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British Legacy and Evolution of Kurdish Nationalism in Iraq (1918-1926): What Significance the ‘Mosul Question’?

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British Legacy and Evolution of Kurdish Nationalism in Iraq (1918-1926): What Significance the 'Mosul Question'?¹

By Zeynep Arıkanlı²

El sur de Sudán tiene que elegir en un referéndum previsto para el próximo 9 de enero próximo entre el mantenimiento de su unidad con el resto de Sudán o la secesión. Los analistas predicen un triunfo de la opción secesionista, mientras que los políticos sudaneses en Jartum ahora finalmente consideran este resultado como "probable".

Abstract

This article aims to study the British modalities of managing Kurdish nationalism in the vilayet³ of Mosul in the 1918-1926 period, when both Kurdish nationalism and Iraqi state-building were in their formative (if not infancy) period. There are two inter-dependent arguments: First, the new British policies of the post-WWI period were also in their formative period, since they were being formed through the issue of a geo-political and frontier re-structuring necessitated by the new international order. Second, Kurdish nationalism in the Mosul province evolved in the prism of the British policies, constituting both a trump card for and a challenge to the Kurdish population. This duality, I will argue, became the main characteristic of Kurdish nationalism in the future configurations in Iraq in particular, and in the Middle East, in general. This duality was the direct outcome of the British policies in the post-WWI period, which were stamped with a considerable polyarchy and tergiversations, due both to the uncertainties generated by the post-WWI period, the necessity of adapting to the new principles of the international order and inter-departmental competition. These polyarchy and tergiversations became manifest in the Iraqi state-building process, especially before the settlement of the Mosul question, the old Ottoman province with a substantial Kurdish population. In other words, it was in the vilayet of Mosul during this period (1918-1926) that the re-structuring of the British policies in the post-WWI era was crystallized -with all their ups-and-downs.

Key words: British policies, Iraq [Mesopotamia], Kurds, Kurdish nationalism, Mandates System, mandate, Mosul [Mosul Question]

Introduction

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³ Vilayet: a province under a governor-general ('*vali*').



Post-World War I (WWI) witnessed the breakup of Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires and saw an ensuing transition from massive multinational political entities to nation-states. In the context of the Middle East, this transition implied, among many other changes, that the region's map was now redrawn on the presumed principle of nationality, with almost rigid frontiers, a concept alien to the largely Islamic territories. In this context, Kurdish nationalism constituted a serious challenge both against mandatory powers (i.e. France and Great Britain) which had to adapt their policies to the new international order stamped by self-determination, and the newly-founded states (i.e. Turkey, French mandate of Syria and British mandates of Palestine and Iraq).

The particularity of Kurdish nationalism or Kurdish nationalist movement, which was a direct consequence the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, was that it was not the product of an independence war against the occupation, nor the issue of resistance to colonialism, but an immediate and direct challenge to the newly founded or constructed nation-states. In a context where Kurdish society populating the old Ottoman territories now became separate states under the mandate, Kurdish nationalism developed as a movement aiming to unite this dispersed population under one nation-state. Thus, the nation-state was not only the scene of Kurdish contestation, but also the main issue (*enjeu*) of the latter, with the process of settlement of the 'Mosul question' being the concretization or crystallization of the main issues of this period of uncertainties. At the end of WWI, 'it was not yet clear that Mosul would become part of Iraq.'⁴ In this sense, the 'Mosul question' was 'the dispute over the exact frontier line between Turkey and Iraq [namely], over the possession of the vilayet of Mosul.'⁵ In a broader sense, it was a question of 'boundaries and belonging' within the new Middle Eastern state-system. What created this question was the rejection of the Peace Treaty of Sèvres signed between the Allied Powers and the Ottoman Empire at 1920 by the newly founded Republic of Turkey. This treaty⁶ was never adopted and superseded by the Treaty of

⁴ Sarah Shields, 'Mosul Questions: Economy, Identity, and Annexation,' in Reeva Spectra Simon (ed.) (2004), *The Making of Modern Iraq*, (New York: Columbia University Press), p.50.

⁵ Peter J. Beck, 'A Tedious and Perilous Controversy': Britain and the Settlement of the Mosul Dispute, 1918-1926,' *Middle Eastern Studies* 17, No. 2 (April, 1981), p. 256.

⁶ Article 62 of the Treaty of Sevres is read as: 'A Commission sitting at Constantinople and composed of three members appointed by the British, French and Italian Governments respectively shall draft within six months from the coming into force of the present Treaty a scheme of local autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish areas lying east of the Euphrates, south of the southern boundary of Armenia as it may be hereafter determined, and north of the frontier of Turkey with Syria and Mesopotamia, as defined in Article 27, II (2) and (3). If unanimity cannot be secured on any question, it will be referred by the members of the Commission to their respective Governments. The scheme shall contain full safeguards for the protection of the Assyro-Chaldeans and other racial or religious minorities within these areas, and with this object a Commission composed of British, French, Italian, Persian and Kurdish representatives shall visit the spot to examine and



Lausanne of 1923. However, the conclusion of the peace treaty did not resolve the dispute over Mosul, which contributed to the evolution of another question, i.e. Kurdish question in Iraq.

The understanding of British modalities of managing Kurdish nationalism in the vilayet of Mosul in the 1918-1926⁷ period, when both Kurdish nationalism and Iraqi state-building were in their formative period –if not in stage of infancy- would contribute to explicit the evolution of Kurdish nationalism, as a modern phenomenon, as well as its particularity. The first of my two inter-dependent arguments is that the new British policies in the post-WWI period were also in their formative period, since they were being formed through the issue of a geo-political and frontier restructurations necessitated by the new international order. My second argument is that Kurdish nationalism in the Mosul province evolved in the prism of the British policies, constituting both a trump card and a challenge for the Kurdish population. This duality, which was the direct outcome of the British policies in the post-WWI period, became the main characteristic of Kurdish nationalism in the future configurations in Iraq in particular, and the Middle East, in general. The British policies in this period, in turn, were stamped by a considerable polyarchy and tergiversations, due both to the uncertainties generated by the post-WWI period, such as the necessity of adapting to the new principles of the international order and inter-departmental competition. These polyarchy and tergiversations became manifest in the Iraqi state-building process, especially before the settlement of the Mosul question i.e., the old Ottoman province with a substantial Kurdish population. In other words, the restructuring of the British policies in the aftermath of WWI were crystallized, with all their ups-and-downs, during the period and region under study.

This article, with good reason, does not intent to blame the British for betraying their promises. It will adopt Elie Kedourie's approach where he writes that: 'The policy of one country towards another is at best, a poor make-shift thing. It is conceived in the heat and urgency of pressing affairs and, from the nature of the case, must be grounded upon ignorance, irrelevance and misunderstanding. Directed as it is to the attainment of advantage and the securing interest, policy is heedless of things as they are, provided the advantage is attained and the interest secured.'⁸

decide what rectifications, if any, should be made in the Turkish frontier where, under the provisions of the present Treaty, that frontier coincides with that of Persia.'

⁷ From the Moudros Armistice of 1918 to the Angora Treaty of 1926. The British occupied Mosul just after the signature of the armistice; the Mosul question was settled definitely with the Angora Treaty signed between Turkey and Great Britain, to whom Iraq was submitted as mandate by the League of Nations' Covenant (1920).

⁸ Elie Kedourie (1987), *England and the Middle East. The Destruction of the Ottoman Empire, 1914-1921*, (London and Boulder: Mansell Publishing and Westview Press), p. 1.



'Politically inept in their response to the post-war situation,'⁹ and also inspired by the Fourteen Points of Wilson, the Kurds 'was the crux of the Mosul affair'¹⁰ and played an important role in the state-building processes during the 1920s. It is worth noting that although there was a considerable Kurdish mobilization in Anatolia in the period in question, its analysis is over the limits of this article; so, I'll focus exclusively on British politics in Mesopotamia and analyze the relations between the British and the Kurds within this framework.

