

BRITAIN'S PRESSING NEED FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN IRAQI ARMY.* (1920 – 1922)

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After World War I, in the San Remo Conference (April 1920) Britain was granted a mandate over Iraq to help it advance to readiness for full independence. In June 1920, an armed revolt against British rule broke out and quickly spread through the mid-Euphrates regions. The heavily armed and surprisingly determined tribes scored a number of early and significant successes. The crushing of the revolt involved besides the cost of lives the expenditure of huge amounts from the British Treasury. Winston Churchill, in taking charge of the Near and Middle East affairs, called a conference to Cairo on March 1921. The questions considered by the conference included the immediate reduction of British expenditure in Iraq with the consequent revision of policy involving 1. the future relationship of Iraq to Great Britain; 2. the person of the future ruler of Iraq; 3. the nature and composition of the defence forces of the new state which was to assume an increasing share of its own defence.

Key words: the British Middle Eastern policy after WWI; the Cairo Conference; the coronation of Fayṣal; the establishment of the Iraqi army; the role of Jaʿfar al-ʿAskarī.

Two leading questions with which the Allies were faced at the end of the war opened the way for an application of the system in framing the structure of the new world after the First World War. The first of these was the disposition of the German colonies in Africa and the second the establishment of new states in the Arab provinces after the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. In both cases the rivalries of the great powers played a leading part. In the Fertile Crescent, the adoption of the mandate system represented a radical change; as for the peoples concerned, it was a passage from loosely integrated territorial areas of

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administration, to separate political states with defined boundaries and more modern types of administration largely following Western lines.¹ However, the philosophy behind the mandate system was unfamiliar and extremely distasteful to the Arabs. There is no doubt that neither the idea of British rule, even for a limited period, nor the idea of a League of Nations mandate appealed to the Iraqi political leaders or to the Iraqi public. The peoples of Syria, Lebanon, and even Turkey had long been familiar with international intervention and regulation of special aspects of their political life. But the mountains of the north and the Great Syrian Desert in the east stood between these areas and Iraq.²

During the war the British army conquered Iraq and consequently a British administration was introduced. As this administration was the work of British officials coming from India, it was largely modelled on the imperial structure in India.³ It was not long before the policies of the Indian administration generated opposition both in Britain and Iraq. In March 1917, the British government signalled that an indigenous Arab government under British guidance was to be substituted for direct administration of colonial type. The British Cabinet instructed Arnold Wilson to ask peoples of Mesopotamia what states or governments they would like to see established in their area, Wilson's reply was that there was no way of ascertaining public opinion.⁴ By 1920 the British bureaucrats in Iraq under Lt. Colonel Arnold T. Wilson, the Acting Civil Commissioner, had managed to frustrate the new policy directives, strengthening their hold on the country. The government in London waited for the decisions of the peace conference and when in April 1920 the Conference at San Remo had assigned a mandate for Iraq to Britain,⁵ it was the last straw for Iraqis.

The Iraqis felt they had been cheated and were full of resentment. Turkish suzerainty had been thrown out only to be replaced by the British. But it was not only among the Arabs that feeling against this kind of imperial suzerainty was growing. Self-determination for small nations, the growing socialist movement with its antipathy to any brand of colonialism and the League of Nations were all growing forces in the world. Therefore, the aim of ultimate self-government had to be conceded as a specific purpose, whatever form the

¹ FROMKIN, D. *A Peace to End All Peace. The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East*, pp. 500–501.

² PENROSE, E., PENROSE, E. F. *Iraq. International Relations and National Development*, p. 47.

³ IRELAND, Ph. W. *Iraq. A Study in Political Development*, p. 141.

⁴ FROMKIN, D. *A Peace to End All Peace. The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East*, p. 450.

⁵ ANTONIUS, G. *The Arab Awakening*, p. 314.

British sphere of influence might take. After lengthy debates the British government came to the conclusion that there would be a period of tutelage during which British advisers and officials would help to establish the Middle East states so that they could stand on their own feet, combining their independence with a treaty relationship which would protect them and safeguard British strategic interests. The period of tutelage was in essence temporary, however, the Iraqis pressed hard for its early termination with all means at their disposal, including demonstrations, riots and insurrection.⁶

The rising anti-British sentiment inside Iraq had been fanned by the Arab nationalists in the towns, the *shīʿī* religious leaders in the holy cities, and disaffected mid-Euphrates tribal leaders. Though the motives of these groups were mixed, all were united by a desire to be free of British yoke. The stirrings of nationalism could not be subdued simply by force, and the techniques that were applied in India would not work in Mesopotamia.⁷ The revolt began in June 1920 when incensed tribesmen rose up against the British. During the revolt, diverse social and political groups collaborated: the *shīʿī* religious leadership of the *mujtahids*, the *sharīfians* and members of tribal populations.⁸ Within two months the uprisings in Mesopotamia involved the whole mid-Euphrates region which had passed out of British control and by October British forces had suffered nearly 2,000 casualties. Press reaction in Britain was bitter. It was particularly galling that the Arabs were revolting against a policy designed to create an Arab state.⁹

