckburgh to use the word and my complaint against Colonel Wilson (whose achievements for the best I fully comprehend) is that he does not seem to comprehend the fact, although he has been here, and seen, and heard for himself."⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Ibid. This is another instance of the India Office being "cautious" with Colonel Wilson. Wilson was a subordinate, dependent upon Whitehall to tell him what His Majesty's Government policy was. Had Hirtzell told Colonel Wilson that he had exceeded his authority, the effect would have benefitted everyone, including Colonel Wilson.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Shuckburgh withdrew a little after that and wrote that he did not want "to continue to give Wilson quite the same latitude as he enjoyed during the early stages of his post, but as much a free hand as possible in administrative matters-- certainly not anything in the nature of a general pledge."⁹¹

The Foreign Office had long opposed Colonel Wilson's policies so their comments on his after dinner speech were universally critical of Wilson. What antagonized the Foreign Office more during this period was Wilson's harping against Faisal and the Baghdadi officers. He wrote one telegram after another saying that Faisal was behind the attempt to organize opposition to the British rule in Mesopotamia. The personnel in the Foreign Office were pro-Sharifian and there was a good deal of sympathy for the Iraqi officers who were with Faisal. Colonel Wilson was convinced that Faisal was not only aware of their activities but encouraged and financed them.⁹²

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² There is no doubt that Faisal gave money to the Baghdadi's but there is no evidence that he intended it for use against the British. The money was most often distributed among the tribes where it was very much needed. When it was used to bribe and buy arms Faisal was only indirectly responsible. Letters on file at the FO from Faisal in 1919 are very believable. Also see Young, The Independent Arab, (London: John Murray, 1933), p.286.

An incident which could have alleviated the controversy between Wilson and the Al Ahd was the arrival in Baghdad in early June 1919 of Naji Beg Suweidi, a prominent Baghdadi Officer from Damascus.

The circumstances of his coming are not explained; it is probable that Colonel Wilson had invited him when the two talked in Damascus when Wilson stopped on his journey to Paris in March, 1919. The Sueidi family was prominent in Baghdad. Jusuf Effendi, Naji's father, had been a nationalist agitator under the Turks and was deported to Constantinople for his activities. Naji's arrival in Baghdad was an opportunity to show good faith with the Damascus group and, at the same time, provide a valuable propaganda notice in London.

Naji was appointed as advisor to the military governor with a substantial salary, but he stayed in the position only a month. On July 14 he resigned abruptly and returned to Damascus giving no reason for his action. Miss Bell said that he resigned because his attempts to suggest administrative improvements were rejected. He had proposed that a municipal committee to govern Baghdad be elected by universal suffrage. His comments had not been asked for and Colonel Wilson ignored them. Wilson instead appointed a committee under the British judicial advisor consisting of two British Officers, four

Baghdadi notables, including Naji, and an Arab secretary.⁹³

While Naji was in Baghdad, his associates in Damascus had contacted General Allenby in Cairo and presented their demands for the establishment of a purely national civil government in Mesopotamia before the present Western bureaucratic system crystallized. Allenby forwarded the letter to the Foreign Office who sent it on to the India Office. After contacting Colonel Wilson, Mr. Montagu sent a long reply to the Foreign Office referring to the "memorialists" demands. (The reference was to the seven Syrians who had presented similar demands in April, 1917). After an explanation that Britain could not prejudge the peace conference, Montagu said that Colonel Wilson would allow certain responsible Baghdadis to return to Iraq and take part in the government. He cited Naji Beg's appointment as proof that "His Majesty's Government afforded the Arabs of proven character and ability full scope for the exercise of their talents--even though Naji Beg has, greatly to our regret, thought it necessary to resign."⁹⁴

Naji Beg returned to his former position as military governor of Aleppo. He said years later, when he was a member of the Iraqi Cabinet under Nuri Sa'id, that he had been sent by the Al Ahd to see the true situation in Baghdad.

⁹³Bell, Civil Administration, op. cit., p.131.

⁹⁴FO 371/4180 doc. 8169 and 8170.

Commenting on Mr. Montagu's letter, Hubert Young said that he was not surprised that Naji Beg was "aghast at the oriental bureaucracy he found in the military governor's office. I know that office and I know Naji Beg."

It was in July that Nuri Sa'id, chief aide-de-camp to Faisal, had the first opportunity to propose the "Greater Syria Scheme" which he would continue to promote until his death in 1958. In a long memorandum to the Foreign Office he described his plan for a union or federation of geographic Syria (including Palestine and Lebanon), and Mesopotamia. Emir Faisal gave the memorandum to Lord Balfour in Paris at the Peace Conference; Balfour forwarded it to Curzon in England. Major Young noted on the memorandum for the attention of Lord Curzon "... if the French are given a mandate for Syria we must anticipate permanent friction between them and the Arabs, the Arabs and ourselves, and most ominous of all, ourselves and the French."⁹⁵

⁹⁵FO 371/4181 doc. 102396.

Abandonment of Faisal

On September 13, 1919, Mr. Lloyd George and Clemenceau agreed that British troops would be withdrawn from Syria and Cilicia, the move to be completed by November 1st. By so doing Britain extricated herself from the "Syrian Question." Unable to arbitrate the stalemate between France and Faisal, Lloyd George simply withdrew from the matter.

The summer had been a frustrating period for Lloyd George: the situation was obviously deteriorating in Mesopotamia; the Bolshevik threat was growing in Persia; there had been rioting in Cairo; the "Sinn Fein" were waging a rebellion in Ireland; and the French were accusing him of protecting Faisal and coveting the mandate of Syria for Britain.

Mr. Balfour had written a memorandum regarding Syria, Palestine, and Mesopotamia on August 11 which said that Anglo-French relations on the subject "are getting more and more strained, so that it does most seriously behoove us to consider the method by which this cloud of suspicion can best be dissipated, and an arrangement reached which will be fair to both countries and of benefit to the Eastern World.

"It must be admitted, in the first place, that we have not 'staged' our plan--so far as we have a plan--with any

notable success. We have made a beau geste, and none have applauded."⁹⁶

The terms of the evacuation agreement were contained in an aide memoire which Lloyd George showed first to Clemenceau and then to the heads of the delegations of the five great powers at the peace conference.⁹⁷ Lloyd George restated the boundaries in the Sykes-Picot Agreement, as amended. British garrisons in Cilicia would be turned over to a French force and those in Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo to an Arab force.

Amir Faisal was, of course, crushed. He wrote a pathetic letter to the Prime Minister two days after receipt of the aide memoire. In it he asked why Britain was breaking its promise to keep Lord Allenby as Commander-in-Chief of the occupied territories until the Peace Conference decided disposition of them. Faisal was adamant about not splitting Syria and asked that if Britain must move its troops, why not move all European troops and leave the responsibility to the Arab Government?⁹⁸

Lloyd George could not be dissuaded. He told Faisal that he hoped that he (Faisal) could strike a bargain with

⁹⁶FO 371/4183 doc. 132187.

⁹⁷The aide memoire was dated 13 September 1919 and is contained as Appendix D.

⁹⁸FO 406/41 doc. 132930.

the French, but British policy was now to stay out of it. Faisal was sent to Paris to see Clemenceau; he went alone without any British escort, as the French had requested. The French had refused to come to London or even to discuss the withdrawal on a military staff level if Faisal were included. Lloyd George tried to smooth the way for Faisal by correspondence, but the decision to evacuate Syria was a decision to withdraw support for Faisal and so cancelled Faisal's only basis for maintaining Arab allegiance in Damascus. When he went to Paris to negotiate with Clemenceau, Arab control in Syria passed to the members of the Young Arab Party and the Al Ahd.⁹⁹

Lloyd George did not entirely solve his difficulties with the French. In answer to the Prime Minister's aide memoire Mr. Clemenceau wrote to the Prime Minister that the French:

"... thoroughly understand the difficulty in which English negotiators find themselves after being driven by political necessities to enter into engagements both with the King of the Hijaz and with France, which, if not in opposition, the one to the other, are at any rate difficult to adjust."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹FO 406/41 doc. 143507.

¹⁰⁰From a file of secret police reports which states that all independent parties of Syria, Palestine, and Mesopotamia were working together. The movement was described as pro-Turkish and anti-Sharifian. It said Yasin Pasha, a member of Al Ahd, was the moving spirit. See FO 371/4183 doc. 144109 dated 22 October 1919.

This letter infuriated Lloyd George. He had abandoned Faisal in order to settle with the French, now Clemenceau served notice that his troubles were not over. The French felt justified to do as they liked in Syria because Lloyd George had allowed Mesopotamia to become a problem almost as serious as Syria. An incident at Dair Ez Zor during the next month would greatly embarrass Great Britain; the decision to withdraw British troops from Syria was the occasion for the incident, but Colonel Wilson's decision to send political officers to the town a year previously was the reason why Britain was involved at all.

Dair Ez Zor

Dair Ez Zor is situated about three hundred and fifty kilometers up the Euphrates from Baghdad. The Sykes-Picot Agreement placed the border between Iraq and Syria about forty kilometers south of Dair, midway between that town and the town of Albu Kamal. Based upon the Sykes-Picot Agreement, Lloyd George had agreed in his September agreement with Clemenceau that Dair Ez Zor and its environs would be turned over to the French. Colonel Wilson's decision to send a political officer to the town a year earlier now placed the British in a dilemma.

There is no doubt that the British intended to evacuate the town despite Colonel Wilson's contention that the population wanted them to stay. Several Iraqi agents were sent from Damascus in order to stir up the people by telling them that the French would soon occupy the area. The agents were led by Ramadhan al Shallash who was stationed at Aleppo. Ramadhan had been in Dair several times earlier in order to enlist the tribes against the British administration. Nor is there any doubt that the earlier anti-British propaganda was part of the Baghdadi officers' pressure to make the British turn over a share of the administration of Iraq to them. This Ramadhan incited the surrounding tribes to capture the city before the French could take over. The exiled officers hoped

to present a fait accompli believing that this would deter the French from entering the area.

There were no regular British troops in Dair, only the political officers and a handful of levies. Ramadhan with about six hundred men easily stormed the town and captured the political officer who was, then held as a hostage for the safety of the town. The British were in a quandary. Ramadhan threatened to kill their hostage if the town was bombed or if the British tried in any other way to retake the town. As it turned out the officer was treated kindly throughout his captivity; the more serious problem was that the British had no claim upon Dair because of Lloyd George's agreement to turn it over to the French, it would appear that Ramadhan's action forced them out. They attempted to bring pressure through Faisal who was then in Paris discussing the British withdrawal agreement. Faisal sent several messages to the Baghdadi officers in Damascus asking that Ramadhan move out of Dair. He also wrote to the British that he regretted the incident very much and though he had nothing to do with the attack. The officers in Damascus were able to recall Ramadhan and placed another Iraqi officer there, but Ramadhan returned. On January 11 a group of levies under a British officer attempted to move forward to the Khabur River about fifty kilometers south of Dair, but Arab tribesmen made a

determined attack on Albu Kamal and the troops were forced to return to that town.

The entire incident only served to convince the surrounding tribes that the British could not enforce their administration. They interpreted what was a political dilemma as a sign of military weakness. Agents such as Ramadhan had harped on the theme that the British had all but evacuated Mesopotamia. The British had never sent any large number of troops to the area around Dair nor had there been any fighting there during the war. For this reason the tribesmen were willing to believe that the British were helpless to enforce their administration. As a matter of fact London had decided months earlier that they did not intend to remain in Dair Ez Zor and had notified the GOC in Baghdad to this effect. The mistake was in not withdrawing the political agent immediately; the loss in prestige was far greater than the loss of the area would have been. This was Colonel Wilson's error.

Colonel Wilson, took issue with the India Office for not informing him earlier that the Government did not intend to contest Dair. The India Office indignantly replied that the War Office had been told to notify Wilson, and to be doubly sure, the India Office had asked Wilson if he saw their telegraph. Wilson had answered at that time in the affirmative.

Mr. Montagu's telegram concluded: "There is therefore no grounds whatever for suggestion in last paragraph of your telegram (that he was not informed) and I regret that you should have thought yourself justified in making it."¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹FO 371/4186 doc. 169052.

CHAPTER VI

EVENTS LEADING TO THE UPRISING

British policy concerning Mesopotamia was linked to and greatly influenced by Syrian development during the years 1918-1920. It was earlier pointed out that the Sykes-Picot Agreement was an attempt to contain the French demands for territory in the Levant in order that the British would know what to promise to Faisal. Britain hoped that the French would have been satisfied to occupy only the littoral between Palestine and Alexandretta, spreading out into what is now central Turkey, and that the Arabs might have accepted French advisors in that part of the independent Arab state designated as a French sphere by Sykes and Picot. Both premises were extremely unlikely and did little to allay burgeoning Arab distrust of the British administration in Mesopotamia.

Since the French would not allow for Mesopotamia to be handled separately from Syria, British policymakers were obliged to take sides between French and Arab. The India Office and Colonel Wilson favored the French cause in Syria;¹⁰²

¹⁰² Arthur Hirtzell wrote on November 20, 1918: "The idea that we can get the French out of Syria by an appeal to local opinion under the Anglo-French Declaration seems to me visionary, unless the League of Nations or some other outside force impresses this upon them; nor do I see that we have any particular interest in getting the French out of Syria." It should be noted that the French still had at that time five settlements in India which the India Government wanted the French to give up. Hirtzell wrote that perhaps the French might make "A trade for some territory nearer home." IO 10.2.38 doc. B 239.

the Foreign Office and the Cairo Bureau favored Faisal. Colonel Lawrence offered to help Lord Curzon convince Faisal to settle with the French, but only in exchange for British concessions in Mesopotamia, including the dismissal of Sir Arnel Wilson.¹⁰³

When Lloyd George decided to abandon Faisal, the Cabinet had already agreed to relieve Wilson. The first indication that he was to be dismissed as acting Civil Commissioner in Baghdad was in a hand-written minute by Hubert Young saying that Sir Percy Cox would replace him. Young was now the secretary for the Interdepartmental Committee and present at the August meeting at which the decision was reached. Young wrote that "Wilson is out of touch with the policy of the Peace Conference."¹⁰⁴

The British government decided that her European alliances were more vital than those in the Middle East. She had already discussed oil agreements with the French which would culminate in April 1920 with a bilateral agreement whereby the French recognized British oil rights in Iraq. The agreement gave France twenty-five percent of oil revenues in exchange for the British right to construct pipelines through

¹⁰³Documents of British Foreign Policy (1st series) Vol. IV, p. 422. Lawrence to Curzon, 25 September 1919, cited in Kedourie, op. cit., p.180.

¹⁰⁴F.O. 371/4128 doc. 118150.

the French sphere to the Mediterranean.¹⁰⁵

Even though Britain acted in accordance with her European policy in deciding against Faisal, she adhered to an imperialistic policy by maintaining the status quo in Mesopotamia. She continued to support Colonel Wilson's policies there, policies which allowed and possibly caused the uprising of the tribes in the summer of 1920. Yet, an imperialistic policy would not have promised a constitution and ultimate local control of the government. What England attempted was a "middle of the road" policy which failed to please anyone. Together with France she had promised self-determination and self-government in November 1918, the leaders of the countries involved would be satisfied with nothing less.

There is no evidence that England was thinking of a quid-pro-quo when she abandoned Faisal. Lloyd George could not have known at that time that the French would expel Faisal from Damascus by force, nor could he have foreseen the urgent need for a pliable Arab ruler in Iraq after the uprising which would occur a few months hence. Nor would Faisal have humbled himself by going to Paris to arrange a deal with Clemenceau if he had any inkling of the Iraqi

¹⁰⁵F.O. 371/4168 doc. 172818. The agreement which was finally signed in April 1920 was known as the Berthelet-Cadman agreement, named for the two men who worked out details.

throne being proffered. Faisal's return to Damascus to face the wrath of the nationalist Arab officers there would indicate that he had no alternative at that time.

Colonel Wilson showed in the early part of the year 1920 that he could not be depended upon to carry out British policy in Iraq as long as it was based upon the Anglo-French agreement. In a long dispatch dated January 23, he said that the fundamental assumption in recent correspondence from London was that an Arab state was possible in Mesopotamia within a short period of years and "that the Anglo-French Declaration of November 8, 1918 represented a practical line of policy to pursue in the near future." (Italics mine) Wilson continued:

My observations in this country and elsewhere have forced me to the conviction that the assumption is erroneous, and although I am aware that in holding this view I differ from authorities and observers both at home and abroad who possess a breadth of vision and a wealth of experience to which I can lay no claim; I venture, probably for the last time, in my present capacity to lay before His Majesty's Government the considerations which have led me to this conclusion.¹⁰⁶

Wilson justified his stand by describing the heterogeneous and dissident population of Mesopotamia in addition to the financial stake which Britain had in the country.

Appended to Wilson's memo was one by Miss Bell in which she described her visit to Damascus during the period

¹⁰⁶F.O. 371/4186 doc. 172818.

October 4 - October 20, 1919. She tells of her interviews with almost every important Iraqi personage in Damascus during the time Faisal's government. Miss Bell wrote in summary that the year of independent government in Syria would "come home to roost" in Mesopotamia. The Iraqi officers would never accept less and, "looked at from our point of view, it seems to me to be preferable to take up from the first a position from which we will not be called upon to retreat."¹⁰⁷

Five days before Wilson wrote this telegram, the Inter-Departmental Committee had decided to recall him as soon as Sir Percy Cox was available to replace him. His phrase "probably for the last time" indicates that he had received word of this decision in one way or another.

Lloyd George, during a debate in the House of Commons, said in rebuttal to Mr. Ormsby-Gore, that England would stay in Mesopotamia and that she would accept a mandate and would keep her part of the November 8th Declaration. This renewal of the "self-determination pledge" prompted Colonel Wilson to appoint a committee to prepare proposals for a constitution for Iraq in accordance with the Covenant of

¹⁰⁷ Later the same month Colonel Wilson was urging that the Divisional councils be considered an interim measure for full constitutional government. He said he had no doubt that "we are on the right line." Major Hubert Young wrote later that he was "not reassured by this message." Young, op. cit., p.305.

of the League of Nations and the published declarations of His Majesty's Government. The committee sat under the chairmanship of Sir Edgar Bonham-Carter, a former legal secretary in the Sudan government.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸The members and the verbatim report of the committee are in Wilson, Clash of Loyalties, op. cit., p.242.

