

THE ROLE OF °ABDALMUḤSIN AS-SA°DŪN IN IRAQI POLITICS IN THE 1920s*

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°Abdalmuḥsin ibn Fahd, a scion of the family Āl Sa°dūn, was born in 1879 in an-Nāṣirīya in southern Iraq. Āl Sa°dūn had been a notable *sunni* family of wealthy landowners and *sayyids* which ruled the great Muntafiq confederation of tribes on the lower Euphrates. His father had close ties in the Ottoman court so his son studied in Istanbul and got his commission in the Ottoman army. After the war he returned to Iraq in November 1921 and in March 1922 entered the second cabinet of as-Sayyid °Abdarrahmān al-Kaylānī. Appointed to cabinet positions at the behest of the British, °Abdalmuḥsin as-Sa°dūn soon emerged as a strongman willing to take action against the *shī'ī* °ulamā' and the tribal leaders, against the wishes of a king who was aware of them. During his political career he served as prime minister four times. Although initially encouraged by the British initiative in 1929, °Abdalmuḥsin as-Sa°dūn had little success in either advancing the cause of the revised treaty or in winning the confidence of the king. Disillusionment and political helplessness compounded by personal problems, led to his suicide in November 1929. It is worth mentioning that his statue decorates one of the main streets in Baghdad, "Shāriat as-Sa°dūn".

Key words: Iraq under British mandate, state formation in Iraq, problems of Anglo-Iraqi treaty conclusion

The outcome of the First World War had offered the victorious powers the possibility of re-building in international order. In this changed political atmosphere a mandate system was devised for the peoples concerned in the Arab territories who represented a radical change in the disrupted Ottoman Empire. For them it was a passage from loosely integrated territorial areas of administration, to separate political states with defined boundaries and more modern types of administration largely following European lines, bringing

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greater efficiency and touching the life of the individual at more points.¹ Among those who would restrict the participation of Arabs in the government of Iraq were those who favoured direct British rule. The Arabs themselves defended the standpoint that a degree of responsibility should be given to an indigenous administration.² At any rate the philosophy behind the mandate system was unfamiliar and extremely distasteful to the Arabs. Their leaders and the political class generally felt themselves part of a great Islamic heritage with an ancient history associated with the very birth of human civilisation. They resented the domination from European powers and were fully prepared to take charge of their own destinies.

As Mesopotamia (later Iraq) became Britain's mandatory territory,³ the British – after two years of upheaval – had the task to end direct military rule and establish an indigenous government. At the 1921 Cairo Conference the decision was taken to establish a kingdom of Iraq and to offer the throne to the Hāshimī Amīr Fayṣal who had been forced to flee from Syria after the French occupation in summer 1920.⁴ Thereafter he came under the protection of the British with whom he generally enjoyed good relations, based on the experience of the Arab Revolt and on close relationships with a number of well-placed British officials. As a public figure he was regarded as having a natural authority in the Arab world, but equally importantly, he was believed to be amenable to British advice and well aware of the limitations that the reality of British power in the Middle East would place upon his ambitions.⁵ However, Iraqī opposition effectively destroyed the possibility of an acceptable application of the principle of the mandate in Iraq. Amīr Fayṣal refused the Iraqī throne unless assurances were given that he would not remain ruler of a country under a mandate. One of the first moves of Britain, therefore, was to fulfil her promise and establish treaty relationships with Iraq. This took the form of a twenty-year treaty which effectively incorporated in a different form the terms of the Mandate, but with

¹ PENROSE, E., PENROSE E.F. Iraq: International Relations and National Development, p. 45.

² IRELAND, P.W. Iraq. A Study in Political Development, p. 153.

³ The system was based on the view that the peoples in a large proportion of Africa and a smaller proportion of Asia who had been in a dependent or colonial status were entitled to self-determination, but as yet were insufficiently developed in a material and educational sense to stand wholly by themselves in the modern world. A great power would therefore be given a mandate by the League of Nations over each of the territories brought within the system.

⁴ CATHERWOOD, C. Winston's Folly. Imperialism and the Creation of Modern Iraq, p. 152.

⁵ Al-ADHAMĪ, Muḥammad Muẓaffar. Al-malik Fayṣal al-awwal. Dirāsāt wathā'iqīya fī ḥayātihi as-siyāsīya wa zurūf mamātihi al-ghāmiḍa. [King Fayṣal I. Documentary Studies of his Political Life and Obscure Circumstances of His Death], p. 55.

no mention in it of the mandate and the king was convinced that “His people would appreciate the importance of this treaty.”⁶ Treaty negotiations with the Iraqis were begun shortly after Fayṣal was installed as king, and by February 1922 a treaty approved by the British Colonial Office was placed before the Iraqi Council of Ministers for discussion. It was debated, often bitterly, for eight months. Various modifications were suggested, but the main Iraqi objection was that the treaty did not abrogate the mandate.⁷

As treaty discussions in the Iraqi cabinet proceeded early in 1922, the strata of public opinion on the matter became clearer. Extreme nationalists, who included, for their own different reasons, the *shī‘ī* ‘ulamā⁸ and leading supporters and even intimates of the king, cried out against mandated “slavery” and demanded complete British withdrawal: an outcry which did not fail to produce a reaction “English” party of notables and shaykhs “favourable” to effective British rule. More moderate nationalists, whose views the king personally shared, stood for abrogation of the mandate,⁹ a friendly and equal treaty and continued British support.

During this period, as the new state gained definition, a major preoccupation of those Iraqis who had been placed at the summit of power was the question of the relationship with Great Britain.¹⁰ The facts that one of the parties was overwhelmingly powerful was effectively in military occupation of the other and held the mandate of the League of Nations to rule the other pending true self-government could scarcely be disguised by this fiction. Newspaper articles in the capital grew ever more violent, street demonstrations were attempted in Baghdad and deputations waited upon the king. The cabinet sustained changes on 30 March 1922 with the resignation of five ministers.¹¹ The reconstructed Cabinet accepted the treaty late on 25 June 1922, but it added the proviso, resisted in vain by Sir Percy Cox, that it must be ratified, with the Organic Law (al-Qānūn al-asāsī) and the Electoral Law (Qānūn intikhāb al-majlis at-tashrī‘ī), by the upcoming Constituent Assembly (al-Majlis at-ta’sīsī). This decision had

⁶ In *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 Establishment of the Modern Iraqi State], p. 115.

