IRAQ’S UNEASY ROAD INTO THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS (1927 – 1930)

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Political life in Iraq during the mandate came to revolve around a tripartite balance of power. One part consisted of the king, a foreign monarch (from al-Êijáz) dependent on the British for his position but anxious to develop a more permanent power base among the local politicians. Another part comprised the British, always fearful of a rebellious parliament and anxious to see their supporters in office as prime ministers and ministers of the interior. To this end they continued to insist on substantial tribal representation in parliament. Between these two elements was a shifting group of Arab sunshine politicians, some more anti-British than others, but all willing to assume office. Some were strong and capable personalities. Indeed, one feature of the period was political pluralism and sometimes intense competition for power at the top. Unused to political parties, the politicians formed parliamentary blocs, based mainly on personal ties and shifting political alliances. Few had roots in any large constituencies outside the halls of parliament, except for their links with tribal leaders. The failure to build broadly based political institutions or to reach out to groups beyond their personal or familial circles was a critical weakness of the nationalist movement. It allowed for manipulation by the British and the monarchy, and it prevented any one group from establishing sufficient power to move the country along in a particular direction. The politicians focused almost exclusively on the treaty, and failed to develop programmes on social issues, although economic issues came to be more important in the early 1930s.

Key words: British mandate; Anglo-Iraqi Treaties; internal balance of power; religious, sectarian and ethnic tensions; the Kurdish question

From the very establishment of the Iraqi government there was keen interest in organizing political parties along Western European lines in order to develop a democratic form of government. Two political parties were already in existence under the Ottoman regime, the Covenant (al-Êih) and the Guard of Independence (Haras al-Istiqlâl), which aimed at defending Arab rights against the
Turks. After the accession of Faysal to the throne in 1921, three new main parties were established: 1. the National Party (al-Hizb al-Watani), led by Ja‘far Abū at-Timman; 2. the People’s Party (Hizb ash-Sha‘b) led by Yāsīn al-Hāshimī; and 3. the Progressive Party (Hizb at-Taqaddum), led by ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Sa‘dūn. These three parties had essentially the same objective, that is, the termination of the mandate and winning of independence. They differed only in means of achieving that objective, not on social or economic issues. The Progressive Party was dissolved at the end of 1929 after ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Sa‘dūn’s death.

The political life in the new Iraqi state soon took on a character of struggle among different sections of the very heterogeneous Iraqi society and its internal political dynamics persisted right up to the fall of monarchy. Politics ran mainly on personal lines. Family relations played a large role. Many politicians were related through marriage; others put several generations of family members in cabinets. Birth and social status were also important. One group of Arab ṣunni politicians came from wealthy, prestigious families who had long played a role in Iraqi society and politics. A number had impeccable Arab nationalist credentials as members of the pre-war secret societies, or had been representatives of the Iraqi provinces in the Ottoman parliament. Usually they were among the few who had attained higher education in Europe or in Ottoman civilian institutions. The other dominant group was composed of the Ottoman-trained army officers and bureaucrats who had used the free education system established by the Ottomans as a route to social mobility. Most came from undistinguished family origins, and had risen through merit. They had to contend with opposition from the side of the established families, who found it difficult to suffer with equanimity the abrupt ascent to influence of men whom they regarded as upstarts. More important, attachment to the Arab cause and to Faysal’s movement in Syria now gave them an advantage. Both groups, however, were urban and secularly educated, and both regarded sectarianism and tribalism with distaste and suspicion. The men of the first group resented the supporters brought by Faysal from Syria, in some cases because these supporters were of Syrian origin; in other cases because of their low social

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2 In Al-HASNAl, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzaq Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqlya. (The History of Iraqi Cabinets), p. 280.
3 MARR, Phebe The Modern History of Iraq, p. 46.
4 GOMBÁR, Eduard Kmeny a klany v arabské politice. (Tribes and Clans in Arab Politics), p. 169.
5 BATATU, Hanna The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: a Study of Iraq’s Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba’thists and Free Officers, p. 322.
In January 1926, at the time of the signature of the second Treaty with Britain, Abdalmuhsin as-Saadūn had been prime minister of Iraq for some six months, heading a cabinet which was supported in the chamber of deputies by a bloc associated with the prime minister’s Progressive Party, while the “opposition”, led by Yāsīn al-Hāshimī and Rashid Ālī al-Kaylānī, drew its support from the People’s Party and the Iraqi Renaissance Party, (Ḥizb annahḍa al-īrāq) short-lived in 1922, and then revived under almost exclusively shīʿī leadership and presided over by Amīn al-Charchafchī.

The general policy of the Progressive Party was of cooperation with Britain and the pursuit of independence for Iraq at whatever pace Britain seemed to be dictating. In consequence, Abdalmuhsin as-Saadūn’s relations with the British residency were normally excellent, which inevitably strained his relations with King Faysal. The king, while respecting his prime minister’s competence, saw his own role in the conduct of affairs diminishing, and, seeking to provide a counter-balance, suggested to Abdalmuhsin as-Saadūn at the end of October 1926 that members of the opposition should be given under-secretaryships at ministries, and other measures disagreeable to the prime minister.

