

THE LAST YEARS OF KING FAYŞAL I. (1930 – 1933)*

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The significance of the Anglo-Iraqi treaty of 1930 stemmed from the fact that it provided for the termination of a mandate – the first such example followed in the Near and Middle East only in Transjordan sixteen years later – and established a new pattern of Anglo-Arab relations. If Britain was prepared to surrender its mandate by 1930, it arrived at this position reluctantly only after the painful experience of persistent agitation among nationalists in the trust territory and a wide segment of the public in England. The instrument itself assured the United Kingdom a preferential status in Iraq. For the duration of the alliance Britain was allowed to retain two air bases and to make use of all Iraqi facilities for the transit of British armed forces (land, naval and air). Under accompanying notes British ambassadors in Baghdad were to enjoy “precedence in relation to the diplomatic representatives of other Powers”, and the Iraqi government undertook to request a British advisory military mission and normally to engage in consultation with Whitehall, “British subjects when in need of the services of foreign officials”. The twenty-five year treaty, which became operative on Iraq’s admission to membership in the League of Nations on 3 October 1932, proved vital to the United Kingdom in the Near and Middle East campaigns of World War II.

Key words: The end of the British mandate; the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930; internal balance of power; the Assyrian affair; the unexpected death of King Fayşal

Despite the fact that in the summer of 1927 the high commissioner Sir Henry Dobbs had seemed to favour the view that Iraq could be proposed for membership in the League of Nations provided it gave certain guarantees, in July 1928 the British government concluded that they could not do it, giving as their reason that the necessary formalities could not be arranged in time, and promising instead that the question of admission would be taken up in 1932 if

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all went well.¹ Disappointment in Iraq at the declaration took the form of agitation for sweeping concessions in the new treaty in demanding (1) the announcement of absolute and complete independence (2) immediate negotiations for the entry of Iraq into the League of Nations and (3) complete Iraqi control over every aspects of its government (especially finance and some other issues).² However, the high commissioner declared the demands inappropriate and during negotiations in London, King Fayṣal and Prime Minister Jaʿfar al-ʿAskarī found themselves opposed to every demand. As a result, the treaty signed in London on 14 December 1927 by Jaʿfar Pasha and Mr. Ormsby-Gore made little practical advancement on the previous treaties.³ It only formally recognized the need for the revision of the financial and military agreements.

The new treaty found little favour in Iraq. Two ministers, Yāsīn al-Hāshimī and Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī, tendered their resignation soon after its publication⁴ and were followed soon after by the prime minister on 7 January 1928.⁵ The new cabinet under ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn tried to pass the treaty and the revised agreements, but negotiations on the agreements resumed in October 1928 ended in deadlock. The high commissioner refused to accept the Iraqi proposals. On the other hand, his counter-proposals made in early December did not satisfy the Iraqis. Therefore ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn sent his resignation to the king on 20 January 1929.⁶ The situation became tense and King Fayṣal informed Sir Henry Dobbs that unless concessions could be made no government could be found to take office.⁷ It was to no avail: the high commissioner declared that the British proposals were final. Public opinion was so violently opposed to the treaty and the agreements that no prime minister could be persuaded to take office. Only on the understanding that the government programme would not include the treaty or amendments did Tawfīq as-Suwaydī undertake to form a cabinet on 28 April 1929.⁸ In the meantime, Sir Gilbert Clayton had arrived in Baghdad on 3

¹ LONGRIGG, Stephen Hemsley *Iraq, 1900 to 1950. A Political, Social and Economic History*, p. 179.

² IRELAND, Philip Willard *Iraq. A Study in Political Development*, p. 410.

³ AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq *Al-ʿIrāq fī zill al-muʿāhadāt*. [Iraq in the Shadow of Treaties], p. 176.

⁴ AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya*. [The History of Iraqi Cabinets], Vol. 2, pp. 139-142.

⁵ AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya*, p. 146.

⁶ FARAJ, Luṭfī Jaʿfar ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn wa dawruhu fī tārīkh al-ʿIrāq as-siyāsī al-muʿāṣir. [ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn and his Role in the Contemporary Political History of Iraq], p. 240.

⁷ IRELAND, Philip Willard *Iraq. A Study in Political Development*, p. 412.

⁸ AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sajjid ʿAbdarrazzāq *Al-ʿIrāq fī dawray al-iḥtilāl wa al-intidāb*. [Iraq

March as high commissioner after Sir Henry Dobbs left a month earlier on his retirement from service.

The advent of the second Labour Government in June 1929 facilitated a change in British policy towards Iraq. King Fayṣal, hopeful of a change in policy, indicated his wish for a more aggressively nationalist cabinet in order to take advantage of the situation in early June 1929. ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn, when asked to form a cabinet declared that he would consent only on the condition that the unyielding attitude with which Great Britain had confronted him during his last term of office be softened.⁹ However, Sir Gilbert Clayton, whose sympathy with and understanding of Arab nationalism had won Arab esteem and friendship during the First World War, had already urged the British government to make a declaration which would at least partially satisfy Iraqī aspirations.¹⁰ His sudden death on 11 September 1929 dashed Iraqī hopes. There followed an interregnum of three months in the high commission until Sir Francis Humphrys took his place.

On 14 September 1929 the acting high commissioner, Air Vice-Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, was instructed to inform King Fayṣal that the British government were firstly prepared to support Iraq's candidature for admission to the League of Nations in 1932 and secondly they would at the next session of the League of Nations inform the council that they had decided not to proceed with the Treaty of 1927.¹¹ The king was also informed that the British government hoped before 1932 to conclude with the Iraqī government a treaty that would regulate the relations of Great Britain with Iraq after the admission of Iraq into the League. This "declaration" published simultaneously evoked contradictory comments. In a speech on 19 September when he became prime minister again ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn expressed the general viewpoint saying that the new offer satisfied part of the aspirations of the Iraqī nation, which would accept in the long run nothing short of complete independence.¹² But the prime minister had long been under heavy strain. Unexpectedly and to universal regret, he committed suicide on 13 November 1929 and Iraq lost in him a leader and true

in the Two Eras of Occupation and Mandate], pp. 155–157.