⁷ MARR, P. *The Modern History of Iraq*, 1985, p. 38.

⁸ ‘Alīm, pl. ‘ulamā’ – in the sunnī community, learned men in Islamic jurisprudence and theology. In the shī‘ī community they are called mujtahids.

⁹ Al-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ‘Abdarrazzāq. *Tārīkh al-‘Irāq as-siyāsī al-ḥadīth*. [The Modern Political History of Iraq]. Vol. II, p. 16.

¹⁰ BIRDWOOD, L. Nuri as-Said. *A Study in Arab Leadership*, pp. 142 – 143.

¹¹ They were Nājī as-Suwaydī (Justice), al-Ḥājī Ramzī (Interior), ‘Abdallaṭīf al-Mandīl (Trade), ‘Izzat Bāshā (Works and Transport), and Dr. Hannā Khayyāt (Health). In Al-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ‘Abdarrazzāq. *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-‘irāqīya*. [The History of Iraqi Cabinets]. Vol. I, p. 89.

the effect of linking the treaty with equally controversial debates about the constitutional framework of the new state. The *shīʿī* minister of trade, Jaʿfar abū at-Timman, resigned in protest.¹²

Protest meetings were organised in the southern *shīʿī* cities and disturbances erupted in the mid-Euphrates region. These rallied anti-treaty opinion, but also highlighted the particular concern of the *Shīʿites* that the treaty and the institutional arrangements needed for its ratification would consolidate a state over which they had no control and which might habitually ignore their interests.¹³ Cabinet approval of the treaty was followed by an initial beginning of electoral processes. Anti-treaty feelings continued to be excited, to the grave danger of public order by the irreconcilable *shīʿī* mujtahids, by the factions and self-interests of the Euphrates shaykhs, and by a locally partisan administration. Conditions elsewhere in the provinces were uneasy or even threatening and violent trouble was expected.¹⁴ The two new *shīʿī* political parties and a press characterised more by violent rhetoric than by sober comment or a serious news service demanded that the public reject the treaty and refuse to participate in elections.¹⁵ Realising that the king was at least tolerating much of the anti-treaty opposition to themselves and their more moderate councils, the Cabinet, resigned on 14 August 1922.¹⁶

The following days were critical for the Iraqī monarchy. Two days before the awaited first anniversary of coronation day celebrations, 23 August, the two *shīʿī* parties issued a violent manifesto,¹⁷ protested openly to the king against British influence. Public order hung in the balance; no cabinet existed and King Fayṣal was prostrated by an acute attack of appendicitis.¹⁸ Sir Percy Cox seized the moment to impose direct rule, suppressing the most radical parties and newspapers, banishing a number of opposition politicians and ordering the bombing of tribal insurgents in the mid-Euphrates. For the king and for others, there could be no clearer expression of British determination to see the treaty

¹² Ad-DARRĀJĪ, ʿAbdarrazzāq ʿAbd. Jaʿfar abū at-Timman wa dawruhu fī al-ḥaraka al-waṭaniya fī al-ʿIrāq, 1908 – 1945. [Jaʿfar Abū at-Timman and his Role in the Patriotic Movement in Iraq], p. 183.

¹³ TRIPP, C. A History of Iraq, p. 52.

¹⁴ LONGRIGG, S.H. Iraq, 1900 to 1950. A Political, Social and Economic History, p. 141.

¹⁵ Al-HASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq. Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya. Vol. I, pp. 121 – 122; Ad-DARRĀJĪ, ʿAbdarrazzāq ʿAbd. Jaʿfar abū at-Timman wa dawruhu fī al-ḥaraka al-waṭaniya fī al-ʿIrāq, 1908 – 1945, p. 187.

¹⁶ Al-HASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq. Tārīkh al-ʿIrāq as-siyāsī al-ḥadīth. Vol. 2, pp. 20 – 21.

¹⁷ Al-HASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq. Al-ʿIrāq fī ḡill al-muʿāhadāt. [Iraq in the Shadow of Treaties], p. 25.

¹⁸ MUḤAMMAD, ʿAlā Jāsīm. Al-malik Fayṣal al-awwal. Ḥayātuhu wa dawruhu as-siyāsī, 1883 – 1933. [King Fayṣal I. His Life and Political Role], p. 172.

and their plans for the Iraqi state carried through. Thus, when at the end of September 1922 King Fayṣal resumed his duties, he reinstated the *naqīb* (as-Sayyid °Abdarrahmān al-Kaylānī) as prime minister and affirmed his support for the treaty which was signed in October.¹⁹

The measures taken by the high commissioner had, in fact, saved the state from anarchy. The *naqīb* was asked in the improved atmosphere to form another Cabinet.²⁰ The cabinet, reassured at last by the argument that entry to the League of Nations – Iraq’s next goal – would of itself end the unpopular mandate, reaffirmed its acceptance of the treaty, which was signed at last by the prime minister and Sir Percy Cox on 10 October 1922.²¹ At the same time it insisted again that it be submitted to the constituent assembly for ratification – a step the British had tried to avoid. The military agreement provided that within four years Iraq should become entirely self-defending from both internal disorder and external assault. To this end the government would devote not less than a quarter of its revenue to defence. Under the financial agreement, the Kingdom of Iraq agreed to contract no external debts without the agreement of Great Britain. Materials for the British forces were exempted from customs duty and taxes.²²

°Abdalmuḥsin as-Sa°dūn, another *sunnī* notable and landowner was a member of the family of *sayyids* which had ruled the great Muntafiq confederation of tribes on the lower Euphrates, returned to Iraq in November 1921 and in March 1922 entered the second cabinet of as-Sayyid °Abdarrahmān al-Kaylānī after the resignation of five ministers.²³ Appointed to cabinet positions at the behest of the British, °Abdalmuḥsin as-Sa°dūn had soon emerged as a strongman willing to take action against the *shī°ī °ulamā’* and the tribal leaders, against the wishes of a king who was aware of them. When the elderly and exhausted Prime Minister °Abdarrahmān al-Kaylānī faced by continuing opposition in the *shī°ī* areas, as well as by demonstrations in

¹⁹ Al-ḤASANĪ, as-Sajjid °Abdarrazzāq. *Al-°Irāq fī dawray al-iḥtilāl wa al-intidāb*. [Iraq in the Two Periods of Occupation and Mandate]. Vol. II, p. 15.