To justify my arguments, I will explore, together with the relevant literature, the British archival materials located at the National Archives (a.k.a Public Record Office - PRO) in London and Middle East Center Archives (MECA) in Oxford. These materials cover a broad range of documents of the main institutions involved in both Mesopotamian campaign and the Mosul question (i.e. Foreign Office, Colonial Office, Royal Air Force, and finally Middle East Department founded within the Colonial Office to formulate a more coordinated and centralized Mesopotamian policy). Furthermore, I will use especially the correspondence of important figures of the period (e.g. Lord Curzon, Lloyd George, Sir Percy Cox, Lord Hardinge, Lord Robert Cecil, Sir Arnold T. Wilson, T.E. Lawrence and Gertrude Bell, Sir Hubert Young) and British government's intelligence reports to make clear the divergence of opinions between the officials (civil and military), institutions and politicians in London and Mosul (and also, Cairo and India).

British Occupation of Mesopotamia, 1914-1918

Until the WWI, the main focus of the British in South Asia was the Persian Gulf. The latter 'was at the heart of the Indian sphere' and 'successive Indian governments had protected British trade routes and enforced a maritime truce in the Gulf.'¹¹ Starting with the activities of the British East India Company and, especially the trade agreement that the Company had made with the Shah of Persia, the British influence in the Persian Gulf increased steadily over the years.¹² This influence had spread both through British traders and Britain's sea power. In Gökhan Çetinsaya's words, 'since the 1830s,

⁹ David McDowall (2000), *A Modern History of the Kurds*, (London and New York: I. B. Tauris), p. 151.

¹⁰ Othman Ali, 'The Kurdish Factor in the Struggle for Vilayet Mosul, 1921-1925,' *The Journal of Kurdish Studies* 4, (2001-2002), p. 31.

¹¹ Robert J. Blyth (2003), *The Empire of the Raj. India, Eastern Africa and the Middle East, 1858-1947*, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan), p. 15.

¹² A. J. Barker (1967), *The Neglected War. Mesopotamia 1914-1918*, (London: Faber and Faber), p. 18.



the British had acquired a virtual monopoly of European influence in [Mesopotamia] and the adjoining regions of Arabia and the Gulf.¹³ Çetinsaya depicts British activities in that period as follows:

British warships regularly patrolled the Gulf, where many of the local shaikhdoms [*sic.*] had concluded 'trucial' [*sic.*] protective agreements with representatives of the government of British India. A large proportion of the trade and the Gulf was done with British India, and British and British India vessels dominated Gulf merchant shipping. A British enterprise, the Lynch Company, held a concession for stream navigation on the Euphrates and the Tigris. Since 1862, a British mail service had run between [Mesopotamia] and India and British-constructed telegraph lines linked Baghdad to India, Istanbul and Tehran. The British Indian pilgrims and students who flocked to the Shi'i shrines of southern Iraq were further channel for British influence.¹⁴

Both Sykes-Picot Agreement of May 1916¹⁵ and the McMahon-Husain Correspondence proved how the possession or, at least, control of Mesopotamia was considered as vital to imperial security, this vitality being even more manifest during the war. Sykes-Picot Agreement and the McMahon Correspondence were, indeed, result of the growing British interests and security concerns generated by the war. As the conflict spread and the associated British interests grown, 'the Middle East became a more integral part of both Imperial and the Indian systems.'¹⁶ In this context, Mesopotamia took its place in the British agenda, as a consequence of British India's long association with the Persian Gulf.¹⁷ Thus, the future of Mesopotamia became the focus of the Indian government.

'The sheer complexity of the Middle East after 1914,' notes Robert J. Blyth, 'created a series of problems for British Indian policy makers, which both challenged the Government of India's sphere of external operations and presented it with new opportunities.'¹⁸ The destruction of the nineteenth-century certainties of western Asia with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the rise of the German

¹³ Gökhan Çetinsaya (2006), *Ottoman Administration of Iraq, 1890-1908*, (New York: Routledge), p. 127. See also Malcolm E. Yapp, 'British Policy in the Persian Gulf,' and 'The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,' in Alvin J. Cottrell (ed.) (1981), *The Persian Gulf: A General Survey*, (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press), pp. 70-100 and 41-69; also Foreign Office, *Mesopotamia* (quoted by Çetinsaya, *ibid.*, p. 206)

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 127-128.

¹⁵ The Sykes-Picot Agreement is a secret agreement between the British and French governments, dividing the Ottoman Arab possessions into spheres of influence. According to this agreement, assented by the Russian Empire, Mosul figured within the French sphere of influence. The terms of the agreement, which was concluded in 16 May 1916, were negotiated by Sir Mark Sykes on behalf of the British and, François Georges-Picot, on behalf of the French.

¹⁶ Blyth, *op.cit.*, p. 132.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 132.



Empire as a new colonial power and the fall of the Russian Empire into chaos, and the rise of Arab and Persian nationalism, transformed almost radically Europe's relations with the Middle East.¹⁹ That period meant for the Great Britain the strengthening of her position especially in Persia Gulf. To this end, and once Mesopotamian campaign was launched, the British concentrated their efforts to obtain and preserve, both diplomatically and militarily, their predominance in the Arab Peninsula, especially since 1916. Nevertheless, it was merely possible to talk about a definite British policy with regard to Mesopotamia. As Kedourie argues, 'at the beginning of the War no long-term Mesopotamian policy existed. The Expeditionary Force from India set out with strictly limited aims, which were to secure Basra and control the Persian Gulf.'²⁰ A. J. Barker goes even further by saying that 'the Army in Mesopotamia was the Forgotten Army of the First World War, or so it seemed to those who were there.' Following him, 'all it got anything was too old, too worn or too inadequate for use elsewhere; even the ammunition was labelled [*sic.*] 'Made in the U.S.A. For practice only.' (...) The men in Mesopotamia were exhausted physically and mentally; failure and frustration lay heavy upon them.'²¹ A telegram sent by the Secretary of State for India shows that the British, even they occupied Basra, had no a precise project afterwards: 'We are not able at present able to do more than assert, as we have, our paramount claims and powers at the head of the Persian Gulf.'²² Encouraged by the success, though, the British Government adopted a policy advocated mainly by Sir Percy Cox, the Chief Political Officer of the Expeditionary Force, and furthered its Mesopotamian campaign, which was completed by the occupation of Baghdad in 1917 and Mosul in 1918, after the signature of the Armistice of Moudros. The occupation of Mosul constituted a new turning point in the history of Iraq in general and, that of the Kurds of Iraq, in particular.

Redrawing the Map: British Tergiversations in Mesopotamia and the Kurds

The relevant literature on Kurds and Kurdistan have in common of underlying the difficulty of various empires to control completely this region. Martin van Bruinessen notes that 'the inaccessibility of Kurdistan and the fierce warring capacities of its inhabitants have always made it a natural frontier of the empires that emerged around it. None of these empires could maintain sovereignty in more than

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Kedourie, *op.cit.*, p. 175.

²¹ Barker, *op.cit.*, pp. 17-18.

²² F.J. Moberly (1923), *Official History of the War: The Campaign in Mesopotamia*, Vol. 1, p. 137.



one part of Kurdistan.²³ Similarly, McDowall argues that 'trying to master Kurdistan and its inhabitants has never been easy for outsiders.'²⁴The outcome was that Kurdistan 'became divided by the political borderlines of surrounding states'²⁵, a reality which remained throughout the history. In this sense, while wars between the Ottoman and Persian empires contributed to this division, the British and French occupations during the WWI had as a consequence of dividing Kurdistan into four parts. 'At the onset of the Great War in 1914,' notes M. R. Izady, 'the land that Kurds have for nearly a millennium been calling Kurdistan was divided between the empires of the Ottomans and the Persians, and more recently, that of the Russians.'²⁶ Kurdish nationalism in the war-time period evolved by the motivation of ending up with this historical division and getting united under a single state. In both the WWI period and its aftermath, the continually changing scope and content of the British policies towards Kurds, this nationalism evolved to one of a minority within the newly founded states. Within this context, the vilayet of Mosul became the scene of these changes and evolution.

Since this period raised Kurdish hopes and aspirations for an independence, and therefore, made Kurds potential allies in the region, British undertaken, by 1917, direct relations with the Kurds of Mesopotamia. 'Shortly after General Maude's capture of Baghdad in March 1917,' writes McDowall, 'representations were received from tribal chiefs controlling Khaniqin, Kifri and Halabja, in spite of Turkish attempts to frighten the Kurds into believing Britain planned to put them under Arab rule.'²⁷ Early in May 1917, British political officers established relations with chiefs in Tuz Khirmatu, Kirkuk and [Suleymaniyya]. At the latter a meeting of notables decided to create a provisional Kurdish government, with Shaykh Mahmud Barzinji at its head, that would 'adopt a policy of complete friendliness to the British.'²⁸ Thus, the British experimented with setting up an autonomous Kurdish province with Mahmud.

