

THE ANGLO-IRAQI RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN 1945 AND 1948

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This paper discusses the British Labour government's social, economic and military policies in Iraq between 1945 and 1948. The ability of the Iraqi monarchy to adapt to the British policies after World War II is discussed. The British were trying to put more social justice into the Iraqi regime in order to keep British influence and to increase the Iraqi regime's stability against the Arab nationalist movement.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In the last century, the Middle East underwent big changes and faced challenging issues, mostly because of the British policies in the Middle East. The British influence in the Middle East during the twentieth century was strong enough that Britain effectively created the modern history for the region, which gave British unprecedented influence. Moreover, Britain had the power and the opportunity to establish a new system in Middle East after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

This thesis will discuss the British relationship with Iraq after World War II, that is, between the years 1945 and 1948. The main focus will be on the new policy of the Labour government after World War II, especially regarding Iraq. The paper will include information about the other Arab states in the Middle East, especially about Egypt and Palestine, when needed because British policy dealt with whole area as one block. Egypt and Palestine were the source of the struggle between the British and the Arab Nationalists, which affected the British relationship with Iraqi leaders, as the Labour government planned for the new policy to cover most of the Arab states in 1945 when the Labour government tried to reorganize the relationships among-Arab states in the Middle East. The new policy came to match the British economic and political situation after the war to reduce Britain's commitment in area. The weak economy for Britain after the war made it hard for the Labour government to provide its social and economic development plans with the necessary sources to move on its scheme.

I chose Iraq as the example for examining the Anglo-Arab relationship for several reasons. First of all, Britain had a special relationship with Iraq because Britain created the state of Iraq after World War I. Second, the tight relationship that Britain had with Iraqi elites during

the monarchy in Iraq, especially with Prince Abdalilah. Also, the natural and raw resources in Iraq made it a good laboratory in which the British could cooperate with Iraqis for mutual benefits. Last, Britain had better opportunities to modernize Iraq after World War II than the other Arab states because the possibilities of mutual benefits made Iraq different from the other Arab states. In addition, Iraq had many raw sources and the Iraqi regime was willing to work with the British on the economic and political projects. For example, Egypt's nationalism movement was strong among the Egyptians politicians, and Jordan's economy was too weak to provide mutual economic possibilities.

The thesis will start from the year 1945 because it was the year that the Labour party was elected. The Labour government came to power at a very hard time for Britain, as described by Ernest Bevin, minister for foreign affairs: "All the world is in trouble, and I have to deal with all troubles at once."<sup>1</sup> Bevin and the Labour government had a new Middle Eastern policy that focused on the peasants more than pashas to increase economic and social devolvement in Middle East states, which in turn would help Britain recover and to maintain its political position.

The paper will end with the new 1948 treaty between Britain and Iraq, even though the treaty was rejected by the Pan-Arab and Iraqi people. Rejecting the treaty ended the new Bevin policy in Iraq. Moreover, in 1948 the Arab-Israeli conflict over Palestine started, damaging the British image and work in many Middle Eastern states as it affected the British Empire.

After World War II, national bankruptcy forced Britain to develop new policies to try to rescue the British Empire. The Labour government under Prime Mister Clement Attlee tried to reorganize the empire and the British situation in the world. Under the Attlee government,

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<sup>1</sup> *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 5th ser., vol. 416 (23 November 1945), col. 777.

foreign affairs was under control of Ernest Bevin, who took full responsibility for the relationship between Britain and Iraq

In Middle East, where Britain had very strong political and economic influence, new British policy faced strong challenges from the British bankruptcy, which stopped Britain from having strong military and economical presence in the region. Britain could no longer maintain a large enough number of troops in the Middle East because of the large geographical area and the cost of millions of pounds every year.

Moreover, the British influence had to deal with a strong nationalism movement in Iraq after the war. Pan-Arab movements were feeding on from the internal and external problems for which Britain was blamed. Most of the external problems that damaged British influence in Iraq came from the Palestine case, as Bevin understood and for which he tried to find a solution that would avoid alienating both Arabs and Jews. The economic and social problems in Iraq challenged the British position in Iraq. The Iraqi economy was lagging behind. It lacked the heavy industries; the main sources of income came from agriculture. Also, the Iraqi society was facing a very strong change of movement because of the immigration from the countryside to the cities. Many of the new arrivals to the cities were illiterate and they almost did not have work skills; on other hand, the Iraqi cities and government did not have enough sources to contain the newcomers. Bevin understood that those problems would stop him from implementing the new policy in Iraq and the Middle East, so he planned to implement a new policy with his view about the helping the low and middle classes in the Iraq, and which would depend on the new social class.

Bevin's policy tried to help Britain to maintain its power through using Middle East sources and improving economic devolvement in the region. The Middle East was rich in natural





## CHAPTER 2

### ANGLO-IRAQI RELATIONSHIPS BEFORE WORLD WAR II

British history as it relates to the Middle East over the last century can be divided into two main periods. The first period began after World War I and lasted until World War II. During these years from 1918 to 1945, Britain was the main player in the Middle East, along with France, with the fall of the Ottoman Empire after the Great War. This was a time when new states, kingdoms, and borders were established between countries who had never known official borders. It was a time when Britain had the political power to decide who could be king or prince. As a result, Britain greatly influenced life in the Middle East. The second period was after World War II when British influence weakened, and people and governments in the Middle East started to become more independent.

The end of World War I brought many changes to the Middle East. The Islamic Ottoman Empire had ruled the Middle East since the sixteenth century. The Ottoman name came from Osman, a Turkish tribal leader in the thirteenth century who established the Ottoman monarchy in Anatolia.<sup>2</sup> During World War I, the Ottoman Empire aligned itself with the Central Powers, which led to the empire's loss of control in the Middle East. The Arabs were not satisfied with the Turkish rule in the early twentieth century. The Arabs in Arabia and Great Syria started to work against the Ottoman rule. Most of the Arab lands under the Turkish rule were not modernized. The Turks had very weak influence over Arabia, the Persian Gulf and in Great Syria, where they were facing very strong Arab Nationalist movements. They lost Egypt, which was occupied by Britain in the nineteenth century.

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<sup>2</sup> James L. Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 25.

In 1914, the British army invaded Basra, the first area that Britain attacked in Mesopotamia. Baghdad and Mosul were conquered before the end of the war,<sup>3</sup> and the Turkish army was defeated in what would later be known as Iraq, allowing Britain to protect its interests in the Persian Gulf and in India.<sup>4</sup> This was a great shock for the Arabs. For the first time since the Prophet Mohammed established his first city and state in the year 622, Arabs found themselves without a Muslim Caliph, the religious and political leader for Sunni Muslims. The Arab Revolution against the Ottoman Empire during World War I had one main objective: Establish an Arab kingdom, with the help of the British, under the rule of Hussein al-Hashemi Sharif of Mecca. Sir Arthur Henry McMahon (1862-1949) worked as the High Commissioner in Egypt during the years 1915-1917 when he contacted the Sharif Hussein.

The Hussein-McMahon Correspondence is the conversation between the British High Commissioner in Egypt during World War I and Sharif Hussein, who was Sharif of Mecca at the time, to persuade Hussein to lead the Arab revolt against the Turkish Empire with the British help. In return Britain would recognize Hussein's claim in ruling the Arab Land and helped his efforts. Sharif Hussein's desire was to be the Arab ruler, which he attempted to negotiate through the Hussein-McMahon letters. However, the Sykes-Picot<sup>5</sup> agreement divided the Middle East between Britain and France,<sup>6</sup> giving Britain control over Mesopotamia.

In 1915 the British Army invaded Mesopotamia, which was under the Turkish direct rule at the beginning of World War I, and which made the area a warfront with the Turkish Empire. After the war, Mesopotamia (Iraq) was under the British occupation from 1914-1920. For the

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<sup>3</sup>Reeva Spector Simon and Eleanor H. Tejirian, *The Creation of Iraq, 1914-1921* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 21.

<sup>4</sup>Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Colorado: Westview, 2004), 22.

<sup>5</sup>Elizabeth Monroe, *Britain Moment in the Middle East 1914-1956* (London: Chatoo & Windus, 1963), 27-37.

<sup>6</sup>John Darwin, *Britain, Egypt, and the Middle East: Imperial Policy in the Aftermath of War, 1918-1922*. (New York: St. Martin's Darwin Press, 1981), 141.

first time, civil administration was established in Mesopotamia. Sir Percy Cox<sup>7</sup> was named the high commissioner in Iraq,<sup>8</sup> and Gertrude Bell,<sup>9</sup> the first female officer in British Military intelligence,<sup>10</sup> played a major role in the new Iraq.<sup>11</sup> Three main territories were combined to form the country of Iraq: Basra in the south, Baghdad in the middle, and Mosul in the north.

With the end of World War I, the British were faced with decisions regarding the benefits versus costs of ruling a new country in an area of the world without a modern form of government, infrastructure, social services, or education system. In April 1920, Iraq was placed under British mandate. Britain considered two different approaches to modernizing Iraq. One option was direct rule by British officers. Arnold Talbot Wilson, Civil Commissioner in Baghdad from 1918 to 1920, supported direct rule by British officers, following the example of India,<sup>12</sup> but he was unsuccessful in his arguments. The second option was indirect rule by appointing an Arab ruler who would follow British policy. British officers T. E. Lawrence and Gertrude Bell worked in the Arab Bureau in Cairo and understood Arab ways and thinking. Lawrence was also well known for his role in the Arab revolution against the Ottoman Empire.<sup>13</sup> Lawrence and Bell favored indirect rule by establishing Arab leaders in the ex-Ottoman territory, and they specifically supported Prince Faisal<sup>14</sup> as leader in Iraq.

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<sup>7</sup> Percy Cox (1864-1937) started his military career in the India force in 1884. He was very successful in his job, which allowed to him to become the British resident in Muscat in 1899. He became political resident in the Persian Gulf in 1904 and served in Mesopotamia during the war. After that he was the high commissioner in Iraq 1920-1923.

<sup>8</sup> Marr, *Iraq*, 24.

<sup>9</sup> Gertrude Bell (1868-1926) went to Jerusalem in 1900. After that she started to learn Arabic and traveled in the Middle East, especially in the Arabian Desert. During World War I she joined the Arab Bureau in Cairo, then went to Basra in 1916 to work with Sir Percy Cox, the chief political officer, as oriental secretary in Baghdad.

<sup>10</sup> Georgina Howel, *Gertrude Bell: Queen of the Desert, Shaper of Nations* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2007), 235.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 45.

<sup>12</sup> Marr, *Iraq*, 22.

<sup>13</sup> Timothy J. Paris

<sup>14</sup> King Faisal Ibn Hussein (1886-1933) was the youngest son of Sharif Hussein, the leader for the Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire. Faisal was the leader for the Arabic army, which gave him the chance to meet the British officers in the Middle East. He became the king of Iraq with the British help.

A growing demand for nationalism among the Arabs sparked a revolution, led by Shiite religious leaders, against Britain in June 1920.<sup>15</sup> The Arabs in Iraq refused the British rule in 1920. The British were facing very strong revolutionary movements against their rule in the area because of the British direct rule. Many British officers agreed with Lawrence and Bell and supported indirect rule of Iraq. Prince Faisal, son of the Sharif of Mecca, had led the Arab revolution against the Ottoman Empire and had already established a favorable relationship with the British military. The Hashemi, Prince Faisal's family, were the Hejaz rulers for many years in the Muslims holy cities of Hejaz, Mecca and Medina. This relationship to the Prophet Mohammed made Prince Faisal acceptable to both the Shiite and the Sunni in Mesopotamia. During the Cairo Conference under Colonial Secretary Churchill's leadership in 1921, Prince Faisal al-Hashemi was named king of Iraq. Prince Faisal was then elected as the first king in Iraq.<sup>16</sup> Britain's policy connected British policy in Iraq with the Iraqi monarchy when Britain decided to build the state of Iraq under the control of the Hashimi monarchy and gave the crown to Prince Faisal.<sup>17</sup>

For Britain, the easy way to take control over the region was through indirect rule, because that was the easiest way to deal with the Nationalist movement in Iraq. The British policymakers believed that they could not make the Indian example functional in the Arab World. British policies in the Middle East after World War I were designed by people who knew Middle Eastern thinking and who had lived many years with the Arabs, which helped British policymakers make the most of the postwar strategy.

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<sup>15</sup> Marr, *Iraq*, 23.

<sup>16</sup> Marr, *Iraq*, 24-25.

<sup>17</sup> David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: Creating the Modern Middle East, 1914-1922*. (New York: H. Holt, 1989), 507-510. Philip Willard Ireland, *Iraq: A Study in Political Development*. (London: Kegan Paul Limited, 2004), 306-311

For example, because Sir Percy Cox spent his life in the area, he was able to exercise considerable influence as high commissioner inside Iraq during the Mandate. Cox worked with many of the early Arab nationalists, especially the Sharifian officers. It was not easy mission for him, but he knew that it was important to work with the Iraqi leaders and he worked to reduce the opposition from the Pan-Arab side. Also, the British officers in the early period had been stationed for a long time in Iraq and the Arab world, which allowed them to have direct contacts with the key leaders in Iraq. Having a direct relationship with Arab leaders in the Middle East is the way to have a good relationship with Iraqi leaders. To make its policy successful in the Middle East, Britain had to build a network of connections with local powers and pro-British supporters throughout the Arab world in order to dominate the region.

The British determined that Prince Faisal was the best choice for a ruler in Mesopotamia, making the Mandate more acceptable to the Arabs.<sup>18</sup> This choice also would allow the British to achieve their goals of modernization and social and economic assistance in the Middle East while allowing the British army to withdraw from the area, saving the British millions of pounds.<sup>19</sup> British citizens and the news media had begun to protest against the high cost of maintaining troops in the Mesopotamian region pressuring Lloyd George in London to withdraw the troops. Churchill advised,

Faisal offers far away best chance of saving our money. . . . Incredible waste now proceeding in Mesopotamia can only be cured by driving large number of troop and followers out of country and off our pay list. . . . We have to carry everybody back sooner or later and keeping them waiting eating up our mutton is pure waste.<sup>20</sup>  
The opportunity in Iraq presented Faisal a second opportunity to wear an Arab crown.

After the Arab revolution against the Turks in early 1920, Faisal was made King of Syria in

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<sup>18</sup> Aaron S. Klieman, *Foundations of British Policy in the Arab World: The Cairo Conference of 1921* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970).

<sup>19</sup> Christopher Catherwood, *Churchill's Folly: How Winston Churchill Created Modern Iraq* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2007), 129.

<sup>20</sup> Hanna Batatu, *Old Classes and Revolutionary Movement of the Iraq*, 2nd ed. (London: Saqi Books, 2004), 325.

March 1920 by the Arab nationalists.<sup>21</sup> However, the French had also made an agreement with Britain to divide the Arab world between them, and the French forced Faisal out of Syria after a short battle in June 1920.

Faisal's experience in Syria gave him some insight into the imperialistic games of the outside world he was joining, and he accepted the challenge to work with Britain. Faisal was not alone in the new Iraqi leadership. Most of the ex-Sherifian officers were also ex-Ottoman officers before the Great War, had participated in the Revolution under Faisal's command, and were also a part of the new Iraq. Thus, in order to achieve her policy in the Middle East, Britain would depend on the leadership and relationships Faisal had already established with his countrymen.

