BRITISH LABOUR GOVERNMENT POLICY IN IRAQ, 1945-1950

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Britain during the Labour government’s administration took a major step toward developing Iraq primarily because of the decision of Ernest Bevin, the Foreign Minister, to start a new British policy toward the Iraqi regimes that would increase the British influence in the area. The British Foreign Office based its strategies in part on the extent of the Soviet threat to the area because of Bevin’s argument the area was a breeding ground for the nationalist oppositions and for the communists. He refused to withdraw from the region because he thought that the Soviets would fill the gap that the British would make by departing. This led to Bevin’s strategy of depending on guiding the Iraqi regime to make economic and political reforms that would lead to social justice. However, the British strategy faltered after the British withdrawal from Palestine, and as a result, the Iraqi regime became weaker. The British stopped their plans for political and military reforms and focused instead on economic reforms, which led to more failure for their strategy: making a stable Iraqi government to lead the essential reformation.

The British Labour government’s policies in Iraq and the Middle East also led to the big gap between the Iraqi monarchy and the Arab nationalists, especially among the younger generations, who started to question the monarchy’s abilities to lead. Western democracy did not succeed in Iraq because of the bad example practiced by the Iraqi elites, who found support from the British government and the Iraqi regime. The nationalist movement became more radical with time precisely because of the failed political developments. Bevin understood the new challenges relating to Iraq and
the Middle East after the Second World War, but his policies did not find fertile ground in Iraq. His decision to support the regime without an essential improvement in the Hashemite dynasty led to the main damage of the British scene in Iraq. Also, the British goal of promoting economic development was very slow to evolve during the Labour government, which increased the political opposition against Britain and the Iraqi regime.

Bevin’s new strategy for the region also failed because the British had to face a very strong nationalist movement, and because of the British involvement in Palestine. Bevin’s failure to win the Arab nationalists to his side led to a direct conflict between the British influence in the area and the Arab nationalists. In addition, British imperialism unofficially ended after World War II, after which the British government could not continue supporting its empire in the Middle East and Iraq.

The British Labour government changed many of its policies toward Iraq in the first two years of the cabinet, led by Ernest Bevin and his policy of making a big change in British policies toward the normal people in Iraq, whom he expected to notice the change. The British Foreign Secretary really believed that Britain had to make a substantial change in its way of ruling the area if it wanted to stay longer in the area. The challenge, as most historians discover from perusing British official documents, was that it was not an easy job for the British Foreign Office to keep the British influence and not lose their supertitles in Iraq during the economic and political formation that they pushed hard on the Iraqi elites to do.

This post-war time was then a critical era for the British government in Iraq and the Middle East. British documents show that the Foreign Office tried to remake
policies to make British rule more palatable for the Iraqi people, but the Iraqi demands were very difficult for the British Empire to meet. The Iraqi nationalists wanted an immediate withdrawal, which the British were not ready to do, no matter whether it was demanded by the Iraqi nationalists or any other power in the area. This big gap between the local interests and the British interests became very interesting for the Middle East historians who wanted to put more light on the British Labour Government policies in Iraq and the Middle East to explore why the British failed to remain in the region.

Historians have written many times about the British indirect rule in Middle East, extensively analyzing British economic, political, and military development in the region. Moreover, writers also have thoroughly discussed Iraqi development under the British influence to give a more complete picture of the British policies in the area.

Silverfarb, in his first book, *Britain’s Informal Empire in the Middle East: A Case Study of Iraq 1929-1941*,1 discusses Iraq history from the period before independence until the time of the Rashid Ali movement in 1941. The focus of the book is Iraq’s role in British imperial history. The author examines the British policy of keeping their influence in Iraq intact after Iraq became independent. Silverfarb chose to use as examples areas in which Britain and Iraq had major disagreements.

Another Silverfarb book, *The Twilight of British Ascendancy in the Middle East*,2 documents the Anglo-Iraqi relationship during the years 1941-1950 and focuses on the

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British effort to maintain political and military superiorities in Iraq. This second book that the author has written about the Anglo-Iraqi relationship documents the British struggle to keep Iraq under its influence by presenting the strategies that Britain used to dominate Iraq during World War II and peace time. The author analyzes the British relationship with the Iraqi monarchy and how the British used it to control Iraq.

The second period started in 1944, when the British Labour Party came into power, and the book ends with events involving the Anglo-Iraqi relationship that occurred in 1950, before the Labour government lost the election in 1951. The author argues that the end of the war brought another round of British policies with Iraq. The relationship between the British and the Iraqi nationalists is a major theme of the work where the author shows that Bevin could not win the Iraqi nationalists’ trust at all. The main strength of Silverfarb’s book is his ability to go behind the scenes in the formation of the British Labour government policies in Iraq.

Silverfarb’s discussion of the British influence in Iraq is well supported by evidence, both primary documents and secondary sources. He makes extensive use of the British archives, especially those of the Foreign Office, Indian Office, and Cabinet papers. However, the book does have its shortcomings: the author fails to show the reader how Iraqis were important to the British influence in the Middle East or how the British tried to use Iraqis as an example to other Middle Eastern countries. He also did not give enough details about the British policy toward the Iraqi elites. Overall, though, he poses very insightful observations on the decline of British influence in Iraq resulting from the foreign policy of the Labour Government and their response to the Iraqi nationalist movement.
Roger William Louis, a very well-known historian whose books about the British Empire are respected in academia, has published historical books covering the entire decline of the British Empire in the Middle East in the second part of the twentieth century. In his book *The British Empire in the Middle East*, Louis discussed the Middle East policies of the British Labour government from 1945-1950 and how Ernest Bevin, the Foreign Secretary, took his policy to the area.

Louis elucidates British Middle Eastern history by examining British policies in every Arab country -- Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, and Saudi Arabia -- and demonstrates his understanding of the connections among those countries that made it harder for the British to have one single policy in the area. The British were a common denominator among the Arab countries because Britain helped them get international recognition after World War I; moreover, Britain helped to create all those newborn countries.

Louis has very a creative way of presenting the evidence with deep insight and interpretation. His writings about the British Empire are very clear and direct. He uses very effective writing techniques that allow the evidence to project his point of view about the subject. Louis is currently exploring recently released primary sources to present a different kind of work, which should help explain a different side of European and British imperialism.

Another advantage for Louis is the availability of new primary sources, especially from the British National Archives. Louis takes advantage of the British policy of releasing their official documents to the public every thirty years to compare

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the new sources with what was written previously about the British Empire. He successfully uses primary sources that were released recently from the British National Archives and the American archives to provide new evidence about European imperialism, especially about the British Empire.

Louis depends heavily on the British Foreign Office and the British Cabinet papers to present the British imperialism policies, commenting that, “The book is based on archive sources and private papers.” Not many historians use the primary sources that Louis uses; this advantage allows Louis to develop intimate knowledge and unique insight about the cases that he explores.

Majid Khadduri\(^4\) was born in northern Iraq, went to Lebanon for his bachelor’s degree, then earned his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in the 1940s. He spent most of his life in the United States after arriving as a member in Khadduri reviewed major Iraqi political events that different governments and leaders dealt with. He also looked at the Iraqi problems with the British during the mandate period as well as discussing Iraqi history from independence in 1932 until the end of the Iraqi monarchy in a military coup in 1958. Khadduri’s book is a general history of the state of Iraq and of the events and policies that shaped Iraqi history.

The author also focused on the military movement in 1936 that opened the door for military involvement in the Iraqi government. Although Khadduri did not want to write about the British history in Iraq, he dealt with it because of the British influence in the Iraqi political scene, which would force any historian to put the spotlight on the British involvement in Iraq. He showed that for the British, the main problem came from

the Iraqi nationalism movement. In addition, he examined British policies concerning
the nationalist movement against British allies in Iraq during the Rashid Ali movement
in 1941 and the Iraqi protest against the Anglo-Iraqi treaty.

Khadduri’s book *Independent Iraq* also explores the Anglo-Iraqi relationship
during the monarchy. The author makes a very good argument about the British
involvement in Iraqi internal and international polices when it related to British interests
such as oil, military, and foreign relationships with neighboring countries. He discusses
Iraqi history and culture, which helps him make very solid arguments, and relates Iraqi
history from the Iraqi point of view.

The author documents many of the Iraqi politicians’ views through interviews
with them during his visits to Iraq. Khadduri says in his introduction that he did not take
any information from the Iraqi elites unless he confirmed them with corroborating
sources.

Khadduri successfully examines the early history of the Iraqi nationalism
movement and focuses on the Iraqi governments and the British relationship with the
Iraqi political elites, which makes it easy to understand the Iraqi political life during the
monarchy. Khadduri also used the Nazi Germany archive in the United States to show
the Nazi-Iraqi relationship during World War II. The author used credible sources to
explain Iraq history during the monarchy.\(^5\)

The author did not continue writing about Iraqi history after 1950, although he
indicates in the title that the book covers the monarchy period. Iraq continued having

unstable political governments because of the main problems that the author
delineates in his book.