²³ Martin van Bruinessen (1992), *Agha, Shaikh and State. The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*, (London and New Jersey: Zed Books), p. 13.

²⁴ McDowall, *op.cit.*, p. 151.

²⁵ Bruinessen, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

²⁶ M. R. Izady, 'Kurds and the Formation of the State of Iraq, 1917-1932,' in Simon, *op.cit.*, p. 95.

²⁷ McDowall, *op.cit.*, p.118. In an endnote, McDowall, by reference to *Loyalties* of Arnold T. Wilson, states that Turkish agents were using General Maude's declaration to the inhabitants of Baghdad as evidence of British intentions to put Kurds under Arab rule. See p. 147. See also, Arnold T. Wilson (1930), *Loyalties. Mesopotamia, 1914-1917. A Personal Historical Record*, (London: Oxford University Press), p. 266. Turkish arguments were based especially on the following statement: 'It is the desire and hope of the British people and Nations in alliance with them that the Arab race may rise once more to greatness and renown amongst the peoples of the Earth' reproduced in Philip W. Ireland (1937), *Iraq: A Study in Political Development*, (London: Cape), pp. 457-458.

²⁸ *Ibid.*



This friendly climate had soon been challenged when Mahmud claimed to represent all Kurds not only in Suleymaniyya but in a wider territory, as far as Sinna, in Iran. 'Hardly an ideal ruler and resentful of British constraints on his power,' notes Jafna L. Cox, 'Mahmud rose in rebellion, but was defeated, captured and deported following a short military operation.'²⁹ With regard to the British position in South Kurdistan, as well as the relations to be established with the Kurds (especially with the tribes), E. B. Soane, Assistant Political Officer at Kurd Bureau, wrote, on 26 July 1917 that 'with the sole exception of the Jaf [tribe], all the tribes within the limits are sedentary, without exception are traditionally anti-Turk, and have been identified with every rebellion which has occurred in the last fifty years.'³⁰

The Russia's withdrawal from the war following the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 had almost immediate effect on British attitudes toward political future of Mesopotamia, including Southern Kurdistan. Nevertheless, the British position in Kurdistan remained unclear, since for the British the question of Kurdistan remained secondary to a political settlement for broader main territories of interest, i.e., Syria and Mesopotamia. The key official British thought as regards Mesopotamia was keeping the latter, together with the Ireland, Egypt, within the British Imperial System. 'If that goal entailed unorthodox steps,' argues Roger Louis, 'the British were prepared to take them.'³¹ In spite of this precise goal, the British remained ambivalent toward the idealism of the Article 22 of the Covenant, even more perplexed about how to introduce Mosul and the Kurds into the scheme. One can even argue that the British policies overall lacked such a precise scheme, together with the divergences among the British themselves, not only between those on the ground and London, but also military stuff and civil officers. A letter of Percy Cox dated of 25 May 1917 is a good example of such divergences. Pointing out that political problems were continually arising, Cox felt it his 'duty to acquaint His Majesty's Government (H.M.G.) with the position which [became] unsatisfactory from a political of view.' And he continued as follows:

General Maude's military successes have established his reputation as a soldier beyond all criticisms; but he is purely a soldier and without any previous experience of the East or of

²⁹ Jafna L. Cox, 'A Splendid Training Ground: The Importance to the Royal Air Force of its Role in Iraq, 1919-1932,' *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 13, No. 2 (January, 1985), p. 168.

³⁰ GB165-0029, 1/3/5, 26 July 1917, 'Note on Position in South Kurdistan and Steps Which Would Be Taken If We Wish To Make Use Of The Tribes,' by E. B. Soane.

³¹ Wm. Roger Louis, 'The United Kingdom and the Beginning of the Mandates System, 1919-1922,' *International Organization* 23, No. 1 (Winter, 1969), p. 92.



Orientalists, and I find him – as is only natural – unsympathetic and somewhat intolerant in regard to political questions, and unable to appreciate the important bearing of apparently simple problems of daily occurrence on larger political and even military interests.³²

These divergences were more manifest as regards determining a definite policy towards Mesopotamia. Two other documents show that the British had no concrete idea about the letter, even less about Mosul and the Kurds, when they launched the military campaign.

Military occupation of [southern Kurdistan] was quite out of the question, for, even after the defeat of the Turks, supply and other difficulties combined to make it impossible even to occupy with a garrison a point so near at hand and so important politically to us as [Suleymaniyya]. The alternative of adopting purely political methods had, therefore, to be adopted, and it was [realized] that the best means to that end was the exploiting of the perfectly legitimate feeling of Kurdish nationality which had long been making itself evident amongst the Southern Kurdish tribes.³³

In March 1920 Gertrude L. Bell wrote:

When we occupied [Suleymaniyya], immediately after the armistice, the ramifications of the Kurdish question were as yet unknown and unforeseen, nor indeed did they develop fully until the following year. Kurdish national aspirations had been put forward in November by General Sharif Pasha and in January a Committee of Kurdish Independence formed in Egypt appealed for us to help in the setting up a Kurdish state. Sir Mark Sykes suggested that the creation of a Kurdish state should include Mosul, but the idea was rejected by M. Picot on behalf of the French Government.³⁴

The end of the war accelerated the course of events: not only the defeat of Ottoman forces in Syria and Mesopotamia, but also the Soviet revolution of October 1917 which made the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement null, necessitated redrawing the Middle East's map. This redrawing meant

³² GB 165-0341/4/8, 25 May 1917, Sir Percy Cox to London.

³³ FO371/4192, 1919, 'Précis of Affairs in Southern Kurdistan during the First World War,' Office of The Civil Commission, Baghdad, p. 9.

³⁴ GB 165-0341/2/5/20, 8 March 1920, Gertrude Bell to Sir Arthur Hirtzel, 'Northern Kurdistan.'



the furthering, or, the concretization of 'the creation of a strategic border in Kurdistan' and thus, the inclusion of the Kurds into the Mesopotamian schemes. This inclusion meant, in turn, the occupation of the vilayet of Mosul, mainly populated by the Kurds. The inclusion of the vilayet of Mosul had become a part of British agenda when British officers in Baghdad recognized, in October 1918, that 'Mesopotamia's political and economic future would be greatly enhanced by the inclusion of the vilayet.'³⁵ The occupation was justified in following terms:

Although the status of Mosul had not been decided, the [vilayet], ravaged by the war, could not be left without administration or assistance, and as soon as the military occupation had taken place, Colonel Leachman was appointed Political Officer. When preliminary organization had been completed, officers were dispatched east and north to 'Aqra and Zakho in order to get into touch with the Kurds and ensure peace on our borders.'³⁶

While awaiting the holding of the peace conference and the crystallization of a definite policy toward Kurdistan's future, London authorized Colonel Arnold T. Wilson, the Acting Civil Commissioner, to take administrative and political measures to ensure political stability, the consolidation of order and peace and the resumption of economic activities in British-controlled Kurdistan.³⁷ Saad Eskander states that Wilson 'was assisted in administrative and political matters by a number of political officers who not only conducted the local affairs in their divisions, but also put forward their own proposals regarding the way in which their divisions should ideally be run.'³⁸ That meant that this was the officers on the ground who were the real policy-makers. In other saying, 'in the absence of a well-defined British position on the Kurdish question, British policy on the ground would play an important part in influencing the course of events.'³⁹

The two years from the Armistice of Moudros to the signing of the Treaty of Sèvres, British policies toward the Kurds 'consisted largely of supporting small autonomous units or principedoms in areas of Kurdistan, especially in [Mesopotamia].'⁴⁰ In the meantime, the British sought to regularize its relations with the Kurdish tribes trying 'to make sure that Britain would not support a united

³⁵ McDowall, *op.cit.*, p. 117.

³⁶ Bell, *op.cit.*

³⁷ Saad Eskander, 'Britain Policy in Southern Kurdistan: The Formation and the Termination of the First Kurdish Government. 1918-1919,' *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 27, No. 2 (November, 2000), p. 141.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Robert Olson (1989), *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion*, (Austin: University of Texas Press), 1989, p. 53.