In Iraq, King Faisal and Nuri al-Said<sup>22</sup> worked to make an Iraqi kingdom with British help. The British established a new political class that was dominated by Arab officers from the Ottoman army who had fought under King Faisal in the Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire. Britain built its direct connection with the Arab local connection, which helped Britain to achieve her interests in the cheapest ways. In Iraq, Britain's goal was to build a constitutional monarchy regime similar to the Western style, which allowed for the British officers to control of the shape of the new country, thus securing British interests in the area because the new regime would need Britain's help to develop.<sup>23</sup> The British main interest in the region was to protect their Empire communications and the raw sources.

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<sup>21</sup> Reeve A. Simon, "The Hashemite Conspiracy: Hashemite Unity Attempts, 1921-1958" *International Journal of Middle East Study* 5, no. 3 (June 1974), 315.

<sup>22</sup> Nuri al-Said (1888-1958) was born in Baghdad, where he joined the Turkish military school. During World War I he became an officer in the Arab army under Prince Faisal, the leader during the Arabs' revolt against the Turkish Empire. Al-Said served as prime minister fourteen times during his political life. He was known in the West as an Arab leader.

<sup>23</sup> Ann Williams, *Britain and France in the Middle East and North Africa, 1914-1967* (London: Macmillan, 1968), 44-45.

Britain not only built a new political regime, but also tried to build a friendly state that could be an example for the Arab states. To do that Britain had to have a direct relationship with the local leaders who would agree to work with the British. Moreover, many people who worked with the British were ex-Pan-Arabs who had fought the Ottoman Empire to get their independence.

Britain's transformation in policies was focused on winning many of the Pan-Arabs to the British side and on working with them to create the State of Iraq. The British were well aware of equivoque policies within Iraq, and yet they succeeded in maintaining a balance between anti-British and pro-British coalitions from 1921 to 1941. The balanced policy between the anti-British and the pro-British continued from 1921 until 1941. The British did not want to make King Faisal an agent in front of his supporters. They had to deal with him if they wanted to remain in Iraq because it was hard to replace King Faisal. The British knew about the equivoque policies, and they worked with them. Being a Pan-Arab did not stop an Iraqi politician from being a prime minister or a high officer in the Iraqi army. British policy before the Labour Government worked with the Iraqi elite to achieve British interests in the oil and the India route, and they did not focus on the social and economic problems that Iraq had before World War II. Although the opposition tried to stop the British influence inside Iraq, British officers and advisers in Iraq were able to limit their demands because of the strong friendships the British maintained with prominent Iraqis.

Britain could manage this policy by having direct contact with Iraqi politicians and the Iraqi kings, especially King Faisal, who knew the Iraqis' weaknesses, knew that Iraq needed the British to help to modernize his country, and knew the necessity for economic and military aid. King Faisal used his power in Parliament to achieve his policies. Faisal needed the Parliament to

take control over the Arab nationalist movement. He was not an emotional man, and he had to take the opposition to the Parliament to allow them to express their ideas which were primarily against the British influence in Iraq. King Faisal used the opposition against the British to strengthen his negotiation with the British.

The Iraqi Nationalists did not agree to have an alliance with the British Empire in Iraq. They wanted to evacuate the British bases from Iraq. The British were suspicious about Faisal's intention to get more advantage from them during the negotiation around the Ally Treaty because of the nationalist influence. One of Britain's biggest challenges was to negotiate new military agreements and alliance treaties with Iraq as well as with all Arab countries. The British knew about the Arab nationalists' objections regarding the alliance treaty with Iraq.

Britain could work with King Faisal and his crew to stay in the area, but not many Iraqi politicians could handle the British domination and the Iraqi Nationalists at the same time without being called traitors. The Iraqi prime minister, Abdul Muhsin al-Saadoon, committed suicide in 1929 after he became depressed about the political situation in Iraq. He wrote his will in a letter to his son, which summarized the British and the Iraq relationship:

To my son . . . the truth is I am heart and soul weary of this life and I have found in life no pleasure satisfaction or honor. The nation expects services, but the British do not agree to our demand. I have never had sufficient support. The Iraqi people, who are demanding independents, are in fact weak. They are too weak and very far from deserving independent.<sup>24</sup>

Nuri al-Said, who was made Prime Minister in 1930, signed the treaty with Britain despite the strong objections from the opposition. The British military requirements were secured in the 1930 treaty. The British needed the royal air bases to secure their Empire's communications. Also, the British used the air bases to assure internal security; for example, the Kurdish used to resist the central government in Baghdad which led the British to depend on

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<sup>24</sup> A.de L. Rush, ed. *Record of Iraq 1914-1966*, vol. 5 (Wilts: Antony Rowe, 2001), 167.



their air power against the Kurdish revolt in the north for several times. Also, air power was used by the British and Iraqi governments to suppress the tribes in the south. Moreover, the British used the air bases to fight the Wahabism attack from Arabia during 1920-1931.

King Faisal had to explain in Parliament about his policy with the British, who knew about the difficulty that Faisal and al-Said had in trying to get the advantage in the negotiation. The British thought that they would take King Faisal and al-Said with them out of Iraq if they were forced to leave the state.<sup>25</sup> King Faisal told the Iraqi parliament that the way to work with the British palace's policy was to have:

A majority strong enough to ratify a treaty with Britain, and an opposition sufficiently vocal to ensure that treaty should be favorable to Iraq.<sup>26</sup>

British policies succeeded, as Britain worked with King Faisal to exert his authority and influence in the Iraqi Parliament. A block inside the Iraqi Parliament was loyal to both the crown and to Faisal. To keep this balance the king had to have a strong personality and know how to allay the pro-British and the Pan-Arabs at the same time.

Britain successfully influenced the establishment of the new country of Iraq through loyal friendships developed with the Sherifian officers during the Arab revolution against the Ottoman Empire in World War I and during the Iraqi monarchy,<sup>27</sup> sometimes at the cost of the lives of people from the region. For example, Nuri al-Said, a famous Iraqi leader, paid with his life for what he believed in and for trying to lead the new country with the British. Al-Said's character and personality forged the Iraqi image from the time of the Mandate, and until the Revolution in 1958, al-Said was pro-British. Thus, the British found in him a loyal friend. He served as an Iraqi

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<sup>25</sup> Batatu, *Old Classes*, 326.

<sup>26</sup> The National Archives (TNA): Public Records Office (PRO) FO 371. Bird to Bevin, 28 March 1947. FO/371/61589/E/2695/3/93. (Foreign Office, Political Department, General Correspondence, 1906-1966.)

<sup>27</sup> Paul W.T. Kingston, *Britain and Politics of Modernization in the Middle East, 1945-1958* (New York: Cambridge Press 1996), 95.

minister fourteen times from 1930 to 1958. With the establishment and almost every change in the new government, he was appointed either as a foreign, internal, or defense minister. Between 1930 and 1958, Iraq was not a politically stable government, making it difficult for any country or individual to modernize this region. Al-Said played a significant role in each of the 58 different cabinets appointed during this time. He wrote much of the Iraqi policy and established important relationships with the American and European powers, especially Britain, during the first half of the twentieth century.

Al-Said began his career as an officer in the Ottoman army during World War I. He was captured by the British and sent to a prison camp in India, where he was offered the opportunity to join the Arab revolution against the Ottoman Empire. After the revolution, he served as an officer under King Faisal in Syria until the French took over. Al-Said's experiences greatly affected his political life and relationship thereafter with the British.

Al-Said was among the first to work for Arab independence and strongly believed in an Arab union. Gertrude Bell, Oriental Secretary to the British Civil Commissioner in Baghdad, saw al-Said for the first time in 1920 and wrote,

The moment I saw him I realized that we had before us a strong and supple force which we must either use or engage in difficult combat.<sup>28</sup>

Anglo-Iraqi history proved her to be correct, although she died in 1926 and never lived to see her prediction come to fruition.

In 1924, Britain and Iraq signed a treaty organizing the relationship between the two countries. Britain maintained military bases in Iraq and kept the right to use Iraqi land in case of war. Every Iraqi ministry was required to include British advisers.<sup>29</sup> A new treaty drawn up in

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<sup>28</sup> Waldemar J. Gallman, *Iraq Under General Nuri: My Recollections of Nuri Al-Said, 1954-1958* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1964), 12.

<sup>29</sup> Marr, *Iraq*, 26.

1930 ended the Mandate and allowed Iraq to join the League of Nations, a process that was finally completed 25 years later in 1957. It is important to note that the 1930 treaty was signed shortly before Iraq gained its independence from Britain in 1932, allowing Britain to retain a strong influence over the Iraqi government. Regarding the treaty of 1930, Prime Minister Nuri al-Said stated that he would “refuse to sign this treaty if he was prime minister for an independent country but this treaty still has little more advantage from the old treaty in 1922.”<sup>30</sup> The 1930 treaty allowed Britain to keep two Royal Air Force bases in Iraq, have access to all Iraqi facilities as needed, and maintain British advisers and experts in positions of authority in the Iraqi government.

Iraq also benefited from the 1930 treaty. First, it gained its independence because Britain would help Iraq to put an end to the mandate, and Britain would help Iraq to join to the League of Nations, and second, the new country obtained military training and equipment from Britain. The system that Britain created in Iraq faced difficulty after King Faisal’s death in 1933, when his son, Prince Ghazi, became the new king of Iraq. Ghazi lacked Faisal’s experience in leadership and wisdom in political relationships with other countries, particularly the European powers and specifically Britain. The delicate balance of Iraqi loyalty to the British Crown was lost because Ghazi supported the Pan-Arabs.

During Ghazi’s rule, Nazi Germany’s activities became increasingly appealing to the Pan-Arabs, particularly as the Palestinians revolted against the British.<sup>31</sup> Ghazi worked against the British until his death in 1939, and was popular among the Iraqi army because he supported the nationalism movement in Iraq. He used to speak on the radio about the Arab nations and

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<sup>30</sup> A’alla Alherby, *Iraqi Royal Men* (London: Dar Alhikma, 2004), 86.

<sup>31</sup> Christopher Bromhead Birdwood, *Nuri As-Said: A Study in Arab Leadership* ( London: Cassell, 1959), 164-165

verbally attacked the British Empire. Moreover, he did not hide his feelings about unacceptability of the British activities in Iraq.

Ghazi strongly supported the nationalist movement in Iraq and other Arab states, especially Palestine's revolt against the British in 1936-1939. Because Ghazi attempted to persuade Kuwait to revolt against their British protectors and join the country of Iraq, by 1939, the British were searching for ways to remove Ghazi from power. Britain lacked any official power to replace the Iraqi king at that time because Iraq was an independent country, but it still retained a strong influence over many of the Iraqi politicians. The British thought the best approach to changing the leadership was for something to happen to Ghazi. Thus, when Ghazi was killed in a car accident in 1939, there were strong feelings among the Iraqis that Britain and Said instigated the fatal crash.<sup>32</sup> The Nazi Germans also supported this theory.<sup>33</sup>

The next royal family member in line for the kingship, Faisal II, was only four years old at the time of Ghazi's death, which allowed his uncle, Prince Abd al-Ilah, to become regent.<sup>34</sup> Nuri al-Said supported the new regent because of their common pro-British stance.<sup>35</sup> Said believed Iraq could not succeed as a country without a western friend, specifically Great Britain.<sup>36</sup> Thus, al-Said and Abd al-Ilah controlled the political power in Iraq until the revolt in 1958. Abd al-Ilah depended on his position as a head for royal house to dominate the parliament and the Iraqi government. The king had the right to appoint the prime minister which gave the crown very strong power over the prime minister. Moreover, after the Ali Rashid movement the regent got more power by changing the constitution and he got the right to dismiss the prime ministers.

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<sup>32</sup> Batatu. *Old Classes*, 343.

<sup>33</sup> Gerald De Gaury, *Three Kings in Baghdad 1921-1958* (London: Hutchinson 1961), 111.

<sup>34</sup> Marr, *Iraq*, 51.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Abd Al-Razzaq Al-Hasani, *The History of Iraqi Cabinets*, vol. 7 (Baghdad: Public Culture House, 1988), 222.

Iraqi officers did not trust the British during the 1930s because the British did not respond to their requests in the 1930 treaty, which stated that Britain would provide the Iraqi army with new arms. In Iraq, the army believed that Britain did not want to supply the Iraq army with the new military equipment, because Iraq could not get military supplies from another country without the British permission.

Britain encountered a very strong nationalist movement led by the Iraqi Army and Rashid Ali al-Kilani, who led the coup against the British and the pro-British inside Iraq in 1941.<sup>37</sup> The Iraqi Army supported the coup, led by many officers who hated British power in Iraq.<sup>38</sup> (Iraqi officers did not hide their feelings about British democracy in the Middle East. Western democracy was seen as just another name for Western imperialism.)<sup>39</sup> The British called the four Iraqi officers who led this movement the Golden Square because they were the leaders for the four Iraqi divisions.

The Pan-Arab coalition was successful in throwing out the Iraqi government that was under the ex-Sherifian officer Taha al-Hashimi, then declaring a new government under Rashid Ali al-Kilani. To stop the British influence the Iraqi Army and the new government under Rashid Ali removed Regent and put Abd al-Ilah in a new regent. Churchill didn't accept those changes during the war.

Rashid Ali's movement in 1941 against the British influence and the pro-British faction inside Iraq broke the balance between the Pan-Arab and pro-British faction built by King Faisal.<sup>40</sup> Cornwallis, the new British ambassador in Baghdad, arrived the same day that the Iraqi army started moving against the pro-British forces. As Cornwallis said, "Damned late in the day,

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<sup>37</sup> Marr, *Iraq*, 53.

<sup>38</sup> Daniel Silverfarb, *Britain's Informal Empire in the Middle East: A Case Study of Iraq, 1929-1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 122-124.

<sup>39</sup> Salah al-Din al-Sabbagh, *Arabism Knights* (Morocco: Tanet Press, 1994), 35.

<sup>40</sup> George E Kirk, *Middle East in the War* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 55-66.

too late to avert the coup.”<sup>41</sup> A political solution for the conflict between the Rashid Ali government and the British was not impossible, but Cornwallis came too late to create a good solution for the crisis. Abd al-Ilah, Nuri al-Said, and the pro-British forces were forced to flee from Iraq because of Rashid Ali’s movement.

The new Iraqi government’s move to establish connections with the Nazi Germany during the war was not acceptable to the British, which resulted in the British army occupying Iraq for the second time in 1941. Abd al-Ilah and al-Said were placed back in power.<sup>42</sup> The Arab nationalism movement was shut down in Iraq after members of the Rashid Ali movement who could escape from Iraq went to Germany during the war. The British turned the Iraqi officers who led the revolt, the Golden Square, over to the new Iraqi government, which executed them.

The end of this movement was a big disaster for the Pan-Arabs. The British army remained in Iraq until the end of the war, creating big changes in Iraqi political life. Most of the Pan-Arab political leaders had to escape from Iraq, and many stayed outside of Iraq until the coup in 1958. Many Pan-Arabs were also arrested and exiled by the British government.