Abdalmuhsin as-Saadūn suggested an election, which he considered would strengthen his position in the chamber, but the king, fearing just this result, opposed a dissolution. Abdalmuhsin as-Saadūn, annoyed at the king’s evident lack of support for his cabinet, decided to make the election of the president of the chamber of deputies a vote of confidence in himself, so that when his nominee, Ḥikmat Sulaymān, was defeated by Rashid Ālī al-Kaylānī, he promptly resigned from office. The opposition, headed by Yāsīn al-Hāshimī,

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6 As-SUWAYDI, Tawfīq Wujūh ʿirāqīya ʿabra at-tārīkh. (Iraqi Personalities Through History), pp. 6-8.
7 Abdalmuhsin as-Saadūn was also Minister of Foreign Affairs and the cabinet included Nūrī as-Saʿād as Minister of Defence, Rashīd Ālī al-Kaylānī as Minister of Interior, Nājī as-Suwaydī as Minister of Justice, Šābīḥ Nashʿat as Minister of Finance, Ḥikmat Sulaymān as Minister of Education. In AL-HASANI, as-Sayyid Abdarrazzaq Tārikh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya. (The History of Iraqi Cabinets), p. 5.
10 Cit. In SLUGLETT, Peter Britain in Iraq, 1914–1932, p. 141.
11 AL-HASANI, as-Sayyid Abdarrazzaq Tārikh al-ʿIrāq as-siyāsī al-ḥadīth. (The Modern History of Iraq), p. 35.
suggested that Ja'far al-'Askari should be invited to return from the Legation in London to head a government which would include Yasin al-Hashimi and Rashid 'Ali al-Kaylani, and this course was adopted.

The second cabinet of 'Abdalmuhsin as-Saadun resigned on 1 November 1926, shortly after the new parliament on the first day of its session failed to support its candidate 'Hikmat Sulayman as speaker of the national assembly. This had allowed the king to call upon his trusted associate Ja'far al-'Askari, then Iraqi minister in London, once more. He was summoned home and three weeks later, on 21 November, formed a coalition ministry. It was during his premiership that three issues came to the fore which typified the nature of the emerging Iraqi state and its relationship with different sections of the Iraqi population. One was the struggle over the treaty, the second was the issue of conscription as a basis for recruitment to the Iraqi army, and the third was the related issue of shii discontent.

The real reason for this change was that the king, together with Nurri as-Sa'id and Yasin al-Hashimi, wanted to form a cabinet which would have a greater chance of persuading the chamber to accept conscription, and thus be in what they considered a better position to obtain independence (through full League of Nations membership) in 1928. It was felt that 'Abdalmuhsin as-Saadun would not be able to act contrary to the known views of the British residency, while Ja'far al-'Askari would be content to act as a figurehead for Nurri as-Sa'id, Rashid 'Ali al-Kaylani and Yasin al-Hashimi, all of whom, with the king, were strong advocates of compulsory military service. A conscript and therefore relatively cheap army would be within Iraq's current means, and since military self-sufficiency was considered a vital criterion for independence,

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13 The cabinet included: Ja'far al-'Askari as Prime Minister and at Foreign Affairs, Rashid 'Ali al-Kaylani at Interior, Yasin al-Hashimi at Finance, Ra'af al-Chadirchi in Justice, Nurri as-Sa'id in Defence, Muhammad Amin Zak in Works and Communication, as-Sayyid 'Abdalmahdi at Education, and Amin 'Ali Bash Ayyan at Awqaf, as-Sayyid 'Abdalmahdi at Education. In: AL-HASAN'I, as-Sayyid 'Abdarrazzag Tarih al-wizarat al-LIraqiyya, p. 86.

14 AHMAD, Ibrahim Khalil and Ja'far 'Abbás IHUMAJDI Tarih al-'Iraq al-mu'asir. (Contemporary History of Iraq), p. 61.

15 MUHAMMAD, 'Ala Jäsim Ja'far al-'Askari wa dawruhu as-siyasi wa al-'askari fi tarih al-'Iraq lattâ 'am 1936. (Ja'far al-'Askari and His Political and Military Role in Iraqi History until 1936), p. 110.
a pro-conscription cabinet would have a better chance of achieving early League membership.

The controversy surrounding the introduction of conscription had important effects both on Anglo-Iraqi relations and on the internal politics of Iraq, and it is appropriate to separate the political from the specifically military aspects of the problem. Under the arrangements in force in the autumn of 1926, the Military Agreement of 1924 would terminate at the end of 1928. At that time, theoretically, Iraq would assume full responsibility for her own defence, therefore the question of conscription became a political issue. On the one hand the Iraqi government could bring pressure on Britain to make good the promise of an Iraqi air force, which had in fact been promised under the 1924 Military Agreement but whose formation had been successfully blocked by the Air Ministry. On the other hand, King Faysal and his close personal associates, most prominent among whom were the high ex-Ottoman officers Nūrī as-Sā‘īd and Yāsīn al-Hāshimī who on 28 November 1926 formed the cabinet’s financial and defence commission, favoured a much larger army (figures of between fifteen and twenty thousand were mentioned) together with an Iraqi air force. Only this, they considered, would be sufficient to guarantee the country’s independence, for only with so large an army could Iraq even attempt to dispense with British military help.