In his book *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movement of Iraq*, Hanna Batatu discussed the social factors in the Iraqi political scene. The author examined the emergence of political movements in Iraq during the monarchy and the republic. Batatu followed the most important changes in Iraqi society and how the movement emerged with time, making this book a major reference for any historian who wants to study the history of Iraq. For example, Batatu started with Iraqi society history at the end of the Ottoman Empire, showing how the ruling classes of modern Iraq in 1921 were different from the ruling classes during the monarchy when the British gave power to the new elite classes.

Batatu’s book *The Old Social Classes and Revolution Movement of Iraq* is a very important book about Iraqi class history. The author supported his argument with many tables that show the societal development over the course of many years, and included many interviews with people in Iraq to record their testimonies. He talked with many students, military officers, and workers who were involved in Iraqi political life. Batatu also used primary sources to reveal the history of many of the political parties in Iraq. He used the reports from the Iraqi communist party and the Arab Ba'th party. In addition, he had access to the Iraqi government papers and consulted a large collection of the newspapers. He used the British Foreign office documents and the public records office to examine the British polices.

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Matthew Elliot focuses on the monarchial period between 1941 and 1958 in his book, *Independent Iraq: The Monarchy and the British Influence, 1941-1958.* He starts his focus with the second occupation of Iraq by the British Empire after the Rashid Ali movement, then moves on to the Iraqi election and parliament, including a description of Iraqi cabinets. Elliot examines also the British influence on Iraqi political life after 1945, when Iraq’s constitutional monarchy was established and new, free elections were held. The British, as the author shows, worked to have several conferences in London to discuss the Middle East issue. The British interests were the main focus in those conferences, which as Elliot explains in his book, were vital to those interests in the Middle East for the British Empire.

New documents recently released by the British Government allow the historian to examine in more detail most of the effort to recover the British Empire after World War II. The official documents give valuable information about the British official policies toward the local governments in the Middle East.

This dissertation posits that the British envisioned a great project for the Middle East and Iraq under Ernest Bevin’s leadership of the Foreign Office. The main goal for British policy was to keep Iraq a stable and friendly state for Britain under the Hashemite dynasty. To achieve this, the British policy in Iraq was divided into two parts. The first part started in 1945 when the Labour party won the election and lasted until 1948 when the British withdrew from Palestine and had to accept the rejection of the Portsmouth Treaty with Iraq. The Palestine case unfortunately destroyed Britain’s

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credibility in Iraq in part because the Iraqi army was humiliated in the Palestine war and the Iraqi nationalists put the blame on Britain for their loss to Israel.

While Ernest Bevin during his first years encouraged Abd il-Ilah, the regent, to make more reforms in the Iraqi government, the British wanted more development in the political, economic, and social realms than merely the social justice Bevin wanted in the Iraqi government’s policies. Bevin supported the Regent’s power in Iraq and maintained the Iraqi army under the British control after 1941. The British had built the new army after the war to be loyal to the Regent. Although the British reorganized the new Iraqi army to secure domestic peace, the Nationalists wanted a larger role for the Iraqi army in local and foreign policies. To secure British interests, Bevin relied more on the Regent and the Old Gang to keep British influence in Iraq, trying to change the old faces only with new generation from the Old Gang. Ultimately, the British did not make major changes to their old policies; rather, they merely tried to keep their control over Iraq by using the royal family.
CHAPTER II
THE BRITISH EMPIRE ENCOMPASSES THE MIDDLE EAST

The British Labour government in 1945 found itself in the control role over the Iraqi political scene and tried to manage it without losing its superiority in Iraq and the region. The Anglo-Iraqi relationship that started in the eighteenth century became much closer with the creation of modern Iraq in 1921, after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. British influence in Mesopotamia had started before the twentieth century, and continued as the British created Iraq by using what they considered to be their historical rights that had developed over time.

The British existence in the Persian Gulf began to build during the eighteenth century and continued unchallenged during the nineteenth century. Much credit for the British influence in the Persian Gulf should be given to the East India Company, which started the official British presence in the Persian Gulf in the seventeenth century by trading within Persia in 1616,\footnote{B.J. Kelly. \textit{Britain and the Persian Gulf} (Oxford University Press, 1968), 50.} the year the company obtained the right to trade in Persia and chose Bander-Abbas on the east coast of the Persian Gulf as the site on which to build its factory. The company changed the location of its headquarters in 1763 to Bushire port, which was a better location for the sea trade. The establishment of the port demonstrates the importance of British factories for the Persian silk trade as well as for East India Company.

The company did not stop in Persia, but expanded to open more factories along the Persian Gulf. British influence in the area became very strong, which allowed the company to make an agreement with the Ottoman authorities to build a factory in
Basra in 1723; this later became the primary location for the company headquarters and led to the later establishment of a British consulate. The company understood the importance of locating in Basra at the apex of the Persian Gulf, because Basra was the main gateway to Mesopotamia.

The Basra location was also a very attractive one for the British to establish a new agency that could serve British communication through the Ottoman Empire to the Mediterranean Sea. The East India Company used Basra to send its mail from India to Britain because it was a safe route for the company.

British commercial activity allowed the British company and the British military officers to have direct contact with the Arab majority who lived on the Persian coast. Meantime, the British created a good relationship with the local powers, especially on the west side of the Persian Gulf. On the other hand, the British had to deal with many historical changes in the Persian Gulf, one of which was the Arab immigration from Arabia to the Persian coast to establish small towns. Many of the Arab tribes started to move out of the Arabian Desert in the eighteenth century to build their own towns. The western side of the Gulf during that period was under the name, but not the power, of the Ottoman Empire.

The British Empire’s very long and continuous history in Mesopotamia included recognizing the importance of south Mesopotamia as well as the eastern and western areas. By the start the twentieth century, the British recognized that South Mesopotamia was useful in securing a land route to India, thus allowing the British to eliminate any passage through the Ottoman Empire. Secondly, the European powers

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and the British formed agreements with local powers in the Persian Gulf to block any threat to the British sea superiority. Moreover, the British switch from dependence on coal to dependence on oil for their ships led to an increase in the importance of the area’s oil, which promised to be a rich resource in the future. For that reason, if for no other, the British used many methods to keep their superiority in the Persian Gulf.7

First of all, the navy had dominated the Gulf in the mid-nineteenth century. In order to accomplish this, the British navy had to execute several campaigns against the local sea powers, especially in the low part of the Persian Gulf.10 In addition, the greatest British feat was winning the local powers’ trust by establishing order and allowing them to keep internal rule by local powers. For example, the British made agreements with Bahrain, Oman, al-Qwasim and Kuwait during 1820-1899, which confirmed their influence over those small sheikhs.

Moreover, the British worked with the local powers on the Arab side to make the sea safer for trade, especially for the British ships. During the first part of the nineteenth century, British policy in the Persian Gulf was focused on the lower part of the Persian Gulf. British documents used to call the area from Qatar to Oman “the Pirate Coast.” The southern part of the Persian Gulf was the way to the most important British colony, India; it was a passageway to Persian lands; and it was a communication route with the Ottoman Empire in the north of the Persian Gulf, especially with Mesopotamia. It was very important for British trade to keep the peace in the Persian Gulf by resolving or avoiding local conflicts between the Arab leaders.

10 The British Navy concluded a big campaign in the Persian Gulf in 1809 which put an end to challenges by the local Arab navy, which the British used to call pirates. This campaign limited the local power threats to the British navy but it did not stop them until 1820.
Hence, the traditional British policy in the area was to secure the Indian trade route. The British were also interested in closing the area to any other European powers, such as Germany and Russia, which could threaten British influence in the area. When piracy in the southern part of the Persian Gulf started to harm British trade, and was thus a main reason for the local conflict in the area, the British officers in Bombay decided to end the piracy. However, it took many years to restore order in the Persian Gulf because the British were busy in Europe with the Napoleon Wars. In 1819-1820 the British mercilessly destroyed the al-Qwasim power and forced the local tribes to sign "The General Treaty of Peace" before the British granted the peace in the area. In addition, the British secured the local tribes’ authority over their lands against any local power.

In the south Persian Gulf, the British had to deal with a different problem affecting trade routes: Arab tribes attacking ships in the Persian Gulf. The main local power was al-Qwasim, who cut off the trade ships located in Ras al-Khaima. The British tried several times between 1808 and 1819 to put an end to al-Qwasim’s power, but they failed. At the same time, the al-Qwasim started to spread its influence on the both sides of the Persian Gulf in the first twenty years of the nineteenth century. In 1820 the British navy destroyed the al-Qwasim’s power and forced it to sign a peace treaty.11

Despite settling the score with one pirate, the British started to search for a better way to deal with the Arab tribes in the Persian Gulf. In 1820 the Indian government asked the British military to destroy the al-Qwasim ships in order to control

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The al-Sabah family in the north Persian Gulf was one of the Arab leaders not involved in piracy and supported this policy, as did Bombay Governor Sir Evan Nepean, who thought that the plan was the only and cheapest way to restore the order in the area. The British officers in Bombay thought to make the Kuwaiti ruler their ally in the area and to replace the local powers in the Persian Gulf, but this policy failed to find much support among the British officers who were working there because replacing the local leaders would make the area more unstable. The local tribes had their own traditions and they would not accept at that time for foreigners to name their sheikhs.