Winston Churchill, then Secretary of State for War, entrusted the task of quelling the rebellion to General Aylmer Haldane. The uprising cost the British 426 lives, 1,228 wounded, 615 missing and prisoners, as well as 8,450 casualties among the insurgents.¹⁰ It involved the expenditure of £40 million from the British Treasury and inflicted great damage on Iraq. Winston Churchill knew that cutting expenses and crushing a rebellion was an impossible combination.¹¹ The upheaval undid much of the work accomplished by the administrators in the previous five years and nearly wrecked the British position entirely. The revolt at least assured a much larger measure of participation by the Iraqis in their first local government.¹² The Cabinet decided to dismiss Sir A. T. Wilson and to send Sir Percy Cox to Baghdad. Major-General Percy Cox

⁶ SORBY, K. R. *Arabský východ, 1918 – 1945* [The Arab East, 1918 – 1945], p. 403.

⁷ REID, W. *Empire of Sand. How Britain made the Middle East*, p. 245.

⁸ BASHKIN, O. *The Other Iraq. Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq*, p. 19.

⁹ BUSCH, C. *Britain, India and the Arabs, 1914 – 1921*, p. 409.

¹⁰ IRELAND, Ph. W. *Iraq. A Study in Political Development*, p. 273.

¹¹ CATHERWOOD, Ch. *Winston's Folly. Imperialism and the Creation of Modern Iraq*, p. 83.

¹² MARR, Ph. *The Modern History of Iraq*, p. 33.

had been the Chief Political Adviser to the Indian Expeditionary Force to Mesopotamia from 1914 to 1917 and was then sent as Acting Minister to Persia, where he was in charge of the diplomatic side of the British effort to prevent that country from being taken over by the Bolsheviks.¹³

In London, the revolt in Mesopotamia and the cost of its suppression intensified the search for a more acceptable form of government in Iraq. On 1 October 1920, Sir Percy Cox landed in Başra and on 5 October arrived in Baghdad to assume his responsibilities as High Commissioner in Iraq under the Mandate. His new instructions provided for the termination of the military administration, the formulation of a constitution and the establishment of a provisional government with an Arab chairman. Sir Percy Cox persuaded as-Sayyid °Abdarrahmān al-Kaylānī, the elderly *naqīb al-ashrāf* of Baghdad,¹⁴ to accept the presidency of an appointed council of ministers working under British supervision. On 25 October 1920, the government was formed, including twenty-one eminent Iraqis from all three of the old Ottoman provinces.¹⁵ However, they were assisted in each case by a British adviser and British advisers were similarly attached to each of the new ministries.

Ja°far al-°Askarī was the first of the Iraqi officers who returned to Baghdad on 22 October 1920 on the invitation of Sir Percy Cox.¹⁶ In the aftermath of the abortive revolt of 1920, Iraq was a country without either an indigenous central authority or any significant structured and functional institutions. Aware of these weaknesses, the British authorities created a puppet government in October 1920 and shortly afterwards proceeded to lay the foundations of what was to become known as the Iraq Arab Army under the supervision of Lieutenant General (al-farīq) Ja°far al-°Askarī, Minister of Defence.¹⁷ Military

¹³ CATHERWOOD, Ch. *Winston Folly. Imperialism and the Creation of Modern Iraq*, p. 83.

¹⁴ He was the head of the descendants of the Prophet in the Iraqi capital.

¹⁵ The Cabinet consisted of: as-Sayyid °Abdarrahmān al-Kaylānī, Prime Minister, as-Sayyid Ṭālib an-Naqīb at Interior, Ḥasan al-Pāchachī at Justice, Ja°far al-°Askarī at Defence, °Izzat Bāshā al-Kirkūkī at Education and Health, Sāsūn Ḥasqayl at Finance, Muṣṭafā al-Alūsī at Waqfs, °Abdallaṭīf al-Mandīl at Trade, Muḥammad °Alī Fāḍil at Works. In AL-HASANĪ, as-Sayyid °Abdarrazzāq. *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-°irāqīya* [The History of Iraqi Cabinets], 7th edition, Vol. I, pp. 14–19.

¹⁶ BELL, L. F. (ed.). *The Letters of Gertrude Bell*, Vol. II, p. 568; MUḤAMMAD, °Alā Jāsīm. *Ja°far al-°Askarī wa dawruhu as-siyāsī wa al-°askarī fī tārīkh al-°Irāq ḥattā °ām 1936* [Ja°far al-°Askarī and His Political and Military Role in Iraqi History until 1936], p. 76.