Major-General A. C. Daly, the recently appointed Inspector-General of the Iraqi army who had arrived in Baghdad in the early summer of 1925, showed himself as a supporter of conscription. By March 1926, General Daly had completed the preparation of a defence scheme for Iraq, which took account of the gradually decreasing role to be played by British forces. The scheme was designed to maintain existing defence strength, but with a greater military commitment on Iraq’s part. However, the plans outlined were infinitely more ambitious and grandiose than Sir Henry Dobbs the high commissioner desired, and rested on principles to which he was fundamentally opposed. The defect in the proposed scheme, apart from the obvious lack of money required, was the fact that the conscription would meet with serious opposition from the rest of

17 SLUGLETT, Peter Britain in Iraq, 1914 – 1932, p. 142.
18 Al-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarraẓzāq Al-ʿIrāq fī ʿall al-muʿāhādāt, p. 162.
20 Daly’s Memorandum of 7 March 1926. Cit. In SLUGLETT, Britain in Iraq, 1914 – 1932, p. 144.
the population of the country. The sunnī townsmen would lead the army, and thus be able to maintain the traditional dominance of town over countryside, while the shīʿī tribes in the south, and the Kurds and Turkomans in the north, would not acquiesce in the scheme for precisely that reason. Furthermore, the application of the conscription would strengthen the hands of tribal shaykhhs who would be able to pay off old scores by picking tribal sections led by their rivals for the leadership and sending them off to the army.

In October 1926, the Iraqi government presented Sir Henry Dobbs with a draft conscription law. By submitting the draft, together with his own comments, to the Colonial Office, Henry Dobbs left Whitehall with little alternative but to tackle the problem and to reach negative conclusions identical to his own. The decision, that active British support would not be given, was communicated to the Iraq Government in January 1927. Although there was no official announcement, the attitude of the Residency, and, by extension, of the Colonial Office, was well known in Baghdad political circles. Sir Henry Dobbs, fearing a cabinet crisis, did not insist on a formal British statement, unless direct questions were asked in the chamber of deputies. By mid-May 1927, with no actual progress either on conscription or the revision of the agreements, which would enable Iraq to enter the League in 1928, the cabinet’s resignation was expected.

The year 1927 had some features of special political interest. The first of these was a revival of the shīʿī element as a political force and a demand for its participation in public life as equals in patriotism, in intelligence, and in wealth – and as numerical superiors – was inevitable. It could no longer be satisfied by a small minority of government posts and the usual single seat in the cabinet. It could count upon a section of the intelligentsia now growing up, and upon the powerful and sect-conscious shīʿī bloc of mid-Euphrates tribes.

The conscription issue was a second dominant interest of the time as the Iraqi monarchy wanted to strengthen the country militarily. On 27 May 1927, the King asked the shīʿī politicians to support the cabinet on this issue, but the shīʿī circles were openly against it stressing that the British were also opposed

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21 AHMAD, Ibrāhīm Khalīl and HUMAIDĪ, Jaʿfar ʿAbbās Tārīkh al-ʿIrāq al-muʿāṣir, p. 63.
22 Al-ḤASANI, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazaqa Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqiyya, p. 100.
Public opinion in Baghdad became convinced that the threats and manoeuvres of the cabinet were merely intended to impress and coerce the British into agreeing to support the National Defence Bill and secure modification of the military and financial agreements. On 8 June 1927, the last day of the parliamentary session, this Bill— in effect a demand for conscription — was given its first formal reading in the chamber of deputies. As had been expected this redoubled Shi‘i anti-government agitation. The Shi‘i Minister of Education, Sayyid ‘Abdalmahdī, resigned immediately, and was replaced at Education by Amīn Zakī, and the latter at Irrigation and Agriculture by the Shi‘i Ḍalwān al-Yāsīrī. With the ending of the session, the issue slipped quietly into the background for the time being. The prime minister secured an adjournment of parliament in time to save his cabinet; but it led only to the transfer of the main political activity from Baghdad to the Euphrates.

Nevertheless, under British aegis the Iraqi army and the security system continued the build up. The British wartime communications facilities were converted to commercial use, although the shortage of funds all through the 1920s and 1930s prohibited any large-scale building programme. In July 1927 the first group of forty-seven army cadets graduated from the Royal military academy; thirteen more finished their studies in England. The majority of army recruits came from the Shi‘i south — the area the nationalists most desired to penetrate. The army continued to be the focus of nationalist hopes. Nationalists attempted several times to introduce a conscription bill, but this was opposed by the British and the tribes, and the bill was withdrawn.

An episode in early 1927, the publication of a book unfriendly to Shi‘ism by a Sunnī schoolmaster, began a sequence of events which sparked off widespread protests, involved ministerial intervention as well as quarrels in the higher circles of the Ministry of Education. The political world was divided, in a day, by a Sunnī-Shi‘i dichotomy; meetings of indignant demand for Shi‘i rights were held in Baghdad and the Shi‘i holy cities, enlivened by a wealth of inflammatory stories of Sunnī oppression.

In July 1927 a violent scuffle occurred in al-Kāzimīya during the Shi‘i 10th of Muharram procession between Iraqi troops and Shi‘i worshipers: shots were fired by a unit of the Iraqi army and a number of people were killed. The
protests which followed no longer emanated only from the mujtahids, but came also from the lay sections of the Shi'ites, represented by the reconstituted Nahda Party. The party organized demonstrations in Karbala and an-Najaf, and inspired articles in its newspapers so savage as to lead Yāsīn al-Hāshimī, as acting prime minister, to suppress it, but this provoked a violent outcry.30 When his action was questioned, he was forced to resign, and in this step was followed shortly by Rashid ʿĀli al-Kaylānī. It needed all the king’s tact and generosity to prevent grave consequences. The year ended with the shībī bloc dangerously militant and the government gravely weakened.