⁹ FARAJ, Luṭfī Jaʿfar ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn wa dawruhu fī tārikh al-ʿIrāq as-siyāsī al-muʿāṣir [ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn and his Role in the Contemporary Political History of Iraq], Vol. 1, pp. 310–312.

¹⁰ LONGRIGG, Stephen Hemsley *Iraq, 1900 to 1950. A Political, Social and Economic History*, p. 181.

¹¹ AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq *Al-ʿIrāq fī ḡill al-muʿāhadāt*. [Iraq in the Shadow of Treaties]. Vol. 2, p. 202; IRELAND, Philip Willard: *Iraq. A Study in Political Development*, p. 413.

¹² FARAJ, Luṭfī Jaʿfar ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn wa dawruhu fī tārikh al-ʿIrāq as-siyāsī al-muʿāṣir [ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn and his Role in the Contemporary Political History of Iraq], p. 319.

aristocrat of high character and with many gifts.¹³

‘Abdalmuḥsin as-Sa‘dūn was succeeded on 18 November, some three weeks before the new high commissioner’s arrival by a cabinet headed by Nājī as-Suwaydī.¹⁴ This eager nationalist devoted his first energies to the transfer into Iraqi hands of the remaining executive powers in government as the country’s new position once achieved would demand. However, little progress was made in the presence of British obstructions and this led to the resignation of the cabinet on 19 March 1930. It was left to Nūrī as-Sa‘īd to deal with the first organized manifestations of these trends in Iraq’s political history. Seizing the opportunity created by Nājī as-Suwaydī’s resignation, Nūrī as-Sa‘īd, by now the most trusted of the king’s confidants, became prime minister four days later.¹⁵ Leading the court faction he gathered around him a circle of intimates, many of whom had been colleagues in *al-‘Ahd* and in the *sharīfian* forces of the Arab Revolt. With the strong backing of the king and of the British, who were now eager to reach an agreement, Nūrī as-Sa‘īd demonstrated the power which such a position gave him in Iraqi politics. In April 1930, treaty negotiations were resumed. They culminated in the long-awaited new Anglo-Iraqi Treaty which was signed in June 1930, which would take Iraq into the League of Nations.¹⁶ The signing of the treaty and the annulment of the mandate signalled a delicate shift in the balance of power inside Iraq. Some power remained in British hands but most was transferred to the Iraqis. By 1930 Fayṣal and his supporters, especially the Ottoman-trained army officers such as Nūrī as-Sa‘īd, were moving to fill the power vacuum. They were firmly backed by the British. The tightening grip of Fayṣal and his pro-British supporters spawned a new opposition which attacked the new treaty and the British connection. This movement was far more broadly based and ably led than the opposition movements of the 1920s.

In the autumn, Nūrī as-Sa‘īd held a strictly controlled election and on 16 November 1930 the Iraqi parliament ratified the treaty 69 to 12.¹⁷ The Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930 promised Iraq’s nomination for League membership in 1932 and retained a close Anglo-Iraqi alliance. It provided for mutual help in

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 355–361.

¹⁴ AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ‘Abdarrazzāq *Tārīkh al-‘Irāq as-siyāsī al-ḥadīth*. [The Modern History of Iraq], Vol. 3, pp. 62–63.

¹⁵ AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ‘Abdarrazzāq *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-‘irāqīya*. [The History of Iraqi Cabinets], Vol. 2, p. 316.

¹⁶ Treaty of Preferential Alliance: The United Kingdom and Iraq, 30 June 1930. In: HUREWITZ, J. C.: *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East. A Documentary Record. Vol. II, 1914 – 1956*, pp. 178–181.

¹⁷ PŘEBINDA, Petr *Cesta k soudobému Iráku. Nūrī as-Sa‘īd a dějiny irácké monarchie, 1920–1958*, p. 55.

wartime, required close consultation on foreign affairs and permitted the British to lease two air bases to be guarded by the Iraqis at Britain's expense. Iraq's military forces were to receive aid, equipment and training from Britain and in return British forces were to enjoy Iraqi assistance and access to all Iraqi facilities including railways, ports, and airports in time of war. The RAF was to remain at the two Iraqi air bases al-Ḥabbāniya and ash-Shu'ayba.¹⁸ Any foreign advisers and experts needed by Iraq were to be British and the conditions of those in service were to remain unaffected. The high commissioner was to be replaced by an ambassador, who would take precedence over other ambassadors. This treaty formed the basis of Iraq's relations with Great Britain after Iraq's independence in 1932.