¹⁷ AL-KHAṬṬĀB, Rajā° Ḥusayn. *Ta'sīs al-jaysh al-°irāqī wa taṭawwur dawrihi as-siyāsī, 1921 – 1941* [The Establishment of the Iraqi Army and the Development of its Political Role], p. 25.

service, the government thought, would encourage the development of a patriotic spirit, and the disciplined and uniformed life of the barracks might succeed in creating some degree of homogeneity among recruits drawn from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds. In addition, a patriotic or “national” (waṭanī,) army was a significant symbol of state sovereignty, and a vital instrument in the maintenance of internal security and the deterrence of external aggression. The idea of serving in armed forces was not a new one for the inhabitants of Mesopotamia. From the time when conscription was applied to Iraq in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Turks normally succeeded in raising a local force of some 16,000 men even in peacetime and in doubling that number in wartime.¹⁸

Large numbers of mostly *sunni* Arab ex-Ottoman officials, hitherto excluded by the British, were now looking to the new government to restore them to their former places. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the formation of the Iraqi army. The first step of the government was the setting up of the ministry of defence and the appointment of Jaʿfar Pasha al-ʿAskarī as the Minister. Jaʿfar Pasha’s military experience was considerable as he had served as Commander-in-Chief of the Ḥijāz army. He was born in Baghdad in 1885 to a family that had moved there from the Kurdish village of ʿAskar.¹⁹ On graduating from Baghdad Military School in 1904 and joining the Ottoman army, he was sent to Berlin, where he spent three years training with the German army. On his return, he was enrolled in the Staff College in Constantinople. His active involvement in politics started during the First World War, when he met ʿAzīz ʿAlī al-Miṣrī and other “politicised” Arab officers who formed the nucleus of the ʿAhd party.²⁰ After meeting Amīr Fayṣal in 1916, he served the Hāshimī family and their British allies loyally. In March 1917, he joined the Arab army under the command of Amīr Fayṣal and Lt. Colonel Lawrence stated that “we received a great reinforcement to our case in Jaafar Pasha, a Bagdadi officer from the Turkish Army”.²¹

Under pressure of Jaʿfar Pasha the provisional government arranged for the organised repatriation from Syria of Fayṣal’s Iraqi officers, who, being zealous nationalists and yet doubtfully disposed towards the new British sponsored

¹⁸ TARBUSH, Mohammad A. *The Role of the Military in Politics. A Case Study of Iraq to 1941*, p. 73.

¹⁹ ṢAFWAT, Najda Faṭḥī (ed.). *Mudhakkirāt Jaʿfar al-ʿAskarī* [Jaʿfar El Askari: Memoirs], p. 9.

²⁰ MUḤAMMAD, ʿAlā Jāsim. *Jaʿfar al-ʿAskarī wa dawruhu as-siyāsī wa al-ʿaskarī fī tārikh al-ʿIrāq ḥattā ʿām 1936* [Jaʿfar al-ʿAskarī and His Political and Military Role in Iraqi History until 1936], p. 30.

²¹ LAWRENCE, Th. E. *Seven Pillars of Wisdom. A Triumph*, p. 171.

compromise regime, could not but form an important element in Iraqi politics.²² Ja'far Pasha played a considerable role as a moderniser, and it is perhaps significant that he was among the pioneers discarding the wearing of the fez and calling for its abolition. Furthermore, as someone who knew a total of eight languages including German, English and French, Ja'far Pasha must have been influenced by current ideas of militarism and the importance attached in other nations of his time to the armies as symbols of national unity.²³

Ja'far Pasha's desire to establish a modern army in Iraq could not, therefore, be in question. He organised the return of roughly 600 former Ottoman officers of Iraqi origin, and from these men, drawn almost exclusively from the *sunnī* Arab families of the three provinces, the officer corps of the new Iraqi army was formed.²⁴ Two months after his appointment to the Ministry of Defence, his brother-in-law, Nūrī Pasha as-Sa'īd, another former commander-in-chief of the Hījāz army, arrived from Syria where, until the fall of Damascus, he had been chief of General Staff. Nūrī Pasha had been similarly educated in Turkish military schools, and had served with the Turkish army until 1913 when he was among the founders of the 'Ahd party. Although less travelled than Ja'far Pasha, he nevertheless spoke five languages including German, French, and English. His familiarity with modern ideas is indicated by the reference to him in the British Embassy records as a "modernist with an exceptionally alert intelligence".²⁵ Shortly after his arrival in Baghdad, on 18 February 1921, Nūrī Pasha was appointed chief of General Staff of the Iraqi army,²⁶ in spite of the fact that at the time the only army the country could claim was limited to a skeleton headquarter staff of ten Iraqi officers. Any expansion of this force would be directly linked with Britain's general policies towards the country as a whole.

The Covenant of the League of Nations, which was already in force, in the case of Arab countries stipulated that the wishes of the populations concerned were to be a principal consideration in the selection of the Mandatory. However, the San Remo conference disregarded that provision, and its decisions were a violation of it.²⁷ The losses occasioned by the rebellion in Iraq

²² LONGRIGG, S. H. *Iraq, 1900 to 1950. A Political, Social and Economic History*, p. 128.

²³ TARBUSH, Mohammad A. *The Role of the Military in Politics*, p. 75.