The British policy makers decided to create a new system to put an end to the local conflict and restored order in the area by working with the Arab leaders in the lower part of the Persian Gulf. This came to be called the trucial system, and became a very successful policy for the British. This system allowed the local powers to share the benefit of the peace and the trade with India as well as stopping the sea war along the coast, which was damaging to the trade in the area. It also provided that the British would use their sea power to protect the sheikhs’ land against any threat, especially from local powers.

Another advantage of the British policy was that it showed the Arab leaders that the British were willing to secure their power and that Britain would recognize them as dependent powers if they worked with the British. The British did not want to replace

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12 Kelly, 139.
13 The British had considered instituting indirect rule since the nineteenth century. It was not until the Ottoman Empire fell during World War I, however, that the British realized they had enough experience to start indirect rule in the Middle East.
14 Ibid., 147.
15 Cottrell, 48-49.
the rulers or become involved in the issues of the people. This policy helped establish British credibility among the local people and encouraged the other Arab leaders in Oman, Bahrain, and Kuwait to deal with the British.

The British guaranteed their influence in the region through protecting Arab rulers and their districts against future threats. However, Britain’s intention to protect some Arab leaders threatened other Arab leaders, as in the case of Kuwait, where the British protected Kuwait from the al-Saud army. In addition, Britain had guaranteed that other European powers could not use their influence in the Ottoman Empire to gain advantage in the Persian Gulf.

The British were building their hegemony in the Persian Gulf by making treaty agreements with Arabs. At the same time, the British were watching a spirit of modernism spreading its influence to Mesopotamia and the Ottoman Empire. In 1830 the Turkish Empire started to modernize its government because the Turkish sultan wanted to emulate Western modernization. The Turkish called this the Tanzimat movement led by Sultan Mahmud II, who worked to modernize the Ottoman government and the Turkish army to help him to save the Ottoman Empire against the Russian threats. The Arabs in Persian Gulf accepted the Ottoman religious and political authorities, but they kept some independence from the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman authorities could not put Persian Arabs under their direct rule because of the weakness of the Empire.

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16 Cottrell, 51.
The Turkish government looked to Britain to help them with military and financial aid, and the British supported the Turks because they knew that they needed the Turks to stop the Russian threat to the British interests in the Near East and India. Moreover, they needed the Turks to safeguard the route to India because the Turks understood the British interest in the area. British policy makers thought that the Turks were as “good an occupier of the road to India as an active Arabian sovereign would be.” The British policy makers followed this policy during the Mohammed Ali Pasha war against the Ottoman authority in 1832. They did not want to replace the Ottoman Empire with a new power that might challenge the British influence in the Middle East.

The British supported the Turkish movement in hopes that the Tanzimat would improve the Ottoman Empire. Unfortunately, the Turks failed to show major improvements as a result of their movement, which frustrated British public opinion and put much pressure on the British policy makers. British Foreign Minister Earl of Clarendon (1865-1866) shared the British public’s opinion, telling the British ambassador in Constantinople, “The only way to improve [the Turks] is to improve them off face of the earth.”

The Turks were not very successful in modernizing their Empire in the nineteenth century. While the Ottoman economic policies did achieve real change, the Turks did not have the courage to make necessary changes in the Empire system. Corruption and bad administration were big problems for the Ottoman Empire and the

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19 Rayburn, 13.
Turkish government could not solve those problems. However, the improvement movement effected some change in Mesopotamia, which for a short time had a good governor who improved the Ottoman authority in the Near East. The Near East established a new school system which included Arab students. This was a big change in Near East history because the graduate students from those schools would later play major roles in the Arab revolution against the Turkish Empire during World War I.

At the same time that the Ottoman Empire in the Persian Gulf was starting to build and reorganize itself in Mesopotamia and on the Arabian Peninsula, Midhat Pasha\textsuperscript{20} started to modernize the Mesopotamian territory that was under his authority. The new Baghdad governor participated in the city’s administration from 1869 until 1871, and his plans affected Middle Eastern history in that his ambitions changed the history of Mesopotamia. The Ottoman Empire could control only the urban areas. It could not spread its authority in the countryside or over the Arab tribes outside the major cities, except to those who were living near the cities where the Ottoman army could be sent to dominate them.

Ottoman territories in Mesopotamia had to wait until the nineteenth century to have the first modern system of education and administration. Baghdad had public schools and a law school for the first time in this period. The Arabs could go to the technical school, middle schools, and most importantly the military schools, which were in Baghdad and in Mosul. Pasha wanted to make the Arabs part of the Ottoman government and to win Arab trust by virtue of the modernization.

\textsuperscript{20} Ahmed Midhat Pasha (1822-1883) was a pro-Western leader in the Ottoman Empire who tried to modernize the Turkish Empire. To do that he became a vizier and grand vizier (a prime minister) but Abdul Hamid II did not like his ideas, which put an end to Pasha’s plans.
While Pasha and the British both wanted to put the Arab lands and the west coast under Ottoman direct rule, for the British the move was the result of concern about the increase of the Ottoman power in the Persian Gulf. On the other hand, the British officers thought that Pasha’s plan was a reaction to the British influences in the Persian Gulf and the result of jealousy of the British power in the Persian Gulf. The British government misjudged Pasha’s plans and ambitions in Arabia because they did not believe that the Turks were capable of achieving their goal among the Arabs. The British in the Indian government thought that Turks would not know how to deal with the Arabs inside the Arabian Desert, but they seriously underestimated Pasha’s abilities.

Other European powers started to move into the Persian Gulf, which alarmed the British officers in the area, and they were thinking that the Indian government and London were not moving fast enough to stop the newcomers’ involvement in the area. Curzon shared the British office’s worry about the European threat for the British interest in the Persian Gulf, especially from Russia and Germany, who established a base in Bushire in 1897 and started trading with the Arabs.

However, as Russia was the greatest enemy of the British interests in the Persian Gulf for decades, Salisbury could not abandon the British defense policy until he made an agreement with the Russians to secure the British interests in the area. While he also tried to make an alliance with the other European powers who were exploring the Persian Gulf area, he knew that Germany and Russia posed the most danger for British interests in the Persian Gulf. Even as he hoped that he could change

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21 Kelly, 717.
22 Busch, 106.
the dynamics by making an alliance with one of them, Salisbury failed in making Germany a friend for his government. In contrast, the Germans thought that Britain was the greatest enemy to their ambitions in the world, a position that made it hard for both sides to find an easy path to an agreement about the Persian Gulf.

Salisbury was ready to make a deal with Russia to secure British interest in the area and in Turkey, if Russia agreed to secure India against their ambition. He wrote to O’Conor on January 25, 1898:

that both in respect to Turkey and China there are large portions which interest Russia much more than England and vice versa. I would say that the portion of Turkey which drains into the Black Sea, together with the drainage Valley of the Euphrates as far as Baghdad, interest Russia much more than England; whereas Turkish Africa, Arabia, and Valley of the Euphrates below Baghdad interest England much more than Russia. Would it be possible to arrange that where, in regard to these territories our counsels differ, the Power least interested should give way to and assist the other?

Salisbury’s policy did not work for the British officers because Russia was very ambitious and would not make a deal at that time. This forced the British and the Indian governments to strengthen their influence in the Persian Gulf and to support their allies. The British thought that the Russians were planning to lay a railway from the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf, which they called Kapnist plan; however, the Russian plan was not very serious and did not directly threaten the British interest.

The British policy was to depend on their allies in the Persian Gulf to avoid any extra cost to the budget. The British had to pay money to their allies in return for their

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25 Sir Nicholas O’Conor was the British Ambassador in Constantinople, 1898-1908.
27 Busch, 105.
work and to guarantee their loyalty, but it was still cheaper to pay their allies more than to keep their army and ships in the area. However, this policy had to change because of the threats from the European powers. Britain had to expand its influence in the area and to support its local allies against any danger.

The British knew that the Turkish Empire did not any real power to put the area under their direct rule. Since the Turks opened the area in the sixteenth century, they had ignored the Arabian Desert, which allowed the Arab tribes to develop their own leadership system. The Turks did not try to make any improvements in the area except during Pasha’s time in 1870.

British policy makers would not have had any complaints against the Ottoman indirect influence in the Arab world had it not led the Turks to be more ambitious and try to put the area under their direct rule. However, this policy was not the British thinking throughout all of the nineteenth century; at times they thought that the Turkish rule was good for them, especially since the Turkish Empire was weak and did not have control over the Persian Gulf. Every time the Ottoman Empire tried to restore order in Arabia or the Persian Gulf. British officers worked to keep Turkish ambition under control. Lord Curzon wrote to the British Government on 21 September 1899:

We cannot pretend to divine the future, or to say whether any European Power, and if so which, at any time will push her advance to the point of claiming a maritime outlet in or near to Persian Gulf. The Fate of Mesopotamia lies beyond our Ken: and it may be that in the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, some strong Power may one day exercise dominion at Bagdad, may occupy Basra, and may demand access for its vessels to the neighboring waters of the Gulf.28

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The Arab leaders found that the British were the main power in the area because the British were very ready to show their power and capacity and to use their power when needed The British became the nineteenth-century authority in the Gulf area, using their influence and authority to keep the peace in the Persian Gulf among the Arab leaders and to stop any future dangers from other powers. After making an agreement with Kuwait in 1899, the British sent several military ships to secure the area against the Turkish threats between the years of 1901 and 1912. Britain wanted to limit the Turkish occupation in north Persia and to force the Turkish government to speak with Britain about the area’s future.