²⁰ In the Cabinet he included: °Abdalmuḥsin as-Sa°dūn at Interior, Tawfiq al-Khālidī at Justice, Sāsūn Ḥasqayl at Finance, Ja°far al-°Askarī at Defence, Muḥammad °Alī Fāḍil at Waqfs, Ṣabīḥ Nasha’t at Works and Communication, and al-Ḥājj °Abdalmuḥsin Chalabī °Al Shallāsh at Education. In Al-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid °Abdarrazzāq. *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-°irāqīya*. Vol. I, p. 133.

²¹ Al-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid °Abdarrazzāq. *Tārīkh al-°Irāq as-siyāsī al-ḥadīth*. Vol. II, p. 28.

²² LONGRIGG, S.H. *Iraq, 1900 to 1950. A Political, Social and Economic History*, p. 143.

²³ FARAJ, Luṭfī Ja°far. °Abdalmuḥsin as-Sa°dūn wa dawruhu fī tārīkh al-°Irāq as-siyāsī al-mu°āṣir. [°Abdalmuḥsin as-Sa°dūn and his Role in the Contemporary Political History of Iraq], p. 55.

Baghdad that gave substance to the new forms of politics which were so alien to him, resigned the premiership on 16 November 1922.²⁴

Two days later ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn succeeded him as prime minister and formed his first cabinet on 18 November 1922.²⁵ His strength and support for the treaty, as well as his patrician background, commended him to the British, who attempted to place him in authority whenever the treaty issue was afoot. These same qualities aroused the suspicion and animosity of Fayṣal, who just as often intrigued to remove him.²⁶ However, the British saw him as someone with sufficient personal authority and social standing to carry through the treaty and the other measures required for the constitutional foundation of the Iraqi state. The new government was committed to acceptance of the treaty, to the convening of the Constituent Assembly and to the defence of Iraq’s integrity against Turkish claims.²⁷

The struggle over the treaty, however, was only one dimension of political life in the new state. Internal political dynamics soon took on a character that persisted for several decades. Political life came to revolve around a tripartite balance of power. One part consisted of the king, a foreign monarch suffering from a “credibility gap” as an outsider, dependent on the British for his position, but anxious to develop a more permanent power base among the local politicians.²⁸ The king often sided with the British and took on the opposition forces if he thought that they were acting against national interest as he perceived, it can be gleaned from the intense conflict that preceded the elections to the Constituent Assembly in 1924.²⁹ Another part comprised the British, always fearful of a rebellious parliament and anxious to see their supporters in

²⁴ AḤMAD, Ibrāhīm Khalīl, ḤUMAJDĪ Jaʿfar ʿAbbās. *Tārīkh al-ʿIrāq al-muʿāṣir*. [Contemporary History of Iraq], p. 38.

²⁵ It retained Sāsūn Ḥasqayl, brought Nājī as-Suwaydī to Interior and ʿAbdallaṭīf al-Mandīl to Waqfs, found room for the usual single shīʿī in the person of al-Ḥājj ʿAbdalmuḥsin Chalabī at the Ministry of Education, and gave the portfolios of Works and Defence respectively to the outstanding ex-generals, Yāsīn al-Ḥāshimī and Nūrī as-Saʿīd. A few days later Nājī as-Suwaydī moved to Justice, and the premier abandoned that portfolio in favour of that of the Interior. In AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq. *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya*. Vol. I, p. 153.

²⁶ NIʿMA, Kāzim. *Al-malik Fayṣal al-awwal wa al-Inklīz wa al-istiqlāl*. [King Fayṣal I, the English and the Independence], p. 131.

²⁷ FARAJ, Luṭfī Jaʿfar. ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn wa dawruhu fī tārīkh al-ʿIrāq as-siyāsī al-muʿāṣir, pp. 72 – 73.

²⁸ MUḤAMMAD, ʿAlā Jāsīm. *Al-malik Fayṣal al-awwal. Ḥayātuhu wa dawruhu as-siyāsī, 1883 – 1933*. [King Fayṣal I. His Life and Political Role], pp. 158 – 161.

²⁹ DAWISHA, Adeed. *Iraq. A Political History from Independence to Occupation*, p. 23.

office as prime ministers and ministers of interior. To this end they continued to insist on substantial tribal representation in parliament.³⁰

Between these two parts was a shifting group of Arab *sunnī* 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. In any case, the opposition parties vigorously opposed the British both during the charged debates over the contents of the treaty paragraphs and through public meetings as well as their newspapers.³¹ Few parties 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 programs on social issues, although economic issues came to be more important in the early 1930s.³²

Family relations played a large role and politics ran mainly on personal lines. 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 *sunnī* 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.³³ These men resented the supporters brought by Fayṣal from Syria, in some cases because these supporters were of Syrian origin; in other cases because of their low social standing.³⁴

The other dominant group was composed of the Ottoman-trained army officers and bureaucrats who had used the free education system established by

³⁰ AL-ADHAMĪ, Muḥammad Muẓaffar. Al-majlis at-ta'sīsī al-^oirāqī. Dirāsa tārikhīya siyāsiya. [The Iraqi Constituent Assembly. Historical, Political Study], pp. 461 – 462.

³¹ AL-MALLĀḤ, ^oAbdalḡanī. Tāriḡh al-ḡaraka ad-dīmuqratiya fī al-^oIrāq. [The History of the Democratic Movement in Iraq], p. 33 – 35.

³² MARR, P. The Modern History of Iraq, p. 46.

³³ AS-SUWAYDĪ, Tawfīq. Mudhakkirātī. Niṣf qarn min tāriḡh al-^oIrāq wa al-qaḡīya al-^oirāqīya. [My Memories. A Half-Century in the History of Iraq and the Iraqi Question], 1969.