²⁴ TRIPP, Ch. *A History of Iraq*, p. 47.

²⁵ Quoted in TARBUSH, Mohammad A. *The Role of the Military in Politics*, p. 75.

²⁶ An-NUŞAYRĪ, 'Abdarrazzāq Aḥmad. *Nūrī as-Sa'īd wa dawruhu fī as-siyāsa al 'irāqīya ḥattā ām 1932* [Nūrī as-Sa'īd and his Role in Iraqi Politics until 1932], pp. 92–93.

²⁷ Political Clauses of the Treaty of Sèvres, 10 August 1920. In HUREWITZ, J. C. *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East. A Documentary Record. Vol II, 1914 – 1956*, pp. 81–87.

caused an intensification of the campaign in Britain for the reduction of expenditure on commitments abroad.²⁸ The success of the proposed withdrawal of British troops from Iraq depended almost entirely on the creation and maintenance of friendly relations between the Iraqis and the Mandatory Power, which had been temporarily improved by the establishment of the provisional government. The continuance of strong nationalist agitation, however, directed against the Mandate on the grounds that the relationship which it created had no basis either in British promises or in Arab nationalism, seemed to indicate that the mandatory regime, as originally conceived and outlined in the draft document, could not be imposed without prolonged military occupation on a scale which British public opinion rendered impossible. On the other hand, Winston Churchill facing the necessity of cutting expenses had to overcome the serious reluctance of the War Office to downsize the British armed forces in the region.²⁹ The mere prospect of increased hostility, leading inevitably in the absence of adequate military forces in the country to disturbances similar to those of 1920 or even worse, would not only paralyse the efforts of British officials to apply the Mandate and develop the country but would also lead to an irresistible renewal of British public opinion for the complete evacuation of the country.³⁰

Towards the end of 1920 the prime minister accepted Churchill's demand that Mesopotamia and Palestine should be administered by the Colonial Office. This decision was taken out of the necessity of devising a less costly British policy for the Near and Middle East and of replacing by unified control the complicated and cumbersome system of divided authority among the Foreign, India and Colonial Offices. In January 1921 Winston Churchill replaced Lord Milner as the secretary of state for the colonies as the Iraq affairs were handled by a newly created Middle Eastern department of the Colonial Office.³¹ At that time, Britain's overriding concern in the Middle East was the maintenance of maximum British influence in the area at the lowest possible cost to the British Treasury. In taking charge of Near and Middle East affairs, Winston Churchill was faced, on the one hand, by the insistent demand of the British public for a radical reduction in expenditure and, on the other hand, by the necessity of maintaining and consolidating the territorial gains and the strategic areas won in the East. With this in mind, the British Colonial Office arranged a conference

²⁸ ANTONIUS, G. *The Arab Awakening*, p. 316.

²⁹ CATHERWOOD, Ch. *Winston's Folly. Imperialism and the Creation of Modern Iraq*, p. 107.

³⁰ NI[°]MA, Kāzīm. *Al-malik Fayṣal al-awwal wa al-Inklīz wa al-istiqlāl* [King Fayṣal I, the English and Independence], pp. 60–61.

³¹ CATHERWOOD, Ch. *Winston's Folly. Imperialism and the Creation of Modern Iraq*, p. 94; LONGRIGG, S. H. *Iraq, 1900 to 1950*, p. 130.

for their Middle East principal political and military officials which was convened in Cairo on 12 March 1921 and headed by the Colonial Secretary, Winston Churchill.³² Regarding Mesopotamia, the main issues on the agenda included the steps to be taken for reduction of expenditure, the treatment of the Kurdish provinces, the claims of the various possible candidates for the throne of Iraq, and the nature of the forces to be created for the defence of the new state.

This last question presented the British with a complex dilemma. They had to formulate a policy that would significantly reduce their defence expenditure in the country without jeopardising its internal and external security. At the time, there were two types of armed forces in Iraq, both British-controlled, and costing the British Treasury an annual sum of around £37 million. The first force consisted of thirty-three battalions of British imperial troops and also of detachments of the RAF, whose continued presence in Iraq was considered essential pending the signature of peace with Turkey. The second force was the Iraq Levies, whose rank and file were mostly Assyrians known to be loyal to Britain and numbered around 4,000, and whose officers were British. The Levies played an important role during the 1920 revolt, performing such essential services to British troops as guidance, scouting and aiding them in combat.³³

Administratively the new Iraqi state began to take shape, but the question of its final constitutional form had yet to be resolved. These considerations in the Iraqi case, and equally important questions in other spheres of British interest in the Middle East, led to the convening of the *Cairo Conference* by Winston Churchill, the newly appointed colonial secretary now entrusted with Iraq's affairs. A large delegation from Iraq attended, comprising for the most Sir Percy Cox, the High Commissioner, General Aylmer Haldane, the Commander of British armed forces in Iraq, other senior British officials and military officers, but also including two Iraqi ministers, Ja'far Pasha al-^cAskarī and Sāsūn Ḥasqayl.³⁴ For centuries Mesopotamia had been divided into three separate Ottoman provinces Baṣra, Baghdad and Moṣul, and their post-war amalgamation into a new kingdom was by no means a foregone conclusion. An overall British Middle East policy had to be trashed out at the Cairo Conference. Winston Churchill and his colleagues, looking for a suitable

³² IRELAND, Ph. W. *Iraq. A Study in Political Development*, p. 311.