European powers started to expand their influence in the northern part of the Persian Gulf in the early twentieth century, which alarmed British authorities into taking action to oppose other European interference within the Arab region. The German plan for the Bagdad-Berlin railway had forced the British to focus more on the northern region of the Persian Gulf to stop Germany from building the railway and to avoid future threats from the Germans. 29 British policy was to make the Persian Gulf a closed sea, so when the Germans wanted to have a harbor in north Persia that allowed German’s military ships access to the entire the area, Britain objected on the basis that Germany could threaten the Indian trade route at any time from the northern port.

World War I caused dramatic changes in British policies in the Middle East. In 1914 the Ottoman Empire entered the war on the side of the central powers against Britain. British forces had invaded Mesopotamia during the war, and as a result, for the

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first time, the British Army had to rule a big area in the Persian Gulf because the Ottoman Empire could not maintain any more legitimate authority in Mesopotamia. Thus the British had to deal with Mesopotamia as an administration problem. The British Army discovered that the area had been neglected by the Turkish government to the point that Mesopotamia did not have any central government and the cities were not connected with any kind of routes.

Making a new Iraq in Mesopotamia was one of the most important projects for British officers in the Middle East after World War I because Mesopotamia had not been a stable area for the last four hundred years under the Ottoman Empire. The main British problem was to create a friendly region that would accept British involvement in its government.

The outbreak of World War I also, of necessity, changed the British thinking on the Near East. The British in the past had tried to avoid any direct rule in the area or sending troops to keep the peace. Even after the war, the British Chief of the Imperial General Staff wanted to reduce the British garrison to avoid any military casualties. Despite this desire to avoid direct military involvement, however, 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, and the Turkish army was defeated in what would later be known as Iraq, thus allowing Britain to protect its interests in the Persian Gulf and in India.

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While the British were busy fighting Germans and Italians in addition to trying to protect their interests in the Middle East, 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), High Commissioner in Egypt during the years 1915-1917, was charged with contacting Sharif Hussein and guiding the project.

The Hussein-McMahon Correspondence is the conversation between McMahon and Hussein, who was sharif of Mecca at the time, to persuade Hussein to lead the Arab revolt against the Turkish Empire with British help. In return Britain would recognize Hussein’s claim and help him become leader in the Arab lands. The British position was strengthened by the Sykes-Picot\textsuperscript{32} agreement, which divided the Middle East between Britain and France,\textsuperscript{33} giving Britain control over Mesopotamia.

In 1914 the British Army invaded Mesopotamia, which was under the Turkish direct rule at the beginning of World War I, and thus a warfront with the Turkish Empire. After the war, Mesopotamia (Iraq) was occupied by the British from 1914 until 1920, when, for the first time, civil administration was established. Sir Percy Cox\textsuperscript{34} was named the high commissioner in Iraq,\textsuperscript{35} and Gertrude Bell, the first female officer in

\textsuperscript{32} Elizabeth Monroe. \textit{Britain’s Moment in the Middle East 1914-1956} (London: Chatoo & Windus, 1963), 27-37.


\textsuperscript{34} Percy Cox (1864-1937) started his military career in the India force in 1884. He was very successful in his job, which allowed 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 from 1920 until 1923.

\textsuperscript{35} Marr, \textit{Iraq}, 24.
British Military intelligence,³⁶ played a major role in the new Iraq.³⁷ 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, direct rule by British officers, following the example of India,³⁸ was favored by Arnold Talbot Wilson, Civil Commissioner in Baghdad from 1918 to 1920, but he was unsuccessful in his arguments. The second option, indirect rule by appointing an Arab ruler who would follow British policy, was propounded by British officer T.E. Lawrence, who worked in the Arab Bureau in Cairo and understood Arab ways and thinking. He was also well known for his role in the Arab revolution against the Ottoman Empire.³⁹ He favored indirect rule by establishing Arab leaders in the ex-Ottoman territory, specifically supporting Prince Faisal⁴⁰ as leader in Iraq with the British help.

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³⁶ 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. Georgina Howell. Gertrude Bell: Queen of the Desert, Shaper of Nations (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007), 235.
³⁸ Marr, Iraq, 22.
⁴⁰ Prince – later, 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 of the Arabian army, which gave him the chance to meet the British officers in the Middle East. He became the king of Iraq with British help.
A growing demand for nationalism among the Arabs sparked a revolution, led by Shiite religious leaders, against Britain in June 1920. The British were facing very strong revolutionary movements against their rule in the area because of the British direct rule, leading many British officers to agree with Lawrence and Bell to support indirect rule of Iraq. They also supported Faisal, a son of the sharif of Mecca, who had led the Arab revolution against the Ottoman Empire and had already established a favorable relationship with the British military. The Hashemi, 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 Faisal acceptable to both the Shiite and the Sunni Muslims in Mesopotamia. During the Cairo Conference under Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill’s leadership in 1921, Faisal al-Hashemi was appointed king of Iraq, then was elected as the first king in Iraq. British policy in Iraq conflated with the Iraqi monarchy when Britain decided to build the state of Iraq under the control of the al-Hashimi monarchy and gave the crown to Faisal.

The al-Hashemi dynasty was well known by the British officers in London for its role in the Arab revolt against the Turkish Empire in 1916. The British found in Prince Faisal I and his family very good allies for British policies in the Middle East, hence the British support for Faisal I to become king in Iraq in 1921.

The Arab revolt in lower Mesopotamia was a serious challenge by 1920. The British administration could not act without increased dissent among the Arab majority.

41 Marr, Iraq, 23.  
42 Marr, Iraq, 24-25.  
The military commissions complained at the time that it was hard to punish the guilty among the rebellious; only by using air power and sending in the British army could peace be maintained, at the cost of increased British casualties.

The British were thinking about Faisal before he was defeated by the French in 1920. The British knew that they would have trouble whether Faisal won or lost the war against the French, but believed that a Faisal success in defeating the French would make him more ambitious to increase his influence in Mesopotamia. The British knew Faisal dreamed of a great Arab Kingdom that depended on the McMahon-Hussein Correspondence. In contrast, if Faisal lost the war against the French, he could work with the Turks in North Mesopotamia and fight the British. The British stayed neutral during the Faisal-French war but they were watching the conflict very closely because of its implications for them in Mesopotamia.

Posting Percy Cox as high commissioner of Iraq in 1920 was a big change in the British rule in Iraq. Cox supported indirect rule and he had long experience in the Persian Gulf. He also had an optimistic view about the British rule in Iraq. He believed that the British and the Arabs could work together, and he did not support any withdrawal from Mesopotamia that would open the door for a hostile power to control Baghdad. He was a big supporter of Faisal as the future king of Iraq.

Percy Cox was also pushing to have an Arab administration in Iraq to avoid direct contact with the Arab majority. The big change was to put an Arabic face in the local government with full power to survive.\footnote{CAB 24/110.} Percy did not trust the local leader in Mesopotamia, which explained his strong support for the Hashemite rule in Iraq. He
did not believe that Mesopotamia had an eligible candidate. Indeed, he was afraid that
the local candidate would turn against them as soon as he had enough power. In
contrast, Faisal was a foreigner in Mesopotamia and he had to have British support to
secure his throne. The British General Staff supported the Cox view when it came to
putting Faisal in power because, in their view, indirect rule in Iraq would provide more
flexibility. Moreover, Faisal had more faith in the British than did the other Arab
leaders. In addition, the British would keep their prestige if they gave the throne to one
of the Sharifian family members after the defeat of Faisal by the French because the
British got the Sharifians to help fight the Turkish Empire.

For Britain, the easy way to take control over the region was through indirect
rule, because that was the most effective 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.

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 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

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45 CAB 24/118.
46 CAB 24/120.
allowed them to have direct contacts with the key leaders in Iraq. Having a direct relationship with Arab leaders in the Middle East was 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 Faisal was the best choice for a ruler in Mesopotamia, making the mandate more acceptable to the Arabs.\(^{47}\) This choice also would allow the British to achieve their goals of modernizing and providing social and economic assistance in the Middle East while allowing the British army to withdraw from the area, saving the British millions of pounds.\(^{48}\) 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 troops 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.\(^{49}\)

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 March 1920 by the Arab nationalists.\(^{50}\) 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-Sharifian 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\(^{51}\) worked to create 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 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. 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.\(^{52}\) The British main interest in the region was to protect their Empire communications and the raw sources. 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

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\(^{51}\) Nuri al-Said (1888-1958) was born in Baghdad where he attended the Turkish military school. During World War I he became an officer in the Arab army under Prince Faisal, the leader during the Arab revolt against the Turkish Empire. Al-Said became prime minister fourteen times during his political life. He was very well known in the West as an Arab leader.