Another result of the Rashid Ali movement was that the power in Iraq shifted back to the pro-British regent and Nuri al-Said.<sup>43</sup> By the end of World War II, the main power inside Iraq was held by British allies. The Pan-Arabs had lost most of their leaders, and they lost access to power until the end of the monarchy in 1958. In Iraq before the war, no one group monopolized the power enough to keep other groups from participating in government, but after the war the old gang became the only group that had the access to the government. The Iraqi politicians did not believe in the party system of exchanging power, which made the Iraqi governments

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<sup>41</sup> Gerald, *Three Kings*, 167.

<sup>42</sup> Tripp, *History of Iraq*, 103.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.



## CHAPTER 3

### BEVIN AND WITHDRAWAL FROM THE REGION

At the completion of World War II, the British Empire was bankrupt. Postwar Britain was forced to make major changes if it wanted to save the British Empire and remain a world power. The newly empowered Labour Party, under the leadership of Clement Attlee,<sup>45</sup> suddenly found itself responsible for the huge empire in the Middle East and Far East with an empty treasury after the election in 1945. Britain's postwar deficit was 26 billion pounds.<sup>46</sup> The British army consisted of 1.5 million soldiers through the world,<sup>47</sup> with 200,000 of the troops in the Suez Canal Zone.<sup>48</sup>

Within the British Labour government, there was considerable debate regarding the best direction for the postwar British Empire, especially concerning the Middle East. According to Hugh Dalton, Attlee was ready to withdraw from the Middle East for defense and economic reasons. If Britain were to go to war with Russia, which at the time seemed a distinct possibility, Britain would not be able to adequately support her interests in the Middle East. Dalton stated, "Attlee is fresh-mind on defense."<sup>49</sup> Attlee believed that World War II necessitated a change in British strategy. British domination in the Mediterranean could no longer secure the British Empire because of advancements made in air power and atomic weapons.<sup>50</sup> Thus, Attlee felt Britain should shift its focus to Africa, which he thought would be more advantageous from an

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<sup>45</sup> Richard Attlee (1883-1967) was the British Prime Minister 1945-1950.

<sup>46</sup> Jacob Abadi, *Britain's Withdrawal From the Middle East, 1947-1971: The Economic and Strategic Imperatives* (New Jersey: The Kingston Press, 1982), 5.

<sup>47</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, *Labour in Power 1945-1951* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 279.

<sup>48</sup> William Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East 1945-1951: Arab Nationalism, the United States and Postwar Imperialism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), 9.

<sup>49</sup> Hugh Dalton, *Memoirs* (London: Fredrick Muller, 1953), 101.

<sup>50</sup> Louis, *British Empire*, 6.



economic standpoint.<sup>51</sup> Ernest Bevin,<sup>52</sup> however, did not share Attlee's ideas about withdrawing from the Middle East.

Bevin had to deal with problems resulting from actions that Attlee had thought would improve the British economy: reducing British responsibility around the world. Bevin knew the problem that British Empire was facing because he was receiving reports and information from the British presidents in the Empire. He did not believe that withdrawing from the Middle East would help the British Empire or save Africa. Bevin wrote to Attlee about the real situation for the British Empire,<sup>53</sup> explaining that they had to work to save the Empire but the situation was not easy:

In fact, you *cannot* read the telegrams from Egypt and Middle East nowadays without realizing that not only is India going, but Malay, Ceylon and the Middle East is going with it, with a tremendous repercussion on Africa territories. I do beg of you take a strong line and not give way to this awful pessimism.<sup>54</sup>

The British economy was weak, and as a minister for foreign affairs, Bevin did not want to withdraw from Middle East because of the losses Britain would incur if it withdrew from the region. In Iraq the British had started planning to develop the state, and abandoning their plans would cause the loss of Arab trust and British interests in the states. Bevin did not deny that the situation was bad for the British economy, but Britain did not lose influence in the area:

I would impress you with this fact. As Foreign Secretary, I can offer nothing to any foreign country, neither credit, nor coal, or goods, expected to make bricks without straw-to use that old proverb.<sup>55</sup>

In Bevin's view, the Middle East was not only a defense line for the British Empire, it was also a way to rescue and save the British Empire. The Middle East was rich in raw resources

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>52</sup> Ernest Bevin (1881-1951) was a Labour Party leader, and Foreign Secretary 1945-1951.

<sup>53</sup> Tony Judt, *Post-War: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 293.

<sup>54</sup> The National Archives (TNA): Public Records Office (PRO) PREM 8/564/E/1845. (Prime Minister Office: Correspondence and Papers 1945-1955. Bevin to Attlee, 1 January 1947.)

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

especially oil and manpower, and Britain believed it could become affluent with Middle Eastern help. The oil fields and cottons were very important for the British economy because the British companies maintained big shares in the oil companies.<sup>56</sup>

The British foreign office was very aware about the importance of oil in war and peace time, especially after World War II. During the war the availability of oil gave the allies a big advantage against the axis power. For the British economy oil was crucial for a strong economy. British policymakers knew that the three big oil producers were the United States, Russia and the Middle East, and the Middle East was the one place where the British had political control over domestic policies. The British Commonwealth's economy was depleting 45 million tons of oil each year, most of it coming from the Middle East. British experts knew that the Middle East was the place to find their oil sources and the capacity to increase production.<sup>57</sup> Iraq had over 700 million tons of oil beneath its land; this estimate would increase over time. The Iraqi Oil Company also owned rights to search for the oil in other countries in the Persian Gulf and Middle East. The British Commonwealth needed the Middle East oil to keep its industries running; there was no replacement for oil from Middle East.<sup>58</sup> The British were expecting Iraq and the Arab states to produce more oil than Iran produced in 1950, which fact increased the importance of the Arab states in the Persian Gulf.<sup>59</sup>

For Britain's economic future, oil was necessary to satisfy British industry's growing demand energy as Britain was importing 60 percent of its oil from the Middle East. The British

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<sup>56</sup> Michael. L. Dockrill, *British Defence Since 1945: Making Contemporary Britain* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 28-32.

<sup>57</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/ 52343 E 11103/2806/65. (Memorandum by Fuel Ministry to the Foreign Office, 12 Nov 1946.)

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/ 61504 E 344/87/G. (Memorandum on Middle East Oil, 12 Dec 1946.)

Foreign Office was worried about the growing need for oil in the world as well as in Britain, recognizing that Britain needed to keep its influence in the Middle East to insure the oil supply.<sup>60</sup>

Additionally, if Britain did not take the responsibility of modernizing the region, but instead withdrew from the area, Russia could easily invade the region, a fateful mistake for British interests. Bevin believed the Middle East could be a replacement for India for Britain's economic interests. He addressed this possibility in a letter to Attlee concerning the future of the British Empire:

My whole aim has been to develop the Middle East as a producing area to help our own economy and take the place of India, which henceforth will absorb her own produce.<sup>61</sup>

To the foreign secretary, the Middle East was important as Africa because, more than any other country in the world, including the United States, Britain's influence was greatest in the Middle East. The Iraqi regime and the other states were depending on British support to stay in power, preventing Britain from abandoning its position in Iraq. In contrast, Bevin started to reform the old relationships with the Iraqi regime by searching for new allies among the Iraqi elites to replace the Old Gang. Britain had to retain her influence in Iraq because of the beneficial economics and balance of world political powers.

Post-World War II, the British government sought to keep its interests in the Middle East region while at the same time it worried over potential competition from the other western powers, in particular the United States.<sup>62</sup> While it was willing to work with the United States and other world powers, Britain did not want to lose her dominant supremacy in the Middle East, which was key to saving the British Empire. While the British liked to work with the United

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> TNA: PRO FO 800/476/ME/47. (Foreign Office, Private Office: Ernest Bevin: Middle East, F.O. 800. Bevin to Attlee, 9 January 1947.)

<sup>62</sup> Michael J. Cohen and Martin Kolinsky, eds., *Demise of the British Empire in the Middle East: Britain's Responses to Nationalist Movement, 1943-55* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), 65.

States, there was limited partnership because of competing influence in both economic and military sectors.<sup>63</sup> Iraq was a member in the Sterling area which forced it to use the pound in its international trade. It was connected with the British through a military agreement, as well. American influence could threaten British control because Iraq could become more powerful and depend on American aid.<sup>64</sup>

The British foreign office's views closely aligned with the chief of staff as it concerned protecting the Middle East from any aggression.<sup>65</sup> From a military view, the chief of staff saw the Middle East as one block in the defense matter. Moreover, Bevin's thinking did not stop with military issues alone. He was also concerned about the way that Britain should take on its relationships with the nations of the British Empire, especially those in the Middle East.<sup>66</sup>

From Bevin's view, the old relationship between Britain and Middle East depended on force and the direct relationship with ruling classes in the Middle East. British official documents referred to the ruling classes in the Middle East as "the Old Gang."<sup>67</sup> Bevin saw Britain's main problem as being too dependent on the Old Gang to serve British interests in the region. As foreign secretary, Bevin began to shape the new relationship Britain should take in the Middle East if it wanted to maintain influence over the region.

In September 1945, Bevin requested a conference in London with the British representatives in the Middle East to draw up a new strategy for the Middle East. Bevin had his own ideas about the new method Britain should take in the Middle East:

The benefits of the partnerships between Great Britain and the countries in the Middle East have never reached the ordinary people, and so our foreign policy has rested on too narrow a footing, mainly on personalities of kings, princes or pashas. There is thus no

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<sup>63</sup> John Baylis, ed., *British Defence Policy in a Changing World* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 34-35.

<sup>64</sup> Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, vol. 2 (New York: Macmillan Company, 1948), 1475.

<sup>65</sup> Kevin Jefferys, *Labour Forces: From Ernest Bevin to Gordon Brown* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002), 20.

<sup>66</sup> Phillip Darby, *British Defence Policy East of Suez, 1947-1968* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 26.

<sup>67</sup> Cohen and Kolinsky, *Demise*, 18. (Long-time and former Iraqi government officials).

vested interest among the people to remain with us because of benefit obtained. Hence it is easy for Great Britain to be blamed when difficulties arise.<sup>68</sup>

Britain's new strategy depended on creating relationships of equality between Great Britain and the Middle Eastern states. To accomplish this equality, Britain and the Middle East had to have equal partnership relationships,<sup>69</sup> which the London conference drew. Bevin's new strategy depended on socioeconomic development in the Arab states: the only way to preserve British influence in the Middle East was to work with the middle and the poor classes in the Middle East. Bevin believed the main problem in the Middle East was the huge gap between the ruling class and the other social classes. Unfortunately, the connection between Britain and the ruling class was transformed into hate against the British as the lower social classes viewed Britain's ideas as protection and support of the ruling classes in the Middle East.<sup>70</sup> It was this relationship that the Arab nationalists attacked, especially after World War II.<sup>71</sup>

The conference in London brought to light that British policies in the Middle East prior to World War II were focused on raw resources, therefore, defense strategies and socioeconomic issues were not at the top of the list in British policies.<sup>72</sup> It was time for Britain to shift her attention to the social and economic problems in the Middle East. To achieve these new goals, the foreign office established the British Middle East Office (BMEO), which was given the responsibility for socioeconomic developments in the Middle East.

During the conference, British influence was also discussed. Britain did not maintain an equal influence throughout the Middle East. A strong anti-British movement existed in the Arab world, although Britain also had strong allies in power in some the Arab states. For example, the

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<sup>68</sup> Alan Bullock, *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary, 1945-1951* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1983), 155.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>70</sup> Cohen and Kolinsky, *Demise*, 10.

<sup>71</sup> Edith Tilton Penrose and E. F. Penrose. *Iraq: International Relations and National Development in Nations of the Modern World* (London: E. Benn, 1978), 118.

<sup>72</sup> Paul W. T. Kingdon. *Britain and the Politics of Modernization in the Middle East 1945-1958* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 10.

British influence over the Iraqi elite class was very strong, especially with Nuri al-Said and the Iraqi regent, Abd al-Ilah. Additionally, Transjordan's Prince Abd al-Ilah was strongly allied with the British policies in the Middle East. On the other hand, the nationalism movement was very strong in Egypt between the elite class and the Egyptian majority.

Bevin saw this disagreement between the Arab countries, which led him to focus on Iraq to make an example for the Arab countries to follow. He adopted a policy to make Iraq a big player on the British policy in the Middle East.<sup>73</sup> Bevin was trying to improve the political situation in Iraq by supporting the Iraqi crown and regent in pushing Iraq into developing a new treaty of alliance with Britain, and to confirm the Iraqi Army loyalty to the crown. The Iraq army after World War II was in bad condition, and rumors blamed the British and the regent for army weakness because of its revolt against the British and the regent in the war. The biggest challenge for postwar British policy in the Middle East was Palestine, which eventually resulted in Britain's loss of influence and power in the region. Britain had cut its losses in Palestine and withdrew from that area without finding a solution for the Arab-Jewish conflict, which affected Britain's reputation as a world leader. Kenneth Morgan, in *Labour in Power*, saw that Britain was "humiliating in the Palestine case especially the foreign office."<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, Bevin knew that British policy in Palestine made the middle class in the Arab world distrust British policy in Middle East. He was trying to open a new connection with the middle class in Iraq and the rest of the Middle East while still trying to avoid the damage that happened as a result of the Palestine case.<sup>75</sup>

The Palestinian issue was not only a problem between Britain and the Arab nationalist movement, it was also a big problem for British allies in the Arab world, such as the Iraqi and

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<sup>73</sup> Joseph Sassoon, *Economic Policy in Iraq 1932-1950* (London: Frank Cass, 1987), 13.

<sup>74</sup> Morgan, *Labour in Power*, 216.

<sup>75</sup> TNA: PRO FO/371/52402/E/12303. (Bevin to Eyres [Damascus], 15 January 1947.)

Jordanian governments, who wanted to continue cooperating with the British. At same time, the Old Gang had to explain their relationships with Britain to the nationalism movement in the Arab world, which started to reject any movement from the British side. Britain had also maintained its influence over small Arab states in the Persian Gulf since the nineteenth century, but those small states did not cause problems for British in the Persian Gulf.

Throughout the years after World War I, Iraq had been Britain's main ally in the Middle East during the Hashimi monarchy, leading the foreign office to deal with Pan-Arabism in different ways in Egypt and Iraq. Britain's longstanding influence over the Iraqi government made cooperation between the two governments easier, but post-World War II, the strong nationalistic movement among the middle class in Iraq went against the British because of Iraq's economic problems after World War II and because of Russian propaganda against the British imperialism in the Middle East. On the other hand, the Egyptian government was strongly nationalistic during negotiations concerning the new British treaty in 1946. In Iraq, Britain's longstanding positive influence allowed more successful achievement in developing program plans. To the British ambassador in Baghdad, Stonehewer Bird, it seemed obvious that the Iraqi government would work with the British programs. Britain would find a stable government that would stay in the cabinet enough time to achieve any program that the Iraqi government would have. The British at that time not only had to go deep into the local issues, but also they had to guide the Iraqi governments to accomplish the Middle Eastern programs.