The treaty placed all responsibility for internal order in Iraq on the king and made Iraq responsible for its own defence, in theory giving the Iraqi government control over the last part of the state structure still in British hands. However, in return, Iraq agreed to give Great Britain the use of all the facilities in its power in the event of war, including the right to move British troops through Iraq if necessary. In addition, the Iraqi army's equipment and military advisers would be supplied by Great Britain and the RAF would keep two major bases on Iraqi soil, one at al-Ḥabbāniya near Baghdad and the other at ash-Shu'ayba near Baṣra. The treaty itself was to remain in force for twenty-five years from the date of Iraq's entry into the League of Nations but could be renegotiated after twenty years.¹⁹ However, the bulk of the Iraqi population remained dissatisfied realizing that the treaty means only a veiled form of British guardianship.²⁰

The main weakness of the official institutions was their narrow scope. They reached only the upper elements of the urban strata, scarcely affecting the rural areas and the lower urban classes. The new opposition managed at least for a time to reach deeper into the social structure and unite urban and rural elements, shī'ī and sunnī, and even incorporating some of the urban lower class. It drew mainly on an appeal to broad pan-Arab sentiments and emphasized Iraq's Arab identity. Although this movement did not survive intact past the mid-1930s, it foreshadowed some of the groupings that would shape events later in the decade.²¹ In 1930, when Nūrī as-Sa'īd concluded the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, his domination of Parliament ensured the ratification of this controversial

¹⁸ Article 5 of the Treaty. In: HUREWITZ, J. C. *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East*, p. 179.

¹⁹ Article 11 of the Treaty. In: HUREWITZ, J. C. *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East*, p. 180.

²⁰ SORBY, Karol R. *Arabský východ, 1945 – 1958*. [The Arab East, 1945 – 1958], p. 44.

²¹ MARR, Phebe *The Modern History of Iraq*, p. 52.

agreement and a regrouping of parties immediately followed. Nūrī as-Saʿīd formed the *ʿAhd Party* (reviving the pre-war *ʿAhd*), whose aim was to carry into effect the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930 and to bring the mandate to an end.

The treaty was regarded by rival politicians as unsatisfactory for the realization of the national aspirations of Iraq. Seeking to give their opposition some formal expression, Yāsīn al-Hāshimī, the leader of the *People's Party* (Ḥizb ash-Shaʿb), and other leading politicians outside the government formed a new opposition party called the *National Brotherhood Party* (Ḥizb al-Ikhāʾ al-Waṭanī) in November 1930.²² A week later, this party sought and succeeded in establishing an alliance with the *Iraqi National Party* (al-Ḥizb al-Waṭanī al-ʿIrāqī) and its leader Jaʿfar Abū at-Timman. The two parties signed a common manifesto which they called the "Brotherhood Document" (Wathīqat al-taʾākhī), declaring (1) that the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930 is absolute and oppressive and should be revised (2) that Parliament does not represent the people and should be dissolved and (3) that any government replacing the existing one must work towards achieving the above aims.²³ Moreover, through Jaʿfar Abū at-Timman the new party enjoyed close relations with the *Renaissance Party* (Ḥizb an-Nahḍa), which was more explicitly based on the Shīʿī community and its concerns with its links to the Shīʿī tribal shaykhs of the mid-Euphrates. Like former parties, these new parties also aimed at achieving the independence of Iraq, and the only differences among them were on the means as to how to achieve this goal.²⁴

The Iraqi economy during the 1920s was predominantly agricultural in nature with dates and grain representing the major exports. Cash crops, such as cotton, had been tried but with only limited success. Hit by the consequences of the world depression in trade, Iraq's economy (especially insofar as it concerned government finances) was in a precarious situation. Therefore the economic predicament of the country in the early 1930s was more of a preoccupation for the leading political forces. Although the climate and soil of lower Iraq were well suited to the cultivation of cotton, neither the landowning shaykhs nor the share-cropping peasants had shown much inclination to take up cotton cultivation. Their reluctance to do so appeared to be vindicated by the slump in world cotton prices in the late 1920s, intensified by the Great Depression that set in after 1929.²⁵ The land and revenue policies pursued under the mandate resulted from the difficulties confronting the government in ruling over

²² AHMAD, Ibrāhīm Khalīl and Jaʿfar ʿAbbās ḤUMAJDĪ *Tārīkh al-ʿIrāq al-muʿāshir*. [Contemporary History of Iraq], p. 71.

²³ AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya*. [The History of Iraqi Cabinets], Vol. 3, p. 99.

²⁴ For a brief account of political parties see GROBBA, Fritz *Irak*, pp. 40–47.

²⁵ TRIPP, Charles *A History of Iraq*, p. 68.

a country where its authority did not derive from any firm basis of consent. As far as the treasury was concerned, the land revenue policy resulted in the gradual decline of receipts from agriculture. The government was forced to look for other sources of income and found firstly custom duties and then oil revenues.²⁶

Oil had been discovered in large quantities near Kirkūk in 1927, but would not be exported until 1934. The Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) was eager to renegotiate the 1925 agreement in order to open up a much larger area of northern Iraq for its exclusive exploration.²⁷ As an inducement, the IPC held out the prospect of substantial advances in the present against future royalties. Given the financial crisis facing the Iraqi government, this was a powerful draw. In March 1931 an agreement was signed, granting the IPC an exclusive concession over the whole of north-eastern Iraq as well as tax exemptions in exchange for annual payments of substantial sums in gold until exports began, some of which would later be recovered from royalty payments.²⁸ So dramatic was the effect of this that from 1931 to 1932 oil revenues constituted nearly 20 per cent of government revenues, having contributed virtually nothing in the previous year. Furthermore, the timely arrival of this income easily wiped out the threatened government budget deficit of that year.²⁹

Until the hard times of the world crisis, municipal development and public services had been expanding. A Municipal Fees Law of 1931 (Qānūn rusūm al-baladīyāt) fixing rates of taxes to be levied in trades and crafts three times higher than previously caused an angry response. During 1931 Jaʿfar Abū at-Timman and the *National Brotherhood Party* had close links with the *Artisans' Association* (Jamʿīyat Aṣḥāb aṣ-Ṣanāʿiyya),³⁰ a trade union founded in 1929 partly in response to the effects of the economic recession in Iraq. Its members included employees of the railway workshops of Baghdad but largely comprised of artisans and small traders who were now the targets of new taxation proposals. As the new party began its campaign against the government in the streets of Baghdad and in the provinces, the *Artisans' Association* under Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Qazzāz played an increasingly prominent role. He had his

²⁶ SLUGLETT, Peter *Britain in Iraq, 1914–1932*, pp. 252–253.