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.

Percy Cox supported Faisal later to put an end to the mandate over Iraq in exchange for an ally treaty. He believed that having a stronger and friendlier government in Iraq would help the British interests in the long run. The nationalism movement in Iraq was very strong, and having a weak ally would not help the British at all. The friendship with the Arab and the Islamic world was one of the first targets for the British officers in Iraq. They tried to avoid any direct conflict with the Arab majority.

In addition, two brothers of Faisal became responsible for two other areas in the Arab world. Ali, the oldest brother of Faisal, became Hejaz king for from 1924 to 1925. Ali succeeded his father, Hussein, in 1924, but he did not stay in power for a long time because Abdul-Aziz Bin Saud occupied the al-Hejaz area in 1926. Abdul-Aziz forced Ali to leave Hejaz and the holy places in Mecca and Medina, which then became part of Saudi Kingdom. For the rest of his life, Ali stayed in Iraq with his son, Abd al-Ilah, and his family.53 The second brother of Faisal was Abdullah, who became responsible for Trans-Jordan, which later became Jordan. The last brother of Faisal was Zaid, who spent his life in Iraq and Turkey.

The story of Iraqi ruling regimes is found in British history because the British created the Hashemite family regime to solve the problems that they had with their occupation. The British, ever mindful of perception and inclined to minimize the cost of

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53 Ali believed that the British government abandoned him and failed to keep its promises to him, and indeed, the British supported Abdul-Aziz against Ali.
empire, needed Arabic faces to rule the area in their name. To secure their superiority over the Hashemites and the Iraqi regime, the British needed to have direct access to the Iraqi military and political scenes.

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 did not want to make Faisal an agent in front of his supporters, but they had to deal with him if they wanted to remain in Iraq because it was hard to replace him. The British were also well aware of equipoise policies within Iraq, and they succeeded in maintaining a balance between anti-British and pro-British coalitions from 1921 to 1941. Therefore, 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 came to power required working with the Iraqi elite to achieve British interests in Iraqi oil and in the India route, but 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 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. Faisal used his power in Parliament to achieve his policies, as he needed the Parliament to take control over the Arab nationalist movement. He also had to allow the opposition in Parliament to express their ideas, which were
primarily against the British influence in Iraq. On the plus side, 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. Rather, they wanted to evict 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 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 or 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 independence, are in fact weak. They are too weak and very far from deserving independence.54

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 secured its requirements in the 1930 treaty, namely, the royal air bases required to secure the Empire’s communications. Also, the British used the air bases to assure internal

security. For example, during Kurdish resistance to the central government in Baghdad, the British depended on their air power in subduing several Kurdish revolts in the north. Air power was also used by the British and Iraqi governments to suppress the tribes in the south, and the British used the air bases to fight the Wahabism attack from Arabia between 1920 and 1931.

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 Faisal and al-Said with them out of Iraq if they were forced to leave the state. Faisal told the Iraqi Parliament that the way to work with the British palace’s policy was to have “[A] majority a strong enough to ratify a treaty with Britain, and an opposition sufficiently vocal to ensure that treaty should be favorable to Iraq.”

The British tied the Iraqi regime’s interests to those of the British government with an Alliance Agreement confirming British military independence from the Iraqi government. The Alliance Agreement allowed the British to have military bases in Iraq, creating areas that would not be under Iraqi control. For the government system, the British worked to tie the Iraqi government to the British advisory system, which allowed the British to guide the Iraqi government’s programs. The British wanted to ensure that the Iraqi government programs worked for the British interests in the area.

Faisal worked with the British government to secure his throne in Iraq because his experience showed him that he needed the support of a Western power if he

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55 Batatu, Old Classes, 326.
wanted to stay in power. Faisal proved to be a very good mechanism for the British to control Iraq because Iraq had very large ethnic groups, some of them very ancient ethnic minorities.\textsuperscript{57} Arabs in Iraq formed the majority, but there were many ethnics, such as Kurd, Turkomans, Assyrians, Armenians, Jews, and Yazidis.

Iraq was not a unified society when Faisal came to power, and the British knew that, so they needed a loyal friend to help them in the area. Faisal had to deal with the British mandate from 1921 until 1932, when Iraq became an independent country. But the British had to stay in Iraq to secure their interests, which they did by making a treaty with the Iraqi government in 1930. The British helped Iraq to build a Western-style constitutional monarchy, but they could not make the Iraqi people accept Western democracy in a short time. In addition, the British encouraged the al-Hashimi family to control the Iraqi political system. It was easier for the British to deal with one man in power than with myriad political parties.

Moreover, Faisal worked to have one identity for the Iraqi people as his way to make one nation, but without the British help he could not keep Iraq united. Iraq needed to have a long time to practice governing as a democracy with political parties before it could function with a stable government.

Faisal’s death in 1933 opened the door for the sharifian officers who had helped Faisal in the Arab Revolt against the Turkish Empire in 1916 to come to power (the British named the Ottoman officers the “Old Gang”). King Ghazi, the only son of Faisal, stayed in power for only six years. The British had a difficult time in Iraq during the Ghazi rule, because Ghazi supported the Arab nationalist movement in the Arab

countries. He worked to have a strong army, which allowed the Iraqi army to be involved in the Iraqi political scene for the first time in 1936. Between 1933 and 1939, the British Embassy in Baghdad was busy with the growing Arab nationalist movement.

Britain successfully influenced the establishment of the new country of Iraq through loyal friendships developed with the sharifian officers during the Arab revolution against the Ottoman Empire in World War I and during the Iraqi monarchy, sometimes at the cost of the lives of people from the region. For example, Nuri al-Said paid with his life for what he believed in and for trying to lead the new country in partnership with the British. Al-Said’s character and personality formed the Iraqi image because from the time of the mandate until the Revolution in 1958, al-Said was pro-British. Thus, the British found in him a loyal friend. He served as an Iraqi 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 fifty-eight different cabinets to which he was 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 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, “[T]he 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.”

To keep the situation under control, the British embassy supported al-Said's promotion to prime minister in 1938, even though he had a contentious relationship with Ghazi during those years. At the same time, the British Ambassador in Baghdad was not comfortable with the king’s policies and character:

For King Ghazi there is very little to be said. . . . But he is immoral, cowardly, treacherous, unbalanced and impulsive -- the impulse being, not the engaging quality of youth, but the artificial product drawn from High and Haig to which he has here courage at every moment of mental stress.

The British ambassador agreed with al-Said about the young king, but he was not in a position make a decision without contacting the Foreign Office because he knew the risk of such an action.

The British Embassy started to receive requests from al-Said to make changes in the Royal Palace -- “cleaning up” the palace -- and started to contact the British Foreign Office to get their instructions. The British Embassy seriously thought to remove the king from the throne, but the British ambassador was worried about who might take his place: “The point at which we must at least try to apply the brakes is dethronement of Ghazi. I would not change him for Abdul’lllah and I’m not yet sure that I would change him for Zeid,” he commented. The British officers were already making the necessary changes to the throne to keep their influence in Iraq. Moreover, the British embassy was not sure about al-Said’s ability to keep the peace if he removed

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61 Ibid., 559.
the king. The Foreign Office shared the British Embassy’s fear about dethronement and decided to delay the project.\footnote{Ibid., 561.}

Al-Said was pushing hard to remove the king because in 1936 the king, al-Said alleged, caused the death of al-Said’s brother-in-law, the minister of defense, and forced the government to resign. The Iraqi army forced al-Said to leave the country in 1936, and the king supported the army’s demand to form a new government. For a short time al-Said was exiled from Iraq, but he came back into power after his loyal officers took charge of the army. The British Embassy knew about the conflict between the king and al-Said, but they weren’t ready to help him at that time.

During Ghazi’s rule, Nazi Germany’s activities became increasingly appealing to the pan-Arabs, particularly as the Palestinians revolted against the British in 1936-1939.\footnote{Christopher Bromhead Birdwood. \textit{Nuri Al-Said: A Study in Arab Leadership} (London: Cassell, 1959), 164-165.} 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 verbally attacked the British Empire. Moreover, he did not hide his feelings about the unacceptability of the British activities in Iraq.

Because Ghazi attempted to persuade Kuwait to revolt against its 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 suspicions among the Iraqis that Britain and al-Said instigated the fatal crash. The Nazis also supported this theory. The Nazis also supported this theory.

The next royal family member in line for the kingship, Faisal I, was only four years old at the time of Ghazi’s death, which allowed his uncle, Prince Abd al-Ilah, to become regent. Al-Said supported the new regent because of their common pro-British stance. Al-Said believed Iraq could not succeed as a country without a Western friend, specifically Great Britain. Thus, al-Said and Abd al-Ilah controlled the political power in Iraq until the revolt in 1958. Al-Ilah depended on his position as a head of the 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. Moreover, after the Ali Rashid movement came into existence, the regent acquired more power by changing the constitution in which he was granted the right to dismiss the prime ministers.

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 Iraqi army with the new military equipment, because Iraq could not get military supplies from another country without British permission.