Britain saw Iraq as a good place for initiating the new strategy. The Iraqi economy was weak after World War II, as was the British economy, but the country was very rich in oil and agricultural resources. From Britain's viewpoint, Iraq needed to develop its irrigation system, which was the main goal for the BMEO. The British policy started to focus on the agriculture

projects that would provide Britain with food products.<sup>76</sup> Iraq had been a good place in the past for agriculture, but because of bad policies and management, agricultural projects failed and did not provide Iraq the food it needed. The British wanted to focus on the countryside in Iraq, helping to improve the people's resources along with improvements in the democratic system. The two countries would both benefit from the British projects and new policies toward Iraq. The post-World War II Iraqi governments shared these British views.

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<sup>76</sup> Sassoon, *Economic Policy*, 20.



## CHAPTER 4

### SOCIOECONOMIC POLICY

The British Foreign Office's main goal regarding British postwar policy in Iraq was to work with the local governments to modernize and improve the Iraqis' standard of living without relying on Britain's old imperialistic methods. Doing that without losing the British interest in the region was not easy for the British Foreign Office. In Parliament, Prime Minister Ernest Bevin presented his new strategy to the House of Commons:

In setting up this office, however, I desire to make quite clear that His Majesty's Government has no intention to interfere in the local politics of the different countries. Question of the government must be a matter for the people in those territories.<sup>77</sup>

From Bevin's viewpoint, Britain should make new policies in the Middle East as well as in the rest of her interests throughout the world, including those acquired as a result of the outcome of war, but it was not an easy task, particularly in the Middle East. Britain had a long history in the Near East. The British had direct connections with most of the powerful people and leaders not only in Iraq but in most of the region; many of them were made leaders by Britain.

The Labour government found itself in a dilemma about the best way to deal with British imperialism in Iraq. Because Britain maintained such great influence in Iraq, it also had large responsibilities. Bevin was now involved in the inner issues in Iraq where three main issues were the subject of most of the discussions between British and Iraqi politicians: the Development programs in Iraq, the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, and the Palestine case. Bevin found that the Iraqi leaders started to contact with him to get Britain to help and guide Regent Abdalilah especially. The regent had the crown power, which allowed him to create Iraq policies and assignments within the Iraqi government, but the head of the Iraqi monarchy did not have the characteristics necessary to lead a country like Iraq without help. In his statement in the House of Commons in

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<sup>77</sup> *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 5th ser., vol. 429 (1945-47), col. 775.

1945, Bevin addressed his strategy after the war in the Middle East. He tried to assure the public that the Labour government would not be involved in the domestic issues of the local governments in the region. On the other hand, he wanted to protect Britain's interests in the region. This was the dilemma for which the foreign office had to find an answer. Bevin did not stop thinking that the Middle East was an important asset for Great Britain.

In peace and war the Middle East is an area of cardinal importance to the United Kingdom, second only to the United Kingdom itself.<sup>78</sup>

For that reason Bevin was not ready to allow British influence to decline in the region, nor was he willing to withdraw troops from the Middle East. In Iraq, Bevin believed the relationship with the old political elites must be reorganized, and Britain had to find new allies who would work with her to continue to modernize and develop Iraq.

Prior to World War II, British policy had focused more on military and economic interests, refraining from addressing internal issues of local governments. After World War II, the Labour government's new strategy was to improve the standards of living for the people in the region. Bevin's policies pushed the British style of economy, and in 1945 Bevin had his own plan to recover the British Empire. The new socioeconomic policies were decided during the London Conference in September 1945 by British experts for the Labour government. The British in the Middle East had the chance to experiment with their ideas about the Middle East and its problems. The British presidents in the area confirmed Bevin's view about the need for social justice in Arab lands. The Labour government took a decision about this new policy on the ground.

The economic part in the new policy was overseen by the newly established British Middle East Office (BMEO). The BMEO assisted local governments in development projects by

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<sup>78</sup> Ritchie Ovendale. *The Foreign Policy of the British Labour Government, 1945-1951* (Gloucester: Leicester University Press, 1984), 149.

providing technical help and sending British advisers to the region. *Britain and the Politics of Modernization in the Middle East 1945-1958* by Paul Kingston provides pertinent details regarding the BMEO. The office's main focus was to help local farmers with agricultural and irrigation projects. For British policy makers, "economic progress was expected to bring political stability."<sup>79</sup>

In a country like Iraq, such projects were at the forefront because the majority of the population in the first half of the twentieth century lived and worked in the countryside. Britain was unable to finance development programs in Iraq, or any other countries, because of her financial straits after the war.<sup>80</sup> During negotiations to set up development programs under the supervision of the British Embassy, British advisers and local Iraqi governments grappled with how to obtain the necessary funds, especially under the Iraqi Saïd Jabir cabinet in 1947 that got support from the British to achieve the development programs. The only way Iraq could find money for the development projects was through national sources or by taking out loans from the International Bank or from the United States government.<sup>81</sup>

The BMEO opened in February 1946 and was tasked with solving the problem of flood control, a big problem in modern Iraq.<sup>82</sup> The BMEO's plan was to establish a development board to take charge of the development plans.

Bevin's new strategy for the future of Great Britain was still framed on Britain's heritage throughout the world. For the new approach to succeed in Iraq, involvement of the local government was essential to develop economic, social, and political programs in the British fashion, but devolvement of the oil industry in Iraq did find a big space in Bevin strategy. Arab

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<sup>79</sup> Kingston, *Britain and the Politics of Modernization*, 3.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>81</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/61621/ E 3836. (Bird to Bevin, FO on 25 April 1947.)

<sup>82</sup> Kingston, *Britain and the Politics of Modernization*, 99.

nationalists and other oppositionists in Iraq also presented a challenge as the British tried to convince them of the potential benefits in modernizing this region of the world. Bevin believed that British military and political troubles in the Middle East would be ended by espousing policies that improved the social and economic standards for working classes (British defense policy since 1945).

Bevin's policies were depending on improving on the peoples' lives and standards of living in view of the degrees of the gap between poor and rich people in the Middle East. In Iraq the main problem was to improve the standards of living in the rural areas and to stop the population shifts moving from the country side to the big cities. The British were helping Iraq improve its irrigation projects, but it also made the majority start to blame the British exit inside the Iraq for all the increase in problems.

In Iraq, Britain immediately began working with local powers to achieve the new British strategy. The British Embassy in Baghdad wasted no time in contacting local leaders and obtaining necessary information regarding political developments in Iraq. Key leaders Nuri al-Said and Regent Abd al-Ilah were easily persuaded of the benefits of the new strategies. Britain's main goal was to develop economic and social life in Iraq, which would hopefully raise the standards of living for the people in the area.<sup>83</sup> Bevin's policy is known in Middle East history as the Peasants Not Pashas Policy.

Challenges by the nationalism movement, however, made changes very difficult. The nationalists were vehemently opposed to any policies that did not serve their interests. Publically, local political names and behaviors remained the same. Britain's previous encounters with the nationalism movement had not been very successful. The foreign office was well aware that the nationalism movement was growing in strength and numbers, particularly in the new middle

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<sup>83</sup> John Callaghan, *The Labour Party and Foreign Policy: A History* (London: Routledge, 2007), 176.

class and among students whose numbers were increasing too fast for the existing infrastructure, especially in the cities of Baghdad and Basra. Ironically, it was the middle class and students who were the focus of the British new policy to improve living standards and with whom Britain strove to avoid any conflict. The population in Baghdad rose from 200,000 to 515,459, more than doubling between 1921 and 1947.<sup>84</sup> During World War II, inflation rose uncontrollably, leaving the Iraqi economy very weak.

The British found themselves so mired in Iraqi local problems that it stopped progress of any kind of development in the state. Al-Said and the regent were part of the shortcoming of the Iraqi political system. They were pushing hard to secure Parliament's loyalty by selecting the deputies and helping them to win the election without thinking about the anger that could happen among the Iraqi people who did not have a truly free chance to select their deputies. Al-Said's efforts to secure a compliant Parliament led to a long feud between the Iraqi elites, who obstructed the efforts at reform. Many British experts in the foreign office believed the Old Gang could not be reformed, and thus the Iraq state could not achieve any new development as long as the Old Gang continued in the power.

Bevin and the foreign office used their influence to find ways to improve political life inside Iraq. Al-Said's skills were well known to the foreign office, but they had problems with his ideas concerning the development programs and his relationships with his old friends. In 1946, the foreign office believed al-Said was not enthusiastic about the modernization programs, and the British began to speak out about his lack of action:

The Future of Iraq must lie, we think, in hand of moderate progressive parties it is not to be in the hands of an Iraqi Tudeh party.<sup>85</sup> To discover and encourage moderate progressive element is one of our most pressing and most difficult tasks. We doubt if Nuri can be of much help here for he is not really interested in internal affairs, in rooting

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<sup>84</sup> Batatu, *Old Classes*, 35.

<sup>85</sup> The Tudeh Party is an Iranian communist party established in 1941.

out bribery from the administration, in embarking on schemes of social reform. Nor can he ever forget a political friend: if he is asked a favor by one of his old associates he will not hesitate to grant it, and with the old gang in the power this country cannot hope to progress very far.<sup>86</sup>

The British showed great concern about the connection between political life and social life inside Iraq. In fact, Britain faced this problem in most Middle East countries where loyalty between politicians existed more because of personal connections rather than being based on ideas or political parties. In Iraq many of the old politicians were from the old Ottoman school of thinking, and the British faced many difficulties when trying to work with personal loyalties between the Old Gang and new, more progressive yet less experienced leaders of the younger generations. Britain's policy was to support the crown and Nuri al-Said during the time of the monarchy; this policy remained in place with the change to the Labour government. It came as no surprise that the British understood the significant power the crown carried over the people who valued royal support to gain personal power.

Prime ministers may change and pass, but the Crown remains. Naturally, therefore, it is the Crown that men look for promotion, security and lucre.<sup>87</sup>

Nuri al-Said was no exception in this issue. Al-Said and the Hashimi officers had brought Prince Abd al-Ilah to power in 1939 because they were loyal to the Hashimi family and to King Faisal II, and they believed they could control the new young regent. However, the Iraqi elite disagreed with al-Said and the Hashimi officers, which affected the government's effectiveness even after King Faisal's death. Additionally, they did not want to create more difficulties in the political life inside Iraq, especially after King Ghazi's death in 1939. The pro-British were content with the political power situation after the war, and they aligned themselves closely with the British policies in Iraq in order to maintain their influence over the country without

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<sup>86</sup> TNA: PRO FO371/ 52315/ E 7045. (Chancy to Eastern Office Department, 16 July 1946.)

<sup>87</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/61589/ E 2695. (Bird to Bevin, 28 March 1947.)

dissension between them. Unfortunately for the British, the regent did not have a good relationship with the anti-British Iraqi leaders, most of whom supported the Rashid Ali movement and the national government during World War II, which led to an unstable situation inside Iraq.

The connection between the British and the Old Gang in Iraq started to hamper British influence in the state, which led the foreign office to search for new allies in the new middle class, which British called the Effendi class,<sup>88</sup> who would understand the common benefits for a partnership between Great Britain and state of Iraq. Bevin defined the new middle class as “The Effendis (By whom I mean the educated and semi-educated products of eastern universities and schools).”<sup>89</sup> Bevin wanted to know the feelings of the new middle class regarding Britain, and admitted to the British ambassadors in the Middle East that he knew about the disagreements between the educated people in the region and British policy in the Middle East. Although there were disagreements, Bevin insisted to British representatives in Baghdad and other Arab capitals that they should continue to work to win the Effendiyya’s trust.

In 1946, the British began to surmise that al-Said’s influence was declining in Iraq and Arab policies,<sup>90</sup> but it was not as easy to replace al-Said as the British Foreign Office thought it would be. Additionally, the relationship between the regent and al-Said was also becoming unstable. With the advent of the new British policy in Iraq, the two men had many disagreements between them. The regent lacked experience and knowledge of Iraqi political life<sup>91</sup>, so he was depending on British help and advice to remain in the power. The regent started acting as the

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<sup>88</sup> Michael Eppel, “The Elite, the Effendiyya, and the Growth of Nationalism and Pan-Arabism in Hashemite Iraq, 1921-1958.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 30, no. 2 (May, 1998), 229-230.

<sup>89</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/ 52365/ E12303. (Bevin to Eyres, 15 January 1947; Bevin to Bird.)

<sup>90</sup> Louis, *British Empire*, 309.

<sup>91</sup> The regent did not practice his full authority during the war time because Iraq was under the British occupation; also, he was spending most of his time traveling inside and outside Iraq.

only main power in Iraq without paying attention to the balance of power inside Iraq. Many pro-British leaders realized that the regent's mistake was affecting the relationship between the Iraqi elite and their relationship with Britain. Al-Said expressed his regret for supporting Prince Abd al-Ilah for the regency.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, many pro-British did not support the regent's policy against the officers who were involved in the Rashid Ali coup, especially the hanging of the Golden Square. Also, the regent did not hide his friendships with the British who were not well supported among the Iraqis. Moreover, he worked directly with British policy makers in ways that damaged the Hashemite popularity between Iraqis and turned them against him.

The British decided to support and work with Regent Abd al-Ilah, although they doubted his skills and qualifications, which turned out to be the main mistake for the British policy makers in Iraq. The British Embassy knew about regent weaknesses and the problems resulting from his lack of abilities:

The regent has failed completely to fulfill the high promise which he gave in 1941 and by his interference in Cabinet making insistence on other unpopular appointments, frequent long absence from the country, extravagance and, in general, his play-boy attitude to his responsibilities has gone far, I am afraid, to undermine the position of the Royal House.<sup>93</sup>

The British were also well aware of the instability in the Iraqi government, especially following World War II, and were greatly concerned about the success or failure of modernizing the region. The British observed that Iraqi governments were unable to remain in power long enough to follow through with any programs successfully. Stonehewer warned the regent about needing to take the BMEO seriously.<sup>94</sup> For example, during the regency's fourteen years of

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<sup>92</sup> Taha al-Hashimi, *Taha Al Hashimi Memories*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar Al Taliaa Press, 1978), 135.

<sup>93</sup> Louis, *The British Empire*, 311.

<sup>94</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/61589/ E 2695/3/93. (Bird to Bevin, 25 March 1947.)



power from 1939 to 1953, there were 25 different cabinets.<sup>95</sup> Many British policymakers began to believe there was a need to reform the political elites.

Through British connections with al-Said and the regent, the British started to persuade the two men about Iraq's need for new blood in civil administration.<sup>96</sup> The Effendiyya class was the main target of Britain's new policy in Iraq. At this time, the British started to involve themselves in Iraqi political life in order to secure their plans. It was not an easy task for any of the British officers in Iraq to find easy solutions for the Iraqi economic, political, and social problems. After the war, the British tried to reform the regime and make it more attentive to the middle class. The Labour government's strategy was to encourage the Iraqi leaders to have new free elections and to start with a new party system that would allow new people to come into the political life. Bevin's idea was not to cut off British relationships with the old Iraq elite; on the contrary, the Labour government tried to improve the regime's scheme to fit the new era after World War II by focusing on social justice.<sup>97</sup> Members of the British Embassy in Baghdad began searching for new names for the second row from the young Iraqis politicians in Baghdad who were friends to the British policy.