²⁷ SULAYMĀN, Hikmat Sāmī *Naft al-ʿIrāq. Dirāsa iqtisādīya siyāsīya*. [The Oil of Iraq. A Political Economic Study], p. 138.

²⁸ LONGRIGG, Stephen Hemsley *Oil in the Middle East. Its Discovery and Development*, p. 79.

²⁹ SHWADRAN, Benjamin *The Middle East, Oil and the Great Powers*, p. 247; SLUGLETT, Peter *Britain in Iraq, 1914–1932*, p. 198.

³⁰ Ad-DARRĀJĪ, ʿAbdarrazzāq ʿAbd Jaʿfar abū at-Timman wa dawruhu fī al-ḥaraka al-waṭaniyya fī al-ʿIrāq, 1908–1945. [Jaʿfar abū at-Timman and his Role in the National Movement in Iraq, 1908–1945], pp. 306–308.

own union-based agenda, but he was willing to lend his support to the *National Brotherhood Party*'s criticisms of Nūrī as-Saʿīd's government.³¹

During the widespread strike of artisans and lower-middle-class workers in Baghdad summer of 1931 the *National Brotherhood Party* had close links with Ṣāliḥ al-Qazzāz, the head of the *Artisans' Association*. Although the alliance was short-lived, it illustrated the emerging social and political forces in the country.³² The strike was the first large-scale rebellion of the lower classes against pressing social ills – the Depression, poor distribution of wages and income and above all, new taxes. The Depression had taken its toll among the urban working class and unemployment had reached serious proportions, especially among railroad workers. Many railroad workers who still had jobs had been placed on half pay.³³ Clashes with the police followed as the strike spread to the towns of the mid-Euphrates – including al-Ḥilla, al-Kūfa, Karbalāʾ and an-Najaf – as well as to the tribes and even to Baṣra. The workers demanded nullification of the municipal taxes and unemployment compensation. The *National Brotherhood Party* leaders asked for the resignation of the cabinet and an election to replace it.³⁴ Nūrī as-Saʿīd quelled the strike, did not resign, and on the contrary his political influence increased.

The government took steps to meet the complaints about the Municipal Fees Law, removing one very potent cause of grievance. In addition, the security forces had been deployed in strength throughout the towns, detaining a number of the organizers, which left people in no doubt about the cost of further defiance. The opposition became increasingly demoralized and Nūrī as-Saʿīd emerged triumphant, confident in the continuing support of the king, the court faction and the British.³⁵ The general strike and the public demonstrations in Baghdad, with the more traditional outbreaks of unrest and sabotage in the tribal regions of the mid-Euphrates, had alarmed many Iraqis and as a result many rallied to the support of the government. Nūrī as-Saʿīd won the upper hand: he successfully separated the component parts of the disintegrating opposition coalition and ensured that the main thrust of Iraqi politics during the following year was the achievement of independence in 1932.

³¹ TRIPP, Charles *A History of Iraq*, p. 72.

³² Ad-DARRĀJĪ, ʿAbdarrazzāq ʿAbd Jaʿfar abū at-Timman wa dawruhu fī al-ḥaraka al-waṭaniyya fī al-ʿIrāq, 1908–1945. [Jaʿfar abū at-Timman and his Role in the National Movement in Iraq, 1908 – 1945.], pp. 308–309.

³³ Cit. in: MARR, Phebe: *The Modern History of Iraq*, p. 52.

³⁴ Ad-DARRĀJĪ, ʿAbdarrazzāq ʿAbd Jaʿfar abū at-Timman wa dawruhu fī al-ḥaraka al-waṭaniyya fī al-ʿIrāq, 1908–1945. [Jaʿfar abū at-Timman and his Role in the National Movement in Iraq, 1908 – 1945.], pp. 311–313.

³⁵ An-NUṢAYRĪ, ʿAbdarrazzāq Aḥmad Nūrī as-Saʿīd wa dawruhu fī as-siyāsa al-ʿirāqīya ḥattā ʾam 1932. [Nūrī as-Saʿīd and his Role in Iraqi Politics until 1932], p. 311.

The Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930 was not received with much enthusiasm by the Kurds of Iraq. They were outraged by the absence of any reference to their special position. Kurdish leaders in Iraq petitioned the League of Nations as well as the British and Iraqi governments, hoping that the minimum Kurdish demands for cultural autonomy and self-rule would be met. This had little impact. It reassured the central elites in Baghdad that the British would not use the Kurdish question as a pretext for intervention, which made many Kurds increasingly apprehensive. They were not much reassured by Nūrī as-Saʿīd's promises to institute special administrative, educational, cultural and linguistic measures in the Kurdish region prior to 1932.³⁶ Therefore unrest continued in the Kurdish areas where riots and demonstrations in the autumn of 1930 led to the reappearance of Shaykh Maḥmūd, who sent a petition accusing Baghdad of atrocities and demanding a united Kurdistan under British mandate.³⁷

To back this up he began once more to rally the tribes which had traditionally supported him. The fighting which then erupted pinned down a large proportion of the Iraqi army and made it clear that the Iraqi government was both unable to maintain order and had failed to fulfil its obligations towards the Kurds. After a month of fighting, the revolt was suppressed with the help of RAF. Shaykh Maḥmūd sued for peace and in May 1931 he was sent into internal exile in an-Nāṣirīya in southern Iraq.³⁸ For Nūrī as-Saʿīd the political opposition in Kurdistan was not of great concern as the king, the British and the various opposition parties of Iraq did not put serious pressure on his government to fulfil the pledges made at various times to the Kurdish leaders. On the contrary, all of them seemed to agree that any tendency towards Kurdish separatism should be crushed even if symbolic concessions to a specific Kurdish identity might be made.³⁹