64 Batatu. *Old Classes*, 343.
66 Marr, Iraq, 51.
67 Ibid.
These were also the years in which 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. The Iraqi army supported the coup, led by many officers who hated British power in Iraq. (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.) The British called the four Iraqi officers who led this movement the Golden Square because they were the leaders for the four Iraqi divisions.

As Nazi Germany rose to power and devoured Europe, the pan-Arab coalition was successful in throwing out the Iraqi government that was led by under the ex-sharifian 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 the regent and put Abd al-Ilah in as new regent, but British Prime Minister Winston Churchill refused to 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 Faisal. 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, too late to avert the coup.” A political solution for the conflict between the Rashid Ali government and the British was not impossible, but Cornwallis

69 Marr, Iraq, 53.
73 Gerald, Three Kings, 167.
came too late to create a good solution for the crisis. Abd al-Ilah, 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 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.\textsuperscript{74} 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 other 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 al-Said.\textsuperscript{75} 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 dependent on

\textsuperscript{74} Tripp, \textit{History of Iraq}, 103.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 57.
the personalities of Iraqi leaders who needed the British guidance and support to remain in the power.\textsuperscript{76} From this time forward, therefore, the Anglo-Iraqi relationship had different shapes until the revolution in Iraq in 1958. The relationship was also affected by the change in the British situation in the world after World War II.

CHAPTER III
THE BRITISH LABOUR GOVERNMENT AND ITS POLICY IN IRAQ:
RECOVERING THE BRITISH EMPIRE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

British Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin\textsuperscript{77} started his 1945 term of office focusing on two important and related goals: first, promulgating an offensive strategy to recover the British Empire, and second, finding new and better ways to formulate the British influence in the Middle East into a means to help the British economy recover as well as to nudge the Middle Eastern countries in the directions most advantageous to the British economy and politics. These two foci became Britain’s main strategic theme throughout the Middle East as the decade and century wore on.

The reason for the emphasis was clear. By the end of World War II, the British Empire was – there was no other way to describe it – bankrupt, thanks to the demands of global warfare twice in one century. Major changes in economics as well as politics were inescapable requirements if postwar Britain were to be in any way capable of saving the British Empire and thus remaining anything resembling a world power.

While Bevin manned the helm of the Foreign Office, Clement Attlee\textsuperscript{78} took charge of the newly empowered Labour Party, which found itself responsible after the 1945 election for a buxom Middle and Far Eastern empire that was, nevertheless and unfortunately, accompanied by an empty treasury.

In addition to finding some serious funding somewhere, the British lucidly realized that they had to push, encourage, motivate, or maybe even intimidate the Middle Eastern countries toward major and extensive reforms that would vastly improve their

\textsuperscript{77} Ernest Bevin (1881-1951) was Foreign Secretary from 1945 until 1951, and a Labour Party leader.\n\textsuperscript{78} Clement Richard Attlee (1883-1967) was British Prime Minister from 1945 until 1950.
administrations -- if they wanted to survive as political entities beyond colonial status or failed states. Britons and Arabs, although recognizing that the solutions lay not only in British hands, alike blamed Bevin and the British government for supporting the corrupt regimes in the Middle East. Obviously, to continue along that path was not going to provide the political renovations so desperately needed, so Bevin set to work to design and implement the political, economic, and social reforms that the Arab world was craving and that had the best opportunity to safeguard the regimes from collapse.

The first country to come under Bevin’s scrutiny and become subject to his plans for improvement was Iraq. Under guidance from the British, the Iraqis started a reform period that would harken back to the historical Hashemite rule in the area in an effort both to involve the Iraqis in reforming their own government and society, and to create the stable, productive type of country Britain – and the rest of the world – desired in the Middle East.

While creating that type of stability for countries such as Iraq would help Britain as well as Iraq in the long run, in the immediate future there were a few hurdles to overcome. British economic shortages resulting from the war demanded quick and effective action from the Attlee cabinet to steer the British economy on the road to recovery as well as dealing with a postwar deficit of 26 billion pounds. The British army’s tremendous wartime expansion put extreme pressure on the treasury and left few pounds with which to launch a nation-building campaign in the Middle East, no matter how attractive the long-term benefits. The British policy of merely keeping the

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Middle East under control required using a huge British army to secure the Iraqi regent’s position at the helm of the country.\textsuperscript{81} During World War II the British army used a large number of troops in the region to secure the British supply routes. After the war, when Britain would have liked to have removed, or at least drastically reduced, the troop level in the Middle East, she found herself maintaining more of an army than she would have preferred or reasonably could afford. As a result of the unsustainable expense of keeping boots on the ground, the British air bases in Iraq increased in importance because of their relative cost-effectiveness compared with paying, lodging, and feeding many more British soldiers. Therefore, keeping control of the air bases, despite strong opposition from the Iraqi nationalists who wanted the British to withdraw completely from their country, remained a non-negotiable sine qua non for the British.

Having little choice of strategy considering the political and economic straitjackets confining his options, Bevin determined to protect and if possible insulate the region, with the help of Western countries, especially that of the United States and France, against threats from nationalist movements and/or the Soviet Union. Despite having been allied with the Soviet Union against the Axis powers, the British realistically recognized, based in part upon centuries of experience, that the Soviet Union wanted to have a larger influence in the Middle East. However, Bevin stubbornly refused to admit that the Soviets had any right to operate in the region,\textsuperscript{82} despite any geographic or other claims the Soviets might invent. British pride and prestige, and perhaps

\textsuperscript{81} William Roger Louis, \textit{The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945-1951: Arab Nationalism, the United States and Postwar Imperialism} (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), 9.
\textsuperscript{82} CAB/129/2 Memorandum for Ernest Bevin, 10 September 1945.
recognition of the general direction of Soviet foreign policy, could not allow them to share power in the area, no matter how helpful the Soviets had been in trouncing Hitler and Mussolini. Strangely enough, however, Bevin wanted the other Western powers to support his strategies in Middle East, obviously counting on those powers to forego deciding to claim some of the Middle East territory for themselves in deference to relations with Britain.

The real reason for Britain's concern, of course, was that the Middle East was rich with the raw resources that could most help the empire – not to mention the Soviet Union and other Western nations – recover from the devastating years of destructive warfare. One would think that Britain could unite around so simple a policy, but that was too much to hope for. Bevin's policy did not get support from Attlee at the beginning because the British prime minister had developed a different plan for recovering the British Empire. He thought that Britain should reduce her military commitment in the world as a means of reducing extraneous expenses and of realigning British strategy in the contemporary manner demanded by the new post-war era.

Within Labour government circles, considerable debate ensued when the question of the best direction for the postwar British Empire, especially the Middle East, was under discussion. In fact, according to Hugh Dalton, Attlee was even willing and ready to withdraw from the Middle East completely for defense and economic reasons. The thinking was that, if Britain were to go to war with the Soviet Union, which at the time seemed a distinct possibility, Britain would not be able to adequately support her interests in the Middle East, and therefore it might be more prudent to
withdraw British troops sooner rather than later. Dalton described it as, “Attlee is fresh-
mind on defense.”

New technology such as much increased air power as well as atomic
weapons, developed and used during the war, now forced the British to rethink their
previous defense strategy, and led Attlee to believe that World War II had forced the
British to realize how much they needed to change Middle Eastern strategy. In short,
British domination in the Mediterranean area could no longer be counted upon to
secure the British Empire, and as a result of this technological and historical shift in
weaponry and power, Attlee believed Britain should shift its focus to Africa, which
could well prove to be more economically advantageous for Britain. Bevin, however,
begged to differ; he did not at all share Attlee’s ideas about withdrawing from the
Middle East and therefore determined to forge ahead with shoring up the countries and
Britain’s interests therein.

This debate among British government leaders and officials about the direction and
extent of defense policy – Middle East or Africa? – was the basis of most of the British
economic crisis in 1947. According to Bevin, Britain needed every part of its empire in
order to save it. However, Bevin also had to attempt to resolve problems resulting from
actions that Attlee believed would improve the British economy, and which were
therefore aimed at reducing British responsibility around the world. Bevin, receiving
reports and information from the British presence in the Empire, knew only too well the
problems that the British Empire was facing; he had more than adequate information,

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84 Louis, British Empire, 6.
85 Ibid., 16.
he just did not always have the most efficacious solutions at hand. He did not believe, for example, that withdrawing from the Middle East would help the British Empire or save Africa, as he informed Atlee concerning the harsh realities for the British Empire.86 The British political situation in 1947 was very critical because of the economic situation and because of other changes happening inside the British territory:

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.87

The British Foreign Minister wanted to warn the prime minister that because of the enormous extent of British military, political, and economic commitment in the world, Britain would lose more than the people’s trust in the British government by continuing to try to retain major influence in (i.e., hold on to) territories the island nation could no longer afford to occupy and assist. Britain could not even afford many of the basic needs for people inside the British orbit at that time, much less extensive reforms and nation building, but abandoning the people of those territories after the war would be considered by some people to be a moral defeat for the British and the destruction of British prestige, even as other people and countries might see it as a great triumph for more local control of government.