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The Iraqi government was permanently in crisis due to the perennial question of the relationship with Great Britain. Under the Treaty of January 1926 the question of Iraq’s membership of the League of Nations was to be reviewed in January 1928 and thereafter every four years. The British government notified Iraq in July 1927 that it would consider a recommendation for such membership in 1932, but not in 1928.31 This was a disappointing development for the eager Iraqi statesmen who were willing to negotiate a new treaty. This led to a new round of talks in London late that year. The king, the prime minister and other ministers and the high commissioner participated and on 14 December 1927 a new Treaty was signed by Jaʿfar al-ʿAskari and Mr. William Ormsby-Gore of the Colonial Office.32 Its validity, subject to approval by the League Council as well as by the Iraqi assembly, was also dependent on a revision of the military and financial agreements.

The only concession to Iraq was the promise that the British government would support Iraq’s membership of the League of Nations in 1932, thus selling a date to the end of the Mandate. For many Iraqis this was heavily qualified by the British assertion that their support would be forthcoming “provided the present rate of progress in Iraq is maintained and all goes well in the interval”. This seemed like a threat. The new Treaty marked a certain advance for Iraq because it admitted that the 1922 and 1926 Treaties had already been superseded by events and it treated Iraq explicitly as an independent sovereign state, and dealt with its internal and international obligations as such; and by its terms the British government undertook to support Iraq’s candidature for League membership in 1932 “provided the present rate of progress in Iraq is

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30 TRIPP, Charles A History of Iraq, p. 63.
31 Al-HASANI, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq Ṭārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿIrāqiyya, pp. 130–131.
32 Al-HASANI, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq Al-ʿIrāq fī qill al-muʿāhadāt, p. 176.
maintained and all goes well in the interval".\textsuperscript{33} It was largely by reason of this proviso that the draft treaty was coldly greeted in Iraq by almost all political elements.

The most pressing problem facing the Ja'far al-Askari's government was the revision of the military agreement with Britain that had been written into the 1927 Treaty. This, particularly, involved problems of finance and organization: how much money could Iraq spend on the armed forces. On 20 December 1927, Sir Henry Dobbs had informed the Colonial Office that the ministers were anxious for detailed proposals from Britain on the amount and nature of the assistance which would be given to the Iraqi forces to enable the government to produce estimates for the coming budget. The problem of defence arrangements had become particularly acute in the face of threats of invasion from Najd and pressure from the Baghdad press for an "active" defence policy. Dobbs asked for authorization to tell the Iraqi government formally that the "Daly scheme" must now be dropped, because of opposition to conscription and suggested that Britain should continue to give a subsidy to the Iraqi army for 1928–1931, and that Britain would continue to honour her pledge to train Iraqis for the Iraqi Air Force.\textsuperscript{34}

The muted reception of the draft treaty in Iraq and the failure of the government to get its conscription bill through parliament, as well as continuing shi'i unrest and the resignation of a number of powerful figures from his government, extraordinarily weakened the Iraqi government and led to Ja'far al-Askari's resignation on 8 January 1928.\textsuperscript{35} The ensuing situation, just as in November 1922 and July 1925, called for a more or less "non-political" ministry, since neither the nationalists nor the court party would accept office under the circumstances of the latest treaty negotiations. Only one man, 'Abdalmuhsin as-Sa'dun, could be relied upon both by the palace and by the British residency, to form a government, and the known coolness between 'Abdalmuhsin as-Sa'dun and the king had the advantage of enabling the latter to plead, if necessary, to his own supporters that the choice had been forced upon him by Britain.\textsuperscript{36}

On 14 November 1928 'Abdalmuhsin as-Sa'dun formed a cabinet which included two Shi'ites one Christian, and a body of experienced politicians.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{33} TRIPP, Charles A History of Iraq, p. 63.
\textsuperscript{34} SLUGLETT, Peter Britain in Iraq, 1914–1932, p. 158.
\textsuperscript{35} MUHAMMAD, 'Ala Jāsim Ja'far al-Askari wa dawruhu as-siyāsī wa al-'askari fi tārikh al-'Irāq ūttā 'ām 1936, p. 130.
\textsuperscript{36} Al-HASANI, as-Sayyid 'Abdarrazzāq Tārikh al-'Irāq as-siyāsī al-ḥadīth, Vol. 3, pp. 42–43.
\textsuperscript{37} The new ministry contained 'Abdalmuhsin as-Sa'dun himself at Defence, the moderate and experienced ex-mutasarrif 'Abdal'aziz al-Qaşšāb at Interior, the Christian
The new cabinet itself was in a highly unenviable position since it lacked the support of the palace, the nationalists, and the Shi'ites, and the prime minister could be attacked with some justification by all three groups on the grounds that he was no more than the high commissioner's nominee. On 18 January 1928 the parliament was dissolved and the prime minister soon called for general elections in the belief that a new parliament would allow him to renegotiate the troubling military and financial agreements with Great Britain and thus ensure the passage of the draft treaty of 1927.\(^{38}\) The situation early in 1928 was that although it was known that the RAF would be retained in Iraq for some indefinite period after the end of 1928, the precise details, and particularly the cost to Iraq, had still to be worked out. In the absence of any definite information on such matters, conscription still remained a live issue. Though 'Abdalmuhsin as-Sacdūn was not inclined to favour its introduction, he realized that it might become an important issue in the elections.