The situation in the northern Kurdish areas became volatile in the summer of 1931, when disturbances linked to Shaykh Aḥmad al-Bārzānī erupted once more. The violence which followed was in part due to very particular local circumstances, but it owed something to growing unease across Kurdistan as the date for Iraqi independence approached. An Iraqi strike force despatched in December 1931 was beaten and only extricated with British air support. In June 1932 Iraqi forces supported by units of the RAF finally occupied Bārzān itself leading to Shaykh Aḥmad's flight to Turkey where he surrendered to Turkish

³⁶ TRIPP, Charles *A History of Iraq*, p. 67.

³⁷ McDOWAL, David *A Modern History of the Kurds*, p. 176.

³⁸ AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya*. [The History of Iraqi Cabinets]. Vol. 3, pp. 131–133.

³⁹ TRIPP, Charles *A History of Iraq*, p. 68.

troops on the frontier rather than to Iraqi forces.⁴⁰

The admission of Iraq to the League of Nations marked the end of an epoch during which King Fayṣal and the Iraqi nationalists had been too preoccupied in bringing the mandate to an end to pay proper attention to internal reforms. However, shortly before the mandate was formally terminated Fayṣal began to discuss with the leading ministers a reform programme for his would-be independent country. In the light of his past experience, Fayṣal realized that Iraq's most urgent need after winning independence was social and economic progress.⁴¹ Fayṣal advised his ministers to follow a policy of moderation, avoiding radical ideas which might arouse suspicion and cause a reaction among the ignorant majority and seeking cooperation between the government and the masses. As British advisers departed from Baghdad the throne inherited most of their power and cabinets continued to be controlled by pro-British former army officers and lawyers. The opposition, led by the *National Brotherhood* group, was formed in collaboration with the British and accepted the treaty. Countryside tribal leaders, well contented with the privileges they had received for their support, remained for the moment quiescent. Although the Shi'as and the Kurds were mainly excluded from the emerging structure of power, their opposition had been neutralized by a few seats in the cabinet and by the representation of their more moderate elements in Parliament.⁴²

In the summer of 1932 the League demanded and received from the Iraqi government a formal declaration promising to guarantee the rights of foreigners and minorities as well as to allow freedom of conscience and religion. In return, those states which had hitherto enjoyed capitulatory privileges in the Ottoman Empire, and thus in Iraq, agreed to renounce them. In October 1932 Iraq's membership of the League of Nations was approved by a unanimous vote of the League's Assembly.⁴³ Iraq thus became the first of the League of Nations mandates to achieve full independence as a sovereign state. However, British influence continued, whether formally through the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930 or informally through the many unspoken rules that governed British relations with much of the Iraqi elite. The period of the mandate had laid the institutional foundations of the Iraqi state and demarcated its territorial boundaries but had also made the state the principal arena for the multiple struggles that were to

⁴⁰ McDOWAL, David *A Modern History of the Kurds*, p.179; AL-HASANĪ, as-Sayyid 'Abdarrazzāq *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-'irāqīya*. [The History of Iraqi Cabinets]. Vol. 3, pp. 191–192.

⁴¹ KHADDURI, Majid *Independent Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics from 1932 to 1958*, p. 34.

⁴² MARR, Phebe *The Modern History of Iraq*, pp. 53–54.

⁴³ TRIPP, Charles *A History of Iraq*, p. 75.

constitute a distinctively Iraqi politics.

When Iraq was admitted to membership of the League of Nations Fayṣal thought that having achieved his immediate political objective the time had come to carry out a policy of internal reforms. He took a hopeful view of securing the help of all leading public men and appealed to them in the interest of their country to forget their quarrels and co-operate in forming a strong government unhampered by an opposition in order to carry out reforms effectively.⁴⁴ He asked Nūrī as-Saʿīd, who had been prime minister from 1930 to 1932, to resign in favour of a new administration which was to include Nūrī as-Saʿīd himself and his opponents the *National Brotherhood Party*. General Nūrī as-Saʿīd, who aspired to head the new coalition, reluctantly tendered his resignation on 27 October 1932.⁴⁵

With end of the mandate and the withdrawal of the British, the king attempted to create a strong government of national unity. As previously mentioned, King Fayṣal moved to propitiate the nationalist opposition by bringing some of its members into the government. The leaders of the *National Brotherhood Party* had already been invited to take part in forming a new administration but did not accept the idea of a coalition, having denounced Nūrī as-Saʿīd's treaty with England and pledged the nation never to be bound by its terms.⁴⁶ But they were decidedly pleased to know that the way to authority was at last thrown open to them and that their popularity throughout the country had been recognized by the king. Fayṣal accordingly decided to form a transitional government, composed of neutral public men, which was designed to prepare the way for a new administration to be formed on the basis of the new elections. For this purpose Fayṣal invited Nājī Shawkat, a young independent politician and sympathetic to his policy, to form a government on 3 November.

The government was intended to be a transitional one and serve only for a limited period.⁴⁷ Nūrī as-Saʿīd suggested that Nājī Shawkat should not dissolve Parliament, and he offered the support of his parliamentary followers to the new cabinet. The prime minister rejected the offer because he suspected Nūrī as-

⁴⁴ KHADDURI, Majid *Independent Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics from 1932 to 1958*, p. 35.

⁴⁵ Al-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq *Tārīkh al-ʿIrāq as-siyāsī al-ḥadīth*. [The Modern History of Iraq]. Vol. 3, pp. 85–86.