Kurdistan embracing parts of Iran.⁴¹ Shortly after the Armistice, the British and French made a joint declaration on 7 November 1918, echoing the 12th article of the famous Fourteen Points of Woodrow Wilson⁴² and addressing especially to the peoples in Syria and Mesopotamia. The declaration was read as follows:

The goal envisaged by France and Great Britain in prosecuting in the East the War let loose by German ambition is the complete and final liberation of the peoples who have for so long been oppressed by the Turks, and the setting up of national governments and administrations deriving their authority from the free exercise of the initiative and choice of the indigenous populations. In pursuit of those intentions, France and Great Britain agree to further and assist in the establishment of indigenous Governments and administrations in Syria and Mesopotamia which have already been liberated by the Allies, as well as in those territories which they are engaged in securing and recognizing these as soon as they are actually established.

Far from wishing to impose on the populations of those regions any particular institutions they are only concerned to ensure by their support and by adequate assistance the regular working of Governments and administrations freely chosen by the populations themselves; to secure impartial and equal justice for all; to facilitate the economic development of the country by promoting and encouraging local initiative; to foster the spread of education; and to put an end to the dissensions which Turkish policy has for so long exploited. Such is the task which the two Allied Powers wish to undertake in the liberated territories.

Contrary to what Kurds might have expected, the declaration suggested Mesopotamian self-determination rather than Kurdish one by deciding to attach South Kurdistan to Mesopotamia. Besides, 'although Britain was now loathe to hand the vilayet of Mosul over to France, its whole approach to the problems north of Mosul was contingent on reaching a substantive arrangement with France⁴³ and London had still no concrete scheme for running the area, let alone deciding the long-

⁴¹ McDowall, *op.cit.*, p. 119.

⁴² A speech delivered by Woodrow Wilson, the US President, to a joint session of the Congress on 8 January 1918. The 12th point is read as follows: The Turkish portion of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development, and the Dardanelles should be permanently opened as a free passage to the ships and commerce of all nations under international guarantees.' See http://www.lib.byu.edu/index.php/President_Wilson's_Fourteen_Points, first access on 13 July 2010.

⁴³ McDowall, *op.cit.*, p. 119.



term future of the Kurdish regions.⁴⁴ To this uncertainty was added the divergence of opinions among the British themselves, especially since 1919. Referring to the activities of Edward William Charles Noel, a British intelligence agent, 'British policy during 1919,' notes Robert Olson, 'could well be called the Noel policy' and follows:

[Noel] was active in attempting to ascertain the viability of a policy that supported an independent Kurdish state or, at least, a viable autonomy for the Kurds. It either were to be achieved, it would be under the aegis of the British. Noel was often called the 'Second Lawrence,' usually disparagingly, by officials in the Colonial Office concerned with the Middle East. These officials were as uncertain about the depth of Kurdish nationalism as Noel was convinced of its strength. Colonial Office officials were not sure a 'Kurd Revolt' would improve the British position in the Middle East, especially with Turkey after the Kemalist victories throughout 1921.⁴⁵

The divergence became even more evident when an Arnold T. Wilson made in his 'Notes on M. Clemenceau's Proposals' the following statements:

We cannot do now what we might have done three months ago. In the East as in the West there is a new spirit in men's minds. The Turkish Empire cannot be destroyed; it is the embodiment of the Muslim ideal of temporal rule on earth of Muslim rulers, which the inability of Christian Powers to agree has aroused, at a moment when Western peoples are exhausted and averse to further wars. The only solution I can now see is the recognition of a Turkish Empire from Constantinople to the Caucasus – both exclusive with Armenian and Nestorian enclaves: European control at the Constantinople by an international body the nationality of whose representatives in the provinces will follow the general lines of spheres of influence of the various nations as now under discussion. This will commit us to support Turkey and to this extent will be satisfactory to our Mohamedan clients. [...] This policy will avoid annexations or protectorates contrary to popular will.

[...]

The restoration of Turkish authority under foreign (preferably British) advisers in the Northern provinces would ease the position on the Northern frontier of Mesopotamia – and in

⁴⁴ Eskander, *op.cit.*, p. 140.

⁴⁵ Olson, *op.cit.*, p. 53.



Kurdistan, where a political officer was recently murdered as a direct result of Turco-Kurdish intrigue.⁴⁶

As the uncertainties of the post-war period increased, the polyarchy among British institutions accelerated. The problem of polyarchy became more evident when the future of Mesopotamia in general, and that of the vilayet of Mosul in particular came into question. 'The 18 months that elapsed between the end of military operations in November 1918 and the award of the mandate for Mesopotamia to Great Britain were characterized by a steady divergence of policy between the imperial authorities in London and Baghdad.'⁴⁷ The failure of London's Government to adapt a coherent policy for Mesopotamia helped Arnold T. Wilson to strengthen his administration within the occupied territories. Arnold Wilson claimed that the Anglo-British Declaration was a 'disastrous error' and declared that the 'country as a whole neither expects nor desires any such sweeping schemes of independence.'⁴⁸ Therefore, as regards Mosul, the British proved a considerable controversy, due mainly to the fact that 'several government departments possessed a stake in the matter' and that they 'inevitably approached it from varying viewpoints.'⁴⁹ Beck summarizes this controversy as follows:

[This controversy] was shown, for example, by the complaint of Lord Curzon, the Foreign Secretary from 1919 to 1924, about departmental interference with his policy. The strategic argument, which justified the British occupation of Mosul in 1918 and explained the area's value both for imperial communication and for Britain's whole position in the Middle East, meant that the Mosul dispute involved not just the Foreign and Colonial Office but also India Office. The strategic argument centered upon the claim that the control of Mosul, which was separated physically from Turkey by mountain ranges, would not only ensure Iraq's survival but would also provide a more secure boundary against Turkey; it was feared that the latter, which was viewed as an aggressive Islamic state, might utilize Mosul as springboard for an attack upon Iraq, and, in time, upon the British interests in the Persian Gulf.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ GB165-0029/6/58, 23 April 1919, 'Note on M. Clemenceau's Proposals' by Arnold T. Wilson.

⁴⁷ Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, 'The British Occupation of Mesopotamia, 1914-1922,' *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 30, No. 2 (April, 2007), p. 366.

⁴⁸ Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 103.

⁴⁹ Beck, *op.cit.*, p. 257.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*



Similarly, Winston Churchill, then the Secretary of State of War and Air, stated in a Cabinet memorandum that he submitted on 1 May 1920 that 'the country was an administrative nightmare divided between three major department.'⁵¹

Within this context, the sole certainty was the immediacy of creating an intermediate area of British influence. 'In theory,' writes McDowall, 'some kind of Kurdish confederation was envisaged. In practice, however, there were real problems in defining a secure boundary for Mesopotamia, a buffer zone north of this to keep the Turks away, and finally a satisfactory northern border of that buffer zone with the putative Armenian state.'⁵² Many proposals were made: Major Noel, for example, advocated a three-hold scheme for Kurdistan: southern Kurdistan based on Suleymaniyya and embracing Nihri, Rawanduz, Arbil, Kirkuk, Kifri and Khaniqin; Central Kurdistan, centered on Mosul, and Western Kurdistan centered on Diyarbakir and stretching as far north as a Kurdish majority persisted, all implicitly enjoying British protection and advise.⁵³ Preoccupied with establishing a secure boundary, Arnold T. Wilson proposed 'the restoration of Turkish authority under foreign (preferably British) advisers in the Northern provinces. [That would] ease the position on the Northern frontier of Mesopotamia – and in Kurdistan.'⁵⁴ Foreign Office in London and General Headquarters in Cairo proposed, in turn, a total withdraw from all Kurdistan keeping only the Mesopotamian plain. Arnold T. Wilson responded as follows:

The whole basis of our action as regards Kurds should be in my opinion the assurance of a satisfactory boundary to Mesopotamia. Such a boundary cannot be secured, I imagine in the plains, but must be found in the Kurdish mountains ... [and that] entails a tribal policy.⁵⁵

These contradictory and unclear policies toward the Kurds became evident at a combined meeting of major British institutions, i.e., Foreign, Colonial, War, Air Ministry, and India Office held on 13 April 1920. By that time, the British concluded that they were to cut off Kurdistan, being unable, though, to find anyone to set up an autonomous state in that part of the country.⁵⁶ Whilst Wilson

⁵¹ CAB 24/106, 1 May 1920, Churchill, Cabinet Memorandum, secret: 'Mesopotamian Expenditure.'