³³ TARBUSH, Mohammad A. *The Role of the Military in Politics*, p. 76.

³⁴ AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ^cAbdarrazzāq. *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-^cirāqīya* [The History of Iraqi Cabinets], 7th edition, Vol. I, p. 36.

monarch for Iraq, decided to compensate Amīr Fayṣal for his loss of the Syrian kingdom by offering him the crown of the new kingdom of Iraq.³⁵

The state of Iraq was created by Britain, to whom the mandate had been given, and it was therefore logical to expect that the nature of that state and of its system of government should be determined by the British government. Britain's interests in Iraq were strategic and economic. The three main strategic elements were communications, the British bases, and oil. Since Britain had acquired a dominant interest in India, one of the main reasons for her concern with the Middle East was it being the shortest route between Britain and her South Asian and Far Eastern possessions.³⁶ However, Iraqi opposition, together with the restraints placed on "imperialism" as a result of changes in the international political atmosphere, which were powerfully reflected in official attitudes within Britain, effectively destroyed the possibility of an acceptable principle application of the mandate in Iraq. The questions considered by the Conference included as problems concerning Iraq: the immediate reduction of British expenditure with the consequent revision of policy involving 1. the future relationship of the new State to Great Britain; 2. the person of the future ruler of Iraq; and 3. the nature and composition of the defence forces of the new State which was to assume an increasing share of its own defence. The status of the Kurdish regions in their relations to Iraq was also discussed.³⁷

In May 1920, a proposal was made that if nationalist agitation were to be cut at its roots and if a friendly government co-operating with Great Britain were to be established in Iraq, a further step in defining the relations between the two countries might be necessary. This step would consist of an attempt to satisfy national aspirations by disguising the relationship, sanctioned under the terms of the mandatory document then already in existence, by means of a treaty of alliance. When Winston Churchill arrived in Cairo for the Conference, he had made up his mind that Amīr Fayṣal was the only possible candidate with whom a treaty, similar to that between Great Britain and Egypt, might be negotiated. It would establish Fayṣal as King of an independent State in alliance with Great Britain.³⁸ Under such a treaty, the scope of British authority might be more

³⁵ CATHERWOOD, Ch. *Winston's Folly. Imperialism and the Creation of Modern Iraq*, p. 127–160; PERETZ, D. *The Middle East Today*, p. 114; KARSH, E.; KARSH, I. *Empires of the Sand. The Struggle for Mastery in the Middle East, 1789 – 1923*, pp. 308–311.

³⁶ TARBUSH, Mohammad A. *The Role of the Military in Politics. A Case Study of Iraq to 1941*, p. 31.

³⁷ IRELAND, Ph. W. *Iraq. A Study in Political Development*, pp. 311–312.

³⁸ AL-ADHAMĪ, Muḥammad Muzaḥfar. *Al-malik Fayṣal al-awwal. Dirāsāt wathā'iqīya fī ḥayātīhi as-siyāsīya wa zurūf mamātihi al-ghāmiḍa* [King Fayṣal I. Documentary Studies of his Political Life and the Obscure Circumstances of his Death], pp. 52–53.

restricted than originally projected, but under skilful handling, the ultimate authority could be made not less effective. It would have the added merit of enabling Great Britain to maintain with less expense her position before the League of Nations without sacrificing her imperial interests.³⁹

Amīr Fayṣal's high birth, as a son of Ḥusayn, *sharīf* of Mecca and King of the Ḥijāz, assured his position among Arabs in general and gave his person a sanctity among the religiously minded, even among the *shī'īs*. He possessed experience in the ways of men and in diplomatic usage gleaned from his early life among the Turks in Istanbul, from his sojourn in the desert in the days of peace and of war against the Turks, from his participation at the Peace Conference at Versailles and from his brief day as a King in Damascus.⁴⁰ Among the nationalists, his early espousal of the Arab cause in Syria, his leadership of the Arab forces in the Ḥijāz and in Syria and his election as the first Arab ruler in Damascus for centuries, secured his standing as an Arab patriot. Fayṣal's short-lived kingship in Damascus, it was believed, had revealed to him the difficulties of a purely Arab administration and the danger of relying entirely on an Arab army. British advice and assistance to the new kingdom would, therefore, it was hoped, be welcomed for their own sake, and be regarded not merely as onerous conditions imposed by the Power which had given him his throne.⁴¹

An important decision taken at the Cairo Conference was to establish a native Iraqi army, soon to become one of the pillars of the new state. A military agreement accompanying the foreseen treaty stipulated that Iraq be responsible for the internal and external defence in four years, although British assistance and advisors were to be provided, and Iraq could not disregard their advice without sanctions. The lower ranks were drawn from tribal elements, often *shī'ī*, but the officer corps could only come from the ranks of former Ottoman army officers. Inevitably, these officers were *sunnī*, perpetuating *sunnī* dominance of the officer corps. Officers with pro-Turkish sentiments were soon weeded out, making the army officer corps primarily Arab in composition and orientation.