In fact, in the course of the year it became clear that Iraqi politicians, of whatever political complexion, were convinced that the object of British policy was to maintain Iraq in a state of dependence on Britain and not to allow her to build up the necessary forces to make the promised independence a reality. Conclusion of the treaty was for a long time delayed due to ongoing opposition of nationalist circles.\(^{39}\) In the course of these months Faysal and Nūrī as-Sa'īd did their best to secure an anti-prime minister chamber, hoping, apparently, to defeat the new cabinet and force the reappointment of the Ja'far al-'Askārī cabinet with enhanced powers.\(^{40}\) At the same time, Faysal was trying to influence the Shi'ites either to oppose 'Abdalmuhsin as-Sacdūn themselves, or to join the palace party, pointing out 'Abdalmuhsin as-Sacdūn's record of intolerance towards the Shi'ites. During the protracted electoral process from mid-January to mid-May 1928, government intervention produced both a supportive parliament and one which contained substantial Shi'ite representation.

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helping the prime minister’s efforts at reconciliation with the Shi‘ites. However, by the time the new parliament met in May, most of the opposition to the cabinet had either been defeated at the polls or simply melted away. Out of a chamber of 88 deputies, 66 could be counted upon to support the government, proving almost incontrovertibly the power of the government of the day to rig the returns in its own favour.

Little progress towards the re-negotiation of the agreements had been possible over these months, although Henry Dobbs had repeatedly tried to ease his own and ‘Abdalmu‘sin as-Sa‘dun’s position by asking the Colonial Office to intercede with the Treasury to make concessions in the more sensitive areas of disagreement, namely the RAF costs, as most people in Iraq were aware of the fact that the RAF was in Iraq to protect the Abadan oil refinery and the developing Iraqi oilfields, to safeguard imperial air communications, and to be trained in desert terrain. The year 1928 saw the worst phases of the “absurd situation” (al-wada‘ ash-sha‘dat) exploited by the Iraqi journalists and humorists. The “absurdity” was that of independence – under a mandate, ministerial responsibility – under advisory watchfulness, aspiration to military strength – but with conscription forbidden, etc. At that time, no proposal could be put forward by the Iraqi prime minister or the cabinet that the Colonial Office did not seem to reject out of hand, and yet the possibility of independence was only five years away.

The whole period between the autumn of 1927 and September 1929 was marked by a sense of the impotence of the Iraq government in the face of British refusal to compromise. The main difference outstanding between the British and Iraqi government at this stage was the question of defence. In October 1928, Sir Henry Dobbs wondered whether it might not after all be possible for Britain to relax her control over the Iraqi army and let the Iraqis go their own way. However, after some weeks the British government replied that it was unable to accept the proposed policy. If presented direct to the Iraqi government this statement would, as Dobbs knew, cause the cabinet’s immediate resignation. In London, the seriousness of the situation was readily

41 TRIPP, Charles A History of Iraq, p. 63.
46 SLUGLETT, Peter Britain in Iraq, 1914 – 1932, p. 162.
apparent. It was feared that the whole basis of cooperation on which the existing arrangements depended might collapse. They hoped that the newly appointed high commissioner Sir Gilbert Clayton would be able to find a way out of this dilemma.

The Iraqi government apparently hoped that the new high commissioner, an old friend of the King and Nūrī as-Sa‘īd, might be able to find some way out of the dilemma that would be less wounding to Iraqi susceptibilities. Ābdalmuhsin as-Sa‘dūn was less successful in renegotiating the military agreements. Great Britain refused to make any concessions and rejected his proposals of January 1929, forcing him to resign. He stayed on for some months as a caretaker prime minister, largely because few politicians were willing to take on a job that circumstances made almost impossible to hold successfully.⁴⁷ Although the nationalist contingent had tried throughout the 1920s to eliminate or modify the treaty, their only success had been some cosmetic changes in 1927. By 1929, matters had reached a crisis point. Even Ābdalmuhsin as-Sa‘dūn, a staunch supporter of the British, was worn down and frustrated. In January 1929, he and his entire cabinet resigned, and for three months Iraq was without an official government.

The high commissioner Sir Henry Dobbs departed Baghdad on 3 February 1929 and his successor Sir Gilbert Clayton, who had a reputation for sympathy with Iraq, arrived on 2 March.⁴⁸ On 28 April 1929 a government was finally formed under Tawfīq as-Suwaydī,⁴⁹ but it accomplished nothing with respect to the treaty.⁵⁰

Parliament supported him, but the king and Nūrī as-Sa‘īd, who was now emerging as the leader of a formidable court faction, undermined him, causing him to resign on 19 September and to give way to Ābdalmuhsin as-Sa‘dūn, who assumed his third premiership once more the same day. Meanwhile, everything depended on a British initiative. This came in September 1929, following the June election of a Labour government in Great Britain and the announcement of its intention to support Iraq’s admission to the League of