The Bonham-Carter Committee

More than a year had passed since the acting civil commissioner had been authorized to form the five provincial councils as well divisional and municipal councils. In January 1920, in responding to a Foreign Office query on how many councils had been formed, Wilson acknowledged that only four of a possible nine divisional councils and no provincial councils were in existence, the Basra council having been assembled for the first time on 18 January, after the receipt of the query from London.¹⁰⁹

The question of divisional councils arose during a visit of Nuri Sa'id to London in April. In a conversation with his wartime friend, Hubert Young of the Foreign Office, Nuri described the congress which had been held in Damascus the previous month. The representatives had demanded the complete independence of Iraq and declared Amir Abdullah as its king. Nuri told Young that the councils promised by Wilson had never materialized and that the few that were in existence were a farce. Nuri again urged the merits of his United Syria and Mesopotamia scheme, or as he called it, his "plant for Greater Syria."¹¹⁰

The results of the Bonham-Carter Committee did not

¹⁰⁹F.O. 371/4152 doc. 172496.

¹¹⁰F.O. 371/5226 doc. 2719.

dissipate the political storm which was gathering in Baghdad. Had it done anything to assure the extremists that they would receive a share in the government, it might have prepared them for the announcement of the mandate in early May. As it was, the committee recommendations repeated Colonel Wilson's plans for a nominal Arab government with all authority vested in a British High Commissioner and British heads of departments. It said that the Arab head of State "would be a person of good social status and prestige and have leisure for social functions."¹¹¹

Colonel Wilson had alerted London that the Bonham-Carter committee had been appointed. London was anxious to learn the results of the long-awaited constitutional committee. After several inquiries by both the Foreign Office and the India Office, he telegraphed the committee's findings which were immediately recognized as an attempt to quiet the demands for Arab participation in the Wilson administration.

When Colonel Wilson asked for permission to make an announcement concerning the future of the constitution based upon the committee report, Lord Curzon and Mr. Montagu agreed that Wilson should not make an announcement on his own, but that some official announcement was necessary. The two secretaries could not agree upon the text. Montagu finally wrote to Curzon:

¹¹¹See committee report. Wilson, op. cit., p.245.

My dear Curzon:

I don't quite like your draft and you don't like mine. The enclosure is a compromise. Do you agree to it or would you like to submit the two to the Prime Minister and post to what the final draft is to be ?

It does not seem that we can get together...¹¹²

When Colonel Wilson made an urgent appeal on April 27 that an announcement be made immediately, he explained that the religious season of Ramadhan might occasion the eruption of pent-up political resentment. In addition he was apprehensive that the visit of the Shah of Iran, which coincided with the beginning of Ramadhan on May 3, would contribute to the hazardous situation. Colonel Wilson sent a flurry of telegrams in a last ditch effort to effect some constitutional change. The telegrams indicate that he sensed something should be done immediately in order to prevent disorders in Baghdad.

In the most recent weeks he had abandoned most of those notions upon which he had based former arguments. On March 20 he urged that the people not be asked again concerning future government; "They don't know what they want and it destroys their confidence that we should ask them."¹¹³ In a telegram to the India Office he said that divisional councils "are

¹¹²F.O. 371/3322.

¹¹³F.O. 371/5071 doc. 2169.

constituted for local and not national purposes and have no authority to give opinions on a national question... we would again draw attention to the fact that few members of divisional councils have any political knowledge or experience and to the possibility of dangerous outbreak of extreme nationalism and religious practices."¹¹⁴

One can imagine the frustrations experienced by the acting civil commissioner. Convinced that time was running out, he was forbidden to make public mention of the Bonham-Carter recommendations which exemplified his own views for the future constitution of Iraq. When news reached him on May 1, by means of a Reuters telegram, that Britain had accepted the mandate for Mesopotamia at the San Remo Conference, Colonel Wilson decided... "with or without permission, something had to be said to amplify the bold announcement from San Remo."¹¹⁵

Despite his instructions, Wilson issued a communique on May 3 announcing the Mandate and held out the hope that "the establishment of civil administration will give ever widening field to native energies."¹¹⁶

Meanwhile the two Secretaries, Lord Curzon and Mr. Mantagu,

¹¹⁴I.O.R. File 4722 part 3 "Political and Secret."

¹¹⁵Wilson, op. cit., p.248.

¹¹⁶Text in Wilson, op. cit., pp.248-9.

had reached agreement upon the terms of the announcement concerning the future constitution and forwarded the text on May 4, 1919, to Wilson. Wilson's announcement, already made, fell far short of that of the Secretaries.¹¹⁷ Undismayed, Colonel Wilson asked that His Majesty's Government reconsider the second portion of its announcement which promised further consultations and discussion with the people. Wilson submitted that it was for His Majesty's Government as Mandatory Power to prescribe what form of government shall be set up in the immediate future.

On May 20 the India Office answered that the framing of the Mandate was in process and that Wilson's proposals must take a different shape. It said "the announcement of the 4th May from the India Office may be postponed in view of your proclamation of the 3rd May. Meanwhile, no further action should be taken or announcement made."¹¹⁸

At the Foreign Office, Major Young and Sir John Tilley were enraged to find that Colonel Wilson had made his unauthorized announcement on May 3rd. Young heard the text for the first time when it was read to him on the telephone on May 15. He immediately made Lord Curzon aware of it, and they planned to bring it to the attention of the Inter-Departmental Committee the following day.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷Ibid.

¹¹⁸Ibid.

¹¹⁹F.O. 371/5226 doc. 4789

The Mandubin¹²⁰

A committee of fifteen persons who called themselves the delegates of the people finally succeeded in arranging a meeting with the Civil Commissioner on June 2. Excitement had run high in Baghdad since the announcement of the Mandate; Ireland states that nationalists held meetings in the mosques where speakers urged a rising against the British in the name of independence, race and religion.¹²¹ Clashes had already taken place and armored cars patrolled the streets.

Colonel Wilson arranged the meeting at the Serai,¹²² he took the precaution of inviting about forty Baghdadi notables who were favorably disposed to the British administration and also made special police arrangements. Wilson's speech was anything but conciliatory: after making allusions to the various covenants and the Bonham-Carter report, he warned that any further excitement to violence would be met by rigorous action by both military and civil authorities.¹²³

After the delegates presented their demands for an immediate election of an Arab National convention with

¹²⁰Those delegated" from the Arabic meaning.

¹²¹Ireland, op. cit., p.215.

¹²²Government headquarters, Fr.-Turkish: Palace, house, inn.

¹²³For full text of Wilson's speech see F.O. 371/5227 tel.6585.

authority to draw up a constitution, some of them were carried out on the shoulders of the crowd. Colonel Wilson says that he, Bonham-Carter, Howell and Balfour were greeted with shouts of abuse and hisses as they left the building under police escort. He said, "It was the first demonstration of its kind and was intended as a sort of declaration of war."¹²⁴

¹²⁴Wilson, op.cit., p.257.

A.J. Wilson's Last Council

Wilson sent many telegrams to the India Office during his time in office after the war, but the one which ended the long struggle between Arnold T. Wilson and the London liberals was sent on June 9th. It caused his enemies to attack his new lukewarm supporters and demand Wilson's dismissal. The rumblings in Baghdad and among the tribal elements of the Euphrates district indicated that the move was overdue.

In his telegram Wilson said:

We cannot maintain our position as a mandatory by a policy of conciliation of extremists. Having set our hand to the task regenerating Mesopotamia, we must be prepared to furnish alike men and money and to maintain continuity of control for years to come. We must be prepared, regardless of the League of Nations, to go slowly with constitutional or democratic institutions, the application of which to Eastern countries has been attempted of late years with such a little degree of success. If His Majesty's Government regard such a policy as impractical or beyond our strength (as well they may), I submit that they would do better to face the alternative, formidable and, from the local point of view, terrible as it is, and evacuate Mesopotamia.¹²⁵

Hubert Young in the Foreign Office, when he saw the telegram, wrote a minute for Lord Curzon in which he said that Colonel Wilson had failed to mention the third alternative; the one His Majesty's Government had maintained all along: to remain in Mesopotamia and maintain the goodwill

¹²⁵P.O. 371/5227 tel. 6948.

of the people. Young maintained that Wilson knew that "he cannot obtain the goodwill of the people without a predominately Arab government, and this I am perfectly certain Colonel Wilson will use every effort to prevent. I regard the telegram as tantamount to resignation and think that it should be accepted as such."¹²⁶

Mr. Montagu referred the entire matter to the cabinet which needed no further urging to take action. An Inter-Departmental Committee met on June 16, Lord Curzon presiding. Present were most of the key personnel of the Foreign Office and the India Office. Lord Curzon brought everyone up to date, describing Colonel Wilson's unauthorized announcements regarding the Mandate on May 3, and his June 2nd speech to the Mandubin. He asked Mr. Montagu if he considered that the policy which they were all in perfect agreement upon was likely to be carried into effect so long as Sir Arnold Wilson remained in political control in Mesopotamia. Mr. Montagu replied that he had "never held the view that Colonel Wilson, with his marked inclination to concentrate power in his own hands, could fairly be asked to carry out the policy of His Majesty's Government in Mesopotamia."¹²⁷ Lord Curzon later said that it was obvious from the whole series of telegrams that Colonel Wilson could not bring himself

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ F.O. 371/5227 doc. 3553, also CAB 23/22 doc. C51/20 (1).

to carry out the policy which the Conference had consistently advocated, and that it was a great pity that Colonel Wilson had been left so long in Mesopotamia, though this had been rendered necessary by the grip he had obtained over the local situation.

No one came to the defense of Colonel Wilson although many of those present knew how Wilson had pleaded for policy guidance from London, especially from the India Office. Present at the meeting from the India Office were Sir Arthur Hirtzell, C.C. Garbett and Mr. Montagu, the Secretary of State for India. The question might be asked why had they waited so long? How had Colonel Wilson been able to defy official policy for so many months? The answers to these questions are contained in a paragraph Wilson later wrote:

Circumstances immediately after the war were, however, wholly exceptional. The problem of Iraq was at the time many-sided, and several departments of State were simultaneously dealing with various aspects, often without consultation with each other. There was virtually no correlating authority in Whitehall; each question had to be fought out as it arose, generally by telegram, both as to the principles involved and as to their local application.¹²⁸

Colonel Wilson was not only permitted, but often forced to make policy decisions; it would have taken courage to do so in Whitehall, but no one did; it was a convenient ploy to "wait for the peace conference to decide."

¹²⁸Wilson, Clash of Loyalties, op. cit., p.217.

In addition to settling the fate of the acting Civil Commissioner, the conference of June 17 directed that a further announcement be made in Baghdad on June 20. It was the same one sent by the India Office on June 7 which Colonel Wilson had not published. In it, His Majesty's Government anticipated that the Mandate would constitute Mesopotamia an independent state under guarantee of the League of Nations and subject to the Mandate of Great Britain which would be responsible for internal peace and external security, for the formation of an organic law in consultation with the people of Mesopotamia, and for the development of Mesopotamia as a self-governing state until such time as it could stand by itself, at which time the Mandate would come to an end.

It promised that Sir Percy Cox, who would return to Baghdad in the autumn, would be entrusted with the task of administering these promises, and that he:

"Will be authorized to call into being, as provisional bodies, a Council of State under an Arab President and a General Elective Assembly, representative of and freely elected by the population of Mesopotamia. And it will be his duty to prepare in consultation with the General Elective Assembly, the permanent organic law.¹²⁹

Philip Ireland called this statement the first straightforward public announcement of a concrete and specific policy

¹²⁹Ireland, op. cit., p.221.

which His Majesty's Government had made in Iraq since the Armistice, a year and eight months before.¹³⁰

¹³⁰Ibid.

CHAPTER VII

THE TRIBAL UPRISING

Tel Afar

On May 26, 1920, the first definite word came to Baghdad that a "Sharifian force" was operating in Syria north of Mosul. The "force" was actually a tribal movement of from five hundred to one thousand men probably led by a ranking Baghdadi officer, Jamil Beg Midfai. There were other rumors, less well founded, of a Turkish force approaching from the northwest. True or not, the rumors were enough to incite the people in Mosul and its environs.

An incident in the small town of Tel Afar, about seventy kilometers of Mosul, touched off the revolt. In Tel Afar on June 4, an Arab levy officer, Captain Stuart, was shot dead on the street. His assistants, Sergeants Lawler and Walker, with one machine gunner, held out on a roof top until a bomb killed them all. Two armored cars sent from Mosul two days earlier on the advice of the political officer in Tel Afar, Major Barlow, were trapped in the narrow streets of the town and their crews killed.¹³¹ Barlow, who had been taken prisoner, escaped but was found

¹³¹The armored car proved to be a poor choice for use in Mesopotamia. The terrain was often impassible and their use in the narrow crooked streets of the small villages was disastrous, witness the action in Tel Afar. The large pneumatic tires made an opportune target for proper small arms fire which crippled the car and left the crews helpless.

killed by his pursuers two miles west of town. He apparently saw the armed cars and made a dash for them but was shot before he could warn them.

The townspeople of Tel Afar, who numbered about ten thousand, had become increasingly aroused as the rumors of an Arab invasion from Syria or Persia by the Turks became rife during the month of May. Nearby Mosul, the third largest city in Mesopotamia, was probably the indirect cause of the rising. The people of Tel Afar were kept abreast of the situation in Baghdad and Damascus by the news from Mosul which was a hotbed of anti-British agitation. Police records in the Foreign Office files report that a plot had been formed in Mosul for a revolt there.¹³² The revolt never materialized but the records show that the rising in Tel Afar was a part of it which was touched off prematurely. Because the British were so prompt in punishing the rioters the people in Mosul became discouraged and their plan never materialized.¹³³

The Military Situation

Lt. General Sir Aylmer Haldane, fifty-eight years old, had assumed command of the Mesopotamian Force just three months earlier. At the time of his appointment he was on semi-retired status in England. His long service had included only six

¹³²The plot and the Tel Afar incident, and the connection between them are narrated in the Administrative Report of the Mosul Division for the Year 1920 (Baghdad: Government Press, 1921), pp. 3-5.

¹³³Punishment in this case consisted of seizure of weapons and burning of crops.

months in the East and that was in India. Haldane was at a disadvantage in not knowing the area or the people; his inability to comprehend the situation was directly due to this failing, a fact often noted at the Foreign Office.

After the Tel Afar incident General Haldane took stock of the forces available for military duty in the event that the uprising spread. The total ration-strength of Haldane's force was 133,000, of whom 47,000 were combatants. Included in the latter figure were some 4,800 British and 8,000 Indian troops who were sick, in transit, or detached to Persia. The number was further reduced by 3,000 British and 2,300 Indians in non-combatant duties. That left the final count of soldiers available for combat duty at 7,200 British and 8,000 Indians.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ After the insurrection the British Chamber of Commerce conducted an inquiry as to why over 80,000 military were tied up with the day to day civil administration of Mesopotamia. The country had been under continuous martial law since the war, but the army also staffed and operated the entire communications systems, including the Inland Water Transport and Railway System, the Electrical and Mechanical Section, the Labor Directorate, and others. The largest expenditure of manpower resources, however, was for guard duty. There remained over 14,000 Turkish prisoners in Mesopotamia and large quantities of military stores left since the war. Both of these burdens should have been disposed of long before. Another logistic burden was created by the arrival during January of 550 British women, wives of British officers and men, with over 400 children. A special camp was constructed for these military dependents in the Persian hills near Karind; it is a matter of speculation as to how many servicemen were occupied with the task of maintaining these people. The subsequent investigation by the Chamber of Commerce into this waste of manpower is described in Haldane, op. cit., pp.65-69.

There were no further outbreaks for a time after Tel Afar, but the calm was broken at the end of June by an incident unrelated to the other troubles. A young political officer stationed at Rumaythah, about 200 kilometers southeast of Baghdad, arrested a local shaikh because he refused to repay a small loan given him to purchase seed. The officer, Captain Hyatt, planned to send the shaikh the next day by train to Diwanyah for a hearing but that night members of his tribe, the Shawalim, broke into the serai and freed him.

The tribes from the district had been at the flash point for weeks. They had been assured by the representatives of Najaf and Kufa, the chief cities of that area, that the British were forbidden by the Mandate to use force. They also believed with some basis that almost all effective British troops had been sent to Persia. The surrounding tribes cut the railway in three places, isolating both Samawa and Rumaythah.

The British decided to consolidate their forces in Rumaythah; the gendarme contingent had barricaded themselves in the building of that place. On July 1, an additional fifty-six Indian regulars reached Rumaythah from Samawa, nearly twice as many arrived the next day and on the third day an entire company of the 99th Infantry under the command of Captain Bragg arrived. The Arab force numbering from

1,500 to 2,000 began a seige of the July 4th. The defending force was in no immediate danger as long as food, water, and ammunition lasted.

A relief force of about two battaltions rushed to Rumaythah but were almost annihilated by the Arabs on July 6. This defeat was apparent corroboration for the propaganda that the British were incapable of handling a large revolt. The truth is that the relief was too hastily organized and greatly underestimated the strength of the insurgents. One British Officer and forty-seven Indian other ranks were killed and one officer and one hundred sixty-six men wounded. The worst aspect of the defeat was that the column was forced to retreat in poor order; the effect was to give courage to the tribesmen and remove all reservations that the time for revolt was at hand.

General Haldane ordered another column to relieve Rumaythah. A large force of about four brigades of infantry plus supporting services proceeded under Brigadier F.E. Coningham to Rumaythah. Thousands of tribesmen had rushed to join the rebels. The Arab defenses were now well established, the trench tactics used were exactly those of the Turks during the war.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ Haldane interpreted this as evidence that the Turks were leading the revolt; a more logical explanation is that the leaders were Arabs who had been trained by and served with the Turks and or Faisal.

The relief force made contact with the Arabs on July 19th near Diwanayah, meeting stiff resistance. An attack by the British failed that day, but the next morning they were able to carry the position. Casualties were heavy on both sides, but General Coningham reached Rumaythah on the 21st and the garrison was relieved.