³⁴ AS-SUWAYDĪ, Tawfīq. Wujūh ^oirāqīya ^oabra at-tāriḡh. [Iraqi Personalities Through History], pp. 6 – 8.

the Ottomans as a route of social mobility.³⁵ Most came from undistinguished family origins, and had risen through merit. More important, attachment to the Arab cause and to Fayṣal's movement in Syria now gave them an advantage.³⁶ 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.³⁷ Both groups, however, were urban and secularly educated, and both regarded sectarianism and tribalism with distaste and suspicion. King Fayṣal came in turn to rely increasingly upon supporters among the former Ottoman army officers who had served with him in Syria, especially Nūrī as-Saʿīd and Jaʿfar al-ʿAskarī.³⁸ These men, unlike ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn, had no personal wealth or family prestige and hence were more dependent upon the king for their power. They were also, conveniently, supporters of the treaty.

ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn, who clearly represented the first group, rapidly became the outstanding leader of the period. The Saʿdūns, originally a family of notables from al-Ḥijāz, had migrated to the south of Iraq, where they had settled in Baṣra, in al-Kūt, and in al-Muntafiq.³⁹ ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn had been trained in the Ottoman school for the sons of tribal leaders, and had served as an officer and aide de camp to the sultan before the Young Turk revolution. He had supported the Young Turks initially, and had been an Arab representative in the same Ottoman parliament in which Fayṣal had sat.⁴⁰ His wealth, experience, and social standing in Iraq gave ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn a degree of independence possessed by few other politicians.

On 10 October 1922 the Iraqī government signed the Anglo-Iraqī Treaty, which effectively incorporated in a different form the terms of the Mandate. It was followed by further drafting and redrafting, in Baghdad and London, of the promised Organic Law; by the completion of the four subsidiary Agreements: and, months before these were ready, by the acceptance of a Protocol to the Treaty itself. The Protocol resulted in part from increased British realisation of

³⁵ GOMBÁR, E. Kmeny a klany v arabské politice. [Tribes and Clans in Arab Politics], p. 169.

³⁶ At-TIKRĪTĪ, ʿAbdalmajīd Kāmil. Al-malik Fayṣal al-awwal wa dawruhu fī taʿsīs ad-dawla al-ʿirāqīya al-ḥadītha. [King Fayṣal I. and his Role in Establishment of the Modern Iraqī State], p. 177.

³⁷ BATATU, H. The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: a Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Baʿthists and Free Officers, p. 322.

³⁸ MUHAMMAD, ʿAlā Jāsim. Jaʿfar al-ʿAskarī wa dawruhu as-siyāsī wa al-ʿaskarī fī tārikh al-ʿIrāq ḥattā ʿām 1936. [Jaʿfar al-ʿAskarī and His Political and Military Role in Iraqī History until 1936], p. 84.

³⁹ FARAJ, Luṭfī Jaʿfar. ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn wa dawruhu fī tārikh al-ʿIrāq as-siyāsī al-muʿāṣir, pp. 19 – 22.

⁴⁰ GOMBÁR, E., PECHA, L. Dějiny Iráku. [History of Iraq], p. 420.

Iraqi sentiment on mandatory matters, but still more from pressure by the press and public in Britain to diminish British expenditure and commitments in Iraq.⁴¹ The procedure lasted until spring 1923 and the final text was brought back from London to Baghdad in March 1923, and signed by Sir Percy Cox and Prime Minister °Abdalmuhsin as-Sa°dün on the last day of April. Reducing the Treaty period from twenty to four years, it could not fail of a warm reception by the King and politicians alike: only the “anglophiles” among the shaykhs and notables, pronounced it a betrayal.

The signature of the Protocol, Sir Percy Cox’s last act in Iraq, was followed on 5 May by his departure. He had, by his intelligence, patience, and benevolent firmness rendered outstanding services to the State.⁴² The post of High Commissioner went to Sir Henry Dobbs, who had served in Başra in the earliest occupation days and returned from India to Iraq as Sir Percy’s Counsellor late in 1923. He tended to see any opposition to the British efforts as the work of men resolved to act decisively against the treaty.⁴³ Due to discord with the *shī°ī* element and to some disagreements with the king, the cabinet of °Abdalmuhsin as-Sa°dün tendered its resignation.⁴⁴ On King Fayşal’s request Ja°far Pasha al-°Askarī had returned from Geneva. He spent a short time as *mutaşarrif* of Moşul, and was then invited to form the cabinet which should face the Constituent Assembly.⁴⁵

The Constituent Assembly was opened with due ceremonial by the king on 27 March 1924. Under °Abdalmuhsin as-Sa°dün, who was elected president, the assembly had to perform three main tasks: to give its verdict on the treaty; to pass upon the constitution of Iraq and to pass upon the electoral law for parliament which was to represent the nation and guard its independence.⁴⁶ The assembly then proceeded to its first task, the ratification of the Anglo-Iraqi

⁴¹ AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid °Abdarrazzāq. *Al-°Irāq fī zill al-mu°āhadāt*. [Iraq in the Shadow of Treaties], pp. 46 – 49.

⁴² LONGRIGG, S.H. *Iraq, 1900 to 1950. A Political, Social and Economic History*, p. 148.

⁴³ DODGE, T. *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation-Building and a History Denied*, p. 91.

⁴⁴ MUḤAMMAD, °Alā Jāsim. *Ja°far al-°Askarī wa dawruhu as-siyāsī wa al-°askarī fī tārikh al-°Irāq ḥattā °ām 1936* [Ja°far al-°Askarī and His Political and Military Role in Iraqi History until 1936], p. 87.

⁴⁵ Accepting the charge, he retained two *shī°ī* ministers including Muhsin ash-Shallāsh at Finance, brought to Interior °Alī Jawdat al-Ayyūbī (a modern-minded ex-officer who had acted as *mutaşarrif* of Hilla), and completed his team with Şabīh Nash’at, Nūrī as-Sa°īd, and the eminent Moşul and Başra notables, Sayyid Aḥmad al-Fakhrī and shaykh Şālīh Bāsh A°yān, in other Ministries; Sāsūn Ḥaşqayl was omitted for the first time. In AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid °Abdarrazzāq. *Tārikh al-wizārāt al-°irāqīya*. Vol. I, pp. 191 – 192.