³⁹ AL-KHAṬṬĀB, Rajā' Ḥusayn. *Ta'sīs al-jaysh al-irāqī wa taṭawwur dawrihi as-siyāsī, 1921 – 1941* [The Establishment of the Iraqi Army and the Development of its Political Role], p. 32.

⁴⁰ MUḤAMMAD, °Alā Jāsim. *Al-malik Fayṣal al-awwal. Ḥayātuhu wa dawruhu as-siyāsī, 1883 – 1933* [King Fayṣal I. His Life and Political Role], pp. 139–140.

⁴¹ At-TIKRĪTĪ, Abdalmajīd Kāmil. *Al-malik Fayṣal al-awwal wa dawruhu fī ta'sīs ad-dawla al-irāqīya al-ḥadītha* [King Fayṣal I. and his Role in the Establishment of the Modern Iraqi State], pp. 34–36.

Some Kurdish officers were eventually brought in as well.⁴² In order to enable the High Commissioner to achieve the proposed economies for the relief of the British taxpayer, the Conference agreed that until the Iraqi Army could be recruited, equipped and trained, the Levies should be increased to 7,500 and that they were to be financed by the British Government and to be administered by the High Commissioner. The expansion of these Levies therefore offered an obvious way for Britain to reduce her own commitment in the country while maintaining an armed force to police it. In addition, six squadrons of the Air Force, stationed at strategic points, were to assume responsibility for the maintenance of order.

The Conference finally agreed that Britain would work towards the creation of an Arab army to share responsibility for the defence of the country with two detachments of the RAF. Further, it was decided that this army would be organised on British lines and equipped and trained by Britain. In March 1921, the Conference officially decided that: "Until such time as Iraqi national forces were in being and capable of maintaining internal order and defending the frontiers, Britain would undertake these responsibilities which would be entrusted to the RAF. The strength of the British forces under the scheme of RAF control was to be eight squadrons of aeroplanes, four infantry battalions, one pack battery and other small ancillary units. It was further decided that immediate steps should be taken to raise an Iraqi army of 15,000 and that British forces should be progressively reduced as the army grew."⁴³ The strategy to be followed in the raising and organisation of an Arab army was then examined. By June 1921, the recruitment of officers and men was in full swing.⁴⁴

Another major decision taken at the Cairo Conference concerned the treaty between Britain and Iraq. The British decided to express the mandatory relationship with a treaty in an effort to invest Iraq from the outset with the dignity of an independent treaty-making state and to neutralise Iraqi opposition.⁴⁵ The proposal of the British government to express the Anglo-Iraqi relationship with a treaty, rather than with an undisguised mandatory government, was approved by Amīr Fayṣal before his arrival in Iraq, and

⁴² AL-BARRĀK, Fāḍil. *Dawr al-jaysh al-^cirāqī fī ḥukūmat ad-difā^c al-waṭanī, wa al-ḥarb ma^ca Brīṭāniyā ^cām 1941* [The Role of the Iraqi Army in the Government of National Defence and the War with Britain in the Year 1941], p. 62.

⁴³ Quoted in TARBUSH, Mohammad A. *The Role of the Military in Politics*, p. 77.

⁴⁴ AL-KHAṬṬĀB, Rajā' Ḥusayn. *Ta'sīs al-jaysh al-^cirāqī wa taṭawwur dawrihi as-siyasī, 1921 – 1941* [The Establishment of the Iraqi Army and the Development of its Political Role], pp. 30–31.

⁴⁵ MARR, Ph. *The Modern History of Iraq*, p. 38.

seemed not to be initially opposed by the nationalist spokesmen there.⁴⁶ The mandate awarded to Britain by the League of Nations had specified that Iraq should be prepared for self-government under British tutelage, but left the means and mode to the mandatory power. However, to the resentment of Iraqi patriots and the poisoning of Anglo-Iraq relations for the next ten years, the mandate itself remained and the “complete independence” claimed by the nationalists, seemed to be too far away. A view hostile to the mandate, and suspicious of a treaty which merely veiled it, was inevitably adopted by the Iraqi elites as well as the Iraqi people from the outset.⁴⁷