To achieve the new policy the British Embassy encouraged the regent to hold new elections and create a new democratic form of government. The British hoped that the regent could push forward new developments in Iraq. It was time for power inside Iraq to transfer from the old political ways to the new generation who could transform life in Iraq. This was main goal of the British new policy.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Al-Hasani, *The History of Iraqi Cabinets*, 7:4.

<sup>96</sup> Matthew Elliot, "Independent Iraq: The Monarchy and British Influence, 1941-58" in *Library of Modern Middle East Studies*, vol. 11 (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1996), 15.

<sup>97</sup> Louis, *The British Empire*, 17-20

<sup>98</sup> Elliot, *Independent*, 25.

At the end of 1945 the regent announced that political parties would be established in Iraq and that a parliament would be part of the new election law. This announcement launched the beginning of a new era in Iraq's history. The regent focused his speech on subjects the Iraqi people were not used to hearing from their government. He started to give hope for the new social and political programs. The political parties in Iraq had been frozen since 1935 when the Iraqi elite were allowed to rule without restrictions. The presence of active political parties in Iraq after World War II was a very significant change. The British supported the new political system<sup>99</sup> because that would fit their new policy, and they put the regent under the pressure to start working for a new and expanded democracy.

The reaction from the Iraqi elites toward the new multiparty system was very different. The Iraqis knew the British were behind the new political system, but this did not stop them from welcoming the regent's announcement. The big challenge for the British in Iraq at this time was to reduce the disorder between the Iraqi elites. The struggle between the Iraqi elites was damaging any kind of government improvement. To have a new government after the war was not an easy mission for the regent. Iraq had one of the most serious political crises in the area after the war. The regent could not choose a new prime minister for over a month.<sup>100</sup> The disagreement between the Iraqi elites about the policy that should be taken effect after the war did not make reform anew easy.

A new cabinet needed to be formed in order to set up the parties' law in 1946 and to clear the way for a new election. The cabinet was established in February under the pro-British leader Tawfiq al-Suwaidi. The cabinet contained for the first time five new ministers. The British

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Batatu, *Old Classes*, 530.

embassy at the beginning was optimistic about the new policy, but with time the British officers started to worry about the outcome of the Iraqi government.

The Old Gang, especially Nuri al-Said and Tawfiq al-Suwaidi, were not enthusiastic about the political parties.<sup>101</sup> They believed that Iraqis were not ready for multiple political parties. At this time the disagreement between the Iraqi politicians became very personal, and al-Said thought the government could not be easily controlled with multiple political parties. Moreover, al-Said knew the old Iraqi elites would have disagreements between themselves, and they were not really ready for such opposition. Al-Suwaidi was ready to give the Iraqis a chance to try the party system to find how harmful it might be for a country like Iraq, but he believed that the Iraqis had the right to join parties.<sup>102</sup>

Al-Suwaidi's government had more liberal perspectives than the British had in mind. Al-Suwaidi opened the door for the Iraqi nationalists to express their ideas and plans for the development their country, and he allowed for them to establish their own newspapers and parties. The nationalists used the new freedom in Iraq to present their programs and views.

The new parties were attacking the British interference in Iraqi political life and the British experts in the Iraqi ministries. The new government not only allowed for Iraqi parties, but in his government program al-Suwaidi asked for new negotiations regarding the alliance with Britain.

The al-Suwaidi government allowed for five parties to be established in April 1946. From the British viewpoint, the Iraqi leaders' parties were not big players in Iraqi political life because the most of them did not have any position in the Iraqi political scene. British Ambassador

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 25-26. Tawfiq al-Suwaidi (1892-1968) was a lawyer. He studied law in Baghdad and Paris, worked for the Ottoman Empire, and was the first interpreter to the Ministry of Education in Constantinople. He became the Prime Minister for the first time in 1929. His relationship with the regent was not very cordial during his tenure in Iraq, although he was loyal to the Hashemite monarchy and the British.

<sup>102</sup> Al-Suwaidi joined the Liberal Party after he was forced to leave the cabinet in 1946.

Stonehewer Birdwood<sup>103</sup> had his doubts about the developments that could be accomplished if the Iraqi parties became “more than a clique of personal followers.” He also did not think that Iraqi political parties would made significant changes in the Iraqi political life, although the Iraqi parties’ propagandas started to harm the British influence in Iraq. At this time Stonehewer was not sure about the political parties’ chance for success in modernizing Iraq, but he thought the formation of the political parties was the first step in changing the social conscience.<sup>104</sup>

The idea of new political parties was supported by the British embassy in Baghdad, which allowed new Iraqi political parties to be in charge; on other hand, oppositionists inside Iraq also started to organize themselves into political parties who were against any British-supported parties. There were five parties which the new government allowed to establish themselves: People’s Party, National Democratic Party, and Party of the National Union were from the left. The fourth party, the Independence Party, was founded by Pan-Arabists, and the Liberal Party was established by the Arab landlord from south. The Iraqi government rejected the communists’ request to open a party and to have a legal position; it was the only request that the Iraqi government refused.

The honeymoon with the Old Gang did not continue for long. Al-Suwaidi started to have trouble with the conservative elites who did not like the liberation movement, which was very popular.<sup>105</sup> The regent did not support the al-Suwaidi government because of his personal disagreement with the prime minister.<sup>106</sup> The al-Suwaidi government had to resign after only three months after it failed to pass the government budget through the Senate. The Iraqi elites did

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<sup>103</sup> Lord Stonehewer Birdwood was the British Ambassador to Iraq from 1945-1948.

<sup>104</sup> TNA: PRO FO371/52401/E3735. (Bird to Bevin, 17 April 1946.)

<sup>105</sup> Daniel Silverfarb, *The Twilight of British Ascendancy in the Middle East: A Case Study of Iraq, 1941-1950* (New York: St. Martin Press, 1994), 82-84.

<sup>106</sup> Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *Iraq, 1900 to 1950: A Political, Social, and Economic History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 337; Majed Khadduri, *Independent Iraq 1931-1958: A Study in Iraqi Politics*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 255.

not want to their oppositions to recover again. For the British officers the cabinet had gone too far in their programs. The Iraqi nationalists had the chance to go back to the political life that made the British Embassy start to worry about its plans, and the British were not sure that they could work with al-Suwaidi cabinet. However, the British did not have to work against the Iraqi government because the disagreements between the Iraqi elites forced the Iraqi government to resign.

The new spirit in Iraq made the British officers in the British Embassy worry about the growing nationalist movement. In the year review for 1946 the British Embassy concluded that “Tawfiq, . . . was unable to get the djin back into the Jar.”<sup>107</sup>

Because of the political developments, the British Embassy thought to support the royal house by reorganized the Iraqi elites to face the nationalist movement. The British officers encouraged the regent to establish his own party to represent the palace in parliament. British Embassy Oriental Counselor Douglas Busk<sup>108</sup> was pushing the foreign office to allow the regent to create a party that would support the Iraqi monarchy; moreover, the British had many friends among the Iraqi leadership, which would carry out policies friendly to Britain.<sup>109</sup> However, Stonehewer did not support this move and worried about the repercussions of a palace-supported political party:

It seems to me that we shall have to think twice before adopting any proposal to run one particular party in Iraq, but Mr. Seton Lloyd's<sup>110</sup> advice is sound in that these young Iraqi politicians who are now trying to found parties cannot hope to run them on lines which we should regard as . . . sound because they . . . have no idea as to how a democratic party system should work.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Bird to Bevin, 15 January 1947, in A.de.L Rush, ed. *Record of Iraq 1914-1966*, vol. 10 (Wilts: Antony Rowe, 2001), 3.

<sup>108</sup> Sir Douglas L Busk (1906-1990) was the oriental counselor in the British Embassy in Baghdad. He became head of the British Embassy in 1947 after the ambassador's illness.

<sup>109</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/ 52402/E/9585. (Busk to Bevin, 19 September 1946.)

<sup>110</sup> Seton Lloyd (1902-1996) was an advisor for the British Embassy in Baghdad while he was working as president of the British School of Archeology in Iraq.

<sup>111</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/52402/E/4943. (Bird to Bevin, 23 May 1946.)

The British knew that the Iraqis needed help to form a multiple political party system of government, but this did not stop them from encouraging some individual leaders. The British embassy's oriental counselor, Douglas Busk, particularly supported Salih Jabir,<sup>112</sup> a new young leader who could prove himself in the Iraqi government. Busk described Salih, stating, "I have seen much of him recently and I am impressed by his ideas and forcefulness."<sup>113</sup>

Busk also favored allowing the palace to support a party that would represent the royal crown in parliament. It was not easy for the royal palace to be directly involved in elections. This involvement could harm the royal family's neutrality. Moreover, the Iraqi monarchy greatly influenced political life inside Iraq without the need of official support from a political party. The British connection with the regent was not an unknown issue inside Iraq, and any ideas presented by such party would be accused by the Iraqis of being a British scheme. Any decision made by the regent could be easily connected with Britain's interests. This well-known characteristic about the British relationship with the regent was not favorable for the Iraqi monarchy.

Busk was anxious to open Bevin's eyes to the oppositions' reactions regarding British influence in Iraq. It was very important to the British to continue their projects inside Iraq. In Busk's report about Iraq political life, he evaluated the Pan-Arab programs and their attitudes towards Britain. Busk found many issues in common within the development programs and in the social justice that the opposition was asking for. Many complaints involved the British methods of asking the different local Iraqi governments to achieve certain tasks. Ironically, the British new ideas about development in Iraq found more commonality with the left than with the pro-British.

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<sup>112</sup> Salih Jabir (1900-1957) was the first Shaii Prime Minister. He was Mutessarif of Basra during the National Government. His career started when he supported the regent against the Rashid Ali movement in 1941. He was arrested during the movement. The regent and al-said supported him, and he became Interior Minister during the war. He helped al-Said to suppress the Arab nationalists and he arrested thousands of the Pan-Arab proponents.

<sup>113</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/52402/E/9585. (Busk to Bevin, 19 September 1946.)

However, Busk found it impossible to work with the left because of their external programs. The British thought it would not be beneficial to work with the left because of their inability to reach reasonable agreements concerning Arab nationalism. The disagreements with the Pan-Arabs were about British policy inside the Palestine and the Allied agreement. The two issues were no surprise to the Foreign Office, which was trying to find a reasonable solution to both of the problems. The British embassy did not open a direct connection with the Iraqi left until they changed their attitude toward the British.<sup>114</sup>

It was not hard for Britain to find many friends inside Iraq at that time, but the majority of British supporters were from the pro-British group only. A dominance of British friends in the new cabinet did not help British influence inside Iraq at all. Many Iraqi politicians avoided joining the cabinet because of the close connection between the Iraqi cabinet and the British Embassy in Baghdad. The economic crisis in Iraq and the social problems within the middle class did not help British influence to grow inside the middle class, although the development plans that Britain started did begin to take serious steps forward. Moreover, the law allowed the middle class to join the leftist parties.

The regent decided to allow Arshad al-Umari<sup>115</sup> to hold the cabinet in June 1946, which was a surprise for the Iraqi Majority it made them suspicious about the regime's design toward the new freedom. Al-Umari led the opposition against the al-Suwaidi cabinet, and he worked with the regent to force the al-Suwaidi government to resign. Public opinion thought that the regent was retreating from his announcement in December 1945. For the British embassy it was a very bad choice that led them to work hard to overthrow the al-Suwaidi government.

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Arshad al-Umari (1882-1978) was born to a well-known family in Mosul. He earned his engineering degree in Istanbul. He was a deputy in the first Iraqi Parliament in 1924 and served as Baghdad mayor several times. He was one of the most conservative of the Iraqi prime ministers during the monarchy.

For the British, the new cabinet had one main object: holding new elections and forming a new government to help with the development plans. This target was also demanded of the Arab nationalists in Iraq. The new government had a program for ten years, which gave the impression that it came to stay. The British Embassy worried about the new program because they thought that they could not work with al-Umari at all because of his personality and his domestic policies.<sup>116</sup> Al-Umari believed in using force, so he was ready to use force against his opposition in his own country. He tried to make the British accept his policy, but Busk believed that the using the violence would anger the opposition. The British had different views from the Iraqi government about how to deal with communist-backed opposition and worker protests.

The British government started to worry about the increase in al-Umari's power, his actions against the leftist party, and the opposition he started to suspend the leftist newspaper and activities.<sup>117</sup> The Iraqi government had the chance to send a strong message to the opposition when a strike occurred at the Iraqi Petroleum Company as workers protested their low wages. The government used force against them and killed ten of the workers.<sup>118</sup>

The regent supported al-Umari's policies in Iraq, including trying to counter the danger from the left, but the British Embassy thought that it was not a wise policy because the Iraqi opposition started to work against the government.<sup>119</sup> On the other hand, the Iraqi elites were blaming the British for the government's policy. The Iraqi government under al-Umari was not encouraged to lead the social and economic development in Iraq. Moreover, al-Umari was not willing to hold new elections that the British and the regent were waiting for.<sup>120</sup> Al-Umari's

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<sup>116</sup> Silverfard, *The Twilight*, 85.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> Batatu, *Old Classes*, 533.

<sup>119</sup> Silverfard, *The Twilight*, 87-89.

<sup>120</sup> *Record of Iraq*, 10:159. Busk to Bevin, 16 August 1946.



behavior turned the British and the Iraqis against him. The regent did not want to replace al-Umani at first, but the British Embassy pressured him to replace the Iraqi prime minister.

Busk was trying to get the foreign office to put the pressure on the regent because the British could not work with the current government. Moreover, the regent was trying to escape from his obligation made in December 1945 for free and new elections. Busk believed that the regent must be encouraged by the Embassy to go forward and replace the prime minister without making the Iraqi people think that the British had the control over him: “and as my official calls are always given publicity and as we cannot allow him to be accused of being run by us asked him to dine privately to discuss the situation.”<sup>121</sup>

The British officers did not work to win the Iraqi public opinion directly, but their policy was to work with friends among the Iraqi elites. The foreign office supported Busk in his policy with the regent, and it agreed to put more pressure on the regent to fulfill his commitment of late 1945 to them and to the public.<sup>122</sup> Moreover, Busk tried to make the regent play a more function in the Iraqi administration.<sup>123</sup> The regent was trying to escape from the Iraqi political problems by being absent from Baghdad, which served only to increase the political troubles.<sup>124</sup> Busk was not sure the regent was capable of holding his position in Iraq, which could be a disaster for the royal family, and so he tried to give the foreign office the real picture about the regent and the Embassy’s problems with him. The foreign office was supporting Busk in his policy with the regent to move on the development programs, and the foreign office started to share Busk’s worry about putting the blame for the Iraqi government action against the Arab nationalists and

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<sup>121</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/52402 E8881/226/93. (Busk To Foreign Office, 5 September 1946.)

<sup>122</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/52402 E 8881/226/93 (Foreign Office to Baghdad, 11 September 1946.)

<sup>123</sup> *Record of Iraq*. 10:163. Busk to Bevin, 6 September 1946.