⁴⁶ IRELAND, P.W. *Iraq. A Study in Political Development*, p. 394.

Treaty and its Protocol.⁴⁷ A favourable majority seemed assured, and initially was in fact present; but the atmosphere quickly changed. Immediately, criticism of the treaty dominated the proceedings. The “severity” of some of the Treaty conditions, notably those of the financial agreement, was emphasised by opposition orators, and the whole force of anti-mandate sentiment became rapidly mobilised.⁴⁸ Kurdish deputies for their own reasons withdrew from the proceedings; those of Moṣul could think of nothing but the danger threatening their wilāya. The tribal shaykhs, moving in a world wholly strange to them, saw and seized the chance of bargaining their support on the Treaty issue for personal or tribal advantages, pledged themselves to support the treaty.⁴⁹

Only about fifteen out of 100 representatives who had been elected – the nationalist lawyer-politicians – were known to be definitely opposed to the treaty. They soon emerged as the most convinced and active element in the assembly, launched a campaign first of insistence upon major or indeed basic changes in the Treaty.⁵⁰ The constant efforts of the High Commissioner were devoted, with little success, to exposition of the basic nature of the Treaty and the facts of Iraq’s situation. He pointed out Great Britain’s accepted obligations to the League, and gave assurances of later modification of the Treaty in Iraq’s favour. A score of interviews between the High Commissioner, the King, the Prime Minister, ministers, Kinahan Cornwallis, Yāsīn Pasha al-Hāshimī, and opposition leaders produced no formula which could reconcile the “patriots” (*al-waṭanīyūn*) to ratification.⁵¹ Henry Dobbs finally announced that Iraqī rejection of the Treaty, such as now appeared inevitable, must with all regret be reported to the League Council at its forthcoming meeting, unless ratification had occurred by 10 June; after that date Great Britain must seek means other than a friendly and generous Treaty to fulfil its mandatory functions.⁵²

From this and from his refusal to bargain or to consider amendments Sir Henry was immovable. Like every preceding day, 10 June was filled with conclaves, submissions, exhortations, refusals. By late afternoon there was no result, and Dobbs categorically refused a twenty-four hour postponement. Before midnight, however, the Prime Minister, Jaʿfar Pasha al-ʿAskarī, suc-

⁴⁷ AL-KHAṬṬĀB, Rajāʾ Husayn. *Al-ʿIrāq bayna 1921 – 1927. Dirāsa fī taṭawwur al-ʿilāqāt al-ʿirāqīya-al-briṭānīya wa atharihā*. [Iraq in the Years 1921 – 1927. A Study in Development of Iraqi-British Relations and its Impact], p. 129.

⁴⁸ AL-ADHAMĪ, Muḥammad Muẓaffar. *Al-majlis at-taʿsīs al-ʿirāqī. Dirāsa tārikhīya siyāsīya*, pp. 492 – 499.

⁴⁹ IRELAND, P.W. *Iraq. A Study in Political Development*, p. 395.

⁵⁰ MUHAMMAD, ʿAlā Jāsīm. *Jaʿfar al-ʿAskarī wa dawruhu as-siyāsī wa al-ʿaskarī fī tārikh al-ʿIrāq ḥattā ʿam 1936*, p. 97.

⁵¹ AL-MUFTĪ, Hāzīm. *Al-ʿIrāq bayna ʿahdayni. Yāsīn al-Hāshimī wa Bakr Ṣidqī*. [Iraq between two Eras. Yāsīn al-Hāshimī and Bakr Ṣidqī], p. 24.

⁵² AL-ADHAMĪ, Muḥammad Muẓaffar. *Al-majlis at-taʿsīs al-ʿirāqī. Dirāsa tārikhīya siyāsīya*, pp. 562 – 568.

ceeded in convening 69 out of the 100 delegates in the assembly hall. Thirty-seven votes for the unamended Treaty were in the end obtained, with 24 in opposition; the 8 abstentions were due, beyond doubt, to intimidation.⁵³ Acceptance of the Treaty, even ratified in this sadly abnormal manner, was hedged with conditions which Ja^cfar Pasha al-^cAskarī found it necessary to specify – that the British government should honour its reassurances by amending the financial agreement in Iraq’s favour: that the King of Iraq should hasten to negotiate with the British Government to this end: and that the whole Treaty should be null and void “if the British Government fails to safeguard the rights of Iraq in the Moṣul wilāya in its entirety”.⁵⁴

The ratification of the treaty was important for the continuation of the mandate relationship. Since direct control had already been formally abandoned it was essential that Britain’s Iraq policy should be acquiesced in by the Iraqis.⁵⁵ Afterwards the Constituent Assembly quietly passed the Organic and the Electoral Laws. The constitution was the outcome of a compromise which proclaimed Iraq “a sovereign state, independent and free” with a constitutional hereditary monarchy and a representative government, set forth the rights of the people and the crown, the legislature and the ministers, established the courts, and regulated financial and administrative responsibilities.⁵⁶ The dissolution of the constituent assembly gave Ja^cfar Pasha al-^cAskarī the opportunity to resign from the premiership. A new cabinet was formed on 2 August 1924 under Yāsīn Pasha al-Hāshimī, to be confronted by pressing questions of the northern frontier and of financial stringency.⁵⁷ The Prime Minister held the portfolio of Defence, and with it that of a new ministry which he created as a timely gesture, that of foreign affairs. Nūrī Pasha as-Sa^cīd became deputy commander-in-chief of the army,⁵⁸ of which the king was titular head.

With the constitutional framework of the state apparently settled, there remained the question of Moṣul. It was rightly anticipated that the Moṣul

⁵³ Al-HASANĪ, as-Sayyid ^cAbdarrazzāq. *Al-^cIrāq fī zill al-mu^cāhadāt*, pp. 115 – 116.

⁵⁴ Al-KHATTĀB, Rajā’ Ḥusayn. *Al-^cIrāq bayna 1921 – 1927*, p. 154.

⁵⁵ SLUGLETT, P. *Britain in Iraq, 1914 – 1932*, p. 89.

⁵⁶ LONGRIGG, S.H. *Iraq, 1900 to 1950. A Political, Social and Economic History*, p. 151.