⁴⁶ Ad-DARRĀJĪ, ʿAbdarrazzāq ʿAbd Jaʿfar abū at-Timman wa dawruhu fī al-ḥaraka al-waṭaniyya fī al-ʿIrāq, 1908 – 1945. [Jaʿfar abū at-Timman and his Role in the National Movement in Iraq, 1908 – 1945.], pp. 323–324.

⁴⁷ AḤMAD, Ibrāhīm Khalīl and Jaʿfar ʿAbbās ḤUMAJDĪ *Tārīkh al-ʿIrāq al-muʿāṣir* [Contemporary History of Iraq], p. 72.

Saʿīd's intention to perpetuate his influence in the new administration.⁴⁸ Parliament was dissolved on 8 November and new elections were held in February 1933 in an atmosphere of indifference since no political issues were involved. Only the *National Party* boycotted the elections on the grounds that there were restrictions on the activities of this party and on the freedom of the press.⁴⁹ The *National Brotherhood Party* took part in the elections because its leaders had great expectations of achieving power. The election returns, although they showed only a slight change in the composition of Parliament, were a victory for the government: the majority of deputies were either the personal followers of the prime minister or former deputies pledged to support the new government. Thus, Nājī Shawkat was able to muster a majority of 72 – forming a parliamentary bloc – and he declared that since he enjoyed such a majority he would continue in office; thus his cabinet ceased to be transitional.⁵⁰

Even though the king had expressed a desire to strengthen the government before the elections by infusing new blood in it, he afterwards persuaded Nājī Shawkat not to resign as there was no pressing need for a cabinet change until he found another solution. However, Nājī Shawkat preferred to resign rather than be dwarfed within his own cabinet by such influential men as Nūrī as-Saʿīd, Yāsīn al-Hāshimī, and Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī. Parliament met on 8 March 1933 and the king read the Speech from the Throne, embodying the cabinet's programme.⁵¹ When Parliament reassembled on 16 March to discuss the speech, the *National Brotherhood Party* members (seemingly with the tacit permission of the king) violently criticized the cabinet's programme as devoid of any measures which would transform the administration created under the mandatory regime into one destined for a truly independent country. Nājī Shawkat felt it an unjustified attack and soon after the meeting requested the king to accept his resignation on the grounds of ill health. The king, thanking him for his services, accepted his resignation on 18 March.⁵²

⁴⁸ MUḤAMMAD, ʿAlā Jāsīm *Al-malik Fayṣal al-awwal. Ḥayātuhu wa dawruhu as-siyāsī, 1883 – 1933*. [King Fayṣal I. His Life and Political Role, 1883 – 1933]; AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya*. [The History of Iraqi Cabinets]. Vol. 3, pp. 213–214.

⁴⁹ Ad-DARRĀJĪ, ʿAbdarrazzāq ʿAbd Jaʿfar abū at-Timman wa dawruhu fī al-ḥaraka al-waṭanīya fī al-ʿIrāq, 1908 – 1945. [Jaʿfar abū at-Timman and his Role in the National Movement in Iraq, 1908 – 1945.], pp. 328–332.

⁵⁰ KHADDURI, Majid: *Independent Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics from 1932 to 1958*, p. 36.

⁵¹ AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya*. [The History of Iraqi Cabinets]. Vol. 3, pp. 230–232.

⁵² AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq *Tārīkh al-ʿIrāq as-siyāsī al-ḥadīth*. [The Modern History of Iraq]. Vol. 3, p. 94.

The doors were thus thrown open for the *National Brotherhood Party* leaders to come into power. When Nājī Shawkat resigned, Fayṣal invited Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī to form a new government.⁵³ Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī consulted his party colleagues and decided to accept the offer if he were allowed to negotiate with Britain for the revision of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930. For the party leaders had already pledged the nation never to recognize the treaty as binding if they came to power. King Fayṣal, who viewed the treaty as a successful bargain with England, was naturally unwilling to accept this condition. A cabinet crisis developed but Fayṣal prevailed over the *National Brotherhood Party* leaders by appealing to their sense of patriotism and by pointing out the grave dangers that might threaten their country if they repudiated a treaty which had just come into force. He deplored that his general lines of policy, which had borne fruition in the independence of Iraq, had not yet been grasped by the party leaders and went so far as to threaten to abdicate if they failed to appreciate his point of view.⁵⁴ The *National Brotherhood Party* leaders were so impressed by the king's arguments that they immediately agreed to form a new government without making any conditions. In order to escape possible disgrace for so doing, they were allowed to insert the statement in their programme that they would "endeavour to realize the national aspirations of Iraq", a statement which was vaguely construed to mean the revision of the treaty.⁵⁵

The new government was formed on 20 March 1933 with Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī as prime minister. Yāsīn al-Hāshimī, leader of the *National Brotherhood Party*, took the portfolio of Finance and Ḥikmat Sulaymān was given the Interior. For the continuity of Iraq's foreign policy, Nūrī as-Saʿīd was given the portfolio of Foreign Affairs upon the request of King Fayṣal. Rustum Ḥaydar, former chief of the Royal Dīwān and the minister of finance under Nūrī as-Saʿīd, was given the portfolio of Communications and Works.⁵⁶ When Parliament met on 27 March, Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī announced the programme of his government. With regard to foreign policy, he declared that his government would "respect Iraq's international obligations" but pledged that it would "endeavour to realize the national aspirations" of Iraq. Promising

⁵³ GOMBĀR, Eduard *Kmeny a klany v arabské politice*. [Tribes and Clans in Arab Politics], p. 169.