Fayṣal ibn al-Ḥusayn was installed as King of Iraq on 23 August 1921. After his coronation came the establishment of a new structure of government under the mandate.⁴⁸ It appears that legal forms and the administrative organisation were much less corrupt than they had been in the Ottoman Empire and that British models had improved the structure and functioning of the courts. Under the ministries during the period of the mandate the British advisers performed functions that in practice went beyond mere advice. The system of British advisers, who were for the most part experienced political officers, was extended to the districts (liwāʾ) with varying degrees of acceptability and success. Such an arrangement could not last long; dual responsibility, differential salaries, and administrative costs, most of which had to be borne locally, rendered it unpopular both in Iraq and with the British public, which were more concerned with economic conditions at home than in Iraq.⁴⁹

In the meantime, *ex-sharīfian* and ex-Turkish officers had been arriving in Baghdad, and by this time their combined number had reached 640.⁵⁰ Unemployed and imbued with nationalist ideas, these officers constituted a potential threat to the government, which assumed it could be minimised by the promise of regular salaries and swift promotions. Thus, these officers were encouraged to join the army. But their positive response was an indication of economic need rather than an expression of identity with the new state. According to a British intelligence report, many of these officers grew far from

⁴⁶ PENROSE, E.; PENROSE, E. F. *Iraq. International Relations and National Development*, p. 47.

⁴⁷ LONGRIGG, S. H. *Iraq, 1900 to 1950. A Political, Social and Economic History*, p. 139.

⁴⁸ The first Iraqi Cabinet under the mandate was formed on 12 September 1921 with as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrahmān al-Kaylānī (*naqīb al-ashrāf* of Baghdad) as prime minister. In AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq. *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya* [The History of Iraqi Cabinets], 7th edition, Vol. I, p. 14.

⁴⁹ PENROSE, E.; PENROSE, E. F. *Iraq. International Relations and National Development*, p. 52.

⁵⁰ CO 730/1, *Intelligence Report No. 11*, 15 April 1921.

satisfied with their new conditions of employment, and sometimes threatened to take employment with the French in Syria or with Mustafa Kemal in Turkey.⁵¹

As had been outlined at the Cairo Conference, the newly created army was to be equipped and trained on British lines. Thus, simultaneously with the creation of the Arab army, a British Military Mission was established and British military advisers attached to the Ministry of Defence. This mission, even during the Mandate, never exceeded fifty officers. However, it would be misleading to draw any conclusions from this relatively small number, since British influence was in the main channelled through the training and instructing NCOs and officer cadets. When the Military College opened in July 1921, Britons on the staff included not only its director and his assistant, but also fifteen out of twenty instructors. English military textbooks and training manuals were translated into Arabic, and even ex-*sharīfian* and ex-Turkish officers were recruited to undergo fresh training in order to learn the new system.⁵²

King Fayṣal had few illusions about the precariousness of his position or about the problems of trying to give some semblance of coherence to the state over which he now ruled. His reign was marked by his attempt to give some strength to an office characterised chiefly by its weakness. He was sovereign of a state that was itself not sovereign. He was regarded with suspicion by most of the leading sectors of Iraq's heterogeneous society for what he was, for his association with the British and for his patronage of the small circles of ex-*sharīfian* officers.⁵³ This gave him certain room for manoeuvre which he used to the full, both to carve out for himself a position of personal authority unforeseen at the outset and to advance his own ideas of the kind of state Iraq should be. He strived for the gradual achievement of real independence from British control and the integration of the existing communities of Iraq into a unitary structure in which they could feel that their identities and interests were fully respected.⁵⁴

With Fayṣal's accession, the Iraqi nationalists who had served with him in the war and who had formed the backbone of his short-lived government in Syria returned to Iraq. Staunchly loyal to Fayṣal, Arab nationalist in outlook, yet willing to work within the limits of the British mandate, these repatriated Iraqis rapidly filled the high military as well as civilian offices of state, giving Fayṣal

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² *Report on the Administration of Iraq, October 1920 – March 1922*, p. 57.

⁵³ Officers who defected from the Ottoman army and who joined the rebellious troops of *sharīf* Ḥusayn of al-Ḥijāz in 1916 and have fought under Fayṣal ibn Ḥusayn on the Allied side against the Turks.

⁵⁴ Al-ADHAMĪ, Muḥammad Muẓaffar. *Al-malik Fayṣal al-awwal. Dirāsāt wathā'iqīya fī ḥayātīhi as-siyāsīya wa zurūf mamātihi al-ghāmiḍa* [King Fayṣal I. Documentary Studies of his Political Life and Obscure Circumstances of his Death], p. 73.

the support he lacked elsewhere in the country.⁵⁵ The intrusion of these men into the administration at all levels marked a critical step in the Arabisation of the regime, a process intensified by the shift from Turkish to Arabic in the administration and the school system. English became the second language. Although the Ottoman civil code was retained and formed the basis of its curriculum, the institution responsible for training most bureaucrats, the Law College, was also put under Arab administration. As a result of his efforts, education in Iraq emphasised the Arabic language and Arab history with an underlying thrust toward secularism.⁵⁶