⁵⁷ ^cAbdalmuḥsin as-Sa^cdūn was called to the Ministry of Interior, Sāsūn Ḥasqayl to Finance. To the Ministry of Justice came a young and clever, but unstable and hasty lawyer of good family, Rashīd ^cĀlī al-Kaylānī; and to that of Communications and Works an imposing and not incompetent younger member of the Pāchachī house, Muzāḥim Bey al-Pāchachī. Education was entrusted to a learned Shī^cī politician, Muḥammad Riḍā ash-Shabībī, and Awqāf to a venerable ex-Shaykh al-Islām lately returned from Istanbul, Ibrāhīm al-Ḥaydarī. In Al-HASANĪ, as-Sayyid ^cAbdarrazzāq. *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-^cirāqīya*. Vol. I, pp. 244 – 246.

⁵⁸ An-NUṢAYRĪ, ^cAbdarrazzāq Aḥmad. *Nūrī as-Sa^cīd wa dawruhu fī as-siyāsa al-^cirāqīya ḥattā ^cām 1932*. [Nūrī as-Sa^cīd and his Role in Iraqi Politics until 1932], p. 120.

question would prove the most intractable of all the problems of the Turkish peace settlement. In 1924 the negotiations between the Iraqi government and the Turkish Petroleum Company went on and the Concession was signed on 14 March 1925.⁵⁹ The king appointed Yāsīn Pasha al-Hāshimī to the premiership largely because of his past record of hostility to the Turks. The Turkish government had finally agreed to a League of Nations commission both to determine the validity of Turkish claims to the Moṣul province in the light of the views of its inhabitants and also to make recommendations about its final status and territorial boundaries.⁶⁰ The cabinet, however, lacked alternative programmes backed by political parties existed in the Iraqi politics of the time. Its months of power were marked by preoccupation with the politics of the Moṣul question, and by the frustrations of an empty Treasury. This poverty, the common misfortune of nascent governments, was accentuated in the Iraq of 1925 by depressed trade conditions. The cabinet of Yāsīn Pasha al-Hāshimī, the last to govern without a parliament, served with valuable results for a year.⁶¹ Promulgation of the constitution was postponed from July 1924 to March 1925, to permit the preparation of election rolls, a lengthy and difficult task, and the liquidation of the Mosul question. Preparations for the assembly of parliament in extraordinary session (since an ordinary session could open only in November) were completed by late June 1925,⁶² and a change of ministry due to differences between Yāsīn Pasha al-Hāshimī and his minister of Interior, ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn, gave to a new government the task of inaugurating the parliamentary regime.

So the premiership of 26 June 1925 was entrusted to ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn and his main task was to hold parliamentary elections.⁶³ The premier also held the new portfolio of foreign affairs and his ministry included a number of prominent politicians.⁶⁴ On 30 June the cabinet decided on opening the first session of Parliament with ceremony on 16 July 1925. The premier placed his

⁵⁹ KHALĪL, Nūrī ʿAbdalḥamīd. *At-Tārīkh as-siyāsī li-l-Imtiyāzāt an-naft fī al-ʿIrāq, 1925 – 1952*. [The Political History of Oil Concession in Iraq], p. 121.

⁶⁰ TRIPP, C. *A History of Iraq*, p. 58.

⁶¹ LONGRIGG, S.H. *Iraq, 1900 to 1950. A Political, Social and Economic History*, p. 164.

⁶² JAMĪL, Ḥusayn. *Al-Ḥayāt an-niyābiya fī al-ʿIrāq, 1925 – 1946*. [The Parliamentary Life in Iraq], pp. 29 – 30.

⁶³ SORBY, K. *Blízky východ v medzinárodnej politike (1918 – 1945)*. [The Middle East in the International Politics], p. 107.

⁶⁴ The cabinet included: Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī, Raʿūf al-Chādirchī, Ṣabīḥ Nashʿat, ʿAbdalḥusayn al-Chalabī, Nājī as-Suwaydī, Ḥikmat Sulaymān (younger brother of the famous Ottoman General Maḥmūd Shawkat Pasha), Ḥamdī al-Pāchachī, and by later substitution Nūrī Pasha as-Saʿīd and Muḥammad Amīn Zakī. In *Al-HASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq. Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya*. [The History of Iraqi Cabinets]. Vol. 2, pp. 5 – 6.

hopes in parliament therefore he met on the day before opening the session with the deputies and explained to them that he would like to form a majority in the chamber with the aim of applying the Anglo-Iraqi treaty with amendments pointed to in the resolution of the constituent assembly. It was agreed that the majority would form a party organisation and named it *Progressive Party* (Ḥizb at-Taqaḍḍum). The party was made up of fifty members and °Abdalmuḥsin as-Sa°dūn was elected its chairman.⁶⁵

From the very establishment of the Iraqi government there was keen interest in organising political parties along Western European lines in order to develop a democratic form of government. After the accession of Fayṣal to the throne in 1921, three new main parties were established: 1. the *National Party* (al-Ḥizb al-Waṭanī), led by Ja°far Abū at-Timman; 2. the *People's Party* (Ḥizb ash-Sha°b) led by Yāsīn al-Hāshimī; and 3. the *Progressive Party* (Ḥizb at-Taqaḍḍum), led by °Abdalmuḥsin 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 selection of Rashīd °Ālī al-Kaylānī as President of the Chamber brought Ḥikmat Sulaymān to his place in Interior.⁶⁶ The life of parliament in this its first session lasted until June 1926. It dealt with a heavy programme of legislation, including a first amendment to the constitution designed to provide for possible regency and for extraordinary sittings. In May 1926 a quarrel in the chamber between the president and Ṣabīḥ Nash'at, minister of Finance, led to the retirement from the Presidency of Rashīd °Ālī al-Kaylānī.⁶⁷

In January 1926, at the time of the signature of the second Treaty with Britain, °Abdalmuḥsin as-Sa°dūn had been prime minister of Iraq for some six months,⁶⁸ 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 Rashīd °Ālī al-Kaylānī, drew its support from the *People's Party* and the *Iraqi Renaissance Party*, (Ḥizb an-

⁶⁵ FARAJ, Luṭfī Ja°far. °Abdalmuḥsin as-Sa°dūn wa dawruhu fī tārikh al-°Irāq as-siyāsī al-mu°āṣir, p. 179.