All the warnings about extended supply lines were suddenly realized and the column decided to evacuate Rumaythah the same day and return north to Hillah, sixty kilometers closer to Baghdad. General Haldane had now to police an area three times that of England with a mobile force of only five hundred British and between twenty-five and thirty thousand Indian troops.

The Manchester Column

General Haldane's next move was to consolidate troops at certain strong points which could be easily defended. The tribes were permitted to seize the more isolated locations; they also severed British communications whenever possible. Rumaythah, the scene of the earlier outbreak, was located on the Shatt al Hillah, the more navigable eastern branch of the Euphrates. The largest town of the Shatt was Hillah itself north of Rumaythah about 100 kilometers south of Baghdad. Haldane ordered reinforcements to Hillah but before sufficient troops could be deployed there,

a section of the Bani Hasan tribe seized Kifli, a railroad station fifty-six kilometers from Hillah.

Kifli was located on the main branch of the Euphrates at almost the same latitude as Hillah on the other branch. The officer commanding at Hillah ordered a relief column to proceed from Hillah to Kifli. The column consisted of three companies from the Manchester Regiment plus a company of Sikh pioneers and two squadrons of Sind horse. Their route toward Kifli was overland, the shortest line between the two branches of the river. Orders given to the column were to advance no more than twelve kilometers the first day and to avoid an engagement with the Arabs if possible. The detachment was woefully small in comparison to the number of tribesmen under arms in the area.

Arab morale was probably at its highest, the tribesmen were elated after the series of engagements around Rumaythah. More important, the absence of the troops from Hillah left that garrison understrength and vulnerable. Colonel Lukin, the Hillah commander, hoped that the column of regulars would overawe the tribesmen and that it could advance to Kifli without engaging the Arabs.

In retrospect, the column was small and poorly organized and equipped. At the end of the first day's march no potable water was found. The two political officers accompanying

the column, Major Pully and Captain Barrett, his assistant, convinced the column commander to move on early the next morning to a better position closer to Kifli. Several hours were wasted marching to a watering place and half of the day was lost watering the stock. A late afternoon march placed the column at a site selected by the two political officers. The men and animals were fatigued and the defenses around the bivouac area were not properly set out. However, the area was suitable for defense.

At 7:50 P.M. a strong Arab force attacked the perimeter but was beaten off, mainly by the supporting artillery. The column commander was convinced by the two political officers that a night withdrawal was necessary. His acquiescence was to prove a costly mistake in judgment. The only chance the column had would have been to maintain a tight defensive position.

At 8:40 P.M. the column began its withdrawal; as soon as it was on the move the Arabs attacked again. The column commander lost control and panic turned the withdrawal into a rout. British losses were twenty killed, sixty wounded, three hundred eighteen missing and many transport animals and vehicles lost. An 18 pounder gun fell into a deep canal and had to be abandoned.¹³⁶

¹³⁶The British removed the breach block of the gun but the Arabs fabricated another and the gun was used several times in attacks upon the British. See below, the attack on the gunboat "Greenfly."

The operation had been a disaster, and at the worst possible time. It convinced many tribes who were as yet undecided to join the rebellion. The loss in personnel was heavy but the more damaging loss was in terms of British prestige. General Haldane disclaimed any responsibility for ordering the relief column, but Colonel Wilson asserted in his memoirs that Haldane had in fact issued the order. General Leslie, the Division commander in the Hillah sector, placed the blame on the two political officers who were with Colonel Lukin.

The Military Build-Up

It was then apparent that a costly military effort would be necessary to subdue the tribal rebellion if the British were to remain in Mesopotamia. The War Office with the concurrence of the Cabinet decided to suppress the rebellion first and then be concerned with establishing an Arab government under the terms of the Mandate. Martial law was still in effect but Colonel Wilson continued to operate the civil government by authority of the military commander. General Haldane completed his plan to consolidate his forces in strong positions from which punitive columns could operate. He asked for and was sent the reinforcements necessary to put down the rebellion; most of them came from India but units were also sent from England.

Through the courage and skill of Colonel Wilson's political officers, most sections of Mesopotamia remained peaceful, albeit precariously. On the upper Euphrates no outbreak occurred until August 12, due to the work of Colonel Leachman, a popular and experienced political officer at Fallujah. The British pulled in their forces to Fallujah and Ramadi which, coupled with Leachman's efforts, kept the situation calm.

More important, the tribes of the Muntafiq (confederation) which controlled the lower Euphrates and Tigris rivers above Basra remained peaceful. Had these tribes rebelled at any time in the early weeks, Baghdad would have become a besieged city and many tribes in that sector would have followed their example. The entire situation would have changed in that event. The work of the political officers in the lower Euphrates area was invaluable, especially that of Major Eadie who is credited by both Wilson and Haldane for keeping the tribes of the Muntafiq from joining the rebellion.

The reinforcements began to arrive from England and India. General Haldane had asked for three British and seven Indian battalions. In addition to these, a battery of horse artillery, a brigade of field artillery, five companies of engineers, medical and other units, and an

air force squadron added to the total. The total combatant troops of all arms came from outside Mesopotamia were:

British officers	323	British other ranks	3,093
Indian officers	302	Indian other ranks	13,200

and of auxiliary services:

British officers	46	British other ranks	107
Indian officers	40	Indian other ranks	4,094

Drafts from India to fill out the shortages of units already in Mesopotamia were:

British officers	587	British other ranks	723
Indian officers	127	Indian other ranks	6,745

Added to the 17,676 combatants already in Mesopotamia, there

was now a grand total of 64,439 effective troops in Iraq. The India government agreed to send most of the 14,000 Turkish prisoners still in Iraq to Constantinople. This was accomplished in August by sending them through Basra port thus releasing an additional 5,000 Indian troops for combat duty. About 2,400 Indian labourers from the Military Labor Corps were trained to perform guard duty, freeing almost that many soldiers for military duty.

Haldane's staff organized a small navy to protect shipping and insure continuous river traffic on the Tigris. If the railroads were cut between the Gulf and Baghdad as they had been in the north, the Tigris would have to become the main supply route from the port of entry to the north.

Home support for Haldane together with the respite afforded by the many tribes who remained quiet assured that the rebellion would be quelled, it was a matter of time, but at no small expense in terms of men and money.

The Train from Diwaniyah

General Coningham who had led the relief of Rumaythah had returned with his force to Diwaniyah. He was directed to evacuate the town and reinforce Hillah which was still in danger of attack. The distance between the two towns was about 120 kilometers; the main communications line was the railroad which had been extensively damaged by the tribesmen.

The number of rebellious tribesmen was now about 131,000, about 59,800 of whom had modern rifles. Most of the insurgents were in the middle Euphrates district; Hillah was almost in the center of that area. General Leslie was now the area commander with his headquarters in Hillah. He conducted active defense which consisted of reconnaissance in force and limited attacks of neighboring villages. Several units reached Hillah from Diwaniyah by rail before the line was cut. The commander at Diwaniyah wisely sent out a force to strengthen the guard at a railroad bridge on the line between the two towns. The bridge called Jarbuiyah crossed the Euphrates about ten kilometers from Diwaniyah. If this bridge were blown up, any chance of getting a train through to Hillah was gone. General Coningham in command of the evacuation force left Diwaniyah by train because the road between the two cities was almost impassable. Another reason for taking the trains was that

there was a serious shortage of railroad rolling stock at Hillah.

The train which departed from Diwanayah at 6:30 A.M. on July 30th consisted of six locomotives and two hundred fifty-one railroad cars. The Infantry strength with the train was about eight regiments together with some four batteries of artillery, plus cavalry units and pioneer companies. As the train inched northward it was joined by other units who had been called in from isolated stations.

The entire trip took eleven and a half days at an average of five and a half miles per day. As many as ten miles of track had to be repaired at a time. The Arab forces harassed the train, but were decisively beaten back by the artillery batteries which had been well mounted on board by General Coningham. Air Force planes contributed by strafing and bombing any concentrations of Arabs seen along the route.

Another train had departed on the 27th but was trapped at Guchan about thirteen kilometers from Hillah. The second train caught up with it and both of them and the reinforcements arrived in time to assure the safety of Hillah.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Haldane wrote in his memoirs that these eleven days were the longest of his military career. It was a most significant accomplishment. Haldane, op. cit., p. 126.

The British Gain The Initiative

For the next six weeks the strategy was to secure lines of communication on the middle and upper Euphrates and to the north of Baghdad. The railroad lines were restored by the tactic of building a series of blockhouses along the line. These blockhouses were close enough together for mutual support and were built and maintained by utilizing armored construction trains. One such train reached Fallujah on September 24th, thus securing the entire length of track north of Baghdad. Three days earlier the last of one hundred seventy-three blockhouses southward on the Kut-Baghdad line were completed. This line paralleled the Tigris river which re-established the main line of communication from Baghdad to Basra.

Another column from Hillah captured the Hindiya barrage on the Euphrates at the point where the river divides into two branches known as the Hindiyah and Hillah canals. There was a regulator on the river at this point which controlled the flow of water on the Hillah branch of the Euphrates. Its capture assured that the water supply south would not be cut off by the Arabs.

The uprisings had reached their height in mid-August; although the British had gained control of the overall situation, they still suffered several defeats. On August 6th,

Mirza Muhammad Taqi Shirazi, the chief Mujtahed at Karbala, had offered prayers on the corpse of an Arab killed in battle--and act which signified jihaad, or holy war. The effect of this action was to remove any chance the British had to calm the predominantly Shi'ah districts of Diyala and Shamiya on the Middle Euphrates. There was no doubt then that military force would be needed to pacify the area.

Although several smaller cities such as Kufah and Samawa were still invested, General Haldane, convinced that the besieged garrisons were in no immediate danger, chose to send troops against the tribes in those regions where there was still a chance to prevent full scale uprisings.

The Role of the Political Officers

The political officers had been instructed by Colonel Wilson to remain at their posts as long as possible in order to reassure the natives.¹³⁸ The results of his directive were mixed. In certain locales the tribes were pacified primarily through the efforts of the political officers as mentioned above; but, in other areas, it had tragic consequences. At Shahraban on the Diyala river

¹³⁸Wilson, op. cit., p.233.

above Ba'quba, it led to the murder of the assistant political officer, Captain W.T. Wrigley. With him were another British officer in charge of the Arab levies and two enlisted instructors, and Captain E.L. Buchanan of the Irrigation Department and his wife.¹³⁹ On August 13th the tribesmen invaded the town and killed all five Englishmen. Mrs. Buchanan was wounded slightly and taken prisoner. She was well treated, however, and later she was rescued by a relief column on September 9th.¹⁴⁰

Until mid-August there had been no outbreak between Baghdad and Ramadi, west of Baghdad, nor on the Euphrates around Fallujah. Shaikh Dhari of the Zobeir tribe had remained loyal to the British; so had Shaikh Ali Sulaiman of the Dulaim. The cooperation of these tribes was maintained largely through the efforts of the political officer Lt. Colonel Leachman, an arabist who had lived in the Middle East since ten years before war. On August 12, Shaikh Dhari treacherously murdered Leachman. His death was the signal for a series of outbreaks on the Euphrates between Fallujah and Hit.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹The others killed were Captain Bradfield commanding the Arab levies, and the two instructors, Newton and Nesbitt.

¹⁴⁰Mrs. Buchanan has written the story of her experience in a book entitled: In The Hands of The Arabs.

¹⁴¹Shaikh Dhari was later captured and sentenced to life imprisonment. Ironically, he died of a heart attack two days after sentencing.

In the latter part of August, Captain G.H. Salman, political officer at Kifri, was captured when the town was pillaged by tribesmen. A few days later he was murdered in prison. Just a week before his murder, Captain Salman had been advised by the military to change his post nearly to Kangarban, where two platoons of Indian Infantry were stationed. He was at liberty to refuse because of the division of responsibility between the GOC and Colonel Wilson. His refusal cost him his life, "but it probably saved the military situation in the area."¹⁴² A few days later Kifri was occupied by a detachment from Kirkuk and there was no further trouble in the area.

Most of the political officers remained at their posts throughout the insurrection and helped maintain peace among the tribes. Captain Hay in the Mosul area and Major Seane in Sulaymaniya were able to keep the Kurds settled. Captain Hay won the friendship of two courageous Kurdish chiefs, Ahmad Effendi and Khurshid Agha. Another officer, Captain Littledale, at Arbil, helped quiet that section of the Kurdish Liwa.

¹⁴²Wilson, op. cit., p.285.

General Haldane later paid tribute to the courage of the political officers:

It is indeed greatly to the credit of the political officers concerned that along the whole line of the Tigris south of Baghdad, equilibrium was preserved, and this more especially on the Gharraf, where the tribes were in direct contact with the Diwaniyah insurgents.¹⁴³

Some Other Military Losses

There were other military losses: On August 10th a river defense vessel, the Greenfly, was stranded on the lower Euphrates five miles above Khidhr. It had run aground and all efforts to refloat it failed. The crew remained aboard and held out until October 2 or 3 when they were forced through starvation and the terrible health conditions to surrender. All British aboard were killed and the Indians taken prisoners. The same 18 pounder gun captured from the Manchester Column was used to fire into the boat and caused extensive damage.¹⁴⁴

During the seige of the Greenfly an armored train was derailed at a rail siding also near Khidhr. A second train came out from Nasiriyah to give aid and attempted to transfer men and horses from the derailed train. A third train, not armored, helped take on the passengers.

¹⁴³Haldane, op. cit., p.

¹⁴⁴Supra, see page 7, chapter 7.

Somehow in the attempt to move out, the two rescue trains collided; the unarmored train was immobilized. Some of the men were able to transfer to the one train still operating, but seventeen Gurka rifles were inadvertantly left behind with two officers and all were killed.

Another defense vessel, the Grayfly, which had been nearby trying to refloat the Greenfly could have provided rear guard action, but for some reason had steamed away two hours earlier for Nasiriyah. General Haldane has written a vivid account of the loss of the train and of the valour shown by the men and their two officers, Captains Russell and Henderson.¹⁴⁵

On August 26th, a convoy consisting of the Grayfly, Sawfly and Stonefly and two steamers came under heavy fire enroute from Nasiriyah to Samawah. One of the steamers, the S-9, ran aground near Khidhr, was captured and burned. Her entire crew was killed together with a platoon of Indian troops and its two British officers who were aboard.

Relief Columns and Preventive Measures

The number of troops at General Haldane's disposal had increased so that by October he could operate two large

¹⁴⁵Haldane, op. cit., p.

punitive columns simultaneously in two directions. The Iraqis had lost a great deal of their first fervor, many tribesmen having retired from the battle.

At Hillah a two-pronged force was organized; the plan was that one column, the 55th Brigade, was to relieve Kufah and recover the prisoners there. The other column, the 53rd Brigade, was to occupy Tuwairij, and threaten the holy city of Karbala. The 53rd Brigade met with no opposition when they moved out on the October 5th, but fought a stiff engagement on the 6th and 7th against 3,500 tribesmen who had taken up positions around Tuwairij. Tuwairij was captured and two days later Karbala was forced to make formal submission and turn-over to the British ten Arabs who had been prominent agitators. Kufah was relieved by the other column on the 17th of October; the prisoners from the Manchester Column were surrendered to the British on the 19th by a delegation from Najef.

During the long seige at Kufah the British in the town numbered about thirteen officers and six hundred twenty two other ranks supported by one hundred fifteen Arabs and Persians. The garrison was never in any real danger of being taken but the tribesmen persisted in their efforts. During one of these attacks, Captain Mann, Kufah's political officer was killed by rifle fire.

Another force was assembled at Nasiriyah under Brigadier General Coningham to relieve Samawah. The column marched to Ur on the October 1st where it was joined by Major General Atkinson, the overall force commander. It consisted of five battalions of infantry, two batteries of field artillery, a squadron of lancers, machine gun corps and a company of sappers. Attached were two railroad trains plus medical and other units. General Atkinson had spent weeks planning the operation; however he was already too late to reach one of his objectives, the Greenfly, which still lay lodged on the sand bar near Khidr. The ship had been overwhelmed and the crew massacred.

As the column moved slowly along the railroad toward Samawah, seventy-eight kilometers north of Ur, it rebuilt the track, constructed blockhouses at a rate of ten per day, and carried out punitive raids on both sides of the Euphrates. When it reached Samawah on the 13th, the relief force found the insurgents were holding strong positions on the outskirts of the town along a line of palm gardens and wall enclosures. The tribesmen numbered more than seven thousand. The ensuing battle was steady all that afternoon. The next day the British infantry fought its way into the town and rescued the garrison. The British

defenders at Samawah had numbered six hundred and seventy all of whom were in good condition other than for a few casualties. The siege had lasted for two months.

The British military retained the initiative and a variety of minor punitive expeditions were carried on throughout the winter of 1920-21. The Middle and Lower Euphrates submitted without a great deal of resistance but segments of some tribes remained restive for another year; some groups of the Diyalas tribes preferred to live the role of hunted outlaws rather than surrender.¹⁴⁶

"Provisional" governments such as the one at Mandali disappeared early in 1921, and the urban and suburban populations returned to normal. The provisional governments were the attempt to realize the objection of the rebellion, that is: govern themselves. They were for the most part very limited and largely unsuccessful.

By October, the insurrection was essentially suppressed. It had been costly for both sides; the British Force lost 2,269, either killed or wounded, the Arabs suffered about 8,450 casualties. The British taxpayer provided L.40,000,000 sterling for the operation.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶In some towns and cities the local citizens organized their own governments believing that the British would not return.

¹⁴⁷Haldane, op. cit., p.331.

CHAPTER VIII

CAUSES AND EFFECTS

Authors who describe the tribal uprising in Mesopotamia in 1920, regardless of their political bias, agree upon the same list of causes; the only difference is the order of their importance. Arab writers place nationalism in one definition or another at the top of their list. Western writers concentrate upon whether the causes were internal or external to Mesopotamia; that is, whether Colonel Wilson's administration was at fault or whether Arab-Turkish-Bolshevik agitation caused the revolt of the tribes. All of the causes usually mentioned have some basis; the noteworthy fact is that they all occurred, or were allowed to occur, concurrently.