On Fayṣal's enthronement, the need for a national army was at its most pressing. Externally, Turkey on the north was pressing her claims over the Mosul vilayet; no fixed frontier existed between the two countries, and Turkish penetration into the northern region threatened Iraq's unity. Also in the north, the Kurdish tribesmen were in a state of open revolt. In the south-west of the country the desert tribes were in a state of disorder, while in the west there was constant trouble from the raids by Syrian tribesmen. Internally, several districts (*liwā'*) contained a hostile population, while the *mujtahids* of the holy *shī'ī* cities of an-Najaf and Karbalā were agitating their followers against the government. Both the unity and the prosperity of the country were threatened by these divisions, as these northern areas contained not only the principal lines of communication between Baghdad and Tehran.⁵⁷ Therefore the government saw the need for a mobile force, and the expansion of the young army was given top priority; a policy that was by then agreeable to Britain. Thus, the question of defence was discussed by King Fayṣal's first cabinet, which met on 11 September 1921, and a decision was reached authorising the cabinet to persist in its efforts to recruit an army of volunteers from among the people, to carry out the important functions which would be entrusted to it, so that the Kingdom of Iraq may be secure against future troubles and events as well as against internal troubles.⁵⁸

However, although the cabinet was calling for the expansion of the army, the number of recruits offering themselves for service was actually declining. During the first three months of the army's existence, about 2,000 men had enlisted. These included a "considerable number of undesirable characters", who may have been driven into joining the army by their inability to find

⁵⁵ Men like Nūrī as-Sa'īd, Ja'far al-Askarī or Yāsīn al-Hāshimī. In GOMBÁR, E. *Kmeny a klany v arabské politice* [Tribes and Clans in Arab Politics], p. 169.

⁵⁶ CLEVELAND, W. L. *The Making of an Arab Nationalist. Ottomanism and Arabism in the Life and Thought of Sāṭī' al-Ḥuṣrī*, p. 72–75.

⁵⁷ AL-KHAṬṬĀB, Rajā' Ḥusayn. *Ta'sīs al-jaysh al-irāqī wa taṭawwur dawrihi as-siyāsī, 1921 – 1941*, p. 33.

⁵⁸ AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid 'Abdarrazzāq. *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-irāqīya*, Vol. I, p. 76.

alternative employment. Although the monthly rate in the number of recruits averaged 287 during the first seven months of the army's creation, that average dropped to 204 during the same seven months of the following year, and continued to decline.⁵⁹ This lack of enthusiasm to join the Arab army can be attributed both to the absence of "patriotic spirit" and to the better rates of pay of the Levies, where a private soldier was earning almost double that of his counterpart in the army. What does appear to have improved the situation of recruitment, however, was the decision of the British authorities in January 1922 to equalise the rates of pay in the Levies with those of the army and to restrict recruitment to the Levies to non-Arabs. It was further decided that: the Iraq army would be increased on the voluntary system from 2,000 to 4,500 by April 1922.⁶⁰

The government also continued its debate about strengthening the army, and the Minister of Defence was already requesting the introduction of some form of conscription if we were to meet the demands made to him to stabilise the interior. At a cabinet meeting held on 9 August 1922, Ja'far Pasha al-^cAskarī, the Minister of Defence, pointed out that the numbers of the Iraq army were insufficient for the defence of the country in cases of emergency and that under these circumstances he would not accept responsibility. He suggested: (a) that he should be given a budgetary sanction for another 1,500 men, or (b) the introduction of some sort of conscription. If neither were accepted he would resign.⁶¹ However, Ja'far Pasha's arguments were unsuccessful. Conscription was not introduced, and his threat to resign proved to be a bluff. Meanwhile, however, the recruitment campaign continued in the national press, echoing the views of the Minister of Defence, and by the end of 1922, the *al-^cIrāq* newspaper was declaring that a big army in now essential "we must rely on ourselves compulsory service must be applied. Then in a short time we shall have 20,000 men. Iraqis are accustomed to conscription it is not a new idea, but volunteer service is new".⁶²

While this absence of national spirit must have been an important reason, it seems that the economic factor remained an overpowering consideration influencing the number of recruits, and a number of cases can be cited as evidence of this. The first is the considerable increase in the number of recruits following the equalisation of rates of pay in the Levies and the army; the second is the immediate drop in the number of recruits following the cabinet decision to reduce the pay of soldiers by 25 per cent in September 1922 as a stringency

⁵⁹ *Report on the Administration of Iraq, October 1920 – March 1922*, p. 56.

⁶⁰ CO 730/7, *Intelligence Report no. 27*, 15 December 1921.

⁶¹ CO 730/24, *Intelligence Report no. 16*, 15 August 1922.

⁶² *Daily al-^cIrāq*, 21 November 1922.

measure. Subsequent to that decision, the average number of recruits for the last three months of the year was 132, compared with 353 for the first nine months.⁶³ These reductions in the rate of pay had brought recruiting to standstill and has resulted in numerous desertions and absentees amongst the rank and file. The desired improvement of the situation slowly but gradually began from 1923.

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⁶³ CO 730/1, Intelligence Report no. 20, 15 October 1922.

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