⁶⁶ JAMĪL, Husayn. Al-Ḥayāt an-niyābīya fī al-°Irāq, 1925 – 1946, pp. 131 – 132.

⁶⁷ Al-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid °Abdarrazzāq. Tārikh al-wizārāt al-°irāqīya. Vol. 2, pp. 60 – 61.

⁶⁸ °Abdalmuḥsin as-Sa°dūn was also Minister of Foreign Affairs and the cabinet included Nūrī as-Sa°īd as Minister of Defence, Rashīd °Ālī al-Kaylānī as Minister of Interior, Nājī as-Suwaydī as Minister of Justice, Ṣabīḥ Nash'at as Minister of Finance, Ḥikmat Sulaymān as Minister of Education. In Al-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid °Abdarrazzāq. Tārikh al-wizārāt al-°irāqīya. [The History of Iraqi Cabinets]. Vol. 2, p. 5.

nahḍa al-ʿirāqī) short-lived in 1922, and then revived under almost exclusively *shīʿī* leadership and presided over by Amīn al-Charchafchī.⁶⁹

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, ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn’s relations with the British residency were normally excellent, which inevitably strained his relations with King Fayṣal.⁷⁰ 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 the premier at the end of October 1926 that members of the opposition should be given under-secretary ships at ministries, and other measures disagreeable to the prime minister.⁷¹ ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn suggested an election, which he considered would strengthen his position in the chamber, but the king, fearing just this result, opposed a dissolution. The premier, 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 Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī, he promptly resigned from office.⁷²

The resignation of the cabinet had allowed the king to call upon his trusted associate Jaʿfar al-ʿAskarī, then Iraqi minister in London, once more. He was summoned home and three weeks later, on 21 November, formed a coalition ministry.⁷³ 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 *shīʿī* discontent. However, the real reason for this change was that the king, together with Nūrī as-Saʿīd and Yāsīn al-Hāshimī, wanted to form a cabinet which would have a greater chance of persuading the chamber to accept conscription, and thus be in what they

⁶⁹ YĀGHĪ, Ismāʿīl Aḥmad. Ḥarakat Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī 1941. Dirāsa fī taṭawwur al-ḥaraka al-waṭanīya al-ʿirāqīya. [The Movement of Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī. Study in the Development of Iraqi Patriotic Movement], p. 15.

⁷⁰ AL-ADHAMĪ, Muḥammad Muẓaffār. Al-malik Fayṣal al-awwal. Dirāsāt wathāʾiqīya fī ḥayātihi as-siyāsīya wa zurūf mamātihi al-ghāmiḍa, p. 88.

⁷¹ In SLUGLETT, P. Britain in Iraq, 1914 – 1932, p. 141.

⁷² AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq. Tārīkh al-ʿIrāq as-siyāsī al-ḥadīth. [The Modern Political History of Iraq]. Vol. 3, 1976, p. 35.

⁷³ The cabinet included: Jaʿfar al-ʿAskarī as Prime Minister and at Foreign Affairs, Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī at Interior, Yāsīn al-Hāshimī at Finance, Raʿūf al-Chādirchī in Justice, Nūrī as-Saʿīd in Defence, Muḥammad Amīn Zakī in Works and Communication, as-Sayyid ʿAbdalmahdī at Education, and Amīn ʿĀlī Bāsh Aʿyān at Awqāf, as-Sayyid ʿAbdalmahdī at Education. In AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq. Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya, p. 86.

considered a better position to obtain independence (through full League of Nations membership) in 1928.⁷⁴ It was felt that °Abdalmuḥsin as-Sa°dūn would not be able to act contrary to the known views of the British residency, while Ja°far al-°Askarī would be content to act as a figurehead for Nūrī as-Sa°id, Rashīd °Alī al-Kaylānī and Yāsīn al-Hāshimī, all of whom, with the king, were strong advocates of compulsory military service.⁷⁵ 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, a pro-conscription cabinet would have a better chance of achieving early League membership.

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 1928.⁷⁶ 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 later 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 Ja°far al-°Askarī and Mr. William Ormsby-Gore of the Colonial Office.⁷⁷ 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 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 *shīṭī* unrest and the resignation of a number of powerful figures from his government extraordinarily weakened the Iraqi government and led to Ja°far al-°Askarī’s resignation on 8 January 1928.⁷⁸ 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, °Abdalmuḥsin as-Sa°dūn, could be relied upon both by the palace and by the British residency, to form a government, and the known coolness between

⁷⁴ AHMAD, Ibrāhīm Khalīl and Ja°far °Abbās HUMAJDĪ. *Tārīkh al-°Irāq al-mu°āşir*, p. 61.

⁷⁵ MUḤAMMAD, °Alā Jāsim. *Ja°far al-°Askarī wa dawruhu as-siyāsī wa al-°askarī fī tārīkh al-°Irāq ḥattā °ām 1936*. [Ja°far al-°Askarī and His Political and Military Role in Iraqi History until 1936], p. 110.

⁷⁶ AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid °Abdarrazzāq. *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-°irāqīya*, pp. 130 – 131.

⁷⁷ AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid °Abdarrazzāq. *Al-°Irāq fī zill al-mu°āhadāt*, p. 176.

⁷⁸ MUḤAMMAD, °Alā Jāsim. *Ja°far al-°Askarī wa dawruhu as-siyāsī wa al-°askarī fī tārīkh al-°Irāq ḥattā °ām 1936*, p. 130.

ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn 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.⁷⁹

On 14 November 1928 ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn formed a cabinet which included two *Shīʿites* one *Christian*, and a body of experienced politicians.⁸⁰ The new cabinet itself was in a highly unenviable position since it lacked the support of the palace, the nationalists, and the *Shīʿites*, 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 1927.⁸¹ 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 ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn was not inclined to favour its introduction, he realised 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.⁸² In the course of these months Fayṣal and Nūrī as-Saʿīd did their best to secure an anti-prime minister chamber, hoping, apparently, to defeat the new cabinet and force the reappointment of the Jaʿfar al-ʿAskarī

⁷⁹ Al-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq. *Tārīkh al-ʿIrāq as-siyāsī al-ḥadīth*, Vol. 3, pp. 42 – 43.