⁴⁷ TRIPP, Charles A History of Iraq, p. 63.
⁵⁰ As-SUWAJDĪ, Tawfīq Mudhakkirāt. Niṣf qarn min tārīkh al-‘Īraq wa al-qaḍīya al-īrāqīya, p. 145.
Nations in 1932 and negotiate a new treaty recognizing Iraq’s independence, recognizing Iraq’s responsibility for its own defence.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{5}Abdalmuhsin as-Sa’dün formed a new cabinet and began negotiations, but they soon got bogged down.\textsuperscript{52} Although initially encouraged by the British initiative in 1929, he had little success in either advancing the cause of a revised treaty or in winning the confidence of the king. Sir Gilbert Clayton’s sudden death in September 1929 deprived him of an important ally and his sense of political helplessness, compounded by personal problems. Shortly after resuming office \textsuperscript{5}Abdalmuhsin as-Sa’dün had been attacked in parliament for his position on the treaty, and evidently depressed over attempts to reconcile the Iraqi position with that of the British, on 13 November he committed suicide. In his suicide note written in Turkish he stated: “The nation expects service, but the British do not agree to our demands. . . . The Iraqi people, who are demanding independence, are, in fact, weak . . . yet they have been unable to appreciate advice given by men of honour like myself.”\textsuperscript{53} Although he was not always appreciated by the anti-British contingent, \textsuperscript{5}Abdalmuhsin as-Sa’dün’s services to the nation as a mediator between the British and the Iraqis had been considerable. His death was a signal that the period of conciliation was over and that some British concessions had to be forthcoming.

\textsuperscript{5}Abdalmuhsin as-Sa’dün was succeeded as prime minister by Nāji as-Suwaydī (elder brother of Tawfīq),\textsuperscript{54} but he too proved unable to deal with the mounting pressures for a treaty to pave the way to independence. Street demonstrations, indicating more systematic use of the new style of urban politics, attacks in the press which he was unable to confront and the undermining of his position within the elite by the king and Nūrī as-Sa’d led

\textsuperscript{51}TRIPP, Charles \textit{A History of Iraq}, p. 64.
\textsuperscript{52} The ministry contained \textsuperscript{5}Abdalmuhsin as-Sa’dün as Prime Minister, and at Foreign Affairs, Nāji as-Suwaydī at Interior, Yāsīn al-Hāshimī at Finance, Nāji Shawkat at Justice, Nūrī as-Sa’īd at Defence, \textsuperscript{5}Abdalhusayn al-Chalabi at Education, \textsuperscript{5}Abdalhazīz al-Qasṣāb at Irrigation and Agriculture, and Muḥammad Amīn Zakī at Works and Communications. In Al-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid \textsuperscript{5}Abdarrazzaq \textit{Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-‘Irāqīya}. Vol. 2, p. 265.
\textsuperscript{53} Text of the note in Turkish and Arabic, In Al-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid \textsuperscript{5}Abdarrazzaq \textit{Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-‘Irāqīya}. Vol. 2, p. 284.
\textsuperscript{54} The cabinet included: Nāji as-Suwaydī as Prime Minister, and at Foreign Affairs, Nāji Shawkat at Interior, Yāsīn al-Hāshimī at Finance, \textsuperscript{5}Abdalhazīz al-Qasṣāb at Justice, Nūrī as-Sa’īd at Defence, Khālid Sulaymān at Irrigation and Agriculture, \textsuperscript{5}Abdalhusayn al-Chalabi at Education, and Muḥammad Amīn Zakī at Works and Communications. In Al-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid \textsuperscript{5}Abdarrazzaq \textit{Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-‘Irāqīya}. Vol. 2, p. 286.
Nājī as-Suwayḍī to resign in March 1930. Fāyṣal took this opportunity to bring in the man he had desired all along, Nūrī as-SA‘īd. Although the British had some doubts about Nūrī as-SA‘īd’s ability to handle the situation, they were soon disabused of this idea. Nūrī as-SA‘īd’s firm hand was needed, for the government was faced with a more broadly based and vocal opposition movement than ever before. For the first time, Nūrī as-SA‘īd was to use the tactics for which he later became famous. The opposition was silenced, the press muzzled, and parliament prorogued. Nūrī as-SA‘īd’s successful handling of the treaty issue and the internal opposition raised him to the position of Iraq’s first politician in the eyes of the British, a position he was to hold thereafter. The untimely death of ‘Abdalmuḥsin as-SA‘dūn paved the way for Iraq’s new strongman.

Iraqi reactions to the treaty were mixed. The nationalists bitterly opposed the twenty-five-year duration, British leasing of the two air bases, the provisions requiring consultation on foreign policy, and the continued employment of British advisers. Although suppressed by Nūrī as-SA‘īd and tempered by subsequent events, opposition to the treaty and the foreign tie continued to surface in subsequent years, and even during periods of calm, suspicions of Britain’s hidden hand behind the scenes remained. It is only in the light of this continued opposition to the treaty that the revolution of 1958 and anti-Western sentiment since that date can be understood.

While the nationalists opposed the treaty because it did not sever the British tie, Iraqi minorities – in particular the Christians and the Kurds – opposed the treaty because it weakened the tie. Fearful for their status, they began the agitation that was to plague the new state in the decade after independence. The Kurds in particular demanded specific safeguards from the League of Nations. Several uprisings in the north, one led by Shaykh Mahmūd, and another by Aḥmad al-Bārzānī, had to be put down by armed force with the help of the RAF. Through all of this, however, the king and Nūrī as-SA‘īd stood firm, and in October 1932 Iraq was admitted to the League of Nations, the first mandated state to receive its formal independence.