⁵⁴ MUḤAMMAD, ʿAlā Jāsīm *Al-malik Fayṣal al-awwal*. [Jaʿfar al-ʿAskarī and His Political and Military Role in Iraqi History until 1936], pp. 214–215.

⁵⁵ Al-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya*. [The History of Iraqi Cabinets]. Vol. 3, pp. 237.

⁵⁶ Al-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq *Tārīkh al-ʿIrāq as-siyāsī al-ḥadīth*. [The Modern History of Iraq]. Vol. 3, pp. 95–97.

sweeping reforms in every department of government, the programme stressed the exploitation of Iraq's economic potentialities and the strengthening of the army. It was approved by parliament but was severely criticized for its foreign policy.⁵⁷ The prime minister assured his critics that his intention was always to try to revise the treaty. The coming of the *National Brotherhood Party* into power without a definite promise to revise the treaty led to a rupture of relations with the *National Party*.⁵⁸

Shortly after Iraq's rise to statehood, King Fayṣal was formally invited by King George V to visit England. He left his son the Amīr Ghāzī, aged twenty-one, as regent. This visit was designed to cement friendly relations between Britain and her former ward on the new basis of equality and mutual interests. On 20 June 1933 King Fayṣal, with three of his ministers,⁵⁹ arrived in London and was received with full and impressive ceremony. The visit was completely successful. He was exhausted by overwork and he would willingly have rested for a further period in Europe: he had planned to spend the summer in Switzerland for health reasons.⁶⁰ But the Assyrian affair, which developed during his absence, not only affected his plans but possibly also hastened his untimely death.

The settling of the Assyrian community in Iraq dates back to the First World War. These Assyrians – Nestorian Christians claiming descent from the ancient Assyrian Empire – had lived until 1915 in the highlands of what is now Turkish Kurdistan. During the war they rebelled against the Turks and withdrew to Persian Kurdistan. After the war the Turks refused to take them back and therefore in 1919 the British tried to secure the settlement of 35,000 Assyrians in Iraq. The Assyrians, who had arrived in the territories of the future Iraqi state as refugees, saw the British administration as their main protector. They had supplied most of the troops for the British-officered Iraq Levies and had a troubled relationship with the surrounding Kurdish and Arab villagers of northern Iraq where the British had settled them. Understandably, the community felt particularly vulnerable as Iraqi independence approached. In

⁵⁷ KHADDURI, Majid *Independent Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics from 1932 to 1958*, p. 38.

⁵⁸ Ad-DARRĀJĪ, ʿAbdarrazzāq ʿAbd Jaʿfar abū at-Timman wa dawruhu fī al-ḥaraka al-waṭaniyya fī al-Irāq, 1908 – 1945. [Jaʿfar abū at-Timman and his Role in the National Movement in Iraq, 1908 – 1945.], pp. 332–333.

⁵⁹ The three ministers were Nūrī as-Saʿīd, (foreign minister), Yāsīn al-Hāshimī, (minister of finance) and Rustum Ḥaydar (minister of communications and works).

⁶⁰ Al-ADHAMĪ, Muḥammad Muẓaffār *Al-malik Fayṣal al-awwal. Dirāsāt wathāʾiqīya fī ḥayātihī as-siyāsīya wa ẓurūf mamātihī al-ghāmiḍa*. [King Fayṣal I. Documentary Studies of his Political Life and Obscure Circumstances of his Death], p. 108.

October 1931 the Assyrians sent a request to the League of Nations for special consideration, but the League's discouraging response led to talk of direct action. This was deflected by the British authorities, who promised to maintain a link of sorts by assigning the Levies to the two British air bases as guard units. British reliance on the Levies (almost wholly recruited from Assyrians) was feared by the fledgling Iraqi army, which was sensitive to its own weakness and resented the Levies as a force controlled by a foreign power.⁶¹ However, this connection proved to be a liability for the Assyrians after 1933: it maintained the community's reputation as allies of the British at a time when Great Britain felt no obligation to protect the community as a whole from the consequences of such a reputation.⁶²

The mistake of the Assyrian community and more particularly of its inexperienced leadership was in making a claim to autonomy without the means to sustain it in the face of a rising tide of Iraqi nationalism. The settlement of the Assyrians in Iraq and continued British protection of the group had long been resented by the Muslim population. Iraqi independence and the shift in responsibility for internal defence to the Iraqi army worried the Assyrian community. Their patriarch, the Mār Sham'un, attempted to regain the communal autonomy the Assyrians had enjoyed under the Ottoman millet system. He refused to cooperate with the government to settle the rest of the Assyrians on their own land, demanding temporal as well as spiritual power. Finally, the Assyrian patriarch was detained in June 1933 in Baghdad despite Fayṣal's pleas from Europe that he be released.⁶³

The situation came to a head in mid-July when a party of Assyrians crossed the Tigris into Syria and demanded permission to settle there. The French refused to accept them and on 4 August bands of Assyrians began to recross the frontier into Iraq, many of them with their arms having been given back to them by the French. The Iraqi troops were preparing to disarm them when shots were fired.⁶⁴ Who fired first has not been clearly established, but serious fighting began. At the end of a day of battle 30 Iraqi soldiers were dead and about half as many Assyrians. The uproar the incident created led the Iraqi government to organize a punitive expedition under the command of General Bakr Ṣidqī, which burned some twenty villages and massacred their inhabitants.⁶⁵ The

⁶¹ TARBUSH, Mohammad A. *The Role of the Military in Politics. A Case Study of Iraq to 1941*, p. 97.

⁶² SLUGLETT, Peter *Britain in Iraq, 1914–1932*, p. 198.

⁶³ LONGRIGG, Stephen Hemsley *Iraq, 1900 to 1950. A Political, Social and Economic History*, p. 233.