⁸⁰ The new ministry contained ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn himself at Defence, the moderate and experienced ex-mutaṣarrif ʿAbdalʿazīz al-Qaṣṣāb at Interior, the Christian economist and business man Yūsuf Ghanīma at Finance, Ḥikmat Sulaymān at Justice, Tawfiq as-Suwaydī at Education and Shaykh Aḥmad ad-Dāwud at Awqāf. There were two Shīʿite members, the Najaf banker ʿAbdalmuḥsin Shalāsh at Communications and Works and another shrewd and experienced Salmān al-Barrāk of Ḥilla at Irrigation and Agriculture, much to the dissatisfaction of shīʿī politicians, who had expected four of their representatives in the cabinet. In Al-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq. *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya*. Vol. 2, pp. 147 – 148.

⁸¹ Al-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq. *Tārīkh al-ʿIrāq as-siyāsī al-ḥadīth*, Vol. 3, pp. 43 – 46.

⁸² SORBY, K.R. *Arabský východ, 1945 – 1958*. [The Arab East, 1945 – 1958], p. 44.

cabinet with enhanced powers.⁸³ At the same time, Fayṣal was trying to influence the *Shīʿites* either to oppose ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn themselves, or to join the palace party, pointing out ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn’s record of intolerance towards the *Shīʿites*. During the protracted electoral process from mid-January to mid-May 1928, government intervention produced both a supportive parliament and one which contained substantial *shīʿī* representation, helping the prime minister’s efforts at reconciliation with the *Shīʿites*.⁸⁴ 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,⁸⁵ 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 ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn’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.⁸⁶ The year 1928 saw the worst phases of the “absurd situation” (al-waḍaʿ ash-shādhdh) 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.⁸⁷ 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.⁸⁸

The whole period between the autumn of 1927 and September 1929 was marked by a sense of the impotence for 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

⁸³ Fortnightly Intelligence Report, 18 January 1928. In SLUGLETT, P. *Britain in Iraq, 1914 – 1932*, p. 159.

⁸⁴ TRIPP, C. *A History of Iraq*, p. 63.

⁸⁵ Fortnightly Intelligence Report, 23 May 1928. In SLUGLETT, P. *Britain in Iraq, 1914 – 1932*, p. 160.

⁸⁶ AL-HASANI, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq. *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya*. Vol. 2, pp. 207 – 213.

⁸⁷ IRELAND, P.W. *Iraq. A Study in Political Development*, pp. 367 – 368.

⁸⁸ AS-SUWAYDĪ, Tawfīq. *Mudhakkirātī. Niṣf qarn min tārīkh al-ʿIrāq wa al-qaḍīya al-ʿirāqīya*, pp. 137 – 138.

possible for Britain to relax her control over the Iraqi army and let the Iraqis go their own way.⁸⁹ 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 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-Saʿīd, might be able to find some way out of the dilemma that would be less wounding to Iraqi susceptibilities. ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn 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 caretaker prime minister, largely because few politicians were willing to take on a job that circumstances made almost impossible to hold successfully.⁹⁰ 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 ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn, 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.⁹¹ On 28 April 1929 a government was finally formed under Tawfīq as-Suwaydī,⁹² but it accomplished nothing with respect to the treaty.⁹³ Parliament supported him, but the King and Nūrī as-Saʿīd 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 ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn, who assumed his third premiership once more the same day.

⁸⁹ SLUGLETT, P. *Britain in Iraq, 1914 – 1932*, p. 162.

⁹⁰ TRIPP, C. *A History of Iraq*, p. 63.

⁹¹ In *Al-HASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq. Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya*. Vol. 2, pp. 225.

⁹² The cabinet included: Tawfīq as-Suwaydī as Prime Minister, at Foreign Affairs and at al-Awqāf, ʿAbdalʿazīz al-Qaṣṣāb at Interior, Yūsuf Ghanīma at Finance, Dāwud al-Haydarī at Justice, Muḥammad Amīn Zakī at Defence, Salmān al-Barrāk at Irrigation and Agriculture, Khālid Sulaymān at Education and ʿAbdalmuḥsin Shalāsh at Communications and Works. In *Al-HASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq. Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya*. Vol. 2, p. 234.

⁹³ *As-SUWAYDĪ, Tawfīq. Mudhakkirātī. Niṣf qarn min tārīkh al-ʿIrāq wa al-qaḍīya al-ʿirāqīya*, p. 145.

Meanwhile, everything depended on a British initiative. The crisis was resolved in June 1929 when a newly elected Labour government in Britain announced its intention to support Iraq's admission to the League of Nations in 1932 and negotiate a new treaty recognising Iraq's independence.⁹⁴

ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn after forming a new cabinet began negotiations, but they soon bogged down.⁹⁵ Shortly after resuming office he had been attacked in parliament for his position on the treaty. 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. Evidently depressed over attempts to reconcile the Iraqi position with that of the British, on 13 November he committed suicide.⁹⁶ 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 the advice given by men of honour like myself."⁹⁷ Although he was not always appreciated by the anti-British contingent, ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn'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. The *Progressive Party* was dissolved at the end of 1929 after ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn's death.

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⁹⁴ TRIPP, C. A History of Iraq, p. 64.

⁹⁵ The ministry contained ʿAbdalmuḥsin as-Saʿdūn as Prime Minister, and at Foreign Affairs, Nājī as-Suwaydī at Interior, Yāsīn al-Hāshimī at Finance, Nājī Shawkat at Justice, Nūrī as-Saʿīd at Defence, ʿAbdalḥusayn al-Chalabī at Education, ʿAbdalʿazīz al-Qaṣṣāb at Irrigation and Agriculture, and Muḥammad Amīn Zakī at Works and Communications. In AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq. Tārikh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya. Vol. 2, p. 265.

⁹⁶ KHADDURI, Majid. Independent Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics from 1932 to 1958, p. 29; AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq. Tārikh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya, p. 280.

⁹⁷ Text of the note in Turkish and Arabic. In AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq. Tārikh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya. Vol. 2, p. 284.

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