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56 BIRDWOOD, Lord Nūrī as-Saʿīd. A Study in Arab Leadership, p. 150.
58 GHAŞSEMLOU, Abdul Rahman Kurdistān a Kurdovia. (Kurdistan and the Kurds), p. 58.
Although the Kurdish problem had been temporarily solved, the oil question remained. The oil concession and the revenues it eventually brought Iraq are among the most important legacies of the British mandate. Despite official disclaimers, British policymakers were fairly certain of substantial oil deposits in the Moșul wilâya, and this was a prime motive behind their desire to attach Moșul to the newly emerging Iraqi state. In fact, the British-controlled Turkish Petroleum Company (TPC) had held a concession for the area from the Ottomans, a concession invalidated by the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The French were compensated for having given up the Moșul wilâya (part of their sphere of influence under the Sykes-Picot Agreement) with 25 percent of the shares of the TPC in the Long-Berenger Agreement, signed in April 1919.

Negotiations for a new TPC concession from the Iraqi government began late in 1923, and continued during the period of the Moșul crisis. The protracted and often acrimonious negotiations generated a bitterness on the Iraqi side second only to that left by the treaty. Although a number of issues were at stake—the right of Iraq to dispose of plots outside those selected by the company; a sliding scale of royalties to rise with production; and a gold rather than a sterling, basis for royalties—the main sticking point was Iraq’s demand for 20 percent equity participation in the company. This provision had been included in the original TPC concession for the Turks and agreed upon at San Remo for the Iraqis. This equity would have given the Iraqis a voice in the company management and some control over production levels, but the company negotiators refused, compromising instead on other issues.

There is little doubt that fears of losing the Moșul wilâya to Turkey and the need for British support on this issue played a major role in the cabinet’s decision to sign the concession in March 1925. Through manipulating the Moșul issue, the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC), as the company was renamed, undoubtedly got more favourable terms than would have otherwise been the case. Concluded for a period of seventy-five years, the concession made room for U.S. interests in the company in 1928 and eventually included all of Iraq.

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59 SLUGLETT, Peter Britain in Iraq, 1914 – 1932, pp. 193–104.
60 SHWADRAN, Benjamin The Middle East, Oil and the Great Powers, p. 225; LONGRIGG, Stephen Hemsley Oil in the Middle East. Its Discovery and Development, p. 44.
except for Başra, which was given to a subsidiary company, Başra Petroleum Company. Exploitation and production, delayed until settlement of the Mosul issue, did not begin until 1927.

The prospect of full Iraqi independence in 1932 led a section of Kurdish society to give voice to their collective demands as Kurds. Hitherto, public affairs in Kurdistan had been dominated by such figures as Shaykh Mahmûd, or Shaykh Ahmad al-Bârzâni, whose actions had been responsible for disturbances in the northern Kurdish areas in 1927. These leaders had sometimes referred to the independence of Kurdistan, but their objectives were generally parochial, depending on local tribal support, or on networks of sufi brotherhoods. In the wake of the Mosul settlement of 1926, however, groups of urban Kurdish intellectuals began to develop ideas of how best to secure a specifically Kurdish identity and interests within the given framework of the Iraqi state. Therefore, by 1926 there was irritation among educated Kurds that “only the most colourless Kurds” were allowed to become members of parliament, and that the Kurdish press was censored. Some had already entered into close relations with powerful figures in Baghdad, for reasons of individual advancement. Others, however, tried to use such patronage to achieve positions of authority within the Iraqi state, for example, by becoming deputies in parliament, which would allow them to give voice to distinctively Kurdish concerns.

In the summer of 1929, a number of Kurdish deputies submitted a petition asking for increased expenditure in the Kurdish areas as a whole and the formation of an all-Kurdish province composed of Duhûk and other districts of Mosul province, as well as the districts of Irbîl, Sulaymânîya and Kirkûk in which nearly all of the Kurds of Iraq resided. A specifically Kurdish set of demands was emerging, different in origin and intent from the demands habitually made of central government by the tribal leaders and enjoying a different kind of social support. The strategy was aimed at fuller engagement with the Iraqi state, based on the deputies’ familiarity with this world. However, it also expressed a determination that their own concerns should not be excluded or marginalized by those who dominated the new state and hinted that, should this be the case, the Kurdish “party” would request that the mandate stay in force for the full twenty-five years stipulated by the League of Nations. As the pace towards independence accelerated, these demands were repeated with some force.

On 15 October 1927, IPC’s first substantial well was brought in at Baba

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64 McDOWAL, David A Modern History of the Kurds, p. 175.
65 TRIPP, Charles A History of Iraq, p. 64.
Gurgur north of Kirkûk. Tons of oil inundated the countryside before the well could be capped. In 1934 IPC completed a twelve-inch pipeline going to Haifa and Tripoli with the capacity to deliver 4 million tons a year to the Mediterranean. By the end of the year, Iraq was exporting 1 million tons a year, and payments to the government totalled ID 1.5 million. This was still a modest sum for development, however. It was not until the 1950s that substantial revenues from oil began to accrue to Iraq. During the entire mandate period, Iraq lacked the funds for development.