<sup>124</sup> Regent Abd al-Ilah was used to going on vacation in summer to London and in winter to North Iraq.

the left, which was increasing the anti-British feeling among the Iraqis. In addition, the prime minister was not enthusiastic about receiving advice from the British or his colleagues.<sup>125</sup>

Public opinion in Iraq shared the British Embassy's opinion about the government, but they believed that the British were behind the regent actions.<sup>126</sup> The Foreign Office advised Busk to start propaganda against the government actions to the opposition and the British government, which was: "We welcome the attitude internal reform show by the left-wing parties."<sup>127</sup> The Foreign Office showed its concern about having a friendly prime minister because Britain was working on many files, such as the revision of the Ally Treaty and the development plans.

By October, the British Embassy was seriously thinking how to persuade the regent to change out the prime minister. Busk started to visit the Iraqi politicians to discover their opinions, especially Nuri al-Said and Salih Jabir, whom Busk was supporting for the cabinet, about the internal situation. For the first time, al-Said was supporting Prince Zaid, the regent's uncle, for prime minister. The British Embassy was willing to accept this choice, but the idea did not work because the prince refused and because of the political difficulty it would cause for one of the royal family to be the prime minister.<sup>128</sup> The British and public pressure worked to change the regent's opinion about the Iraqi Government. In December 1946, the prime minister resigned after the regent refused to allow to him to institute martial law.<sup>129</sup> It was an indirect order to the prime minister to resign during the monarchy if the regent refused to allow the prime minister to issue a law.

In December 1946, al-Said established his ninth cabinet, whose main goal was to prepare for new elections. Al-Said successfully persuaded two parties from the left, the Liberal and

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<sup>125</sup> *Record of Iraq*, 19:182. Bird to Foreign Office, 19 July 1946.

<sup>126</sup> *Record of Iraq*, 10:167. Busk to the Foreign Office, 24 September 1946.

<sup>127</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/52402 E 9585/226/93. (Memorandum for the Foreign Office, 26 September 1946.)

<sup>128</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/52402/ E 9922/226/93. (Busk to the Foreign Office, 3 October 1946.)

<sup>129</sup> Al-Hasani, *History of Iraqi Cabinets*, 7:127.

National Parties, to join his cabinet, and he was able to make agreements with them to hold free elections.<sup>130</sup> These elections were very important for the British Foreign Office because they wanted to establish new negotiations regarding the Anglo-Iraqi treaty and the development board, and they need to have a friendly government.

The leftist parties started to claim al-Said to manipulate the election to guarantee the majority in Parliament, which led their ministers to resign at end of December 1946. Al-Said's policy toward Britain and the importance of being an ally with Britain was addressed in his speech during late 1946, and this policy made the left worry about al-Said plans and did not help his image among the leftists.<sup>131</sup> The British Embassy agreed with the left about al-Said's attempt to take control of the election results, so they did not believe his statement about government neutrality in the election.<sup>132</sup> The British did not address election honesty in the debate, but they knew about the government ability to insure the majority in parliament.

The election made a big change in Iraqi political life because Salih Jabir's power was growing under the al-Said cabinet. The regent started to support him, which made Salih a target for the opposition and forced him to resign from the Finance Ministry. The British Embassy was convinced that the crown would not allow him to lose his voting bloc inside parliament. Moreover, the left worked to create a big challenge for the government.<sup>133</sup>

The elections were held in March 1947, and the pro-British faction successfully held the majority inside the Iraqi parliament. On other hand, the left won only four deputies.<sup>134</sup> The election kept the opposition outside parliament, which made the left use the streets and the coffee

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<sup>130</sup> Elliot, *Independent Iraq*, 58.

<sup>131</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/52405 E 12399/226/93. (Bird to the Foreign Office, 10 December 1946.)

<sup>132</sup> TN: PRO FO 371/52405 E12426/226/93. (Bird to the Foreign Office, 23 December 1946.)

<sup>133</sup> Ahmad Baban, *Memories of Ahmad Baban, the Last Iraqi Prime Minister During the Hashimi Monarchy* (Beirut: The Arabic Institute for Research and Publishing Press, 1999), 130.

<sup>134</sup> Al-Hasani, *History of Iraqi Cabinets*, 7:153.

shops as places for their protest and activities against the government. The majority in Iraq thought that the government would win, especially outside Baghdad.<sup>135</sup> The regent made Salih Jabir the prime minister. This, too, was a big success for the British embassy, which supported Jabir for membership in the cabinet. The British had worked with Jabir before and they believed that there was an opportunity to move forward with a good relationship with new Prime Minister of Iraq.

The new government programs were some of the most ambitious programs in Iraqi government history, especially concerning socioeconomic developments. The programs dealt with many hot issues,<sup>136</sup> for example, the alliance with Britain was a big target for the government. Also, the increase in standards of living was the main goal for the program. In general the Iraqi government was very ambitious with its programs.<sup>137</sup>

The British had to work with Salih Jabir to put the development plans on track. Bevin's plans for the social, economic and military developments had to be at the top of the list of the new Iraqi cabinet. Bevin and the British policymakers faced hard times dealing with the situation in the Middle East. Iraq was the British ally because British friends were in power in Iraq, so it was not hard for the British to convince them to adopt the British programs.

Britain's problems were not limited to supplying the BMEO with necessary funding only. Sufficient numbers of advisors were difficult to find to work in the region. Stonehewer, the British ambassador in Baghdad, had major difficulties finding experts to follow through with the plans in Iraq. He asked Bevin to supply the Iraqi government with British experts because of the lack of adequately knowledgeable Iraqis.<sup>138</sup> Stonehewer pushed Bevin for an increase in the

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<sup>135</sup> *Record of Iraq*, 10:205. Bird to Foreign Office, 20 March 1947.

<sup>136</sup> *Record of Iraq*, 10:210. Bird to Foreign Office, 28 April 1947.

<sup>137</sup> Louis, *The British Empire*, 321.

<sup>138</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/61621/ E 3774. (Bird to Bevin, 29 May 1947.)

numbers of experts because the Iraqi government started to complain about Britain's delay in providing the necessary experts. It was not easy for the British Embassy in Baghdad to deny the Iraqis demands for the help, but the Foreign Office was having problems finding enough experts who were willing to go to Iraq. The British Foreign Office, however, looked to the Salih Jabir cabinet to achieve its economic and political plans in the Iraq. The British Embassy supported Salih Jabir, the first Shiite Iraqi prime minister, and expected him to play a major role in implementing new policies in Iraq.

Negotiations for the board's formation began with Salih Jabir in 1947, as the British depended on the Salih Jabir cabinet to start the development board in Iraq.<sup>139</sup> However, the British plans would end in failure when Salih Jabir resigned after the Portsmouth storm in 1948. Thus, the project was suspended until 1950. The BMEO did not continue for long because the situation in the Middle East after Palestine became very anti-British, and this fact did not make the British officers' work in the Arab countries any easier. When the office died in 1949 the British had to work with Iraq to create the development board.

In Iraq, the flood control project was strongly supported strongly by the regent. Regent Abd al-Ilah had his own reasons to support the irrigation projects in his country. The regent had depended on Iraqi tribal leaders to gain power, especially in parliament. The majorities in the parliament were landlords who were strong allies of the regent. The British knew about the connection between the regent, the strong landlords and tribal leaders, so Bevin tried to draw a policy that would provide justice for the small farmers. Abd al-Ilah did not trust urban leaders or the Iraqi army, especially after the failed Rashid Ali coup. He supported the tribal leaders and attempted to stop any limitations to their power or their authority on their land.<sup>140</sup> Moreover, the

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>140</sup> Baban, *Memoirs*, 124.

regent prevented the Iraqi government from passing any laws which could limit or challenge the tribal leaders' power because he believed that they were loyal to the crown. On this issue, the British embassy blamed the Old Gang for slow development in Iraq.

Bevin knew about Iraq's internal problems and asked the regent to focus more attention on small farmers by giving them more land as a beginning of instituting reform.<sup>141</sup> British policymakers knew it would be difficult to succeed in getting the Iraqi elite to agree with the new plans. Many problems stemmed from the old gang of leaders. Britain found that they had to reform their relationship with the old Iraq elite if they wanted their plans to succeed, even though the British strongly influenced Iraqi political life and the majority of the Iraqi leaders were seeking British support.

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<sup>141</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/52402/E/ 6928/226/G. (Bevin to Bird, 19 July 1946.)

## CHAPTER 5

### THE REVISION OF THE ANGLO-IRAQI TREATY

The main struggle for the British policy makers in the British Foreign Office during the Labour government in Iraq was the Iraqi nationalists' demands for evacuation of the British military bases in Iraq and revision of the alliance treaty between the Britain and Iraq. The British experts noticed that anti-British feeling among the Iraqi people was growing because of the British policies in Palestine and the military bases<sup>142</sup> post-World War II. British officers who worked in Iraq knew that Iraqi people did not think that they had full independence because of the British bases in Iraq, and they were asking the British Royal Air Force to leave, especially after Syria and Lebanon became independent in 1946, a major pressure on the Iraqi elites to ask for a new agreement between them and Britain.<sup>143</sup>

British allies in the Iraqi regime did not share with the Iraqi nationalists their feeling about the British military presence in Iraq, but they had different view about the treaty agreement with Britain. Nuri al-Said and the regent, Abd al-Ilah, wanted to revise the old treaty to help them to hold their positions inside Iraq. The British military officers who worked with the British military mission in Iraq knew how the Iraqis felt about foreign bases in Iraq, and they shared their knowledge with Foreign Office in London. The British military mission between 1944 and 1948 was under commander the Major General J.M.L. Renton, who went to Iraq to reorganize and rebuild the Iraqi army.<sup>144</sup>

Ernest Bevin understood that he had to solve the military agreement with Iraqi if he wanted to achieve his plans to develop the country and win the Iraqi peoples' trust. Bevin

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<sup>142</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/ 45255 /E/9213/175/65. (Harrid to the Foreign Office, 20 November 1945.)

<sup>143</sup> William Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East 1945-1951: Arab Nationalism, the United States and Postwar Imperialism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), 324.

<sup>144</sup> Daniel Silverfard, *Twilight of British Ascendancy in the Middle East: A case study of Iraq, 1941-1950* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 98.

understood that the Iraqi demands about evacuating the British Royal Air bases was very strong among the middle class in Iraq, and that he had to find a political solution for the military existence in Iraq, but he also had to achieve the defense scheme for the British Empire in the Middle East at the same time. The British Foreign Office started to receive official requests from the Iraqi government starting with al-Suwaidi government in 1946. The British Foreign Office decided to negotiate a new alliance treaty with Iraq to achieve two main goals: the new treaty would introduce good will for the Iraqi people, and the British tried to modernize the Iraqi Army and to make Iraqi army loyal to the Iraqi regent.

The alliance treaty between Britain and Iraq of 1930 had been activated in 1932 when Iraq became an independent state, which allowed Iraq to join to the League of Nations. The fact that the Iraq was the first Arab state to become independent in 1932 made the Iraqi elites very proud. The treaty remained in place for 25 years, to be ended in 1957 with the right for each party to ask for an early negotiation about the treaty after 20 years, in 1952. The Iraq government did not have the right to ask for an agreement before 1952, but the changing world after World War II, especially the growing nationalist movement in the Middle East, made it hard for the Labour government to refuse the Iraqi request. Moreover, Bevin believed that he could succeed in his policy toward the Arabs by abandoning the old British imperialism policy before the Labour government. For the British, that it was only a matter of time before the Iraqis asked the British to revise the alliance treaty before 1952.<sup>145</sup>

It was a big challenge for the Foreign Office to make a new treaty with Iraq to address the Bevin's policy for equality between Britain and Iraq. Bevin had to deal with four Iraqi governments before signing the new treaty in Portsmouth in January 1948.

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<sup>145</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/52401 E 1947.226/93. (Memorandum for the Foreign Office, 9 March 1946.)



In February 1946, Iraqi Prime Minister Tawfiq al-Suwaidi announced that his cabinet would ask to reopen the negotiations on the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty that was signed in 1930.<sup>146</sup> Busk in the British Embassy sent to the Foreign Office a letter blaming the Iraqi prime minister for his announcement because the oriental consular thought that the prime minister was playing political games with his opponents. The Iraqi government was facing strong opposition from the Old Gang, so he was using the British air bases in his debate with his political enemies. Busk ignored the fact that the evacuation was a very popular idea among the Iraqi people, and that the Iraqi government was presenting the Iraqi elites' demands.

After the war, the al-Suwaidi government released thousands of Iraqi nationalists, most of them from the middle class and with Western educations, who started to publish new newspapers and become involved in the Iraqi political scene. Busk thought that al-Suwaidi was only thinking to impose his successor in the Iraqi cabinet, because the current Iraq government was preparing for the new elections during 1946.<sup>147</sup> The Iraqi people thought that they had a new chance to reorganize their relationship with the British after World War II because of the new Labour government in Britain. The two partners had had bad experiences in last war that had led Britain to occupy Iraq for a second time, so the old treaty did not help the two countries to solve their problems.

During World War II, one of main reasons for the disagreement between the British government and the Rashid Ali al-Kilani government was the disagreement about interpretation of the treaty. The British military officers understood that the British bases inside Iraq did not have big support from the Iraqi majority. The Iraqi people were sensitive about having foreign

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<sup>146</sup> D. K Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East, 1914-1958* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 110-111

<sup>147</sup> The election took place a year later in 1947.

forces in their land, but the alliance treaty allowed to the British to have military bases despite the disagreement about them.

The British Embassy did support openly and publicly the argument about the alliance agreement because they knew that the Anglo-Iraqi treaty was the main target for the nationalism movement in Iraq. The Iraqi government started to make serious steps toward renegotiating the treaty by naming a committee of four ministers to make a new proposal to submit to the British government,<sup>148</sup> but the al-Suwaidi government did not continue for long, which brought an end to the Iraqi government's programs. The Iraqi government did not ask for evacuation of the British bases, but it did ask for more advantages for the Iraqi. The British thought that the al-Suwaidi government was a nationalist government, and they could not have a new agreement with them, although he did not officially ask the British government to reopen the negotiation over the treaty.

The Iraqi request made the Foreign Office start to examine the Iraqi request because the British Foreign Office was in middle of negotiations with Egypt about a new revision for the alliance with Egypt. Ernest Bevin did not want to have to negotiate agreements with the Iraqi and Egyptian governments together.<sup>149</sup> Bevin decided to focus on the Egyptian problem before turning toward the Iraqi request. The British foreign minister in mid-1946 was very optimistic<sup>150</sup> about the British position in the Middle East, so he thought the British could have new agreements with the Iraq, Egypt, Jordan and Palestine. Iraq had to wait for the conclusion for the Anglo-Egyptian agreement, but Bevin was open to the Iraqi proposal and ideas about the new

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<sup>148</sup> Abd Al-Razzaq Al-Hasani, *The History of Iraqi Cabinets*, vol. 7, 213. (Baghdad: Public Culture House, 1988)

<sup>149</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/52401/E/2995/226/93. (Foreign Office to Busk, 4 March 1946.)

<sup>150</sup> Gordon Alexander Craig, and Francis L. Loewenheim, *The Diplomats, 1939-1979* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 108-111.

agreement.<sup>151</sup> The Iraqi regent told Bevin in July 1946 that Iraqi government under al-Umari cabinet would wait until the British ended negotiations with Egypt before opening their official request for a new agreement.