⁵² McDowall, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

⁵³ FO 371/4149, 6 April 1919, Memorandum: Future Constitution of Mesopotamia, Enclosure 8 note by Political Office Suleymaniyya.

⁵⁴ GB165-0029/6/58.

⁵⁵ FO 371/ 4192, 12 September 1919, C-in-Egypt to War Office and Wilson's response.

⁵⁶ Olson, *op. cit.*, p. 57. This 'inability' was mainly due to the failure of their experience of establishing indirect control over of Kurdish part of Area B, including Suleymaniyya, Kirkuk, Kifri, i.e. Southern Kurdistan. In 1918-1919 period, the British undertaken the foundation of an autonomous Kurdish state under Sheikh Mahmud, the latter challenging seriously British position in the ares, by claiming that he was the king of all Kurdish area. For the details of this first autonomous Kurdish



argued that the abandonment of southern Kurdistan would jeopardize British position in the Persian Gulf, as well as in Mesopotamia, Lord Curzon disagreed his opinion. The impossibility of coming up with a concrete decision, the committee of the meeting agreed on Robert Vansittart's draft proposal reporting that would not sever Kurdistan 'straight off' but left the problem to be solved in the course of the next year. Vansittart's proposals became articles 62, 63 and 64 of the Treaty of Sèvres.⁵⁷ In the course of discussions, whilst Edwin Montagu, secretary of state for India, advocated an independent Kurdistan, Lord Curzon stated 'that if the British established a quasi-autonomous Kurdish state with British administration, the French might be tempted to establish a similar state with French advisers in northern Kurdistan.'⁵⁸

'By May 1919, in their first retreat from a single Southern Kurdish state, the focus began to shift to the idea of an Arab province of Mosul fringed by autonomous Kurdistan states under Kurdish chiefs with British advisers.'⁵⁹ Although the idea of political separation between Kurd and Arab remained, the uprisings of 1919 persuaded the British in Iraq of the need for a closer grip on local affairs. However, but the policy makers in London thought to abandon a mountainous region that was costly to control. 'While the former won the day, talk of an independent Kurdistan, even of autonomous states, underwent modification.'⁶⁰ Wilson cabled his principals in London in the aftermath of Shaykh Mahmud's rising:

Recent events have in no way altered my view as regards necessity of giving effect to policy approved by HM's Government on [9 May] for autonomous Kurdish States, but degree of supervision must depend on need of country and on strategic considerations.⁶¹

This variety of opinions and proposals contributed to that the problem of northern boundary of the vilayet of Mosul remained unsolved. During the period under question, British efforts were concentrated on establishing proper local alliances, namely, to find 'suitable Kurdish leaders with whom it would be possible to work out a solution.' General Sharif Pasha, an erstwhile member of the Kurdish party of 1908, who also attended the Peace Conference of 1919; Shaykh Mahmud Barzinji; Shaykh Taha of Nikri were prominent Kurdish leaders with whom the British tried to work out solution, these efforts remaining roughly fruitless. This blurriness was accelerated by the division among the

Government, see Eskander, *op.cit.*, also Saad Eskander (November, 2007), *From Planning to Partition, Great Britain and the Future of Kurdistan, 1915-1923*, (Suleymaniyya: , unpublished Ph.D. thesis, 2007).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ McDowall, *op.cit.*, p. 165.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Wilson, *op.cit.*, p 143.



Kurds themselves. 'By the spring of 1919,' states David McDowall, 'there were three strands of political thinking among the Kurds: pro-Turkish, pro-Allies and finally, among the Dersim Kurds, a desire for complete independence from all outside interference. Many of the Kurds, perplexed by the uncertainties involved, did not wish to commit themselves irretrievably to one course of action.'⁶²

By 1920, the foundation a separate Kurdistan remained a general tendency, whilst the frontiers could not be decided. Throughout 1920 and 1921, many proposals were made. For example, on 13 August 1920, a letter addressed to Sir Percy Cox⁶³, is read as follows:

I therefore further assume that a desirable development of the general situation in the Eastern Vilayets [*sic.*] would be the success of a Kurdish autonomy under Turkish suzerainty followed by a successful appeal at the end of five years for independence and, and an option for severance from [Baghdad] and inclusion in the New Kurdish state.

[...]

In regard to the areas of S. Kurdistan which are at the present administrated from Baghdad, I would suggest a federation of Kurdish states by Kurdish chiefs with British president by their sides, and a Federal Council, possibly at [Suleymaniyya], over which for the present a British political officer should preside. [...] As member of Federal Council in addition to those [*unread*] locally, I would recommend Hamdi Bey Baban, a representative from Bedr Khan⁶⁴ family, and an associate of the Kurdish Club at Constantinople.⁶⁵

Nevertheless, it was also said that the future of Southern Kurdistan could be decided on the function of local conditions and it depended on the position that the US would take. Additionally, the full scale uprising of July 1920, as well as the rise of Arab nationalism blurred even more the future of Southern Kurdistan. In October 1920, Sir Percy Cox replaced Wilson and soon undertook an initiative supporting an Arab government in Iraq. In a letter to Sir Wyndham Henry Deedes,⁶⁶ for example, Hubert Young underlined the necessity of 'setting up such a Government and keeping it purely Arab.'⁶⁷ By the end of the year, British position towards Kurds seemed even more changed. 'When the electoral law revised in December 1920,' note McDowall, 'it contained no recognition of the safeguards to which Iraq's Kurds were entitled under the Treaty of Sèvres, signed only four months

⁶² McDowall, *op.cit.*, p. 121.

⁶³ Cox replaced Arnold T. Wilson on October 1920, several months later following the full scale rebellion of July 1920.

⁶⁴ Bedr Khan was, at the Ottoman period, the leader of a rebellion in the vilayet of Mosul against the centralization efforts (1843).

⁶⁵ GB 165-0309/ DS 799.K, 13 August 1920, Political Baghdad to Sir Percy Cox.

⁶⁶ Chief Secretary (1920-1922) to Sir Herbert Samuel, the British High Commissioner in Palestine.

⁶⁷ GB 165-0309/ DS 42.3.67, 15 October 1920, Sir Hubert Young to Sir Wyndham Henry Deedes..



ago.' In Proceedings of the Council of Minister was stated that the law was called as 'Provisional Electoral Regulation' and stipulated the following:

[...] the Congress should consist of 100 members of whom 20 should be elected by the [Sheikhs] of tribes. In addition to this special representation, any qualified tribes who inscribe their name on the electoral registers may cast their vote like other Mesopotamia citizens. Special representation is also extended to the Jewish and Christian communities in Iraq, a member to the first and five to the second.

'Other points of interest are that the clause which described the Iraq as the territory 'defined by the treaties of the Powers' has been omitted and that the wholly Kurdish Division of [Suleymaniyya], as well as the Kurdish districts in Mosul and Kirkuk division, are included in its provisions.⁶⁸

Although the Kurds were included in the electoral, even with some special clauses, Percy Cox proposed 'to address separately on the subject of [Suleymaniyya] and the Kurdish districts as they require careful handling, compatible with the Article 64 of the Treaty of Peace 64 with [the Ottoman Empire].'⁶⁹

As regards Kurdish situation, the Intelligence Report of 31 December 1920 stated that Political Officers of Mosul, Kirkuk and Arbil were of opinion that there were no desire in their areas to separate from the Iraq provided they were assured of the continuance of British control and that certain local safeguards with regard to language, etc. were given.⁷⁰ In spite of the consideration of Kurdish rights, 'these were to be wholly subservient to British (and Iraqi) strategic concerns.'⁷¹

Another important change was that Colonial Office, replacing India Office, was charged of the Iraqi affairs and the creation of the Middle East Department within the Colonial Office. This change was mainly due to, among others, two reasons: 1) the exigency of minimizing the inter-departmental interference. As regards this issue Young, for example, wrote: '[...] so long as the control of the Middle East was divided between two departments who could differ so vitally on questions of principle, it would be quite impossible for us to carry put a combined policy'⁷²; 2) the necessity, mostly under a considerable public pressure, of developing 'a policy designed to reduce Imperial

⁶⁸ CO 730/1, 31 December 1920, Intelligence Report, in Robert L. Jarman (ed.) (1998), *Political Diaries of the Arab World. Iraq*. Volume 1: 1920-1921, (Oxford: Archive Editions), pp. 74-75.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁷¹ McDowall, *op.cit.*, p. 166.