The British in attempting to control Mesopotamia had without doubt struggled against certain inherent problems; some of them were: the difference in religion between British and Arab; Moslem distrust of a Christian administration; western standards which were alien to the Arab inhabitants; and the loss of wartime revenues and employment. There was also the inevitable nostalgia for the old methods and traditions; the British had expelled the long established Turkish order and its departure created a void.

These are still not sufficient explanations for what happened. As a colonial power England had had long practise at governing even a hostile population. The difference in Mesopotamia was that time and circumstances had changed not only British potential, but also their incentive to govern. The British occupation in Iraq was acceptable to the nationalists at the end of the war; it was bitterly resented less than two years later. The fact is that a half-hearted British policy allowed the sequence of events which led to the uprising. Many of the causes cited for the uprising are really effects of more fundamental problems, the casus belli being the indecision of British policymakers during the preceding two years.¹⁴⁸

Military Weakness

The British Mesopotamian force at the time the uprising began had been considerable weakened by loss of personnel and equipment. Its inability to act promptly and with authority certainly raised the confidence of the tribes.

The war's end had seen a large exodus of troops;

¹⁴⁸There appeared to be unanimity on this point; Gertrude Bell, who was in an excellent position to gauge public opinion, describes the friendly Iraqi attitude toward the British occupation just at the end of the war. See Bell, op. cit., p.124.

after that there was a steady drain within Iraq until the steady extension of administrative responsibility outreached the military capability to enforce it. The total number of effective troops in Mesopotamia was being eroded at both ends, by the troops going home on one side and the increasing demand for military personnel to help with the civil administration on the other.

Then there was the cost to the British government. The British Empire had suffered greatly during the four years war against Germany and her allies. The great war had been the most costly in history, both in terms of casualties and resources; Britain's economy was close to ruin. For these reasons the electorate following the war was in no mood for costly expenditures, and the party out of power led by Mr. Asquith, was vehement in its attacks upon Lloyd George's government.

England's troubles were multiplying throughout the empire; in Ireland, in Persia, in Egypt and in Mesopotamia. Lloyd George could little afford further difficulties. In these circumstances Mesopotamia came increasingly to public notice.

A survey of articles in The Times throughout the two-year period described the situation as it steadily worsened. The Times's editorials consistently pointed out that England

had enough responsibilities at home, that the administration of Mesopotamia would be troublesome and that the lessons of India and South Africa should be enough to discourage the another from the attempt. If for no other reason, the people of England were lukwarm about Mesopotamia being annexed or managed; the cost of the venture would be prohibitive in spite of optomistic forecasts of oil and commercial profits.

Before the insurrection broke out in Mesopotamia, The Times reported a debate in the House during which Mr. Asquith questioned the advisability of the entire Mesopotamian situation. The opposition leader wanted to know just what sort of government was planned, who in the government was responsible for Mesopotamia, and what was the troop strengths and forecasts.¹⁴⁹ In the same debate, Mr. Ormsby-Gore gave details which fostered his opinion that oil profits would never defray the high cost of military occupation. Later, Lord Islington, in a letter to The Times, called for a cutback in expenditures, especially in Mesopotamia.¹⁵⁰

Mr. Asquith, in a campaign speech in June 1920, while the fighting was intensifying, compared the expenditure in Mesopotamia to the cost of needed civic improvements at home,¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., March 27, 1920, p.11.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., May 29, 1920, p.10.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., June 21, 1920, p.5.

a very obvious political device but effective nonetheless. Lord Islington, a week after Asquith's speech, asked questions regarding the number of officers serving in both the civil and military government.¹⁵²

When the tribal troubles became more serious in late summer, The Times echoed public opinion that a partial withdrawal was necessary:

... Our duty now is to relieve our beleaguered garrisons, to establish at once whatever form of Arab government is acceptable to the people, and to withdraw to the head of the Persian Gulf. The idea of conducting another South African war over half of Mesopotamia is unthinkable. The nation will never sanction it, and the taxpayers will not bear the vast additional burden likely to be involved.¹⁵³

Another Times editorial said that the "military occupation is the crux of the whole question."¹⁵⁴ This was again late in the summer when a large segment of public favored a withdrawal of all troops from Mesopotamia except those technicians needed as advisors to the Arab administration.

Major Young pointed out that British troops in Mesopotamia

¹⁵²Ibid., June 26, 1920, p.8. The files at the Foreign Office show how hardpressed was the political staff to provide all of these answers. The number of officers was out of proportion to the number of troops. Especially were the officers of the civil administration considered exorbitant. The officers with the civil administration at that time were 424; this was an increase of 110 since the war had ended; the two year average was 362. The number of troops caused additional pain to explain; at the time there were 13,500 British and 66,000 Indian soldiers in Mesopotamia.

¹⁵³The Times, August 24, 1920, p.11.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., August 30, 1920, p.11.

were in excess of reduction estimates by 14,300 on June 25, 1920. This was more than the excess of Egypt, Palestine, and Constantinople together.¹⁵⁵ These estimates had been made immediately after the armistice in response to public demand for return of the soldiers to England.

Proof of the importance accorded troop reduction is given by General Haldane in a report of an interview with Winston Churchill who was then Secretary of War. Haldane had just accepted the post in Mesopotamia. A few days before his departure for Baghdad he was called in by Mr. Churchill for a briefing; Haldane said: "He harangued me for twenty minutes on the necessity for making drastic reductions in the garrison of Mesopotamia, the cost of which, he said, was becoming intolerable to the British taxpayers."¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵F.O. 371/5226, doc. 6055. This was prepared by Young to answer a question in the House of Lords by Lord Easington. The figures were:

	Est.	Actual	Excess
Mesopotamia	52000	66300	14300
Egypt & Palestine	33000	46300	12700
Constantinople	13700	15200	1500

Mr. Young subtracted the Indian labor battalion working in Mesopotamia which from a tactical standpoint did not count but for a financial survey should have been included.

¹⁵⁶Alymar Haldane, A Soldier's Saga, 1948, p.371. Cited by Kedouri op. cit., p.189.

The return of a large part of the Mesopotamia Force to either India or England was unavoidable; the fact that an increasing number of those remaining were required to perform tasks in the civil administration in Iraq was not. Relations between Colonel Wilson and General Haldane were never friendly (Wilson is very critical of Haldane throughout his description of the uprising in his book Clash of Loyalties which he published twelve years later).¹⁵⁷ The main point of contention was Colonel Wilson's refusal to withdraw his political officers from outlying posts even after General Haldane notified him that there were not adequate troops to defend them.¹⁵⁸ The lack of communication between military and civilian authority was apparent in the Dair Ez Zor withdrawal when Wilson complained that the Foreign Office nor General Haldane had notified him of the plan.¹⁵⁹

This rivalry between the two commands had been no secret to the officials in London. On June 3 in a private message to Hirtzell, Colonel Wilson said that the army was weak and

¹⁵⁷ See Wilson, Clash of Loyalties, op. cit., Ch. XII and XIII.

¹⁵⁸ There was no question that General Haldane had supreme military authority and that Colonel Wilson's duty was to cooperate by pulling out his political officers from areas which overtaxed the military capability, especially in the early stages of the campaign.

¹⁵⁹ See Chapter V supra.

scattered and that he had no reserve political officers, "some of the best have at last had to take leave, many of the remainder are tired men. I have warned you since March 1918, that a breakdown or worse was likely. I now regard it as inevitable; it can be mitigated or delayed by Cox, and drastic military action when occasion arises. But both will be needed and our power to apply the latter remedy is now doubtful."¹⁶⁰

General Haldane was not without fault. Some of his messages showed a failure to grasp the nature of the problem. Soon after his arrival in Iraq he published a general order which forbade all ranks from discussing the future of the country in clubs or elsewhere; the reason stated in the order was that it was to prevent injudicious remarks regarding the military and political situation. Wilson sent a letter the next day to GHQ taking exception, saying that he regretted that the General Officer Commanding should have thought it necessary to issue the circular, particularly at this juncture.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰IOR 4722 part 2 tel.No.4513 dated June 3,1920. In the same file are other telegrams from Wilson telling of the GOC's "independent attitude" as well as copies of Holdane's message to the WO citing his warning to Wilson to withdraw his political officers; for example DOBUK.

¹⁶¹F.O. 371/5074, doc.5417 the dates of their correspondence are some indication of the delays which were too prevalent between one office and the other. Holdane's circular was dated April 1; the rebuttal by Wilson, April 2. The civil commissioner sent a copy to the India Office on April 8, who finally sent it to the Foreign Office on May 27. The Foreign Office sided with Wilson but a note on the correspondence considered it too late by nearly two months) to take any action.

Nationalist Agitation

The following is a translation of an anonymous proclamation, apparently printed in Aleppo, which was circulated throughout Mesopotamia during the month of Ramadhan, May-June 1920.

We true Mesopotamians should follow our representatives who are working for the benefit of our success and future; they are demanding our complete independence. They have demanded it on the 18th Jamad Al Awwal at Damascus...

Every individual is ready to overcome all difficulties and pass over all obstacles which may prevent the procuring of full independence. Never accept anything but what was declared by our representatives.¹⁶²

The aims of the Baghdadi officers in the insurrection is still a matter for argument, but it is safe to say that they worked to bring about a change in British methods in Mesopotamia, if not the expulsion of the British altogether. Colonel Wilson had resisted the inclusion in the government of Mesopotamia of any of the expatriate Mesopotamians who were in Faisal's service.¹⁶³ It was no secret that they expected to be given the largest part in those new Arab governments promised by Britain by virtue of their service with Faisal and the British. When it became apparent that

¹⁶²F.O. 371/5228, doc. 8914 the reference is obviously to the Baghdadi Group in Damascus and the conference they had held on March 11, 1920, declaring the full independence of Iraq and selecting Abdullah as its king.

¹⁶³supra, Chapter VI.

there would be no such Arab government in Mesopotamia and that the Baghdadi officers' chances of a share in Syria were remote even if Faisal were successful, they transferred their campaign from against the Turks to against the British. The Baghdadis from Damascus played a large part in fulminating the tribal revolt because they realized they had nothing to gain by a continued British occupation of Iraq.

Articles appearing in al Aqaab, a popular nationalist newspaper published in Damascus, openly criticized the Wilson administration. The articles tended to exaggerate and overstate, but there was always enough facts included to make the articles damaging to British prestige. They spoke of British brutality whenever British soldiers were involved in altercations with Arabs; they claimed extortion whenever a British court confiscated land at a price deemed unfair by the Arabs. Every court decision for that matter, which involved litigation between British and Arab was criticized, usually on religious grounds; the British tried to use Moslem judges and Moslem law but with little success.

Prior to 1914, Arab nationalist movements against the Turks had failed primarily because of sectionalism, personal rivalries, religious differences, and ethnic animosities. Now al Ahd and other secret societies were able to unite

these diverse elements at least temporarily. The Iraqis working for Faisal in Damascus were the catalyst which fused the opposing internal factions for the fight against the foreigner.

The al Ahd sent emissaries and probably money to the Shi'ah townspeople and tribesmen in an effort to enlist their aid.¹⁶⁴ The Shi'ahs formed Haras al Istiqlaal, (guard of Independence) their own party, in Baghdad in February 1919, in competition with al Ahd for the leadership in Iraq.

By whatever means and motive, at least a tacit agreement was reached between the two Moslem groups, Sunni and Shi'ah; a truce was maintained long enough to unite public opinion to a degree not thought possible just months before.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴There is some controversy over whether money was actually sent to the Shi'ahs. They denied that they ever received any although Al Fir'aun says that \$26,000 in gold was sent by Faisal "with some persons"; the same author says that "not one farthing reached Ayatallah or any of the leaders of the revolt." See Fir'aun, Vol I, part I, pp.288-9, cited by Kedourie, op. cit., p.191.

¹⁶⁵During the first few weeks of Ramadhan, the Sunni and Shi'ah used each other's mosques for political meetings, and even attended each other's prayers, a rare occurrence.

Bolshevik-Turkish Support

The Arab Nationalists were not alone in their resistance to British rule in Mesopotamia. An abstract from a Baghdad police intelligence report dated April 3, 1920 read as follows:

Bolshevism and rebellion are the topics of conversation everywhere; and "Pan Arab" is gradually merging with "Pro-Turk." There is little doubt that ex-Turkish officials are fanning the sparks of unrest and excitement, and look forward to open demonstration if not actually open revolt in the near future.¹⁶⁶

There was indeed a conspiracy between the Turks and the Arab Nationalists in Syria after November 1919, and quite probably this conspiracy included the Bolsheviks.

Miss Bell wrote: "There was no lack of evidence to show that a league of conspiracy, organized by Bolsheviks in cooperation with the Arab Nationalists had long been in touch with extremist Arab political societies, with the object of exploiting the common ground of religion... the only unifying bond between these various elements... in order to undermine the British position in the Middle East."¹⁶⁷

When Faisal was told to bargain directly with the French after November 15, 1919, he was bitterly disappointed. He lost effective control in Damascus and there is ample

¹⁶⁶F.O. 371/5226, doc. 5287, dated May 26, 1920.

¹⁶⁷Bell, Review, op. cit., p.144.

evidence that some of his followers were in contact with agents of Mustapha Kemal in hopes of establishing a defensive alliance. Police reports from Baghdad talk about Bolshevik activity but there is a paucity of evidence in the file.

The young extremist officers of the Al Hizb al Hurr (Independence Party) were effectively in charge when Faisal returned to Damascus from Paris in January 1920. Faisal was unsuccessful in his efforts to play the British against the French, and the extremists suspected that he had made an agreement with the French while in Paris. There had been preliminary talks between them, but no evidence that Faisal agreed to a French compromise. Faisal had left France aboard a French warship. When Faisal greeted Colonel Waters Taylor in Beirut on January 14, he told Taylor that he had not signed the proposed agreement with the French, but had brought it with him in order to obtain the consent of his people.¹⁶⁸ He soon realized the impossibility of achieving ratification of the agreement. Faisal instead had to struggle to maintain leadership in Damascus; his popularity had diminished and that of a group of officers who called themselves the Young Arabs had replaced it.

¹⁶⁸Zeine, Struggle, op. cit., p.130.

General Clayton, chief of British Intelligence, Cairo, had reported during the summer of 1919, that Faisal's hold on the Arab movement in Damascus had all but disappeared.¹⁶⁹ Faisal was forced now, in January 1920, to declare for the Young Arabs, or surrender the leadership Faisal's family had won through their role in the Arab Revolt.

Major Bray, a special intelligence officer attached to the political department of the India Office,¹⁷⁰ prepared an extraordinary report in September 1920, which connects the Arab nationalist movements in both Syria and Mesopotamia with the successful movement in Turkey led by Mustapha Kemal Ataturk. The report stated that this union of Arab and Turk was only part of a larger conspiracy directed by Berlin and Moscow. The report by Major Bray was marked "very secret." While preparing it he had access to all the records of the India Office. The report is apparently well documented in most instances, but lapses into deduction

¹⁶⁹F.O. 371/5228 doc. 14820.

¹⁷⁰Major N.N.E. Bray, a specialist on the Pan Islamic question, was appointed by the India Office as special intelligence officer for the purpose of investigating the causes of the unrest in Mesopotamia. He obviously accentuated the "external" causes in an effort to make the India Office and Colonel Wilson's administration less to blame. The Foreign Office later appointed Col. Cornwallis who had been director of the Arab Bureau and an advisor to Emir Faisal for a year as a special investigator of the causes. Predictably, Cornwallis felt that British blunders had caused the problem, and that outside factors were incidental.

and speculation in others.¹⁷¹

Major Bray reported that neither the local discontent nor any faults of the administration were the causes of the uprising in 1920. He said that the Pan Arabs, the nationalists, the disgruntled effendi, the tribesmen, and the priests, taken separately were innocuous, but taken collectively formed a very dangerous combination.

Bray described two important meetings which involved the Arab nationalists: the first at Montreux, presided over by Talaat Pasha one of the ruling Turkish triumvirate who came directly from a visit to Berlin; a representative of Emir Faisal was present. The meeting took place on November 15, 1919; its purpose was to discuss a) a defensive alliance between the Damascus Government and Mustapha Kemal, b) to unite all the chiefs of Arabia on a Pan Islamic basis, c) to ask the King of the Hedjaz to head the movement.

The second meeting occurred on December 2 or 3, 1919. Zaki Pasha, the Turkish representative arrived at the Belle Ville Palace in Berne, Switzerland, where he met Amir Chakib Arslan and delivered a message for Talaat Pasha to the effect that Faisal entirely concurred in the arrangements

¹⁷¹P.O. 371/5230, doc. 12339.

agreed to at the meeting at Montreux.¹⁷²

Major Bray quoted several messages from Constantinople which show Turkish connection with the tribal agitation. He also quoted Mustapha Kemal who admitted his connection with the Arab movement. As an example he quoted a conversation between Mr. Stern of the Foreign Office and Mustapha Kemal when Stern was attempting to talk Kemal into a truce to end the fighting between Greek and Turk. Kemal agreed, if Turkish sovereignty was guaranteed, to disband his troops and to abolish the organization of anti-British propaganda and the agitation kept up by his agents in Mesopotamia, Cilicia, India, Caucasus, Persia, etc.¹⁷³

In summary the report attempted to show the connection between the various secret societies such as al Ahd, in Mesopotamia, Nadi al Arab in Syria and the Mouhavidin Society of Ankara.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷²The referenced documents listed in the report show that Arslan did attend the meeting but his connection with Faisal is doubtful. Faisal did correspond with Arslan and said that he admired his work, but nothing exists in the Foreign Office file to show that Faisal recognized Arslan as his spokesman.

¹⁷³F.O. 1054 dated 20/8/20 cited by Bray, ibid.

¹⁷⁴The Mouhavidin society according to the records, had definitely proclaimed itself pro-Bolshevik, with representation in Moscow.

Major Bray published a second report in the causes of unrest in Mesopotamia.¹⁷⁵ In his preliminary report he had described the attempts by Mustapha Kemal to enlist the aid of the Arab nationalists. In his second he traced the cause of unrest directly to the Eastern Department of the Berlin Foreign Office and the Moscow Government.