The Anglo-Egyptian negotiations of a new agreement constituted a serious challenge to the British policy in the Middle East because the Arab states, especially Iraq, wanted to use the new Anglo-Egyptian treaty as a guide for their own new agreements.<sup>152</sup>

The Iraqi request for a new agreement raised the question of the British bases in Iraq. In 1946 the British had two bases for the British Air Force as a result of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930. The military bases in Iraq were used to secure the British in Middle East. The British military officers knew the importance of British positioning in Iraq for strategy reasons, and they were not ready to give up that position in Iraq. The British had proved that they had a major role to play in Iraq during the conflict with the Iraqi Army in May 1941.

The British Foreign Office wanted the Iraqi nationalist request for eliminating the British bases from Iraq because it was thinking of moving the Iraqi bases to Kuwait and Jordan. The British Embassy in Baghdad supported moving the British bases, especially Douglas Busk, because he thought that would remove a source of struggle of between the Iraqi nationalists and Britain. Moreover, the rulers in Kuwait and Jordan were loyal to Great Britain and would not object to the bases being located in their countries.

The Minister of Defense did not support removing the Royal Air force from Iraq because of strategic and economic reasons.<sup>153</sup> The British had two military bases that could cover the British defense scheme in the region: the Habbaniya base, located in northern Iraq, and the Shaiba base in south Iraq. The Habbaniya was the main base for the British communication with

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<sup>151</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/52401/E/2831/226/93. (Bevin to British Embassy in Baghdad, 16 April 1946.)

<sup>152</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/52402/E/6928/226/G. (Bevin to Bird, 19 July 1946.)

<sup>153</sup> Silverfard, *Twilight of British*, 125-127.

the west. The British also needed the military bases in Shaiba to secure the oil fields in the Middle East,<sup>154</sup> especially those in south Iran. In addition, in 1946 the British still had their imperial lines of communication with India to secure. Moreover, removing the British bases from Iraq would cost the British government a lot of money because the suggested locations were not designed for military use, which forced the British to spend a lot of money to preparing the new location.<sup>155</sup>

The British were interested on Iraq because it was part of their planned defense policy for the entire Middle East. The British officers were thinking of the Middle East as one block, and the Iraq was protection the northeast front. The British main concern in the war was to protect the eastern front from attack from the Soviet Union,<sup>156</sup> and they need the bases in Iraq to support the Iranian and the Turkish fronts. Also, the British knew that they did not have enough military forces in Iraq. The Iraqi land force could not stop any foreign attack, and they relied on British air power to delay any attack in case of war.

Bevin was deeply involved with negotiations with Egypt in the late 1946, but he was ready to listen to the Iraqis to know their policy toward the British military bases and influence in Iraq. Moreover, Bevin told the Iraqi foreign minister in September that he would encourage the military chief of staff in the Middle East to go to Iraq and to “talk over the whole problem in a friendly way.”<sup>157</sup> The Iraqi foreign minister assured Bevin that his cabinet would not ask to reopen the treaty with Britain. In fact, the al-Umari government was very busy trying to repress their opposition, who left the Iraq policy in disorder. Bevin was ready to open unofficial talks

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<sup>154</sup> Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 427.

<sup>155</sup> Report by Joint Planning Staff, Chiefs of Staff Committee, to the Office of the Cabinet and Minister of Defense, 25 October 1946, in Anita L.P. Burdett, ed., *Iraq Defence Intelligence 1920-1973*, archive ed., vol. 4 (Chippenham: Antony Rowe, 2005), 251.

<sup>156</sup> Colin McInnes, *Hot War, Cold War: The British Army's Way in Warfare, 1945-95* (London: Brassey, 1996), 5-7.

<sup>157</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/52402/E/9355/226/G. (Bevin to Bird, 18 September 1946.)

with the Iraqi side about the treaty to know their proposal while the Foreign Office was preparing his options about opening the revision of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty.<sup>158</sup>

The Iraqi regent wanted British help to secure the Hashimi crown because he was having troubles with the Iraqi elites and he did not trust them. In 1946 the dissension between the Iraqi politicians was very deep, leading to several crises in Iraq. For example, the leftist parties and students started to remonstrate against the government because of government acts against the student and oppositions. The government did not allow the newspapers to criticize its work; moreover, the government started to arrest the students and close the newspapers. For the first time in Iraq the Iraqi soldiers joined to the protest against the government.<sup>159</sup> The Iraqi regent had a difficult time dealing with the Iraqi problems, and he needed the British help to get more advice about the internal crises. The regent believed that British were his main ally and he could count on them to get advice because he had few honest Iraqi advisers.

Moreover, the Iraqi army was a main player in Iraq during the Hashemite period, but Abd al-Ilah had bad experiences with the Iraqi army during the al-Kilani government, which forced him to flee Iraq and led the Iraqi army to remove him from his position as a regent in May 1941 before the British army took him back to Baghdad. Regent Abd al-Ilah wanted British help to make the army loyal to him and to reorganize the Iraqi army because he believed that he could rely only on a royal army.<sup>160</sup> The regent took a chance that a new agreement with British would be more popular among the Iraqi nationalists and the Iraqi officers.

The regent took the negotiation with the British as his own responsibility. He wanted to do the unofficial negotiations with British, which Bevin offered to the Iraqis, but he wanted the

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<sup>158</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/52403/E/10671/226/G. (Memorandum for the Foreign Office, 20 December 1946.)

<sup>159</sup> Elliot, *Independent Iraq*, 56.

<sup>160</sup> A.L. Rush, ed., *Record of Iraq 1914-1966*, vol. 10 (Wilts: Antony Rowe, 2001), 172-173. British Embassy to the Foreign Office, 3 October 1946.

British officers to negotiate secretly with him and with al-Said only, without telling the Iraqi government. The British workers in the British Embassy had to tell the Foreign Office about the regent's request because al-Said at that time did not have any official position, although he was a major player in the Iraqi political scene.

The British ambassador believed that the regent and al-Said did not have any kind of proposal about the new agreement.<sup>161</sup> The regent and al-Said ignored the proposal that the al-Suwaidi committee created, and they did not try to consult with the Iraqi elites about a new agreement with British. The regent was afraid to take a step with the secret negotiation because he preferred to wait for the results for Anglo-Egyptian negotiation. The regent did not want to make any promises to the British about the new treaty during the unofficial meetings, which could tie him down when he wanted to negotiate officially. The regent was afraid that the nationalist propaganda against him if he took an agreement that Egypt refused to take.

The British had a very hard time during the negotiations with Egypt, and the agreement with them did not concern the near future. This fact put the regent under very hard pressure because the Iraqi nationalists would raise their demands against the British. Moreover, the British struggle over Palestine made it hard for the Iraqi leaders to take steps toward the British policy in the Middle East. The regent was worried about Palestine because the Iraqis could not follow any public policy with the British scheme in the Middle East if the final solution for Palestine was against the Arab demands. The regent believed he could not resist the pressure from the Arab nationalists about Palestine:

If the decision reached on Palestine is unacceptable to the Arabs, any government, no matter how friendly it wishes to be, will be under such pressure that we shall be faced with drastic demands for Treaty revision and no military conversation on cooperation would therefore be possible.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/52403/E/11474/226/G. (Bird to the Foreign Office, 22 November 1946.)

<sup>162</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/52403/E/211712/226/G. (Memorandum for the Foreign Office, 10 December 1946.)

The regent agreed with the British suggestion about opening unofficial negotiations with the British. Moreover, the British were thinking to solve the “military aspect”<sup>163</sup> with the Iraqis first, before they opened political negotiations.

The foreign office was receiving requests from the British officers in Baghdad to take the reform of the Iraqi army seriously by rebuilding the Iraqi army to be loyal to the regime, because British officers in Baghdad and London were concerned about the army loyalty to the regime, especially to the personality of regent. The various sides started to ask for a new reform plans in October 1946. The Iraqi Minister of Defense asked the British mission officially to reform the Iraqi army, which was a very popular idea in Iraq because the Iraqi army after the war was in very bad shape.

The Pan-Arabs inside Iraq were blaming the British for army weaknesses. The British Embassy took the chance for a new agreement with the Iraq to deny such idea. Busk was arguing support for the reform of the Iraqi army when he wrote to the Foreign Office to get its support for the Iraqi request: “Explode myth that we wish to keep Iraq weak; and keep army loyal to the regent.”<sup>164</sup> Most of the Iraqi opinion about British against the Iraqi army came because of the Iraqi and the British policies toward the army during War World II.

During World War II al-Said needed to control the army while he was the prime minister, so he started a policy to weaken the army. He started to take the army from the nationalists; moreover, he worked to replace the young officers with older officers whom he could trust to guarantee their loyalty to his government. Al-Said’s policy against the army forced the Iraqi army to stay away from the political scene during the war.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/52403/E/11445/226/G. (Bird to the Foreign Office, 22 November 1946.)

<sup>164</sup> *Iraq Defence Intelligence*, 4:204. Busk to the Foreign Office, 5 October 1946.

<sup>165</sup> Louis, *British Empire*, 324.

The British mission in Iraq had a big influence over the Iraqi army. In 1944 the British mission reformed the Iraqi army on the al-Said request.<sup>166</sup> J. Renton, the head of the British mission, worked on reducing the Iraqi army divisions from four to three. Renton worked to reduce the Iraqi army number getting rid of the old officers who did not fit with modern warfare. The new plan for Iraq army had mountain, plains and cadre divisions. The new plans were made to serve the Iraqi geography, but reducing the Iraqi army was not a popular idea inside Iraq. Many Iraqi leaders saw it as a way to punish the army because of the war against the British in 1941, but Renton believed that Iraq did not need more than those divisions to secure the internal order. The Iraqi economic condition did not help the Iraqi government to increase the army number.

The new period and the political changes occurring after the war changed the Iraqi and the British views toward the military cooperation between them. The minister of defense under the Arshad al-Umari cabinet was planning to change the army plan, but in late November the al-Umari government resigned and Nuri al-Said made one of his nine cabinets. Al-Said at this time was ready to work with the British to reform the army again, but he could not do that by himself because the al-Said's cabinet job was to hold the election and then resign. In December 1946, the British knew that they had to wait until the election for the new Iraqi government to open negotiations about the treaty. The new Iraqi government would have to deal with the new treaty agreement.<sup>167</sup> The British Foreign Office told the British Embassy in Baghdad that it would send a small group to Iraq to research the Iraqi demands and to prepare for the unofficial meeting the new Iraqi government.

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<sup>166</sup> *Iraq Defence Intelligence*, 4:196. Renton to the Chief of the General Staff, 18 September 1946.

<sup>167</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/52403/E/11693/226/G93. (Memorandum for the Foreign Office, 3 December 1946.)



The new Iraqi election gave a majority to al-Said and the regent, who put Salih Jabir in the Iraqi cabinet as prime minister in March 1947. The new government programs were very ambitious, calling for the government to take responsibility for solutions for the most of the Iraqi economic, political and social problems. Revising the alliance with Great Britain was one of the main targets for the new government:

Work for the adjustment of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty on the basis of ensuring mutual interest as between equal and in light of principles of the United Nation Charter with a view a to consolidating the traditional friendship existing between Iraq and Great Britain.<sup>168</sup>

The British Embassy encouraged the Iraqi prime minister to hold unofficial negotiations with them about the treaty in Baghdad. The royal palace also supported Jabir as leader of the negotiations with the British officers. The regent took responsibility for making an agreement with the British to achieve the nationalist request for more independence. The British had decided to send the unofficial delegates in May 1947 with the main goal of presenting the British proposal for the new treaty and discovering the Iraqi demands and proposed changes to the old treaty.

The negotiations between the two parties were friendly, and covered most of the controversial issues pertinent to the Joint Defence Board, the defense of Iraq, training the Iraqi forces, and equipment requirements. The main points of dispute between the British and the Iraqis were over the British air bases and with providing Iraq with the newest equipment. The British refused the Iraqi request to turn the British military bases into Iraqi ones during peace time, even though the British would have the right to use them in the war time. Also, the British were ready to provide Iraq with what military aid they could provide at that time, though most of the British equipment available had been used previously. The British army did not have new

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<sup>168</sup> *Record of Iraq*, 10:210. Bird to Bevin, 25 April 1947.

equipment to give the Iraqi army<sup>169</sup> because the British army was not receiving any up-to-date equipment. The Iraqi side did not accept the British excuse of being out of military stock since the end of the Second World War.

The British came to Iraq without any intention of abandoning their military bases in the area. They wanted to keep their position in Iraq, especially the air bases, because they wanted to maintain their influence in Iraq. Abandoning the military bases would lead to diminished British influence over the Iraqi government. The British experiences with the Iraqi government during the war affected its judgment on turning over the British bases in peacetime to the Iraqis and using them in wartime. The British tried to persuade the Iraqi government of the benefits of a partnership with the British. Moreover, the British officers were supporting military cooperation between the Arab states on one side and the British Empire on the other. The benefit from such cooperation would extend to all the Arab states.

On the other hand, the Iraqis were trying to persuade the British to evacuate their military bases by turning them over to the Iraqis or to moving them to Kuwait. This was because the Iraqis had adopted policies too close to those of the British, and though the Iraqi government was willing to make a deal with the British, it preferred a military agreement that would keep them from losing their status in the Middle East “in view of evacuation of foreign troops from other Arab countries, [the Iraqis were] apprehensive that Iraq [would] be vulnerable to criticism.”<sup>170</sup> The Iraqi prime minister and the regent told the British officers that Iraq would support the British plans to make a defense agreement between Britain and Arab countries so they could share military defense schemes with Britain.<sup>171</sup> Baghdad’s negotiations with Britain did not generate a favorable result for the Iraqis because the British did not want to leave their

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<sup>169</sup> Silverfarb, *The Twilight of British*, 131.

<sup>170</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/61590/E/4274/3/G. (From Commander in Chief to the Chief of Staff, 16 May 1947.)

<sup>171</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/ 61590/E/4252/3/G. (Busk to the Foreign Office, 19 May 1947.)

bases.<sup>172</sup> In spite of this, Britain and Iraq were ready to make an agreement, and they continued discussions over the Royal Air Bases when the British finished negotiations with Egypt.

The British relationship with Iraq after the Baghdad negotiations affected the growth of the nationalist movement. There were external elements that affected British relationships with the growing middle classes in Iraq and other countries in the Middle East, and the British could not control the increasing anti-British sentiment in the Middle East. Busk was very worried about the increasing nationalist movement in Iraq because of Britain's failure to sign a new treaty with the Egyptian government. In July 1947, Egypt went to the United Nations to argue about the treaty between it and British government.<sup>173</sup>

The British negotiations with Egypt ended in a big failure. The British could not solve their problems with the Egyptian government without harming their image in the Middle East. Also, the Palestine case was another reason for the British Embassy to warn the Foreign Office about the growing nationalist movement in Iraq. The regent believed that, also, and he wanted to start the official negotiations with the British over the treaty. In July 1947 the Iraqi Foreign Minister asked Bevin to open the negotiations in August 1947, as the regent pushed hard to solve the military agreement as soon as he could to avoid any change in the plans: "[T]he regent was anxious to have talk on this subject in August,"<sup>174</sup> but Bevin did not accept the Iraqi request because his program was very busy and he could not engage in any official talks before the winter. Bevin could not make any hurried decisions about the agreement with Iraqi government without being sure that the Iraqi government would work to assure success for the negotiations with him.