⁷² GB 165-0309/ DS 42.3.67, October 1920, Sir Hubert Young to Clayton.



expenditure by successive stages to a minimum.⁷³ The Middle East Department was officially founded at the Cairo Conference of March 1921, which also decided that Feisal, the son of Hussein of Hejaz, would be the future king of Iraq.⁷⁴ The Cairo Conference had major effects on the British politics towards the Kurds: The Conference was 'an attempt by the British to arrest the drift of British policy that had occurred in 1920 and continued to characterize policy in early 1921.'⁷⁵ The Middle East Department drew up a memorandum in London that it submitted to the political committee on Kurdistan. The committee was composed of Winston Churchill (chair), then Colonial Secretary, Percy Cox, Gertrude Bell, Cox's secretary and Colonel T. E. Lawrence. Major Hubert Young and Major E. W. C. Noel were consulting members. The memorandum stated overtly that the members were strongly in opinion that purely Kurdish areas should not be included in the Arab state of Mesopotamia, but that the principles of Kurdish unity and nationality should be promoted as far as possible by H.M.G. At the end of the discussions, the four members over seven favored a Kurdish entity separate from Iraq: Churchill, Young, Noel and Lawrence, against Cox and Bell (Major R. D. Babcock, the secretary of the committee being left out of the discussions). Yet, 'an amazing policy reversal was to occur in the next few months: the Middle East Department and Churchill's policy was rejected in favor of Cox's.'⁷⁶ Thus, 'the idea of allowing the emergence of a separate southern Kurdistan was finally discarded in favour of retaining it as a part of Iraq.'⁷⁷ To the eyes of Cox, 'the best policy being to consider the Kurds as a minority in Iraq but give them a chance after three years to reconsider their [*sic.*] decision.'⁷⁸ This was what the British meant when they advocated 'local autonomy' for the Kurds in the draft Mandate and also during the Mosul debates.

These changes created diverse reactions among the Kurds of the vilayet of Mosul. The new regime was extended to three major divisions of the vilayet, i.e., Kirkuk, Arbil and Mosul, 'while

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ 'The Cairo Conference was convened by Winston Churchill, then Britain's Colonial Secretary. With the mandates of Palestine and Iraq awarded to Britain at the San Remo Conference, Churchill wished to consult with Middle East experts, and at his request, Gertrude Bell, Sir Percy Cox, T. E. Lawrence, Sir Kinahan Cornwallis, Sir Arnold T. Wilson, Iraqi minister of war Jafar al Askari, Iraqi minister of finance Sasun Effendi (Sasson Heskayl), and others gathered in Cairo, Egypt, in March 1921. The two most significant decisions of the conference were to offer the throne of Iraq to Amir Faisal ibn Hussein (who became [Faisal I](#)) and the [emirate of Transjordan](#) (now Jordan) to his brother Abdullah I ibn Hussein. Furthermore, the British garrison in Iraq would be substantially reduced and replaced by air force squadrons, with a major base at Habbaniyya. The conference provided the political [blueprint](#) for British administration in both Iraq and Transjordan, and in offering these two regions to the Hashemite sons of Sharif Hussein ibn Ali of the [Hejaz](#), Churchill believed that the spirit, if not the letter, of Britain's wartime promises to the Arabs would be fulfilled.' Information available at <http://www.answers.com/topic/cairo-conference-1>, accessed on 13 July 2010.

⁷⁵ Olson, *op.cit.*, p. 58.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁷⁷ McDowall, *op.cit.*, p. 166.

⁷⁸ FO 371/5067, 12 June 1921, Civil Commissioner Mesopotamia to Secretary of State for the Colonies,



Suleymaniyya remained at its express wish under direct British control' and 'every effort' was made 'to develop native administration along normal lines.'⁷⁹ The British response to these reactions was formulated by a *communiqué* by Percy Cox. The latter affirmed that 'the High Commissioner has active consideration the administrative arrangements to be made for the future of the Kurdish districts in Iraq. It has been represented to him that apprehension exists best the interest of the Kurds should suffer by subordination to the national government established in Baghdad, and that for this reason there is some demand for an autonomous regime.' It would be relevant to quote this *communiqué*, though long, in order to show that the idea of a separate Kurdistan had been abandoned and to explicit how the British tried to justify their position towards the Kurds:

At the same time the leaders of Kurdish opinion are understood to be fully alive to the economic and industrial ties connecting their areas with Iraq proper and to the inconveniences which separation might involve. In these circumstances His Excellency desires if possible to obtain an indication of the real wishes of the Kurdish communities. Should they prefer to remain under the Iraq government, he is prepared to recommend to the Council of State a solution on the following lines:

One – As regards the Kurdistan districts of the Mosul Division which fall within the sphere of British Mandate, a sub-liwa⁸⁰ should be formed comprising the districts of Zakho, Aqra & Amediya, with headquarters of Dohuk, the sub-liwa to be under a British Assistant [Mutesarrif]. Qaimmaqams⁸¹ for the time being should be British, but will be replaced by Kurds or Kurdish-speaking Arabs acceptable to the Kurds as soon as competent men are forthcoming. This sub-liwa would be generally subject, for all financial and judicial purposes, to the National Government in Baghdad and would then naturally send representatives to the Constituent Assembly; but for the purposes of general administration the Qaimmaqams would address the Sub-[Mutesarrif] while administrative appointments would be made by H.E. the High Commissioner in consultation with the local authorities.

Two – The High Commissioner will endeavour to arrange to associate British officers with the administration of Arbil, together with Keui Sanjak⁸² and Rowanduz, and will secure that in the

⁷⁹ McDowall, *op.cit.*, p. 167.

⁸⁰ Liwa: a district governed by a mutessarif.

⁸¹ Qaimmaqam: district governor.

⁸² Sanjak: Sub-division of a vilayet



appointment of Government official regard will be had [sic.] to the wished of the people. Details should be elaborated as soon as the situation admits.

Three- [Suleymaniyya] will be treated as a Mutesarrafliq governed by a [Mutesarrif] Adviser attached to him. Pending the appointment of a [Mutesarrif] the British Political Officer will act in this capacity.⁸³

While these conditions were accepted by Mosul and Arbil divisions, Suleymaniyya rejected them. One might hardly talk about the British position as regards the Kurds. The Declaration of 24 December 1922, for example affirmed the establishment of a Kurdish government within the boundaries of Iraq. 'His Britannic Majesty's Government and the Government of Iraq,' was said in the Declaration, 'hope that different Kurdish elements will, as soon as possible, arrive at an agreement between themselves as to the form which they wish that that government should take and the boundaries within which they wish it to extend and will send responsible delegates to Baghdad to discuss their economic and political relations with His Britannic Majesty's Government and the Government of Iraq.'⁸⁴ These promises were confirmed, in a way, by the Decision of the Council of Ministers of 11 July 1923. The Decision stated that 'the Iraq Government do not intend to appoint any Arab officials in the Kurdish districts except technical officials, nor do they intend to force inhabitants of the Kurdish districts to use the Arabic language in their official correspondence.'

Yet, the compromise was only in appearance, since Cox expressed previously 'that the declaration of local autonomy would split the Kurdish nationalist into two groups: 'the more enlightened Kurds' and 'the more ignorant and fanatical elements' led by Mahmud.⁸⁵ In the meantime, the unrest in Southern Kurdistan grew consistently especially with the arrival of Feisal. The latter 'and the issue of his election to the Iraqi throne changed the political situation,'⁸⁶ conformingly, indeed, to the rejection of the Middle East and Churchill's policy. In this sense, 'the exchange of views between the Colonial Office and the British authorities in Mesopotamia was suspended. To prevent the Kurdish issue from becoming an obstacle in the way of installing Feisal as king of Iraq, the Colonial Office postponed not only the drawing of ethnic boundaries between

⁸³ GB 165-0341, 6 May 1921, 'Promises made to the Kurds,' Communiqué by Sir Percy Cox published by the British Advisers in Mosul, Kirkuk and [Suleymaniyya] division. Also see, FO 371/6351, 15 May 1921, Intelligence Report. The Report also states that 'it is feared that [Suleymaniyya] will not accept any compromise propose, but will vote against the inclusion in the Iraq.'

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Eskander, op.cit, p. 176. See also FO 371/7782, 16 November 1922, High Commissioner of Iraq to Secretary of State (S/S) for the Colonies.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 163. See also CO 730/2, 23 June 1921, Colonial Office Minute No. 31558, and FO 371/6552, 9 July 1921, Secretary of State (S/S) for the Colonies to High Commissioner, Priority.