Enver Pasha solicited the aid of Berlin and Moscow in his nationalists movement but was told that he must arrange unity of opinion among the Arabs before he could expect help from these governments. Enver who was one of a ruling triumvirate could do nothing without the concurrence of Mustapha Kemal Ataturk, who in turn received the support of the Arab society. Bray traced each step in the movement including the Switzerland meetings and tells how the Bolsheviks planned to use the Arab movement as a aid to its own plan for world revolt.¹⁷⁶

Major Bray had a change of heart in this second report. In the first he saw no significant internal causes for the unrest in Mesopotamia; in the second he did. He suggested the enlistment of the aid of Al Ahd "of which Jaafar Al Askari is a member;" saying that the society was "at heart anti-Turk."

¹⁷⁵F.O. 371/5231, doc. 12339.

¹⁷⁶A chart from Major Bray's report illustrates the German-Bolshevik-Asiatic intrigue. This is included as Appendix E.

The Pan Arab Party in Mesopotamia is as sincere and ardent in its desire for independence as the Egyptian Nationalists. The majority of this party favor development under British control, they have been persuaded that the independence they hoped for was being denied by them. If we can enlighten them as to our honesty of purpose there would appear to be good grounds for hoping we might detach them from the Nationalist-Bolshevist control.¹⁷⁷

Tribal Unrest

No one doubted the potential strength of the tribal organization in Mesopotamia in 1920. The Turks had kept the tribes under control by inciting them against each other. The British on the other hand, supported the shaikhs and land owners in return for their allegiance.

The arrangement turned out badly for the British. In certain areas the tribes turned on their own shaikhs when necessary to rid the country of the British. It is generally believed that their rising was brought about by "outside" interference, but there were many internal factors which perpetuated tribal unrest within Iraq.

Among these factors was the rivalry between the tribesmen and the townsmen (particularly in Baghdad) that had existed continuously throughout Iraqi history. Although the centers of nationalist unrest were in the cities, it was the tribes who did the fighting during the rebellion.

¹⁷⁷Major Bray, op. cit., p.15.

The tribesman is dependent upon agriculture for his livelihood, therefore almost the only contact he had with the British administration had to do with land or something related to land. The owners of the tribal lands were seldom the men who tilled the soil; Iraq was a land of absentee landlords and tax farmers; because of this, the distribution of wealth was very poor-it was inevitable that the farmer and tribesman would apt for change. British administrators had no compunctions about entering into land problems which had remained unsolved for centuries. They also established a through system of revenue and taxes. These last mentioned, revenue and taxes, were matters which effected every farmer in Iraq and they afforded a fallow field in which to sow anti-British propaganda.

Lieutenant Colonel E.R. Howell, Wilson's deputy, and responsible for a land development scheme, established a Revenue department which typified the new British efficiency as opposed to the complacent Ottoman methods. The Turkish Pasha had depended upon tax-farming, often through absentee land-lords, as a means for collecting revenues. The Pasha, in turn was required to send a fixed amount to Constantinople; it was his business how much he got from the people. The British method was more direct; Colonel Wilson's own political officers were responsible for assessing land and

crop values and collecting taxes based on the estimate. British rates of taxation were actually more lenient than those of the Turks had been, but their system of direct assessment and collection was so much more efficient that they were able to collect more of the amount owed; in consequence the system of revenue appeared to the farmer to be excessive.

Ruined fields and lack of seed crops were another problem. When the Turks and Russians left as the war came to an end, they destroyed what crops they did not eat or take with them. The British devised a method for lending capital to buy seed and repair irrigation ditches and pumps. During the war the British often did this themselves or helped the farmer without demanding repayment. In 1920 the food crisis had passed so the British put borrowing on a business basis, demanding repayment with small interest plus a tax on the crops.

The Turks also bequeathed the British an extremely complicated land registration system. "The Turks," wrote Gertrude Bell, "has a genius for lack of uniformity and he applied his peculiar gifts with notable success to every branch of his land revenue system."¹⁷⁸ The Turkish system

¹⁷⁸Bell, op. cit., p.82.

of land title and tax assessment had created an administrative labyrinth which Colonel Wilson's administration attacked with great vigor.

Unfortunately the Turkish system of land grants was a combination of tax-farming and political expediency, also a means of discrediting certain shaikhs by manipulating ownership to punish those who might cause trouble. The British decided to continue the Turkish system of land registration with a more direct method of tax assessment and collection.

The British plan to subsidize certain shaikhs showed itself in this method of registering land. Many times lands which were unregistered under the old Tapu system were submitted to the Political officer for arbitration.¹⁷⁹ The deeds for land ownership were registered in the names of the tribal shaikhs for convenience. The British also allowed the large land owners in the cities to continue as absentee landlords.

The delay in settling the peace was especially bothersome in the matter of land ownership and taxation. Many

¹⁷⁹ Tapu was a system by which a land freeholder established claim to his land but the cost of registering had been prohibitive for the small farmer; consequently he did not bother to register his land. He found that his title lapsed after a certain period which allowed the government to claim the land and sell or lend it to someone else.

cases could not wait. Colonel Wilson, acting on the advice of his assistant, Colonel Howell who had derived a remarkable scheme for land development and utilization, let the administration become involved in the buying and selling of land. He was criticized for this at the Foreign Office because it involved the administration in long term leases, as many as twenty five years. This violated the policy that the British would not give the impression of preparing for a long stay in Mesopotamia. This was another indication that in Wilson's view the British were there to stay. The shaikhs in whose names the small tribal forms were registered soon made it obvious that they considered the arrangement permanent, thus perpetuating the feudal nature of Iraqi agriculture. The British were wrong again; the system gave cause for nationalist propaganda which proved more costly than the good will of shaikhs was worth.

The assessment and collection of taxes by the British political officers did nothing to endear the occupation government to the tribesmen. The small owner or feudal serf was quite willing to listen to any plan which would expell the British and, more important, break up the large estates.

The clergy were another powerful voice among the tribes. It was often through the clergy who hoped for a return to

some sort of theocracy that the tribes were approached. The Shi'ah Mujtahids were religious leaders who despite their extremely narrow educations maintained a strong hold on the people. The clergy saw no benefit for themselves in the British administration; to them it was an infringement upon their authority. They nurtured the seed of revolution within their following and were responsible for keeping the rebellion going after any hope for success had disappeared.

The two years following the war had done little to ameliorate the internal unrest which had always plagued Mesopotamia. The armistice which stopped the fighting also stopped many war-time sources of income for the Iraqi. The crop destruction and several seasonal failures had added to rising unemployment and poverty.

The tribal affinity for loot is often cited as a reason for the unrest.¹⁸⁰ This was no doubt true in 1920 but was

¹⁸⁰Stephan Longrigg who was a political officer during the revolt, wrote years later: "...indeed the history of the Euphrates in 1935-6 reproduces faithfully the episodes of 1920 on a smaller but important scale. It shows again the ease with which the Shaikhs were willing to follow, as they followed in 1920, any movement which seemed to offer them personal or tribal advantage--government--appointed paramoury in the tribe, a seat in the Chamber, a reopened land dispute, or a grant of rice lands-- with motive of no wider a patriotism than those similarly exploited by the Baghdadi's fifteen years earlier.

not a significant factor. More than loot, a desire of the part of the agricultural tribes to break up the large estates was a big incentive. The tribesmen made little distinction between British and fellow Arabs during the raids of the summer of 1920, especially vulnerable were the holdings of the absentee landlords and tax farmers.

The nature of the tribal troubles bespeaks a parochialism which though exploited by the townsmen and young extremist officers in order to further the nationalist cause, had little to do with nationalists per se, especially not in the sense of a united Iraq.

Errors in Administration

Adding to existing pitfalls, British policy in 1918-1920 allowed for further administrative errors which worsened the situation.

In Colonel Wilson's view, British officers were the only ones capable of administering Iraq. He attempted to spread his civil administration into every part of Mesopotamia, and in some cases, beyond it. This practice might have worked if the people had been willing to recognize British authority or if there had been sufficient troops to enforce that authority.

Wilson expected his officers to enter into every aspect of administering the country, especially the law and revenues.

The political officer was, in addition to his already prescribed duties, responsible for the educational program. The Nationalist movement throughout the world was concerned with education and Mesopotamia was no exception. Colonel Wilson was criticized for the lack of secondary schooling provided by his administration. Wilson admitted neglecting this program but excused it by saying that the primary schools must be developed first in order to train teachers for the higher schools.

With the exception of a religious school in Baghdad, opened and supported by Shi'ah religious leaders, not one secondary school was opened by the administration during Wilson's tenure. Colonel Wilson's reasoning was sound in theory; in practice, it was a costly mistake.¹⁸¹

Mr. Dobbes, Montagu's assistant at the India Office, felt that the use of political officers as educational advisers was wrong.¹⁸² Colonel Wilson's reasons for so using his officers was that he was short of personnel and that no one was better qualified than the political officer

¹⁸¹ Colonel Wilson did give permission for one Shi'ah secondary school to open in Baghdad which was never anything but a sounding board for nationalist anti-British agitation. Strangely enough it remained open and quiet during the tribal revolts.

¹⁸² IOR 4722 part III doc. 1462 dated March 18, 1919.

to know the needs of the people in this regard, nor more able to explain the administrations' position.

The rivalry between Sunni and Shi'ah was present in 1920 just as it had been for centuries. The Sunni Moslems were a minority in comparison to the Shi'ah in Mesopotamia, yet the British continued to favor the Sunni as the Turks had before them. It is true that the Shi'ahs had few administrative skills, but the British did nothing to alleviate this imbalance. Instead, the Sunnis were given the majority of appointments and seats on the provincial councils. This neglect, like the educational one, gave the anti-British agitators a damaging piece of propaganda. The Shi'ah stood to gain from any change in government, many of the Sunni politicians favored the British for this reason.

The arrival of the dependent military families during the last four months of 1919 was a sore subject. They were a headache during the uprising, and they also gave the impression before the revolt that the British intended to stay a long time in Mesopotamia. This idea more than any other the British government had wanted to avoid. The civil administration cannot be criticized for the arrival of families, the decision was made by the military who were well aware of the prescription for not "prejudging the peace conference." Another reason for not bringing them in was

the clamor at home for reducing costs in Mesopotamia. General Haldane admits in his book that he saw the documents concerning the dependents while he was still in London, but also did nothing to stop it.¹⁸³

Dependence upon the Peace Conference

"Those charged with holding down the lid of the Middle East cauldron with their bare hands had good grounds for complaint, for their countrymen in London and Paris would neither agree that the pot was boiling, nor take steps to move it to the side of the fire."

Britain, rather than take the initiative, waited in the vain hope that the dilemma would somehow solve itself at the conference table.

During the hiatus between the end of the war and May, 1920, when the revolt started, most of Whitehall's policy-makers were in Paris at the conference. Mr. Balfour, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs spent most of the period there; Lord Curzon acted for him in London. Indeed, Lord Curzon himself was called to Paris for several months

¹⁸³ Elizabeth Monroe, Britain's Moment in the Middle East (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964), p.67.

at a time and matters requiring his attention were often kept in abeyance.¹⁸⁴

At the conference Lloyd George tried to have Syria and Palestine treated separately from Mesopotamia; he hoped to establish the administration in Mesopotamia with little fanfare since it did not enter into the Palestine-Syria dispute. However, neither the French, nor Faisal, nor the Zionists would let Britain play down Mesopotamia, all for different but very obvious motives.

Gertrude Bell said that before the armistice the people of Mesopotamia had accepted the fact of British occupation and were resigned to the prospect of British administration.¹⁸⁵ If the problem of Syria could have been settled to the satisfaction of both France and Faisal, the situation in Mesopotamia would have taken a different turn. Britain would have been

¹⁸⁴ Sir Hubert Young, who was close to Lord Curzon during this time, said of his absence, "Lord Curzon was in Paris all through the month of January 1920, and it was difficult to get any decision taken about Mesopotamia." Young, op. cit., p.301. Once Lord Curzon held a critical telegram from Colonel Wilson for an inordinate time. It was received November 15, 1919, and contained a request for an Interdepartmental Conference on his decision that an independent Mohammedan state was impossible under any circumstances at that time. Young says, "The papers were all retained by Lord Curzon and did not appear again in the office until April 1920." Young, op. cit., p.204.

¹⁸⁵ Bell, Review of Administration, op. cit., p.126.

able to decide what needed to be done there and acted more quickly. Most of all, they could have announced their plans. It was the indecision that palled

The French however, were not willing to make the peace in Paris on British terms with regard to Europe or the Middle East. In a private telegram to Sir Percy Cox in Teheran on November 14, 1919, Lord Curzon said, "Present situation in Mesopotamia is causing us considerable anxiety. The French are insisting upon the absolute parallelism of Mesopotamia and Syria. Faisal is quite capable in his difficulties with the French of embarrassing us by similar tactics."¹⁸⁶ Thus the British found themselves in a dilemma during 1918-1919 concerning Mesopotamia.

British policy at the conference was complicated by the India Office's opposition to Faisal's claims. Immediately after the Armistice, Arthur Hirtzell had written a memorandum for Mr. Montagu calling upon the peace conference delegations to recall that nothing was owed to Emir Husain and that the Arabs should be allowed fend for themselves in Syria. He wrote:

If we cannot eliminate the French from Syria, neither can we weaken their hold there without pro tanto weakening our hold over Mesopotamia.

¹⁸⁶ Documents on British Foreign Policy, edited by E.L. Woodward and Rohan Butler (London: H.M. Stationary Office, 1952), p.531.

I submit that His Majesty's Government should at once pronounce themselves accordingly for the guidance both of the British delegate of the Peace Conference and of the Civil Commissioner, Baghdad...¹⁸⁷

The good will among the Iraqis toward the British which Miss Bell described disappeared during the two years of Colonel Wilson's administration. Wilson's personal popularity was never a problem with the Iraqi people, nor with the members of his administration, nor with the India Office. He kept all concerned well informed about his day to day actions. He was in constant contact with London; the files are full of communications in which he described his actions and his views. Until the middle of June, 1920, when the uprising was already out of control, his superiors in London let all initiative remain with Wilson; it was only then that the communications to Baghdad became directive in their tone and content.

Internal rivalries as well as international pressure caused England to take the easiest course in deciding about the future of Mesopotamia; that was to make no decision at all. Arnold Wilson, left to his devices, did not hesitate

¹⁸⁷ IOR File 10.2.38 doc. B246.

to implement his own theories.¹⁸⁸ His tactics in Mesopotamia contributed to the uprising in the spring and summer of 1920, as did the other factors, both internal and external, enumerated here. Some of the events were inevitable; some of the problems difficult, if not impossible, to solve, but most were in themselves effects to the indecision and lack of guidance from Whithall.

¹⁸⁸In the Interdepartmental meeting on June 17, 1920, which finally decided to sack Wilson, everyone talked about the "Wilsonian principles." While discussing an interim successor for Wilson until Sir Percy Cox could return to Baghdad, many names were eliminated because they were as much or more "Wilsonian" than Wilson himself. F.O. Cab. 24/20, June 16, 1920.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSIONS

The effects of the Iraqi uprising are much more difficult to ascertain than its causes. There is a great deal of wishful thinking of the part of the modern Iraqi who attempts to describe the rebellion as a "national war of liberation." Some Britons, on the other hand, prefer to think that it was an isolated and spontaneous expression of nationalist fervor, much akin to nationalist movements so widespread in the years following World War II.

Both viewpoints contain elements of truth, but they are both overshadowed by the fact of Britain's poor handling of the situation in Mesopotamia, as well as that in the entire Middle East following the war. Elizabeth Monroe, in Britain's Moment in the Middle East, described Britain's moment as the period from 1914 to 1956; but it might better be restricted to the period between 1918-1920, the period of the Peace Conference.

The disintegration of the Ottoman Empire left a void in the Middle East, one which England could have filled. Britain failed to realize her potential there after the war because she failed to organize a forward-looking policy based upon a realistic evaluation of her interests in the area. This was no less true for Mesopotamia than it was for Syria, Palestine and Egypt. She was, at the end of

the war, the heir apparent; her failure was in not understanding what her role should have been in an area of developing national consciousness.

Any analysis of why the tribes rose against the British administration is impossible if one insists on finding a list of reasons common to all the tribes. The fact is that certain tribes rebelled and others did not and for a variety of reasons, a good many simply because their neighbors did or did not. Often the personal ability of the nationalist agitator or the resident political officer was the only determinant. Despite agitation before the revolt, it was for the most part spontaneous.

An interesting area for speculation is the connection of the Iraqi revolt with the Arab Revolt of 1916. The latter started in the Hijaz and spread to Syria and Palestine; the former may have been part of a chain reaction to the over-all Arab struggle against foreign rule which started in the peninsula during the war. Chronologically and historically the Iraqi episode was closely associated with the first which many describe as the first flush of militant Arab nationalism.

A larger number of books have been written about the event by the Iraqis of different sectional and political persuasions. Much of the criticism directed against these

writers arises from their confessional and sectional prejudices. Many of their reasons for the revolt and for the results it achieved can be dismissed as so much patriotic zeal. The real results of the uprising can not be so easily established; for many it did have a connection with the Arab revolt of 1916. Considered as an adjunct of the earlier revolt it helped focus a national consciousness among the Arabs, coordinated their loyalties, and gave direction to the major problem of gaining national independence.

Most Iraqi writers insist that the rebellion forced Britain to establish an Arab government in Iraq and eventually grant complete independence.¹⁸⁹ This opinion is not supported by the facts which show that Britain gave somewhat less autonomy to Iraq after the revolt than she promised before it began. Britain had made its first clear-cut statement of policy toward Iraq on June 19, 1920, a month before the uprising. Colonel Wilson objected to the announcement, because it went further than he wanted to go in granting the Arabs a share in their own government. The government which actually materialized in 1922 was hardly that described by the announcement in June. A good illustration is the choice of Faisal as regent. Fortunately, he turned out to be a good choice, but there is no question

¹⁸⁹For the Arab viewpoint of Antonius, op. cit., p.358.

that he was a British choice and that he was selected by referendum only after British pressure upon the Iraqis assured his selection. Yet the announcement of June, 1920 had promised the Iraqis complete freedom to choose any type of leader and to make the specific choice. The British were wary of granting too much freedom in the wake of the insurrections, and definitely adopted a "go-slow" policy.