⁶⁴ LENCZOWSKI, George *The Middle East in World Affairs*, p. 237.

⁶⁵ STAFFORD, R. S. *The Tragedy of the Assyrians*, pp. 161–176.

National Brotherhood Party fully exploited the Assyrian incident to its own advantage. Since the king was then on a state visit to England, they were free to deal with the issue in this way. Thus by appearing as heroes who saved their country in time of trouble the *National Brotherhood Party* leaders became national idols. The Assyrian affair elevated Bakr Şidqī to the position of a national hero overnight, and the sudden popularity of the army made possible the introduction of the conscription bill long desired by the nationalists. The bill was subsequently passed by Parliament. The men responsible for these atrocities were never punished.⁶⁶

While Fayṣal was still in London disquieting news reached him about tensions that had developed between the government and the Assyrians. He tried to intervene from London and sent cables to his ministers advising them to deal more gently with the Assyrians but the *National Brotherhood Party* leaders, who thought the king had come under the influence of the British government, would not listen to him. King Fayṣal, who was ill and needed medical treatment, returned to Baghdad on 2 August but found the situation completely beyond his control.⁶⁷ His intervention, which annoyed his ministers, had a further damaging effect on his health. Certainly his self-respect and dignity had never been so severely wounded. In September 1933, Fayṣal left for Europe in ill health and ill spirits. He left Baghdad almost unnoticed on 2 September. Only members of the Cabinet saw him off but there were hardly more than fifty people at the airport. The following statement was issued on 1 September:

*I am leaving Baghdad owing to the necessity for completing my convalescence, and I hope that my absence will not last for more than six weeks. I take this opportunity to express to my people my appreciation of their affection for me and for the manner in which they have maintained peace and confidence among the different sections of the community during recent events. All I have seen of the actions of my nation and government has strengthened my hopes that we shall attain our national ideals very soon. Relying on the assistance of Almighty God, I shall continue to do my best to serve my country and nation, notwithstanding any difficulties I may meet.*⁶⁸

Only six days after Fayṣal reached Berne he suddenly and unexpectedly died

⁶⁶ SORBY, Karol R. *Blízky východ v medzinárodnej politike, 1918 – 1945*. (The Near East in International Politics), p.109.

⁶⁷ AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya*. [The History of Iraqi Cabinets]. Vol. 3, p. 298.

⁶⁸ AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya*. [The History of Iraqi Cabinets]. Vol. 3, p. 309. English translation in: KHADDURI, Majid *Independent Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics from 1932 to 1958*, p. 43.

in the early hours of Friday morning, 8 September 1933. He had left Baghdad by air an ailing and tired man seeking medical treatment in Switzerland.⁶⁹ However, in the opinion of his physician, Dr Alfred Kocher there was nothing to suggest the possibility of his sudden death. On the evening of 7 September, Fayṣal complained of palpitations of the heart and the doctor was called. After careful examination, his doctor said that the king was suffering from arteriosclerosis, and that his heart was also in a very feeble condition. This, it was thought, had developed from worry about events in Iraq. The doctor decided to give him injections, and a nurse was left with him for the night. After midnight Fayṣal again complained of feeling ill and his brother King ʿAlī, who had come with him as well as two of his ministers Nūrī as-Saʿīd and Rustum Ḥaydar, were called to his bedside. When they arrived Fayṣal had already breathed his last words.⁷⁰ He had died of a heart attack according to the doctor. General Nūrī as-Saʿīd and Rustum Ḥaydar at once cabled the sad news to Baghdad. As he had died suddenly and no adequate *post mortem* examination was made, this gave rise to suspicions and speculations as to whether his death was natural.⁷¹

On the morning of Friday 8 September the people of Baghdad awoke to learn the news of Fayṣal's tragic death and they were stunned. They soon realized how ungrateful they had been to a monarch who had given his life for his country.⁷² Although a succession crisis was mercifully avoided, Fayṣal's death removed the one man capable of moderating the differences among Iraq's diverse elements. It destroyed the promising start he had made in incorporating opposition elements into a coalition government. Many appreciated his ability to stand above party and personal politics which had set him far above his colleagues and contemporaries. Although Fayṣal never went as far as the anti-British party desired, his willingness to work with opposition elements to establish a government based on a broader foundation than the British embassy was a far sounder basis for future stability than any solution hitherto had perceived.

The Cabinet held a meeting immediately after the news of Fayṣal's death was received and two hours later Fayṣal's only son Amīr Ghāzī, acting as

⁶⁹ 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], p. 320.

⁷⁰ Al-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-irāqīya*. [The History of Iraqi Cabinets]. Vol. 3, p. 311.

⁷¹ FO 371/16924, 19 September 1933. Cit. in: TARBUSH, Mohammad A. *The Role of the Military in Politics. A Case Study of Iraq to 1941.*, p. 101.

⁷² KHADDURI, Majid *Independent Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics from 1932 to 1958.*, p. 44.

Regent during his father's absence, was sworn in before the members of the Cabinet and proclaimed King Ghāzī I. Early in the afternoon the young king drove in procession between lines of Iraqi soldiers along the capital's main street from the royal residence to the royal palace, where he received homage from notables and representatives of the various sections of the people. King George V sent a message of condolence to the new king and congratulated him on his accession. King Fayṣal's death created a power vacuum in Iraq which the country was ill-equipped to fill.⁷³ His powerful figure had been essential to a country still searching for a viable political system.

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⁷³ AL-ḤUṢRĪ, Sājiʿ, (Abū Chaldūn) *Mudakkirātī fī al-ʿIrāq*. [My Memoirs in Iraq]. Vol. II (1927 – 1941), p. 273.

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