Southern Kurdistan and Arab Mesopotamia, but also the political future of the former.⁸⁷ The mountainous regions of Rowanduz, Suleymaniyya, Barzan and Aqra in particular were the scene of growing disorder. The British responded to this situation by carrying out ground and air operations. The situation worsened with the foundation of Iraq under Hashemite rule.

Another turning point was when the Turkish Independence War (1919-1922) triumphed and the Republic of Turkey was found in October 1923, following the signature of the Treaty of Lausanne on 24 July 1923. With the treaty, a likely foundation of a Kurdistan seemed almost totally vanished. The Treaty of Lausanne did not remove all problems between Iraq (so, Britain) and Turkey, 'since the dispute over the possession of the vilayet of Mosul, or rather over the exact frontier line between Turkey and Iraq still remained in a state of deadlock.'⁸⁸ Where to place Mosul, and therefore, the Kurds, became one of the major questions of the period. This question was mainly about the 'boundaries and belonging,' which constituted the realm of the debates on the vilayet.

'The Brave New World:' Mandate System and the Mosul Question

The process ending up with the awarding of the vilayet of Mosul to Iraq might be summarized as follows:

The Mandate system originated at the Peace Conference of 1919, which also instituted the League of Nations.⁸⁹ Inspired by Fourteen Points of Woodrow Wilson whom ideas were furthered by J. C. Smuts, the South African statesman, who proposed a League of Nations as *A Practical Suggestion*,⁹⁰ the Mandate system consisted of parceling out the territories of the defeated empires, i.e. Germany and the Ottoman Empire. 'In former wars,' notes Hales, 'the conquest of colonial territory was usually followed up by the annexation of the whole or of part of the occupied

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Beck, op.cit., p. 256. See also Salahi Ramsdan Sonyel, 'Turkish Diplomacy 1918-1923, Mustafa Kemal and the Turkish Nationalist Movement,' *History: Review of New Books* 4, No. 1 (1975), pp.195-226.

⁸⁹ The foundation of a League of Nations was incorporated in the Treaty of Versailles of 1919. 'The formal life of the League of Nations began on 10 January 1920, when the Treaty of Versailles came into effect, with the Covenant forming the first section of this Treaty and the other treaties imposed on the defeated Central Powers.' See George Egerton, 'The League of Nations: An Outline History. 1920-1946,' League of Nations (1996), *League of Nations, 1920-1946, Organization and Accomplishments. A Retrospective of the First International Organization for the Establishment of World Peace*, (New York and Geneva: United Nations Archives), pp. 24-29.

⁹⁰ Lieut.-Gen. The Rt. Hon. Jan Christiaan Smuts (1918), *The League of Nations : A Practical Suggestion*, (London and New York: Hodder and Stoughton).



territories.⁹¹ The Mandate system, however, consisted of a certain denial of any annexation. The principles of this system were stated in Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations.⁹² Article 22 distinguished three types of mandate: 1) A Mandates consisting of former Ottoman territories; 2) B Mandates in Central Africa, and 3) C mandates in the Pacific and in South-West Africa. San Remo Conference held on 19-26 April 1920 allocated a Mandate over Iraq and Palestine to Great Britain, and one over Syria and the Lebanon to France. The precise boundaries were left, however, to be determined by the Principal Allied Powers and the terms of the agreement could only be confirmed by the Council of League of Nations on 24 July 1922.

Iraq was the last country to be allocated as A Mandate. As I've mentioned above, the British opted for establishing a monarchy under Hashemite rule, with Faisal at the throne. 'In August 1921, [Faisal] was elected King by an overwhelming majority⁹³ and began negotiating with the British so as to place the relations of the two countries on the treaty basis. Consequently a draft Mandate for Iraq had been submitted to the Council in September.'⁹⁴ The justification of the establishment a monarchy under an Arab ruler was justified by the British as follows:

His Majesty's Government found themselves unable to resist the overwhelming desire of the people of Iraq for the formation of a national Government under an Arab ruler. The march of events was so rapid that it did not admit of their consulting the Council before taking steps of which they were confident that that body would approve: namely, the recognition of the Sovereign whose recent accession to the throne followed upon the universal demand of the people of the country.⁹⁵

⁹¹ James C. Hales, 'The Creation and Application of the Mandate System (A Study in International Colonial Supervision),' *Transaction of the Grotius Society* 25, Problems of Peace and War, Papers Read before the Society in the Year 1939 (1939), p. 188.

⁹² The first paragraphs of the Covenant are read as follows: 'To those colonies and territories which as a consequence of the late war have ceased to be under the sovereignty of the States which formerly governed them and which are inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world, there should be applied the principle that the well-being and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilization and that securities for the [formation] of this trust should be embodied in this Covenant. The best method of giving practical effect to this principle is that the tutelage of such peoples should be entrusted to advanced nations who by reason of their resources, their experience or their geographical position can best undertake this responsibility, and who are willing to accept it, and that this tutelage should be exercised by them as Mandatories on behalf of the League. The character of the mandate must differ according to the stage of the development of the people, the geographical situation of the territory, its economic conditions and other similar circumstances.'

⁹³ The debates on this 'overwhelming majority' who elected Faisal as King of Iraq are out of limits of this paper.

⁹⁴ Hales, *op.cit.*, p. 201.

⁹⁵ League of Nations (1921), *Official Journal*, p. 1355.



This was not until 1924, however, that Iraq's status could be finalized. Following the conclusion of the first Anglo-Iraqi treaty on October 1922, a protocol supplementing the latter was signed. Hales summarizes the process as follows:

The ratification of these documents by a newly constituted Iraq Assembly took place, after Turkey had finally renounced her rights over Arab provinces by the Treaty of Lausanne. [...] Consequently at its meeting on [27 September 1924], the Council approved the work of Great Britain in establishing a constitutional Monarchy in Iraq, by means of an Instrument known as 'Decision of Council' and not as a Mandate, but which imposed upon Great Britain the duties incumbent upon a Mandatory Power in the case of an A Mandate.⁹⁶

Although Turkey renounced her rights over Arab provinces, the frontier line between Turkey and Iraq could not be determined, the discussion being about the incorporation of the vilayet of Mosul to either Turkey or Iraq. No agreement being reached at Lausanne, the resolution of the Mosul dispute was submitted to the League of Nations Council, given nine months further negotiations following the treaty remained fruitless.⁹⁷ In September 1924, a technical commission, composed of Mr. Wirsén, Count Teleki and Col. Paulis, were authorized to investigate the facts of the vilayet on the spot. Meanwhile, the Council fixed a provisional frontier which defined the military *status quo*, a frontier known as Brussel's line.⁹⁸ In September 1925, the Council examined the Commission's report. The latter recommended the Brussel's line provided Great Britain retained mandate for twenty-five years and accorded cultural autonomy to the Kurds. On 16 December 1925, the League Council awarded the disputed territory to Iraq (thus, to Great Britain) under the conditions that are mentioned above, unless Iraq becomes a member of the League at an earlier date.⁹⁹ Thus, a new minority within the state-system in the Middle East was created: the Kurds.

⁹⁶ Hales, *op.cit.*, p. 202.

⁹⁷ The relevant article of the Treaty of Lausanne on the frontier between Turkey and Iraq is read as follows:

'The frontier between Turkey and Iraq shall be laid down in friendly arrangement to be concluded between Turkey and Great Britain within nine months.

'In the event of no agreement being reached between the two Governments within the time mentioned, the dispute shall be referred to the Council of the League of Nations.

'The Turkish and British Governments reciprocally undertake that, pending the decision to be reached on the subject of the frontier, no military or other movement shall take place which might modify in any way the present state of the territories of which the final fate will depend upon that decision.' Treaty of Lausanne, Art. 3, Paragraph 2.' See <http://www.hri.org/docs/lausanne/part1.html>, accessed on 3 August 2010.

⁹⁸ A line slightly south of the northern boundary of the vilayet of Mosul.

⁹⁹ League of Nations, *Question of the Frontier between Turkey and Iraq*. Report submitted to the Council by the Commission instituted by the Council Resolution of September 30th, 1924, Geneva, August 1925, 90 p.; *League of Nations Monthly Summary* 5 (December, 1925), pp. 325-326. For the different stages of the solution of the dispute see Quincy Wright, 'The Mosul Dispute,' *The American Journal of International Law* 20, No. 3 (July, 1926), pp. 453-464.