Despite this weakness of the British economy, Bevin, as a minister for foreign affairs, did not want to withdraw from Middle East because of the additional losses

87 Bevin to Attlee in January 1, 1947, PREM 8/564 E 1845.
Britain would incur by withdrawing from the region. For example, in Iraq the British had started planning to develop the state, and abandoning their plans would cause the loss of Arab trust as well as the financial loss of British interests in the country.

Bevin did not deny that the situation was bad for the British economy at the moment, but he did not want Britain to lose influence in the area because there were potentially more important gains to be made in the coming years. 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 it because, as previously noted, the Middle East was rich in natural resources, especially oil and manpower, and Britain believed it could become affluent again with Middle Eastern help – that is, on the backs of the Iraqi and other Middle Easterners. British companies maintained major share holdings in the oil companies based in Middle Eastern countries, and that income was vital to helping Britain pull out of the post-war slump. The cotton grown in the area was also a major source of trade revenue, so despite the immediate costs of renovating and maintaining the Iraqi government and society, in the long run the British stood to make large economic gains both through government activities and through private investment.

Obviously, the British Foreign Office was very much aware of the crucial and ever-increasing importance of oil in war as well as in peace time, especially after World War II. During the war the availability of oil gave the Allies an unbeatable advantage against the Axis powers. The three largest oil producing countries (or areas) were the United States, the Soviet Union, and the Middle East; it was only in the Middle East that the British had political control over domestic policies. The British

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Commonwealth’s economy was depleting 45 million tons of oil each year to keep its industries running; sixty percent of that amount was imported, most of it from the Middle East and for which there was no replacement.  

British experts knew that the Middle East was the place to find their oil sources and the capacity to increase production. For example, Iraq had more than 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 were expecting Iraq and the Arab states together to produce more oil than Iran produced in 1950, which fact increased the importance of the Arab states in the Persian Gulf.

The British Foreign Office was worried about the growing needing for oil in the world as well as in Britain, recognizing that Britain needed to keep its influence in the Middle East to ensure the oil supply and the competition for carbon-based fuels increased geometrically in the post-war era. Additionally, if Britain did not take the responsibility of modernizing the region, but instead withdrew from the area, the Soviet Union could easily invade the region, a fateful mistake for British interests. Thus, to the foreign secretary, the Middle East was as important as – or maybe more important than -- Africa because, more than any other country in the world, including the United States, Britain’s influence was greatest in the Middle East.

Another facet preventing Britain from abandoning its position in Iraq was that the Iraqi regime and those in other Middle Eastern states were depending on British

89 Ibid.
91 Memorandum on Middle East Oil, 12 Dec 1946. FO 371/ 61504 E 344/87/G.
92 Ibid.
support to stay in power. Bevin had already started to reform the old relationships with the Iraqi regime by searching for new allies among the Iraqi elites to replace the Old Gang and thus continue balancing power in the region. This concern was not an incidental detail. Post-World War II, the British government was, for good reason, considerably worried about potential competition from the other Western powers, in particular the United States.93

While willing to work with the United States and other world powers, Britain did not want to lose her supremacy in the Middle East, because it was so obviously the key to saving the British Empire. While the British liked to work with the United States, there was a limited partnership because of the competition between the familial countries in both economic and military sectors.94 Iraq was a member in the sterling area, which forced it to use the pound in its international trade, and was connected with the British through a military agreement as well. Invasive American influence could threaten British control because Iraq could well shift its allegiances to become more powerful and also to depend on American rather than British aid.95 This would obviously have been a disaster for Bevin’s post-war strategy to use Middle Eastern resources to revive the British economy. His development plans for the Arab countries,96 therefore, included revamping political, economic, and military policies in the Middle East to connect the whole province with the British Empire, partially as a means to protect the Middle East from any aggression.97 While the chief of staff saw

96 CAB /129/1 Meeting of the Cabinet 30 August 1945.
the Middle East as one military block in the defense equation, Bevin’s thinking did not stop with military issues alone. He was also concerned about the way that Britain should take on its economic and political, even social, relationships with the nations of the British Empire, especially those in the Middle East.\textsuperscript{98}

In 1945 Ernest Bevin asked the British representatives in the Arab world for a conference to discuss British plans for the region. He wanted to hear their ideas about the areas and to share his own view about the British interests, as he worked out a plan for the Middle East that would ensure British domination. Iraq and the Middle East were very promising as oil producers and the British companies held a majority of shares in the oil companies. During the first three years after the election in 1945, then, Bevin started to reorganize the British relationship with the Middle East as an entity that was inside the British orbit and a main target for the British Foreign Office.

The conference in London brought to light that British policies in the Middle East prior to World War had been focused on raw resources, and that, therefore, defense strategies and socioeconomic issues were not at the top of the list of British policies.\textsuperscript{99} However, the major changes in global economics and politics demonstrated that 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 responsibility for socioeconomic developments in the Middle East. This move indicated that major philosophical and attitudinal changes might be in the works.

The old relationship between Britain and Middle East had depended on force and a direct relationship with ruling classes in the Middle East. British official documents had referred to the ruling classes in the Middle East as “the Old Gang.”\(^{100}\) With the post-war era shifts of thinking as well as borders, Bevin saw Britain’s main problem as being too dependent on the Old Gang to serve British interests in the region. As foreign secretary, he began to shape the new relationship Britain should work on forming in the Middle East if it wanted to maintain influence over the region.

Of the September 1945 conference to draw up a new strategy for the Middle East, Bevin explained:

> 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 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.\(^{101}\)

During the conference, other parameters of British influence was also discussed. Britain did not maintain an equal influence throughout the Middle East, and a strong anti-British movement had been born and was growing in the Arab world, although Britain also had strong allies in power in some the Arab states. For example, the 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 both in the elite class and in the Egyptian majority.

\(^{100}\) Cohen and Kolinsky, *Demise*, 18. Long-time and former Iraqi government officials.

Bevin’s awareness of this growing disagreement within the Arab countries led him to focus on making Iraq an example for the Arab countries to follow, as, for example, he adopted a policy to make Iraq a major player in the British policy in the Middle East.\(^{102}\) Bevin was also 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’s loyalty to the crown. This last challenge was perhaps more difficult than one might think, as the Iraqi army after World War II was in very weak, a condition that was rumored to be the result of the British and the regent punishment for revolting against the British and the regent in the war.

The biggest challenge for postwar British policy in the Middle East was Palestine, which eventually was a direct cause of 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, a retreat that affected Britain’s reputation as a world leader. Kenneth Morgan, in Labour in Power, concluded that Britain was “humiliated in the Palestine case especially the foreign office.”\(^{103}\) Furthermore, Bevin knew that British policy in Palestine made the middle class in the Arab world distrust even more, if that were possible, 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 fiasco.\(^{104}\)

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\(^{103}\) Morgan, *Labour in Power*, 216.

\(^{104}\) Bevin to Eyres (Damascus), 15 January 1947. FO /371/52402/E/12303.
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 Jordanian governments, who wanted to continue cooperating with the British. At same time, the Old Gang had to explain its 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 several small Arab states in the Persian Gulf since the nineteenth century, but those small states did not cause problems for the British.

Throughout the years after World War I, Iraq, governed by the al-Hashimi monarchy, had been Britain’s main ally in the Middle East, 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 Soviet 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. Back in Iraq, Britain’s longstanding positive influence allowed for and resulted in more successful achievements 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. Ideally, Britain would find a stable government that would stay in the cabinet long enough 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 British 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 although Iraq needed to develop its irrigation system; that became the main goal for the BMEO. Not surprisingly, the British policy started to focus on the agriculture projects that would provide Britain as well as Iraq with food.105 Iraq had been a good place in the past for agriculture, but because of bad policies and management, agricultural projects failed and did not provided 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, just as both governments agreed on these approaches.

Britain’s new strategy depended on creating relationships of equality between Great Britain and the Middle Eastern states,106 which the London conference designed in addition to presenting Bevin’s new strategy of socioeconomic development in the Arab states: The only way to preserve British influence in the Middle East, it was clear, 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 providing protection and support of the ruling classes in the Middle

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East rather than trying to improve the status of the lower classes at least economically.\textsuperscript{107} It was this relationship that the Arab nationalists attacked, especially after World War II.\textsuperscript{108}

Bevin’s attempted creation of equal relationships within and with other Arab nations moved away from the traditional British policy that depended on indirect rule, and is evidence of how the national character of the British people had changed over the previous century. The “moral principle” became part of the British heritage and affected English foreign policy.\textsuperscript{109} The British started to have more egalitarian ideas about what constituted a better world; moreover, they felt that they had responsibility toward the creation of that world. However, this idea did not fit with the British position as a great empire because the cost for such ideas was too much for British economy “as a responsibility, rather than as instruments of British power.”\textsuperscript{110} As a result, after World War II the British were trying to build a “New Jerusalem” in Britain, which took too much time and money from the monies needed to recover the British economy. One fact of life that was not new in the post-war era was that Britain’s main power came from free trade, for which Britain used its strong navy to secure its interests around the world, including the Middle East. The British developed a model trading system that allowed to them to manage their resources in the empire, but at the end of World War II, British experts started to examine the empire’s capability to remain a great power, a self-reflection that could have had very negative effects on British

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 125.
holdings (colonies?) in the Middle East. The British found that they had to work hard to improve their economics in the face of increasing competition from European countries. The war damaged the British trade system which depended on free-market capitalism. For example, during the war Britain lost more than 11.38 million tons of the merchant shipping, and the extensive damage to the British navy could not be repaired or replaced immediately.