A further proof that the insurrection changed very little is the Mandate itself, which was implemented according to all pre-revolt specifications. The announcement of the Mandate was ostensibly the spark which ignited the uprising, the terms of which had been written more than a year before by Colonel House, President Wilson's principal adviser at the Peace Conference.¹⁹⁰ The fault was that the Arabs were never made aware of this; Britain's objection to it had been that the mandate was identical for both Mesopotamia and Syria.

Abdullah Faysal, an Iraqi, claims that the two main objectives of the revolt were first, complete independence and second, the evacuation of the British army from Iraq. He admits that neither of these were accomplished by the revolt but insists that it caused a reversal of British policy. Faysal says that Sir Percy Cox was quickly

¹⁹⁰ Ireland, op. cit., p. 341.

dispatched to Baghdad with instructions to form an Arab government and that the decision was made to deal with Iraq by treaty rather than by means of a mandate.¹⁹¹ Not much of this was true. Not even the most radical extremists thought Iraq could govern itself in 1920, not was there any significant change in British policy after the revolt. This is proven by Sir Percy's instructions which gave him a great deal of latitude in deciding what was best for both Iraq and England. His instructions were not changed; they were in keeping with the announcement of June 19, 1920. As for the treaty, Mr. Montagu had suggested such a departmental meeting at the Foreign Office on Monday, May 17, 1920.¹⁹² Sir Hubert Young, who was the recorder at the meeting, said that he himself had suggested a treaty with Iraq a month and a half earlier. Both suggestions probably stemmed from the results of the Milner Commission in Egypt in the early months of 1920 which also recommended a treaty relationship between England and Egypt.

Wilson's Recall

The Iraqi uprising can not even be credited with Arnold T. Wilson's recall in October, 1920. The decision

¹⁹¹ Abdullah Payyad, The Iraqi Revolution of 1920 (Baghdad: Al Irshad Press, 1963), p.325 ff.

¹⁹² Young, op. cit., p.313.

to replace him had been made almost a year before; it was just a matter of making Sir Percy Cox available. Sir Percy had been occupied with settling British political problems in Persia which appeared to be under control at the time the Iraqi cauldron was boiling.

Arnold Wilson had been an inexperienced young man when he stepped in for Sir Percy Cox thirty months earlier. As a lieutenant in the India army prior to the war, Wilson had performed creditable service in the wild tribal territories of Persia. In December, 1913 he was one of two British commissioners responsible to delineate the Persia-Turkish boundary, a knotty problem in view of the oil rights concerned. Wilson had only slightly more than ten years experience in the civil service when he became acting civil commissioner in 1918.

The flaccid state of British policy after World War I was due in no small part to the division of authority among the policymaking agencies in London. Rather than too much guidance, Wilson received too little; the only decisions of consequence in Mesopotamia during his tenure prior to the announcement of the Mandate were made by Wilson himself. Longrigg who served during the entire terms of Cox, Wilson, then Cox again, calls him "indefatigable" and every other

account by those who knew and worked with Wilson agreed that he was available twenty-four hours a day, extremely erudite and dedicated to his task.

Arnold Wilson passed from the scene hors de combat, his career as a government official ended. Professor Kedourie thinks that whatever mistakes Wilson made, they could not have appreciably influenced the outcome of events in Mesopotamia. The odds against him were too heavy, his opponents too numerous, his views too unfashionable for his policies to have had any chance of getting the support of the British government.¹⁹³

Wilson himself may have touched the heart of the matter when he wrote: "The problem of Iraq was at the time many-sided, and several departments of State were simultaneously dealing with various aspects, often without consultation with each other. There was virtually no correlating authority in Whitehall: each question had to be fought out as it arose, generally by telegraph, both as to the principles involved and as to their local application."¹⁹⁴

The many London agencies involved in the formulation of British policy in Iraq were more prone to second-guess than to suggest a plan of action. The India Office had

¹⁹³Kedourie, op. cit., p.197.

¹⁹⁴Wilson, op. cit., p.217.

been responsible for appointing Colonel Wilson. More important, Colonel Wilson continued to report directly to that office throughout his tenure as acting civil commissioner. Although none of its members would defend Wilson in June 1920, they had seldom, if ever, overruled his actions. Wilson wrote: "I can recollect no case of any importance in those three years, nor indeed, for the previous three years, during which I was deputy to Sir Percy Cox in which the civil administration had reason to complain of or take exception to a decision reached by the India Office on matters within its competence."¹⁹⁵

It would have been better for all concerned if Colonel Wilson had had fewer friends in the India Office. Wilson said: "Neither Hirtzell nor Shuckburgh had ever visited Mesopotamia, Persia, or the Persian Gulf, but they had an understanding... which made their memorandum generally more reliable and often more enlightening than those of Arabian experts... They were always sympathetic and never censorious."¹⁹⁶

Subsequent British Policy

In its instructions to Sir Percy Cox when he was returned as High Commissioner in August, the India Office

¹⁹⁵Wilson, *op. cit.*, p.261.

¹⁹⁶*Ibid.*

allowed him a great deal of latitude; he was directed to allow the Iraqis as much voice in the government as possible and yet retain authority for Britain. The Arabs were to have free choice of the type of government, as well as the choice of the head of state or king if a monarchy were selected. All ministers of State were to be Arab with assistance by British secretaries who would be employees of the local government. The major reservation was that the High Commissioner retained the final say in all matters of controversy between the Arab ministers and their advisors.¹⁹⁷

The uprising did effect subsequent internal relations between Britain and the Iraqis. The various elements of the population vied with each other for the lions' share of the credit for the revolt. Both Sunni and Shi'ah communities claimed to have been the prime cause of the rising; the claim became synonymous with anti-British sentiment and persisted throughout the term of the Mandate and beyond. Those Iraqis who took part in the Mandate government were considered collaborators by the majority of the population of Iraq. Conversely, the British could

¹⁹⁷F.O. 371/5229. Appointment of Sir Percy Cox as High Commissioner; Instructions of His Majesty's Government.

not help but remain suspicious of those tribes who had taken up arms against them in the summer of 1920. This mutual distrust was self-reinforcing and it not only weakened every government formed under the British aegis, but persisted until the revolution of 1958.

To the officers of Colonel Wilson's administration the uprising was a bitter disappointment which undid much of the good done since the war in Iraq. To the British Government it was:

...a reminder that its formulation of policy had, less in itself than by its delays and psychological maladroitness, taken too little account of local discontent, or of the force of Iraqi nationalism and its power of popular appeal; a reminder also, if such had been needed, of the need for such a regime in Iraq as would, by satisfying major elements in that country, lighten the financial burden developing on the British taxpayer.¹⁹⁸

The defect in the organization of Whitehall which allowed this fragmentation of responsibility was corrected shortly after the Iraqi uprising. At a Cabinet meeting in May, 1920 Winston Churchill had asked that responsibility for Mesopotamia, as well as the entire Middle East area, should be concentrated in Colonial Office. Attached to his memorandum on file at the Public Record Office is a map which illustrates the excessive cost of the many military

¹⁹⁸ Longrigg, op. cit., p.122.

garrisons in Mesopotamia. Churchill had no difficulty proving that the long supply lines were prohibitive in cost,¹⁹⁹ ineffectual, and vulnerable to defeat in detail by a tribal uprising. This evidence was presented just prior to the beginning of the insurrection. At a subsequent Cabinet meeting, Secretary Montagu also recommended that all Middle Eastern areas should be placed under a single controlling agency in London.²⁰⁰

The new Department recommended by Churchill and Montagu came into existence on February 4, 1921. Mr. Churchill, who had been secretary of State for War and Air, was sent to the Colonial Office as Secretary for the New Middle East Department. The collection of young talent was impressive: Hubert Young, Wilson's protagonist at the Foreign Office, was appointed as an assistant to Sir John Shuckburgh, Wilson's foremost defender at the India Office. Colonel Lawrence was attached as Political Advisor and Colonel Meinertzhagen, who had succeeded Sir Gilbert Clayton as Chief Political Officer to Lord Allenby in Cairo, was put in charge of the military desk. The formation of this office was one very tangible effect upon British policy brought about by the

¹⁹⁹F.O. CAB 24/106 CP 1320. Churchill's memorandum is dated May 1, 1920.

²⁰⁰F.O. CAB 24/107 CP 1402, dated June 1, 1920.

insurrection of 1920.

Churchill often spoke later about his association with "that most gifted group of young men." Whatever decisions were made in the next few years regarding the Middle East were made by them. And yet, the lessons learned in Mesopotamia after World War I were by no means sufficient to cure all of the ills of British Foreign Policy at that time. For this was the time of what George Dangerfield described as termed "the strange death of Liberal England."²⁰¹ All of the principle members of Lloyd George's last cabinet had lived their formative years in the nineteenth century; Balfour was born in 1848, Milner in 1854, Bonar Law in 1898, and Curzon was, in Lord D'Abernon's phrase, "born eloquent" in 1859. England needed to experience a change of direction in its policy in dealing with the territories which had been part of the Ottoman Empire; the new concepts such as nationalism and self determination needed to be met with a new approach. Already Milner and Balfour had shown signs of recognizing the need, but England was slow to change and its moment had almost passed. In spite of the troubles in Iraq in the summer of 1920, at a meeting in December of that year, the cabinet

²⁰¹George Dangerfield, The Strange Death of Liberal England (New York: Capricorn Books, 1961).

agreed that a) it was not possible, without further consideration, to reach a decision on the Government's future policy in Mesopotamia, and b) that in a House debate scheduled for two days hence they should resist demands for any declaration of policy beyond that which had already been made since the war.²⁰²

British Foreign Policy had not advanced much in the two years since the war; it remained for new faces with fresh ideas to try to repair the harm which had already been done.

²⁰²F.O. CAB (20) (1) 13, Dec. 1920.

The Future of Mesopotamia.

(NOTE BY SIR PERCY COX.)

I.

1. Before dealing with lesser issues I should like to state the position as I understand it to be at present, to make sure that I start from the right premises.

- (i) In the proclamation which we issued on our arrival at Baghdad we announced to the people, and, in the Press, to the world at large, that we came as friends and not as conquerors, to emancipate the inhabitants of the country from the oppressive rule of the Turks, and to assist them to work out their destiny on more auspicious lines. Incidentally we invited them to come forward and take part in the administration.
- (ii) In the announcement of policy made by His Majesty's Government in the telegram of 29th March 1917, from the Secretary of State for India to the Viceroy, it was stated that, whereas it was contemplated that the Basrah Vilayet (as then defined) should "remain permanently under British administration" and annexation was definitely indicated, the Baghdad Vilayet, on the other hand, was to be formed into an Arab State or Province under British protection, in everything but name.

2. During the year that has since elapsed the general situation has undergone considerable development, an important feature of which has been the entry of America into the war, and in the latter connection certain fundamental principles have been enunciated for which America in particular and the other Allies in general are considered to be fighting. Of these principles the one which particularly concerns us at the moment requires that the peoples of the countries interested or affected should be allowed to determine their own form of Government. Recently the Prime Minister has publicly stated that the destinies of Palestine, Mesopotamia, &c., will be decided at the Peace Conference.

3. I gather that it is now proposed to deliberate as to what particular steps or line of action are advisable in order to square our working policy with the above principle and announcements, in case we should have to adhere to them in spite of the fact that Germany has not respected them in dealing with conquered territory in Russia.

4. I assume that, if at the end of the war we find ourselves in a sufficiently strong position, and in effective administrative control, we should still hope to annex the Basrah Vilayet and exercise a veiled protectorate over the Baghdad Vilayet; but it is recognised that the question of annexation has become exceedingly difficult *vis-à-vis* the President of the United States, who will presumably exercise the most potent influence at the Peace Conference. Our original proposals must consequently be regarded as a counsel of perfection, and we must be prepared to accept something less. At any rate, however, we have the strongest grounds, in view of our assurances to the inhabitants and the millions of money we have sunk in making the Port, for standing out for the annexation of Basrah and from thence to the sea, with a small block of territory necessary to round off the enclave. As regards the rest of the occupied territories, the essential aim must be to effect the complete elimination of Turkish suzerainty, and it is assumed that we shall leave no stone unturned to achieve that end, only tolerating its retention in the last resort.

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5. In any case we must set our faces against the admission of the slightest Turkish element or participation in the administration. In this connection, I should mention that when I was in Cairo it was suggested that, as events were shaping, we might be obliged to decide to come to some compromise with Turkey at any moment; I also learnt there of Sherif Faisal's secret overtures to the Turks; and when asked my opinion I expressed the view that if in the last resort we were compelled to come to some compromise with Turkey I did not consider that the retention of nominal Turkish suzerainty need be considered altogether incompatible with the realisation of our practical aims, always provided that the country were safeguarded against the least control or interference by Turkey in the administration. As cases in point we have the precedent of Egypt and the more pertinent one of Koweit. The fact is that the bulk of the people of the country are not concerned with abstract theories or niceties of international principle; for example, as long as the Shaikh of Koweit feels assured that his interests are under our practical protection, and are safe in our hands, he does not trouble his head as to whether in the distance Turkish suzerainty exists or not. I think the position would be the same in the case of the inhabitants of Iraq, where nine-tenths of them are altogether inarticulate, and all they are concerned with is the manner of their treatment by the Government actually in control of Baghdad. As regards the remaining tenth, who are capable of understanding the real issues, they would, of course, not be completely reassured (supposing that the fiction of Turkish suzerainty were being maintained) unless they were absolutely safeguarded against the participation of Turkey in the administration. I assume, therefore, that we are on common ground in considering that if the Turks were to be allowed to retain the suzerainty of Mesopotamia (*minus* Basrah) they must, at any rate, be completely eliminated from the administration, and that it must be our mission to ensure that Iraq obtains the administration which the country needs and which her future demands. There must be no Turkish Commissioner and no Turkish flag. A special flag must be devised.

6. Alluding for a moment to the question of relative status, as between the Basrah and Baghdad Vilayets respectively, it is my very definite opinion that a homogeneous administration in all practical aspects is not in any way incompatible with a technical difference of political status, and that it is essential in the interests of the country that the administration of both Vilayets should be uniform, that of the Basrah Vilayet being brought into line with Baghdad in due course.

7. In considering the precise form of the administration there are several alternatives to be weighed in the balance, and attached to each alternative are subsidiary difficulties which need consideration. For the moment we will consider the Baghdad Vilayet only, on the hypothesis that Basrah Vilayet can be made to conform to it at a convenient juncture.

8. The question of the "Arab façade" offers no insurmountable difficulties to my mind. The essential problem is the determination of status to be assigned to the province of Iraq. It is agreed that the administration should be under British guidance, and 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 its development unless investors are satisfied that their interests are fully safeguarded, a condition which cannot be assured except under protective British supervision. How is that supervision to be achieved? The most satisfactory solution would seem to be government by a High Commissioner assisted by a Council, formed partly of the Heads of the most important Departments of State, and partly of representative non-official members from among the inhabitants. But the foreign relations of such a government must obviously lie in British hands, and it would thus be practically a British protectorate.

9. If such an arrangement could be achieved and recognised by the Powers, well and good; but if not, then the existence of a titular native ruler would become a necessity. I do not think it would be impossible to find one, but the difficulty is that if the administration were given such a form it might

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Be difficult for it to avoid being hampered by capitulations, and the right to consular representation by Foreign Powers; the former contingency being one which we should obviously do our utmost to escape.

10. If it is decided that we should have a nominal headpiece to the administration to conduct his own foreign affairs under British guidance, I think, as I have said above, that it would be possible to find a local candidate, and I cannot see the least justification or necessity for introducing one of the family of the Sherif of Mecca to play this rôle. I have always ventured to deplore the fact that the discussion of the future of Iraq with the Sherif, as one of the pawns in the negotiations with him, was ever permitted. I have also expressed my views plainly on the political and practical objections to recognising him as King of Arabia and Sovereign of a group of Confederate States. In my opinion a more reasonable solution would be that he should remain King of Hejaz, and, if desired, have his own representative with Foreign Powers, while the foreign relations of the Iraq State, and of the other confederate Arab Potentates or States, should lie in our hands. For the Arab Ruler of the Iraq State a title might be devised conveying something less than King, e.g., Sultan or Hakim (Ruler), and all the Confederate Rulers would undoubtedly pay appropriate deference to King Hussein as Sherif of the Holy Places in the Hejaz. If considered essential in view of their commitments to the Sherif, His Majesty's Government might even decide to guarantee the payment to him of an annual subsidy in some form from the revenues of Iraq, as recognition of his services to the cause of Arab independence during the war; or, as a religious contribution towards the upkeep of the Holy Places.

II.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE MORE DETAILED ISSUES.

11. *Can any Arab authority, dynastic or representative, be discovered that will command the necessary moral sanction in the country as a whole? What weight does King Hussein or his family carry with the local Arabs?*

In my opinion, we have in the Naqib of Baghdad and his family a dynastic element which would carry the necessary moral sanction, in the Baghdad Vilayet undoubtedly, and, in my opinion, in Iraq as a whole. I believe they could be brought to identify themselves with British interests. The present Naqib himself possesses a very great prestige and influence not only in Mesopotamia but among the Mohammedans of India, and I feel sure his selection as Head of the State would be regarded as an appropriate solution, and be received with favour throughout India as well as Mesopotamia. The Naqib considers himself superior, in purity of descent and nobility, to the Sherif, and no less important, and the introduction of a relative of the Sherif of Mecca as Head of the State of Iraq would, in my opinion, be greatly misunderstood and resented by the Naqib and his family, and thus tend to alienate our most potent element of influence over the Arabs of Iraq. King Hussein and his family carry no weight in Iraq, where only the most distant interest is taken in him. In the early days of the Sherif's entry into the lists, when the question of giving him military help was being discussed, the General Officer Commanding, Mesopotamia, was asked by the War Office whether the failure or collapse of the Sherif would prejudice our military or political interests in Mesopotamia. We replied after deliberate consideration that the inhabitants had not been at all moved by his successes, and would, in our opinion, regard his failure with complete indifference.