Conclusion:

Kurds of Mosul: From Autonomy to Minority's Status

In spite of its historical roots that might be found since seventeenth century, 'in its modern form the Kurdish nationalism developed during the second half on the nineteenth century along parallel lines with the similar movements of the other subjects of the Ottoman Empire in Asia, the Arabs and the Armenians.'¹⁰⁰ The defeat of the Ottoman Empire in WWI in 1918, the signature of the Treaty of Sèvres, coupled with the twelfth point of Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points contributed to the raise of the Kurdish aspirations for an independent state. The projects for the latter, the modalities of political, social and military involvement varied throughout the post-war period, and were highly stamped by the uncertainties of the post-war period. From 1918 to 1926, the British policies took also their part in the shaping of the Kurdish nationalism. In absence of a definite British policy toward Mesopotamia and the Kurds, the Kurdish nationalism evolved in the prism of British tergiversations. This implied that this nationalism became both a crux for the British policies and a serious challenge to the latter.

The awarding of the vilayet of Mosul to Iraq, namely, the incorporation of the Kurds into an Arab nation-state meant the creation of an ethnic minority in Iraq, in particular and contributed to deepening of the historical division of Kurdish lands. Within the new nation-state system, this division determined the evolution of Kurdish nationalism in the Middle East. Coupled with a set of European assumptions and also British policies stamped by tergiversations were the constituent part of this evolution and became the very beginning of the Kurdish question in the Middle East.

¹⁰⁰ C. J. Edmonds, 'Kurdish Nationalism,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 6, No. 1 (January, 1971), p. 87.



APPENDICES

APPENDICE I

San Remo Resolution of 1920

(a) To accept the terms of the Mandates Article as given below with reference to Palestine, on the understanding that there was inserted in the *procès-verbal* an undertaking by the Mandatory Power that this would not involve the surrender of the rights hitherto enjoyed by the non-Jewish communities in Palestine; this undertaking not to refer to the question of the religious protectorate of France, which had been settled earlier in the previous afternoon by the undertaking given by the French Government that they recognized this protectorate as being at an end.

(b) that the terms of the Mandates Article should be as follows:

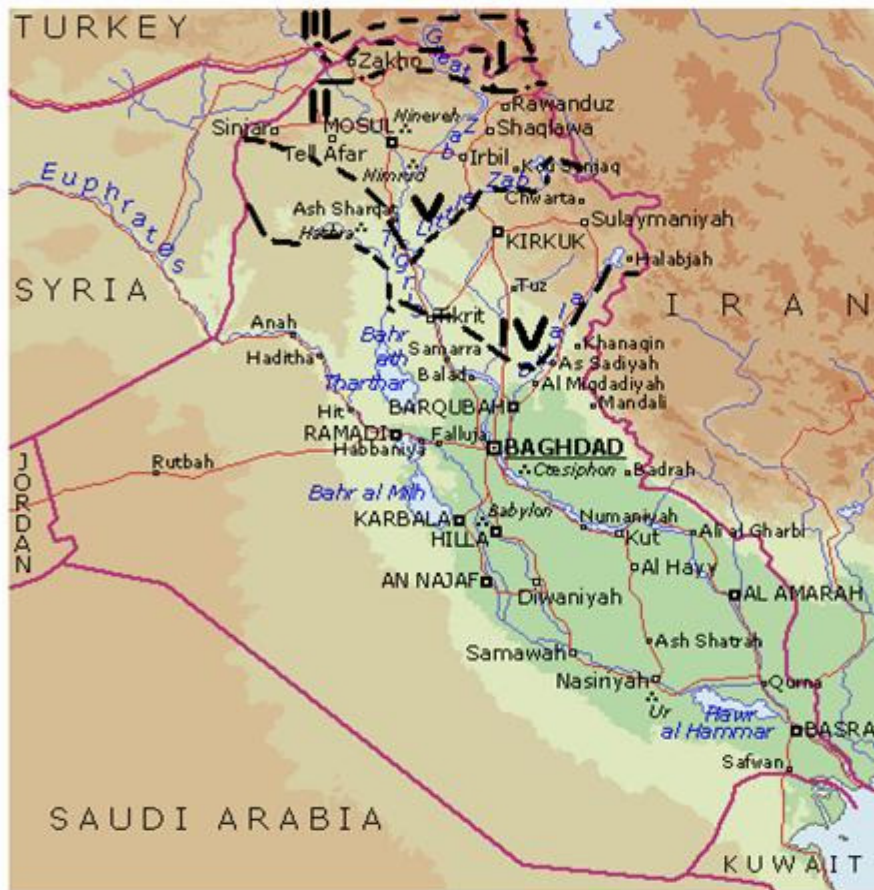
The High Contracting Parties agree that Syria and Mesopotamia shall, in accordance with the fourth paragraph of Article 22, Part I (Covenant of the League of Nations), be provisionally recognized as independent States, subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone. The boundaries of the said States will be determined, and the selection of the Mandatories made, by the Principal Allied Powers.

The High Contracting Parties agree to entrust, by application of the provisions of Article 22, the administration of Palestine, within such boundaries as may be determined by the Principal Allied Powers, to a Mandatory, to be selected by the said Powers. The Mandatory will be responsible for putting into effect the declaration originally made on November 8, 1917, by the British Government, and adopted by the other Allied Powers, in favour of the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.



APPENDICE II

The proposed maps for the vilayet of Mosul



I – Actual Iraqi frontier - Brussel's line, recommended by the Commission;

II – Frontiers at Sèvres;

III – Frontier proposed by the British (for northern frontier of Iraq - between the Hazil and Khabur rivers; the district of the Assyrian tribes between the Khabur river and the Jelo Height; the broken country between this district and the Shemsdinan river; from the Shemdinan river to the Persian frontier)

Source: KOVACKS, Péter Kovacks, 'Paul Teleki et le Règlement de l'Affaire de Mossoul dans la Société des Nations,' *Miskolc Journal of International Law*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (2004), pp. 156-187

APPENDICE III

Extracts from the Report of the Mosul Commission

The main focus of the Commission's report on the dispute was ethnical and racial characteristics of the vilayet. The report of the Commission, as well as the main arguments of Turkey and Great Britain justify this statement. The Commission's report distinguishes five types of argument: 1) geographical and ethnical; 2) historical; 3) economic; 4) strategical [*sic.*]; 5) political. 36 over 90 pages of the report are consecrated to the geographical and ethnical arguments. These pages constitute the first chapter of the report and are divided on four sections of which analysis of ethnical arguments is the most detailed one in overall.

On this issue, the report considered that 'the country is inhabited by Kurds, Arabs, Christians, Turks, Yezidi and Jews, in that order of numerical importance' and that "the Kurds and the Arabs are the only races who live in compact masses in large areas, and it is only between them that a line of racial demarcation can be found or determined.'

Wishes of the population was expressed as follows:

Subject to reservations made in the report in regard to the opinions given, that fact seems to be established that, taken the territory as a whole, the desires expressed by the population are more in favour of Iraq than of Turkey. It must, however, be realized that the attitude of most of the people was influenced by the desire for effective support under the mandate, and by economic considerations, rather than by any feeling of solidarity with the Arab kingdom; if these two factors had carried no weight with the persons consulted, it is probable that the majority of them would have preferred to Turkey rather than to be attached to Iraq.

Together with the other arguments, the Commission recommended, as regards the Kurds of Mosul, that 'regard must be paid to the desires expressed by the Kurds that officials of Kurdish race should be appointed for the administration of their country, the dispensation of justice, and teaching in the schools, and that Kurdish should be the official language of all these services.'



COMMISSION.

GERMAN ELE



THE MOSUL COMMISSION AT WORK.—The Commission appointed by the League of Nations to report upon the frontier between Iraq and Turkey recently concluded its investigations and will shortly present its findings. Our photograph shows the Commission at work at the northern frontier, one of the last places to be visited. The British Assessor, Mr. Jardine, is seen translating into Kurdish the benefit of local notables the method of inquiry laid down by the Commission. Left to right: Mr. Jardine; Col. Paulin; M. of France (seated); the Swedish President; Suluk Pasha, the Iraqi representative; Count Paul Telaki (seated); Consul Bey, a Turkish expert.