With the oil concession out of the way, the British and the Iraqis could turn to the Mosul question itself. The issue was submitted to the League of Nations for settlement, and between January and March 1925, an international commission conducted an investigation in the area. The pro-Turkish population of the area opposed incorporation into an Arab state, but in the solidly Kurdish areas opinion was decisively anti-Turkish and pro-British, although not pro-Arab. In March 1925, convinced that most of the population preferred British to Turkish rule, the commission recommended that the Mosul wilaya be attached to Iraq, retaining the Brussels line (an interim border fixed by the League of Nations in October 1924, and corresponding mainly to the boundaries of the old Ottoman wilaya) as the frontier. They stipulated, however, that Kurdish rights should be protected by placing Kurds in administrative and educational positions in their territory, and that Kurdish should be the official language in that area.

The establishment of urban Arab Sunnis in the political sphere was accompanied by developments in the economic sphere that tended to bolster their position. The growth of a new landed class, due largely to the acquisition by private individuals of prescriptive rights over large tracts of land, was one. Many of these investors were resident tribal shaykhs anxious to gain legal title to the land inhabited by their tribes, but most were urban investors and speculators who, profiting from the security introduced by the mandate, borrowed capital and bought up land. The 1920s was also marked by a striking growth in private ownership of irrigation pumps in the riverside tracts of Iraq. Many politicians were already landowners themselves; others became

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68 EDMONDS, C. J. Kurds, Turks and Arabs, p. 431.
landowners, gaining title to land through this and other laws. By 1930, the growth of a new oligarchy of landlords, urban entrepreneurs, and politicians was well under way. Meanwhile, the reach of the central government was extended, slowly but surely, into the countryside. One indication of this was the increased effectiveness of tax collecting, which now reached painfully mainly peasants and workers. However, the tax laws were imperfectly enforced, with the burden falling mainly on those who were salaried rather than on the wealthy and influential, who largely avoided taxation.

Toward the end of the 1920s Iraq, like other countries, suffered from the depression. The Hilton Young report of 1930 summed up Iraq’s economic situation. By 1930, bankruptcies had increased, the prices for cotton goods had fallen over 40 percent, and urban unemployment had increased in key industries such as the railroad. As a result, little was accomplished under the mandate in the way of economic or social development. It found a substantial increase in agricultural produce (due to pumps), but no improvement in the quality or variety of products. In 1930, Iraq’s resources were still underdeveloped, and a large proportion of its population remained illiterate. The educational situation under the mandate was abysmal, partly owing to lack of funds and partly owing to the small numbers trained by the British, who were afraid of producing more graduates than the bureaucracy could absorb. In the year 1930, for example, only 1,440 elementary students, 136 intermediate students, and 159 secondary students passed the public examination. A small number went abroad for education. Little was done to create a modern economy. At the end of the mandate, much of Iraq’s countryside — where 70 percent of the population lived — was still virtually untouched by modernization, and modern industry had scarcely begun.

Meanwhile, new social classes were taking shape. At the upper reaches were the new oligarchy of tribal and urban landowners, investors in pumps, and urban entrepreneurs and merchants, able to profit from the security brought by the mandate. A small middle class of civil servants, retail merchants, and professionals had begun to emerge as well. However, the bulk of the population — urban and rural — remained at or near the poverty level. Urban migration, although not as severe as in the 1930s, produced a group of uprooted people inhabiting urban slums. A small number of workers benefited from the start of the oil industry and the development of the port and the railroad system, but the

lack of funds slowed the growth of industry and infrastructure. In the same time, local artisans and craftsmen were gradually undermined by foreign imports. Iraqi society remained strongly conservative. Family ties were still paramount. Religious communalism was strengthened by the British, who insisted on support for various Christian and Jewish minorities through separate school systems and special representation in parliament.72

The 1920s had been marked by an increasingly lively and sometimes scurrilous press in Iraq, as well as by the flowering of poetry that engaged with the politics of the day. In the emerging debate, both journalistic and literary circles demonstrated a deepening involvement in distinctively Iraqi political issues. Among the still restricted groups of Iraqis actively engaged in national political debate this was influential in a number of ways. It presented an articulate opposition to British control, characterized by telling criticisms both of British policies and of their prejudices in dealing with the Iraqis. Furthermore, it tried to encourage a sense of a distinctively Iraqi national community that would bridge the many particular identities of Iraq's inhabitants. To some extent there was a conscious effort on the part of certain writers to construct a secular identity that would minimize sectarian differences between Sunnis and Shi'ites. It was clear, however, that this was primarily an Arab identity which excluded the Kurdish, let alone the Turkoman, population from consideration — vividly illustrated in writings about the Mosul question which made much of its inclusion within Iraq, but said little about its largely Kurdish inhabitants.73

In April 1930, treaty negotiations were resumed. In June 1930, they culminated in the long-awaited treaty that would take Iraq into the League of Nations. In the autumn, Nur al-As-Saad held a strictly controlled election, and on 16 November 1930 the parliament ratified the treaty 69 to 12. 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 wartime, required close consultation on foreign affairs, and permitted the British to lease two air bases, to be guarded by Iraqis at British 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-Hashbaiya and ash-Shubayba. 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

72 MARR, P. The Modern History of Iraq, p. 50.
73 TRIPP, Ch. A History of Iraq, p. 66.
ambassador, who would take precedence over other ambassadors.  

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