12. *What materials exist for setting up a Local Administration or Administrations of a suitable character?*

There is adequate Arab or local material available or in the making for the subordinate services of the administration. The difficulty we are confronted with at present, and must be for some time to come, is to find individuals suitable for higher posts in the administration, e.g., Mutessarifs,

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Qaimaqams, such as would be filled in the Indian administration by gazetted officers—Deputy Commissioners, Assistant Commissioners. The reason is that under the Turkish *régime* almost all these posts were filled by pure Turks; these have been eliminated, and there is at present no one to fill their place. Wherever we have tried ex-officers of the late Administration they have almost invariably proved unsatisfactory; they are in fact saturated with the evil traditions of the *régime* in which they have been brought up and trained. Until we can create this element, enlisting as far as we are able the assistance of the Egyptian and Soudan Administrations, we must rely mainly on young British officers. I may mention here that whereas I have done my utmost to employ experimentally any inhabitants of the country at all likely to be suitable, this laudable endeavour finds no favour with the local inhabitants concerned. I am continually appealed to by them not to place the conduct of their affairs in the hands of ex-officials of the late *régime*, even though they be Arabs of the country, on the ground that they have all been born and bred in a vicious school of corruption, and cannot rise above the evil traditions of the past. The population, from the cultivator to the well-to-do merchant or landowner, infinitely prefers to be handled by a British officer, who of course employs Arab subordinates.

13. I fully realise the importance of finding or creating a type suitable for employment in the superior posts, but the fact is that it does not at present exist. In the more subordinate posts our personnel is almost entirely indigenous. Where other elements, Indian or English, are employed it is almost entirely in the purely clerical or technical branches of the Headquarter Administration, e.g., clerical and cypher branches, English branch of Government Press, &c. The following is a rough analysis of employees in the Baghdad Vilayet:—

Arab, Armenian, Christian, Jew, ex-employees of the late Government taken over by us	-	-	- 210
Newly sanctioned by us:—			
Mohammedans of Iraq	-	-	- 17
Domiciled Persians of Iraq	-	-	- 16
Jews of Iraq	-	-	- 60
Christians, Syrians, Chaldeans	-	-	- 132
Egyptians	-	-	- 3
Indian Christians	-	-	- 19
British-born Europeans	-	-	- 35
(Government offices, Government Press, &c.)			

14. The highest type of official corresponding to those who function as Heads of Departments and Ministers of State does not exist in Mesopotamia; they will have to be imported.

15. *To what extent is the Administration based on Indian models, and to what extent is British supervision indispensable?*

Except in that the "Iraq Occupied Territories" Code of Law applied in Basrah is based on English and Indian Law (just as the Soudan Code is) the administration is not in any way based on Indian models. We have taken over the structure of the Turkish administrative system as we found it, substituting British officers for Mutessarifs, Qaimaqams, &c., but for the present designating them Political Officers and Assistant Political Officers, while in the posts which, under the Turks, would have been filled by an official of the status of Mudir; we have been able to employ natives of the country subject to the exception that wherever British garrisons or troops are located it is essential, owing to the difficulty of the language question, and the fact that the local product cannot be left to deal with our troops, to use British officers, and we thus require more of them now than will be necessary in the permanent administration after the troops have left. But apart from that, as I have explained above, until we can produce the necessary type of superior Arab official more extensive and close supervision by British officers will continue to be necessary.

16. In my opinion, with the unavoidable exception of the military régime of the Military Governors in the large towns, the administration as carried on in Basrah and Baghdad Vilayets is that to which the people, both urban and rural, have been accustomed, except that the element of corruption is greatly reduced.

17. The branches of the administration in which we are necessarily most backward, and in regard to which our hands are in a great measure tied during the military occupation by military considerations and exigencies, are the Civil Judicial and Civil Medical.

18. As regards the former, Mr. Bonham Carter, the Judicial Officer who was lately appointed from Egypt, has only been with me a short time, but is now getting into the saddle. I have submitted to the India Office a copy of proposals for a temporary judicial system for the Baghdad Vilayet formulated by him in consultation with me. It seems to me just what is required. Meanwhile, such local law and justice as has been essential has been administered by my district Political Officers with simple civil and criminal powers granted them by the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief on my recommendation. As a matter of fact, outside the large towns we have been little troubled with civil and commercial suits, incapable of adjustment by compromise through the good offices of the local Political Officer.

19. As regards the Civil Medical branch. We are almost ready for the separation of the Civil Medical work from that of the Army Medical, and just before I left I raised the question with the Director of Medical Services as to whether the time had not now come for creating a Civil Medical Department with a separate personnel, though still to be under his general supervision. It is under lively consideration. A similar separation has recently been effected in the Department of Civil Posts, but in these matters we are so dependent on the military organisation that we have to defer to their views to a great extent as to when developments are feasible.

20. *The extent and the period for which British and Indian Troops will be required after the War* is a difficult question for me to answer without discussion with the military authorities, and depends so much on the position in which we are left at the end of the war. In peace times the Turks employed about 20,000 regulars of all arms, and 3,000 gendarmerie for the maintenance of security and order in the Baghdad and Basrah Vilayets. I should say that, for a peace establishment for internal security only, we should require for some time after the war to keep a division in Mesopotamia with one British regiment to a Brigade as at present constituted, and about the same number of gendarmerie, exclusive of 1,000 civil police for the towns. In the course of time we should hope to replace the Indian troops by Arabs, organised on the lines of the Egyptian Army, but it must necessarily take some years. I am not of the opinion that any Indian police will be required, except small levies to begin with to form a nucleus for the training of the indigenous product. I hope that in this field we shall be able to give employment to the Arab ex-officer of the Turkish Army, otherwise this class will be a difficult and malcontent element to deal with.

21. *The directions in which we can most usefully direct our energies with a view to popularising our Administration* are Irrigation, Education, and Civil Medical. In all these departments we are alive to the importance of speedy progress and are doing our utmost compatible with existing conditions and with the material at our disposal.

22. *The elements that we most need to encourage* are: Firstly, the Jewish community in Baghdad. In this connection I recommend that Dr. Weizman be induced, if possible, to pay a visit or send a reliable representative to Baghdad to influence the Jewish community in favour of the British connection. Secondly, the Arab notables and nobility among the townspeople of Baghdad and Basrah. They are a somewhat impecunious and backward element, but one which it is very necessary to encourage and take into our counsels as far as possible. Thirdly, the wealthy landlord element, both Arab and Jew, and

16. In my opinion, with the unavoidable exception of the military régime of the Military Governors in the large towns, the administration as carried on in Basrah and Baghdad Vilayets is that to which the people, both urban and rural, have been accustomed, except that the element of corruption is greatly reduced.

17. The branches of the administration in which we are necessarily most backward, and in regard to which our hands are in a great measure tied during the military occupation by military considerations and exigencies, are the Civil Judicial and Civil Medical.

18. As regards the former, Mr. Bonham Carter, the Judicial Officer who was lately appointed from Egypt, has only been with me a short time, but is now getting into the saddle. I have submitted to the India Office a copy of proposals for a temporary judicial system for the Baghdad Vilayet formulated by him in consultation with me. It seems to me just what is required. Meanwhile, such local law and justice as has been essential has been administered by my district Political Officers with simple civil and criminal powers granted them by the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief on my recommendation. As a matter of fact, outside the large towns we have been little troubled with civil and commercial suits, incapable of adjustment by compromise through the good offices of the local Political Officer.

19. As regards the Civil Medical branch. We are almost ready for the separation of the Civil Medical work from that of the Army Medical, and just before I left I raised the question with the Director of Medical Services as to whether the time had not now come for creating a Civil Medical Department with a separate personnel, though still to be under his general supervision. It is under lively consideration. A similar separation has recently been effected in the Department of Civil Posts, but in these matters we are so dependent on the military organisation that we have to defer to their views to a great extent as to when developments are feasible.

20. *The extent and the period for which British and Indian Troops will be required after the War* is a difficult question for me to answer without discussion with the military authorities, and depends so much on the position in which we are left at the end of the war. In peace times the Turks employed about 20,000 regulars of all arms, and 3,000 gendarmerie for the maintenance of security and order in the Baghdad and Basrah Vilayets. I should say that, for a peace establishment for internal security only, we should require for some time after the war to keep a division in Mesopotamia with one British regiment to a Brigade as at present constituted, and about the same number of gendarmerie, exclusive of 1,000 civil police for the towns. In the course of time we should hope to replace the Indian troops by Arabs, organised on the lines of the Egyptian Army, but it must necessarily take some years. I am not of the opinion that any Indian police will be required, except small levies to begin with to form a nucleus for the training of the indigenous product. I hope that in this field we shall be able to give employment to the Arab ex-officer of the Turkish Army, otherwise this class will be a difficult and malcontent element to deal with.

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the important Shaikhs of the settled tribes. If it becomes a question of obtaining public expression of feeling in favour of British control, it can be done; but I think the subject would have to be handled cautiously. The intelligent inhabitants of Iraq at the back of their minds are possessed by the apprehension that Mesopotamia may conceivably be restored to the Turks at the Peace Conference, and as long as this nightmare is present with them we should merely emphasize it by asking them which Government they would prefer. By so doing we should be clearly putting them in a very unfair position because they know well that if they elect for British control and if nevertheless the Turks were ultimately to return, all those who had declared for us would receive short shrift. It will be understood that the rural population of Iraq as a whole is quite inarticulate and can hardly be consulted. As regards the elements who do count, e.g., the Jews and other denominational communities in the large towns, they could without doubt be squared in some form to give expression to the sentiments that we desire. But we must consider and decide what is to be regarded as constituting the representative public opinion which we have to consult.

23. *Steps to be taken to consolidate Commercial Influence in Mesopotamia.*

The great initial difficulty here is the absence of commercial transport and general scarcity of tonnage and accommodation, and last, but not least, the uncertainty of the future. It is difficult to encourage private enterprise when accommodation for agencies is not available. Sites and land cannot be sold, and machinery cannot be imported:

We are most anxious to encourage trade generally, but to announce that trade to Baghdad is open is to suggest that commercial tonnage both by sea and by river is available and not liable to be requisitioned. Another difficulty is that, owing to the importance of preventing supplies reaching the enemy from the markets of Iraq, we have not only to maintain an external blockade cordon, but have also to limit exports inland from Basrah to the minimum requirements of the towns and communities inside occupied territory. This in itself interferes greatly with the natural flow of trade, yet we can only relax our safeguards with great caution. As a matter of fact, there has quite recently been some easing of the blockade.

LONDON,
22nd April 1918.

P. Z. Cox, *Major-General,*
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APPENDIX B

British Reasons for Anglo-French Declaration of November 1918

*From Secretary of State to Viceroy, Foreign Department,
28th October 1918.*

(Repeated to Civil Commissioner, Baghdad.)

Foreign Secret. Following is for your very confidential information. Foreign Office telegraphed to His Majesty's Ambassador, Washington, 23rd October as follows:—

"As a result of our advance interpretation of our Agreement of 1916 with the French became a matter of urgency. From publication made by the Bolsheviks and from other sources, both Arabs and French public were aware of general tenour of Agreement, and it became necessary to reach some working arrangement with the French in order to avoid serious complications which might hamper our further military operations.

"2. *Modus vivendi* has accordingly been arranged whereby, while supreme authority in all matters is left with Commander-in-Chief, civil administration in the districts recognised by the Agreement as having special interest for the French is to be in the hands of French officials acting as General Allenby's political advisers.

"3. In intimating to French Government our acceptance of this arrangement we have stipulated that it is to apply only to the territories occupied, or to be occupied by General Allenby's force. With regard to the future government of the other territories mentioned in the 1916 Agreement, we have pointed out that the provisions of that Agreement no longer appear suitable in all respects to present conditions in that the entry of the United States into the war and the defection of Russia have radically changed the whole situation. We have therefore suggested that as it would be useless to attempt a settlement at present this question should form the subject of fresh conversations in which the United States and Italian Governments should also be invited to take part. We have ground for believing that the French Government will accept this suggestion.

"4. In informing the Italian Ambassador of the substance of the above communication to the French Government, we have invited Italian participation in the proposed conversations, while assuring His Excellency at the same time that there is no intention of calling in question the validity of the Treaty of London of 1915.

"5. But in addition to these measures for meeting the immediate practical difficulties with the French, and placing the question in its wider aspect on a proper inter-Allied footing, it has become essential to make some public declaration in order to allay the misgivings and suspicions of the Arabs and Syrians which may be dangerously exploited by our enemies. It has therefore been decided to publish an Anglo-French declaration outlining the policy which the two countries wish to pursue in the territories in Syria and Mesopotamia delivered from the Turkish yoke, and we have stipulated that this declaration should be communicated to President Wilson before publication. The text will be telegraphed to your French colleague, and you should co-operate with him in communicating it to the President with the least possible delay, and telegraph when this has been done.

"6. You should also explain frankly to the State Department the whole situation as set out in this telegram."

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APPENDIX C

ANGLO-FRENCH DECLARATION

7 NOVEMBER 1918

The object aimed at by France and Great Britain in prosecuting in the East the War let loose by the ambition of Germany is the complete and definite emancipation of the people so long oppressed by the Turks and the establishment of national governments and administrations deriving their authority from the initiative and free choice of the indigenous populations.

In order to carry out these intentions France and Great Britain are at one in encouraging and assisting the establishment of indigenous governments and administrations in Syria and Mesopotamia, now liberated by the Allies, and in the territories the liberation of which they are engaged in securing and recognizing these as soon as they are actually established.

Far from wishing to impose on the populations of these regions any particular institutions they are only concerned to ensure by their support and by adequate assistance the regular working of governments and administrations freely chosen by the populations themselves. To secure impartial and equal justice for all, to facilitate the economic development of the country by inspiring and

encouraging local initiative, to favor the diffusion of education, to put an end to dissensions that have too long been taken advantage of by Turkish policy, such is the policy which the two Allied governments uphold in the liberated territories.

APPENDIX D

Aide-mémoire in regard to the Occupation of Syria, Palestine, and Mesopotamia pending the decision in regard to Mandates. —(Communicated to Foreign Office September 18.)

1. STEPS will be taken immediately to prepare for the evacuation by the British army of Syria and Cilicia, including the Taurus tunnel.
2. Notice is given, both to the French Government and to the Emir Feisal, of our intentions to commence the evacuation of Syria and Cilicia on the 1st November, 1919.
3. In deciding to whom to hand over responsibility for garrisoning the various districts in the evacuated area, regard will be had to the engagements and declarations of the British and French Governments, not only as between themselves, but as between them and the Arabs.
4. In pursuance of this policy, the garrison in Syria west of the Sykes-Picot line and the garrisons in Cilicia will be replaced by a French force, and the garrisons at Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo will be replaced by an Arab force.
5. After the withdrawal of their forces, neither the British Government nor the British commander-in-chief shall have any responsibility within the zones from which the army has retired.
6. The territories occupied by British troops will then be Palestine, defined in accordance with its ancient boundaries of Dan to Beersheba, and Mesopotamia, including Mosul, the occupation thus being in harmony with the arrangements concluded in December 1918 between M. Clemenceau and Mr. Lloyd George.
7. The British Government are prepared at any time to discuss the boundaries between Palestine and Syria, and between Mesopotamia and Syria. In the event of disagreement in regard to the above boundaries, the British Government are prepared to submit the question to the arbitration of a referee appointed by President Wilson.
8. In accordance with the principles of the Sykes-Picot agreement, the French Government shall not object to the Arab State granting to the British Government the right to construct, administer, and be the sole proprietor of a railway line connecting Haifa with Mesopotamia on a trace to be decided on after survey anywhere as far north as the latitude of Deir-*ez-Zor*. The British Government shall have the right to construct oil-pipe lines as well as the railway line. The British Government shall, in addition, have a perpetual right at all times to improve the facilities of these railway and oil-pipe lines, and to transport troops along the railway, and these rights shall be exercisable even in time of war, without infringement of the neutrality of the French Government or of the Arab State. In the event of disagreement as to the trace of the railway line and oil-pipe lines, the British Government are prepared to submit this question to the arbitration of a referee appointed by President Wilson.
9. The British Government notify the French Government and the Emir Feisal of their intention immediately to carry out a survey with the object of finding, if practicable, a trace for the railway line and pipe lines entirely within the British mandate, in order to enable them to avoid the necessity of exercising the rights of construction referred to above.
10. Until the boundaries of Palestine and Mesopotamia are determined, the British commander-in-chief shall have the right to occupy outposts, in accordance with the boundary claimed by the British Government.
11. The French Government having accepted responsibility for the protection of the Armenian people, the British Government will consent to the immediate despatch of French troops via Alexandretta and Mersina for this purpose.

Paris, September 13, 1919.