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<sup>172</sup> Silverfarb, *The Twilight of British*, 130.

<sup>173</sup> Louis, *British Empire*, 257.

<sup>174</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/61592/E/6397/453/93. (Bevin to Bird, 18 July 1947.)

In August 1947 Bevin's plan for making a defense agreement with the Arab states were collapsed. He could not make any progress with the Egyptian government. Moreover, he was not sure about the future of the British in Palestine. The Iraqi regent used the opportunity of being in London to ask Bevin to open the official negotiation with Iraq officially, and to welcome the Iraqi prime minister to London in October to discuss the details. The regent explained to Bevin about Iraqi fears of the changing plans in Palestine and Egypt, and that they were optimistic about the situation in the Middle East. Bevin agreed with al-Said and the regent, but he asked for additional work on the proposal before the prime minister arrived in London.<sup>175</sup>

Bevin was certain at this time that the Iraqi government would be willing to make a deal with the British. He wanted to prepare most of the details with the Iraqi government before opening the official talks, which would avoid the mistakes made with the Egyptian government that led to the breakdown in the treaty negotiations with Egypt. At this time Bevin was dealing with the regent and al-Said to find a deal with Iraq, and he counted on their judgment concerning the Iraqi demands.

Bevin was also working to secure the Iraqi military requirements. In September he asked the British Cabinet to meet the Iraqi military's needs. Moreover, he was willing to share the training cost for the Iraqi officers in Great Britain because he wanted to encourage the Iraqi officers to benefit from being partners with the British.<sup>176</sup>

At the same time, Busk started to be worry about the government situation inside Iraq. The British counselor was working to put the Iraqi government on solid ground because the opposition to the government in power was increasing because of Jabir's behavior with the Iraqi elites and weak economy. The struggle between the Iraqi politicians was main reason in the past

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<sup>175</sup> *Record of Iraq*, 10:61. Bevin to Busk, 18 August 1947.

<sup>176</sup> *Iraq Defence Intelligence*, 276. Bevin to the Cabinet, 17 September 1947.

for the short durations of Iraqi governments; Busk was hoping to avoid any struggle while the preparations for the negotiations with Britain were taking place.

Busk supported Jabir cabinet, but he worried that his colleagues thought that the cabinet members were not qualified. "I have little doubt that the prime minister is acutely aware of the weakness of his team," he wrote to the Foreign Office. Busk advised the prime minister to expand his cabinet, especially the interior chair because there no one held that ministry. Busk asked the Foreign Office to used its influence on the regent and al-Said to make the prime minister expand his government to strengthen the cabinet.<sup>177</sup> Busk continue to send warnings to the Foreign Office about the increasing importance of the nationalists in Iraq.<sup>178</sup>

Bevin decided to accept the Iraqi request for opening the official negotiations for the alliance treaty in October 1947. He informed the British cabinet and requested their support for his decision. He made up his mind because of the pressure of the nationalists on the Iraqi government; the Iraqis believed that they were "under the growing pressure of nationalist feeling in Iraq that provisions of the Treaty constitute an infringement of Iraqi's independence."<sup>179</sup> Bevin concluded that he could make an equal agreement with Iraq if he shared the British bases with the Iraqis. Bevin declared that he would not do any long debate with Iraqi and he would avoid the reasons that led to collapse of Anglo-Egyptian negotiations earlier this year. The British were keeping the bases from the Iraqi government to the "last possible moment"<sup>180</sup> to avoid another crisis with another Arab country.

The internal situation in Iraq started to worsen because of the bread crisis and the Palestine case. The British withdrew from Palestine and notified the United Nations of their

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<sup>177</sup> *Record of Iraq*, 10:219. Busk to the Foreign Office, 2 August 1947.

<sup>178</sup> *Record of Iraq*, 10:222. Busk to the Foreign Office, 17 September 1947.

<sup>179</sup> *Record of Iraq*, 10:685. Memorandum by Bevin to the Cabinet, 7 October 1947.

<sup>180</sup> *Iraq Defence Intelligence*, 4:285. Memorandum by the Chief of Staff, 16 October 1947.

decision. The Arab reaction to the British announcement was very violent. In December the United Nations decided to partition the territory between the Arabs and the Jews. Al-Said told the Foreign Office in London that he was depending on the British Government to solve this issue, but he was worried about using force to put an end to the matter. Al-Said advised the British to withdraw their administration as soon as they could, because he understood the violent reaction of the Arabs against the partition, and he was sure that force would be needed to resolve the issue.<sup>181</sup>

In Iraq the Iraqi government supported the student protest against the partition decision. Moreover, the prime minister gave a vehement anti-partition speech that drew the support of Iraqis, especially those in the Arab League in Cairo. The situation inside Iraq was very unsettled because of the Palestine situation. Busk sent to the Foreign Office a warning that the Iraqis believed that the prime minister “doubted whether any Iraqi prime minister could have said anything else or, if he did try to take a more reasonable line, whether he would survive for more than five minute.”<sup>182</sup>

The British Embassy concluded that the situation was very bad in Baghdad and the Iraqi government was making the matter worse by ignoring the economic problems in Iraq. The Iraqi parliament tried to discuss the bread crisis with the government but Jabir ignored the people’s request.<sup>183</sup> The British and the Iraqi governments were working to finish the treaty agreement, which made the prime minister less concerned about the internal problems. Iraq at this time was lacking wheat, and the food prices were increasing in Baghdad and other cities. The British

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<sup>181</sup> *Record of Iraq*, 10:62. Foreign Office to Baghdad, 11 December 1947.

<sup>182</sup> *Record of Iraq*, 10:64. Busk to the Foreign Office, 14 December 1947; Louis, *British Empire*, 330-331.

<sup>183</sup> Al-Hasani, *History of Iraqi Cabinets*, 7:209.

Embassy noticed that barley, which was used to make bread in Iraq, was exported to Lebanon, and the government was criticized for that.<sup>184</sup>

The British and the Iraqis decided to talk about the treaty in January 1948. The Iraqi delegation had to travel to Britain to discuss the final draft and to sign the new alliance. Both British and Iraqi governments kept the discussions secret to avoid any public difficulties during the early negotiations, but eventually they had to tell their people about the new agreement. In Iraq the prime minister refused to give the public any details about the treaty because he did not want to publicize to read a draft of the treaty before he signed the final treaty in Britain. Al-Said was worried about the prime minister's policy toward the Iraqi elites because he was refusing to tell the Iraqi politicians any details about the treaty. Al-Said used his influence with the regent to hold a meeting to announce the new agreement as he prepared for the nationalist reaction to the new treaty. He wanted the government to get the Iraqi elite's support before going to Britain.

The meeting was held in the regent's palace on December 28, 1947,<sup>185</sup> and January 3, 1948. In the meeting Tawfiq al-Suwaidi suggested to al-Said that the Jabir government should resign and a new government should sign the Treaty, but al-Said refused the idea although he knew that Jabir lacked the necessary support from the Iraqi elites. In the meeting the prime minister continued refusing to give any kind of information for the Iraqi elites. Neither were the Iraqi political parties invited to the meeting. The party leaders knew about the treaty revision from the radio, so the Iraqi parties rejected the new treaty and demanded that the British withdraw from the air bases. Demonstrations led by students started in Baghdad to protest the treaty. The government reaction was to close the university where the protest happened.

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<sup>184</sup> TNA: PRO FO 371/61661/E/0869/641/93. (Report for the British about the Iraqi economy, 1 November 1947.)

<sup>185</sup> Al-Hasani, *History of Iraqi Cabinets*, 7:224

The Iraqi delegation went to Britain January 5, 1948. The regent asked al-Said and al-Suwaidi to join to the Iraqi delegates. The two men refused to go at the beginning, but later they agreed to attend under the regent's pressure. The regent sent most of the strongest Iraqi politicians to the negotiations.

The treaty was signed by Bevin and Jabir on January 15, 1948, in Portsmouth in the south of Britain. As soon as the treaty was published in Iraq, violent protests started in Baghdad. The leftist parties and the communist's illegal party joined the student protests, uniting against the treaty and leading to violent revolt against the government. The regent thought that he was facing a social revolt against his regime. The government thought to restore order by using force, but this led to killing several students, which turned public opinion against the government.

On January 21 the regent met with Iraqi politicians to find a political solution for the protests. He contacted the prime minister in London, ordering him to return to Iraq, but the prime minister did not take the situation seriously and he refused to return to Iraq.<sup>186</sup> In the meeting the regent lost his judgment and agreed to assure the Iraqi people that he would not agree to any agreement that did not satisfy the Iraqi nation. The regent tried to buy time because he did not find any support from the Iraqi elites for the treaty, because they were afraid of the public reaction to the treaty with the British, and they were supporting the Jabir government.

Jabir did not find many allies among the Iraqi senior politicians. The British Embassy at Baghdad lacked senior officers because all of them went to Britain during the negotiations, but the British resident in the Embassy contacted the regent to get more information about his announcement the night before. The regent was alone among the Iraqi leader and he did not have

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<sup>186</sup> Busk and Bevin tried to persuade Salih Jabir to return to Iraq soon after the protest, but the prime minister was planning to take a vacation in Britain.



support except from minor leaders, which forced him to make the speech.<sup>187</sup> The Iraqi prime minister returned to Iraq on January 26, 1948, to try to restore order and to persuade the public to accept the treaty.

The Iraqi reaction was violence and many of the Iraqi leaders still refused to support the Jabir government. Moreover, Jabir's ministers started to resign in protest against his violent reaction to the disturbance. Busk described the situation on January 27 as confused, and the prime minister was trying to bring order to the streets. Al-Said was supporting the prime minister and was trying to keep him in the cabinet to pass the treaty, but the regent was not giving the prime minister his full support because he was afraid of the disturbance.<sup>188</sup> The regent did not get the army support when he tried to send the army into the streets.<sup>189</sup>

On January 28, 1948, the regent asked Jabir to resign in order to end the protests. Al-Said tried to convince the regent to put al-Suwaidi in the cabinet, but the regent refused. The British Embassy did not put enough pressure on the regent to support al-Said's suggestion. The regent named Mohammed al-Sader prime minister on January 29, and the new Prime Minister promptly informed Busk that his cabinet rejected the new treaty. The public did not accept the new agreement, either, although many Iraqis had the chance to read the agreement before the protest, because the new treaty extended the alliance between Britain and Iraq beyond the 1957 expiration date of the old treaty.

The British Labour government decided to open a new era with the Iraqi government. Bevin believed that he was making progress by sharing the military bases with the Iraqis, but the local problems had big affect on the public judgment about the Treaty. The nationalist movement was very strong and provided the leaders to protest the British influence in the area.

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<sup>187</sup> *Record of Iraq*, 10:229. Baghdad Embassy to Foreign Office, 22 January 1948.

<sup>188</sup> *Record of Iraq*, 10:237. Busk to Bevin, 27 January 1948.

<sup>189</sup> Al-Hasani, *History of Iraqi Cabinets*, 7:269.

Unfortunately, the new treaty did not stand up for long because the public in Iraq refused to accept the Portsmouth treaty, which put a black mark on the Anglo-Iraqi relationship. Bevin was shocked by the rejection of the treaty by the Iraqi people. He thought that he had secured responses to the Iraqi demands and that British and Iraqi people would have a new, equal relationship.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

The British Labour Government under Clement Attlee came to power in 1945 during a very critical time. The British had to rebuild their Empire and make up their losses after World War II. The Middle East was under British control, and British responsibility in the region had increased during the War; for example, the British army increased in the region. The British Foreign Minister, Ernest Bevin, created the British polices in the Middle East. The British economic and political weaknesses after World War II forced the Foreign Minister to reorganize the British heritage in the Middle East

After World War II the British economy forced Britain to reduce its spending in the world because of the high cost of British expansion in the region. Moreover, the resistance from the local people to the British influence was increasing. The Arab Nationalist movement became stronger in encounters with the British and their ruler allies in the Arab World.

The British Foreign Minister refused to evacuate the British presence in the area despite the high cost on the British economic system. Bevin believed that the British interests in area were very important for the British Commonwealth. The British polices tried to reorganize British relationships with the other nations in the area by switching their concentration to the middle and worker classes. Bevin saw that in the past the British policies focused on getting the elite rulers to serve the British interests, but these relations had not helped the British in the past. The local governments did not have success in their economic, social and political programs, which led to unstable regimes and continued the crises in the Middle East. The regimes in the area were corrupt in the British view. The middle and worker classes had a very hard time surviving, which did not help the British at all.

Bevin's view was to focus on the economic problems and to help the local governments in their social and economic development plans. The stable economies would lead to stability for the political scene, which was the key for Bevin's policy. The British had to establish new programs to lead the regimes and to watch the local governments. The British presidents in the area had to hold these policies and push the Middle Eastern governments to adopt these policies. Two conferences were held in London in 1945 and 1949 by the Foreign Office to draw up the British plan. A new program was established by the British Middle East Office (BMEO).

Britain's government was responsible for the Iraqi regime because during the years personal relationships were established with the most powerful men in Iraq. The Iraqi elites were depending on the British advice. The British established the BMEO in Iraq and provided British advisers who could assist with drawing up plans for the Iraqi economic problems, but the British had several problems which led to failure of their development plans between 1945 and 1948. The British advisers were not enough to cover all the programs. The Iraqi government did not have the money sources to pay for the development programs and were trying to cover the money from loans from Britain most of the time, which was hard for British to ensure also. The British could not have success with the social-economic development because they could not help the Iraqi government to hold long enough to finish their programs. The governments in Iraq could not stand for a long time because of political disagreements between the Iraqi elites.

The British were also facing the Pan-Arabism movement, which was demanding that the British evacuate British military bases in Arab countries. But the British needed their bases to keep their influence in the region because the British were connected to the Arab countries by military agreements, which covered the whole area. Bevin had to listen to the Nationalists' demands, but he could not dismantle the British defense network. In contrast, he tried to make

the Arab countries partners in British defense by sharing with them the military bases, which would put Britain and its Arab allies in equal partnerships capable of facing threats from the Soviet Union. The British also did not succeed in their defense plans of securing the region against the threat from the Soviet Union.

The Iraqi government and the regent believed in the British plans and they worked with the British, even though Iraqi society was split between Pan-Arabism, which did not want to have any kind of engagement with foreign powers and the Iraqi elite under leader Nuri al-Said, who did not believe in neutralism. The Nationalist movement was growing because of the decrease in the number of people left standing, and they were suffering. The British could not support the Iraqi crown, which was weak in the face of the pressure, and could not manage Iraqi policies in a positive direction. The British had also failed in other Arab counties, which had a bad influence on their effectiveness inside Iraq. The Treaty with Egypt turned into a very big disagreement between the British and Egyptians, and the Palestine case was the main reason for the demise of the British in Iraq because it could not defend its position in the Middle East.

The world was changing. Bevin knew that, but Britain suffered from huge damages because of World War II and could not provide enough emergency resources in order to succeed in their plan.

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