APPENDIX D

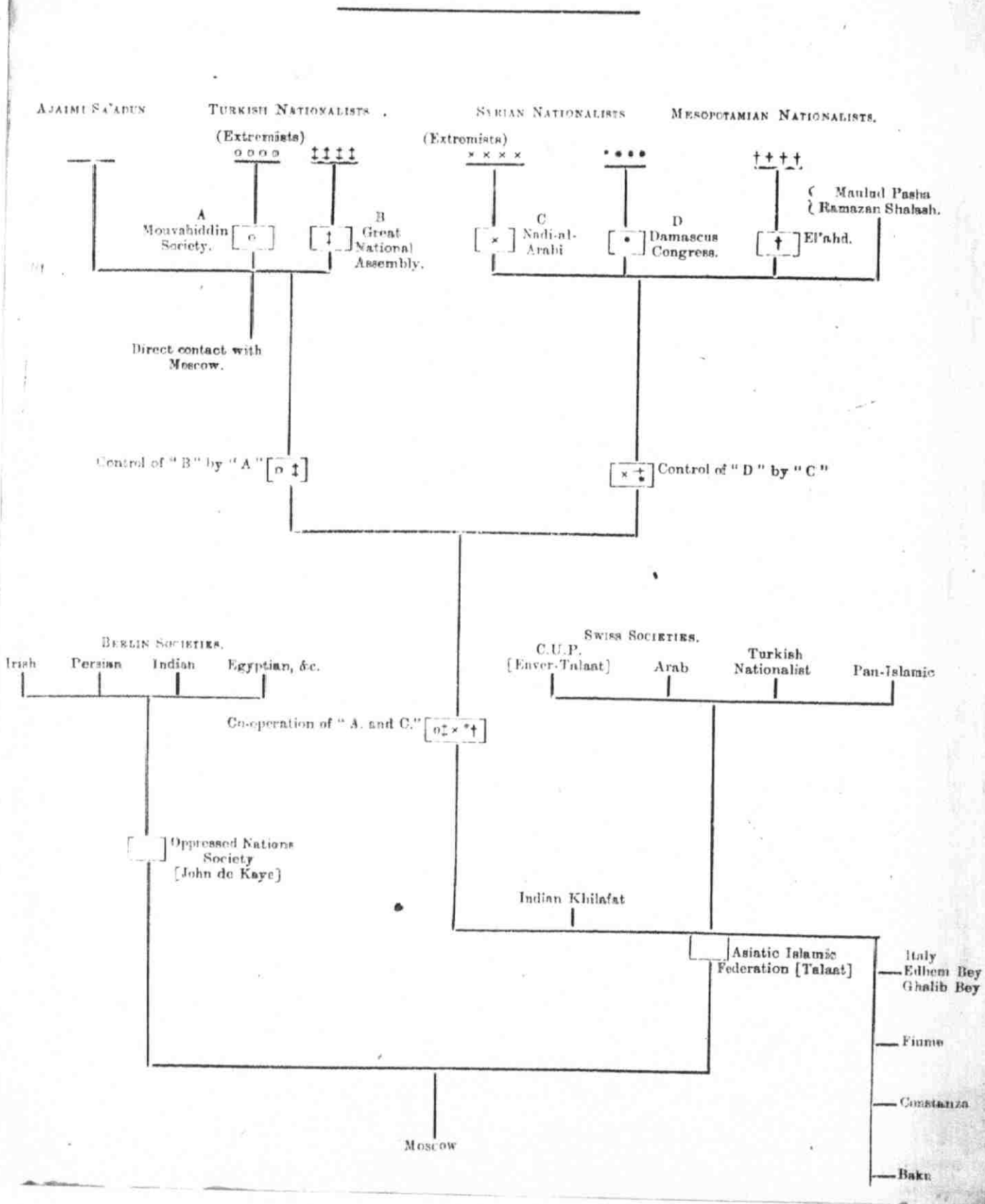
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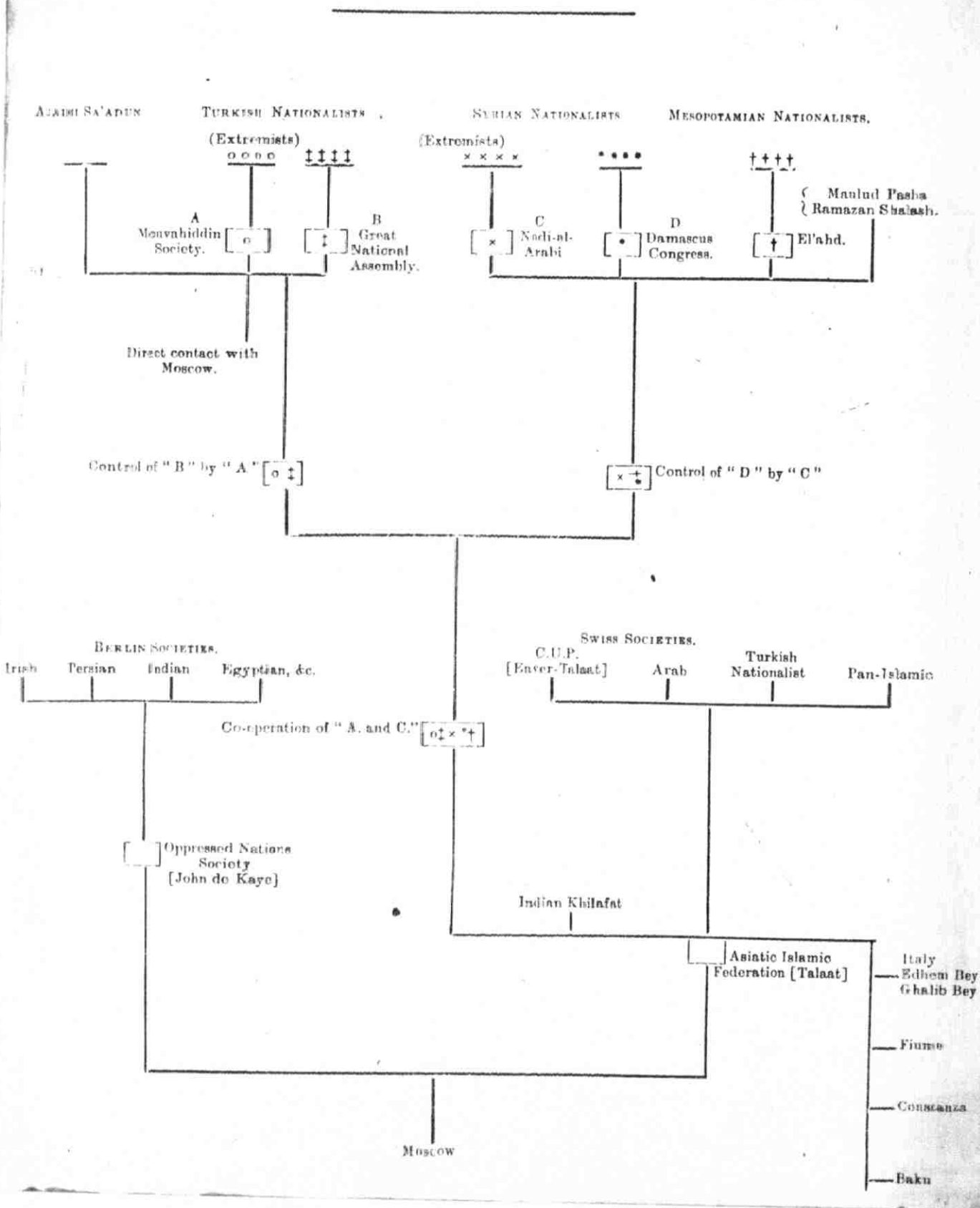
APPENDIX E

Chart illustrating German-Bolshevik-Asiatic Intrigue.



APPENDIX E

Chart illustrating German-Bolshevik-Asiatic Intrigue.



RECENT EVENTS IN MESOPOTAMIA.

MEMORANDUM BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WAR.

I circulate a Memorandum on recent events in Mesopotamia.

W. S. C.

THE WAR OFFICE,
30th September, 1920.

1. To understand and appreciate the course of the present operations in Mesopotamia, it is necessary to give a short account of the cause of the present trouble. There is reason to believe that its main source is not in Mesopotamia at all, and that the local trouble is only part of a general agitation against the British Empire and all it stands for.

2. The Middle East has been a fertile field for such propaganda and use has been made of the Turkish Nationalist and pan-Arab movements, and of religious fanaticism, among the Moslem population. The publication of the peace terms imposed on Turkey and the feeling aroused by them among Mohammedans, had already created a spirit of anger among many peaceably disposed Arabs, which it only required the work of an agitator to bring to active life. In addition to these underlying factors, there are also various local causes which have contributed to the general unrest. Delay in defining the status of Mesopotamia which necessitated the maintenance of absolute British administration long after the armistice, had an unfortunate influence on the country. In the opinion of the Civil Commissioner at Baghdad we have been going too fast in various administrative matters affecting certain tribes causing gradual loss of that popularity which the Civil Administration enjoyed at first in such a marked degree. Collection of the land revenue and other taxes, and the fear of the country being exploited by western commercialism have been sources of trouble coupled with the disappointment felt by the Arab landed interests, who reject the idea that landlords have duties as well as rights. We have, as a matter of policy, backed the sheikhs and supported their authority. They, in their turn, have tried to impose too great a burden on their tribesmen, with the laudable intention of improving the cultivation and ensuring good crops, by extensive work on clearing canals and making bunds, and incidentally have lined their own pockets very substantially. The sheikhs have discovered too late that they did not possess the influence that they imagined they had over their tribesmen, and are suffering accordingly. Complexity of Turkish law on the subject often makes the position of political officers exceedingly difficult.

3. Another factor which has tended to cause discontent is the gradual appearance in the country of what may be called post-war conditions, such as have been felt for some time in Europe. High prices, shortage of necessaries, &c., and the sudden acquisition by certain classes of the population of wealth brought into the country by the Army of Occupation have caused discontent among the more numerous class who feel the pinch of present conditions; for these we as the victors in the war are in Mesopotamia as elsewhere naturally held responsible.

4. An important contributory factor to the actual outbreak was the perception by the tribes of our military weakness. To kick a man when he is down is the most popular pastime in the East sanctioned by centuries of precept and practice. As it was, our withdrawals on the Upper Euphrates, and our evacuation of Enzeli and Resht, were seized upon by the agitators and depicted as showing Great Britain's military weakness. Our inability to deal rapidly and effectually with the Rumaitha rising, owing to the non-existence of a mobile reserve, and other minor withdrawals, gave colour to these ideas and by diminishing our military prestige encouraged other hotheads to join in the strife on the side of, as they thought, the top dog.

5. There is also reason to believe that the spread of the trouble has been fostered by articles in the British Press, inspired by the very natural desire for economy. Unfortunately the demand for our withdrawal from Mesopotamia and for handing over

Winston Churchill's Reasons for Uprising

APPENDIX F

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APPENDIX F

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6. The following is a summary of the location and potential fighting strength of the hostile Arab tribes in Mesopotamia according to the latest information :—

Tribe	Approximate fighting strength.	Spheres of activity.
(1.) FROM BASRA TO BAGHDAD.		
(a.) On the Euphrates line.		
Muntafik*	43,000	Kurna viâ Hamar Lake to Nasiriyah and up the Shatt el-Hai.
Khazail	11,500	
Various	16,000	} Samawah—Rumaiitha—Hillah Kufa area.
Zobeid	} 1,500	
Janabiyin		} Left bank between Musayib and Mahmudiyah.
Masud		
(b.) On the Tigris Line.		
Bani Malich and neighbours ..	18,500	} Kurna to Amara.
Albu Muhammed	8,000	
Albu Darraj	4,300	} Amara.
Beni Lam	5,000	
Beni Rabiah	5,500	} Kut-el-Amara to Baghdad.
Various	3,000	
(2.) BAGHDAD—HIT AREA.		
Zohaa	2,500	Zuqlawiyah to Abugharaib.
Dulaim†	27,000	Felujah to Asshur.
(3.) BAGHDAD—MOSUL AREA.		
Shammar Jarba	2,700	} Mosul lines of communication.
Various	3,400	
(4.) BAGHDAD—KIRKUK—QUAIRITU (PERSIAN RAILWAY).		
Diyala District (except Mendali) ..	4,000	} Baquba to Khanikin.
Various	2,900	
Danda	1,300	} Kifri—Kirkuk—Sulaimanyeh.
Various	800	

The total of the above is about 160,000, but it is probable that some of the figures refer to rifle strength and not fighting strength, since a previous estimate put the fighting strength of these tribes at 270,000. This statement does not, of course, include the Kurdish tribes, who are believed to total 481,000 fighting men, of whom about one-third are believed to be armed with rifles. They do not, however, as a rule, fight far from their homes, and any concentration of a centrally controlled force of any size is considered improbable. Action on their part would probably be confined to looting villages or attacking isolated weak posts and convoys. It should be borne in mind that the Arab and Kurd are traditional enemies, and any combination between the two is very unlikely.

7. As regards the actual sequence of events, reports at the end of June indicated that a spirit of unrest was prevalent amongst certain tribes in the Middle Euphrates. Matters came to a head on 1st July when a party of the Dhawalim, a section of the Beni Huchaim tribe, attacked the prison at Rumaiitha, killing the local Arab

* Of this tribe about 10,000 are at present active around Nasiriyah and Samawah; the remainder are not openly hostile, and there have recently been signs of internal dissension amongst them on the Shatt-el-Hai.

† This tribe have stood firm to the present time and have assisted in keeping open communications on the Upper Euphrates.

Note: the pages following contained a summary of the hostilities up to that point and are not included here.

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(1.) FROM BASRA TO BAGHDAD.		
(a.) On the Euphrates line.		
Muntafik*	43,000	Kurna via Hamar lake to Nasiriyah and up the Shatt-el-Hai
Khazail	11,500	
Various	16,000	} Samawah—Rumaitha—Hillah Kufa area.
Zobeid	} 1,500	
Janabiyin		
Masud		Left bank between Musayib and Mahmudiyah.
(b.) On the Tigris Line.		
Bani Malich and neighbours ..	18,500	} Kurna to Amara.
Albu Muhammed	8,000	
Albu Darraj	4,300	} Amara.
Beni Lam	5,000	
Beni Rabiiah	5,500	} Kut-el-Amara to Baghdad.
Various	3,000	
(2.) BAGHDAD—HIT AREA.		
Zohaa	2,500	} Zuqlawiyah to Abugharaib.
Dulaim†	27,000	
(3.) BAGHDAD—MOSUL AREA.		
Shammar Jarba	2,700	} Mosul lines of communication.
Various	3,400	
(4.) BAGHDAD—KIRKUK—QUAIRITU (PERSIAN RAILWAY).		
Diwala District (except Mendali) ..	4,000	} Baquba to Khanikin.
Various	2,900	
Danda	1,300	} Kifri—Kirkuk—Sulaimanyeh.
Various	800	

The total of the above is about 160,000, but it is probable that some of the figures refer to rifle strength and not fighting strength, since a previous estimate put the fighting strength of these tribes at 270,000. This statement does not, of course, include the Kurdish tribes, who are believed to total 481,000 fighting men, of whom about one-third are believed to be armed with rifles. They do not, however, as a rule, fight far from their homes, and any concentration of a centrally controlled force of any size is considered improbable. Action on their part would probably be confined to looting villages or attacking isolated weak posts and convoys. It should be borne in mind that the Arab and Kurd are traditional enemies, and any combination between the two is very unlikely.

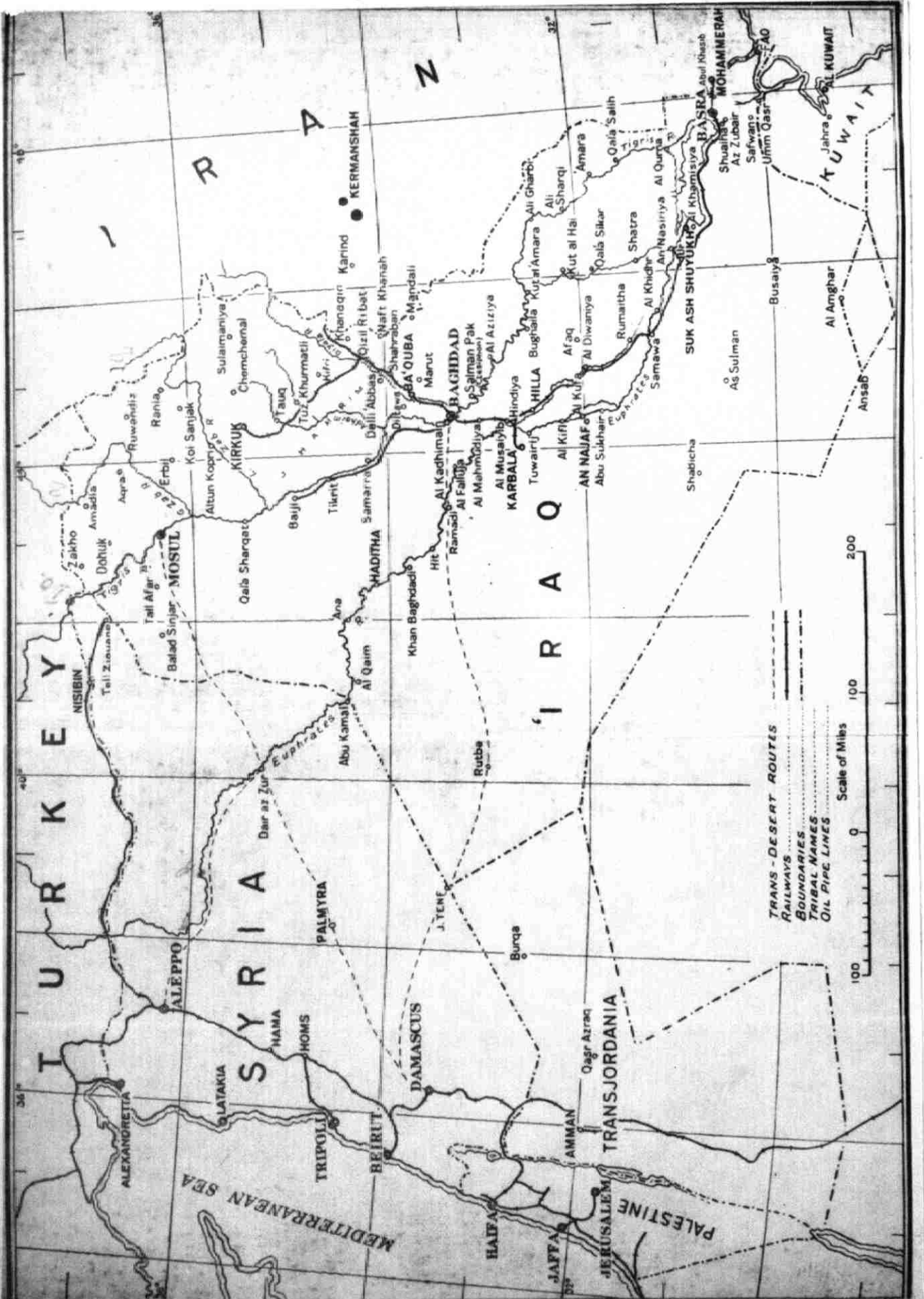
7. As regards the actual sequence of events, reports at the end of June indicated that a spirit of unrest was prevalent amongst certain tribes in the Middle Euphrates. Matters came to a head on 1st July when a party of the Dhawalim, a section of the Beni Huchaim tribe, attacked the prison at Rumaitha, killing the local Arab

* Of this tribe about 10,000 are at present active around Nasiriyah and Samawah; the remainder are not openly hostile, and there have recently been signs of internal dissension amongst them on the Shatt-el-Hai.

† This tribe have stood firm to the present time and have assisted in keeping open communications on the Upper Euphrates.

Notes: the pages following contained a summary of the hostilities up to that point and are not included here.

APPENDIX G
Map of Iraq 1920



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