The Foreign Office strategy for making up the trade losses and rejuvenating the empire therefore was dependent upon building an integrated system in the Middle East. The location of Egypt and the Suez Canal in the west with Palestine at the center and Iraq on the east also provided the British with a strong defensive wall against any attack from the Soviet Union. The British military system provided a strong defense for the oil fields in Iraq and the Persian Gulf. In this way the British linked the Middle East into the Imperial System, which was important because the Middle East was in the middle of the British Empire and thus in the path of communication with other Empire territories. Second, it was a strategic target for any enemy of the British Empire to destroy Britain as a great power. Not least of all, the area was the empire’s main source of oil. In addition, the British practiced their political methods on the area and failure would have been a defeat for the British-influenced way of life – an unthinkable catastrophe.

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112 Ibid., 380.
113 CAB/66/67/5 Memorandum for the Cabinet in 2 July 1945.
The renovation of the Middle East had been retarded in part by the decrease in British industrial and human resources after World War I, when the British still depended on the traditional heavy economy anchored by manufacturing. British industries like coal, steel, and shipbuilding were using traditional, nineteenth-century methods, and the economic strategy failed to induce such industries to adopt twentieth-century technology. Instead of developing their own techniques and sources for upgrading and improvements, British businesses bought new technology and tools that they needed from the American market when they did upgrade. Not surprisingly, the British share of the world trade decreased from 31% in 1870 to 11% 1910. New technology and oil increased international trade, but Britain could not monopolize international trade as it had previously and was forced to import new technology from the United States. Neither could the British match the American and German levels of production.

The decline in British trade did not make redesigning the Middle East and the British Empire any easier. Despite the best of intentions to update and rebuild both Iraqi and British economies post-World War II, in 1949 Bevin’s new strategy in the Middle East started to collapse. At a 1949 conference British representatives for the Middle East admitted that the whole region was under pressure and their policies were not working. The attempt to make the region a unified bloc had failed. In addition, the Arab countries’ relationships started to disintegrate, and the new military treaties between Britain and the Arab countries collapsed. The development programs grew slowly, motivating the people in the region to more readily support the opposition to achieve their hopes of a more prosperous society and economy.
The nationalism movement in Iraq became more powerful after Britain allowed to India to become independent and Mountbatten partitioned India and Pakistan. Attlee agreed to the Mountbatten plan, even though for Britain, losing India meant losing a major market for British products. Moreover, the Indian army was helping Britain to defend the Empire and providing the British army with manpower. However, India had to be allowed independence because the British simply could not keep it colonized any longer. The Indian independence shocked the British Empire because India was a positive example for the potential for achievements that British imperialism could at times provide.

During the struggle over the Middle East, the British Cabinet confirmed the British presence inside the region, but the Arab-Israeli war opened a new challenge for the British polices in the Iraq. The increasing difficulty of the British situation tied their political hands in Iraq and as a result, the British decided to withheld their cooperation with the regimes in the region in response to the difficulties, although the British policies normally were to support effective local administrations as much as possible. This lack of an effective local government meant that Iraq was also under an increasing danger of communism. The tension between Iraq and Israel was intense because of Palestine, but still the British hoped that Israel and Iraq would exchange recognition of each other.

The British Cabinet did not stop supporting economic and social development even as it tried to stop the collapse of the Iraqi regime, for which the primary danger came from unqualified government administration: Specifically, the British noticed that the Iraqi elite did not take government work seriously enough. The British
conservatives complained that they could not get even one government to pass an economic program. The Iraqi regime could not adequately manage internal finances, and the external finances were even more difficult to manage. As a last resort, Ernest Bevin decided to help Iraq go to the International Bank for more loans in hopes of preventing Iraq’s collapse.

Despite additional capital from the loans, however, the Iraqi elite failed to show any capability for major administrative and political reform, which forced the British officers to push the regent to start emergency reforms. The ineffective Iraqi taxation system reduced the revenue for the Iraqi governments, but the British could not raise the tax revenue because of government corruption. Even though by this point King Faisal had accepted Western democracy, worked with the British to create a new Arab state on a Western model, and Iraq had an elected Parliament with its major officials leading the cabinet, the main political problem for Iraq after the death of Faisal was that “Iraq lacked the leadership which was necessary for stability and progress.”\textsuperscript{114}

Faisal had also used the nationalist movements to counter British influence by creating a balance between his relationship with the British and that with the Arab nationalists so that he could rule Iraq.\textsuperscript{115} Although it was not easy for Faisal to work with the Arab nationalists and British at the same time, he managed to negotiate the extremely tenuous and treacherous path between those two powers in Iraq.

Thus, in addition to a weak Iraqi government and leadership, the British Foreign Secretary had to face a strong nationalism movement in Iraq. The main conflicts

\textsuperscript{115} Hanna Batatu, \textit{The Old Social Classes}, 326.
between the British government and the Iraqi nationalist movement were over the British civil servants, the British military bases in Iraq, and Palestine. Even though the British reduced the number of British advisers in the Iraqi government as part of a new strategy to try to ameliorate conditions and lower tensions between the British and the local leaders, the Iraqi people also demanded a reduction in the number of British workers in the Iraqi government.\textsuperscript{116} Such reductions were not realistic as the local power had become a secondary power in part because the monarchy and the British depended on the ex-sharifian officers, who had been officers in the Ottoman army before World War I. Most of the new officers came from the poor or middle classes. During the war the ex-sharifian officers had joined Prince Faisal and the British against the Turkish Empire, thus aligning themselves with the British interests. The British and the Iraqi monarchy created a new elite class from the ex-sharifian officers, who then dominated the Iraqi governments during the monarchy.

The strongest ex-sharifian power was Nuri al-Said, who worked with Faisal during the Arab revolution against the Turkish Empire and was supported by the British intervention in Iraq and the Middle East. He served as prime minister fourteen times during the monarchy, which demonstrates how much the British depended on Said to help them stay in power in Iraq.\textsuperscript{117} For example, he was the main proponent for signing the first Ally Treaty with Britain in 1930. The British knew that he supported the nationalist movement only as a means to stay in power, but the relationship also provided a basis for the British to continue to trust in his abilities to control the Iraqi

\textsuperscript{116} Silverfarb, 77.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 335.
nationalists. Said was trying to follow Faisal’s policy, but he could not control the nationalist movement for very long after Faisal died.

The Iraqi nationalist movement itself divided after the Rashid Ali movement emerged in 1941, at which point the ex-sharifian officers lost trust in the new generation of Iraqi nationalists, especially in the Iraqi army. This in turn led to the military movement in 1941, which continued unrest in the country to the point that Iraq did not have a moment’s rest between 1920 and 1958. The British Embassy’s biggest failure during this period was to merge their domestic demands with the regional demands of Iraqi nationalists, even though the official British government policy was to support collective policy for the Arab world.

Although the Arab world after the war was under British influence in general, the political scene was divided by the British policies during the first fifty years of British rule of Arab lands. The Persians were under the British protection, while few Arab countries were independent in reality. Syria and Lebanon were under French control before becoming independent. Iraq and Egypt had alliance treaties with the British. Palestine was under direct British control, although this changed when the Labour government came to power and Palestine came to be governed by a different policy. In 1947, Iraq was less independent than Syria and Lebanon because of the military agreement with Britain.

Independence was not a realistic hope for most Arab societies at this point because the British needed Iraq, among others, to support the Turkish and Iraqi fronts

118 “The Arab world” in this paper includes only the Arab countries of Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the small Arab countries in the Persian Gulf -- the countries that had common political policies while under British Rule.
against any attack from Soviet Union. In late 1946 the Russian army was gathering more than 600,000 Soviet soldiers in Romania and Bulgaria, along the Turkish front. Bevin and the British policymakers saw the Soviets as a very real threat to British existence, which in turn led Bevin to depend more on his relationship with the Hashimi family in Iraq to secure the British military bases.

Bevin knew about the corruption inside the Iraqi regime, but he supported the leadership anyway because the British officers were afraid to lose their domination and control of Iraqi government. This was the main contradiction to what Bevin had announced in public about supporting the democracy after the Labour Party came to power in 1945. The British lost a lot of credibility with the Arab majority because they started to deal with the Iraqi politicians without focusing on the immediate need to change the head of the Hashemite family. This action severely damaged the actual and potential democratic system in the long run because it failed to foster an expectation of using free elections to change leadership. However, developing a democratic government was not on the British list of things to do in Iraq. They focused on controlling government policies to stop any conflict between the British and Iraqi interests.

The British Embassy in Baghdad, meanwhile, was afraid that the Bevin policy would open the door for the development of political parties again in Iraq. Perhaps not surprisingly, the main objection came from Iraqi politicians, in part because transfer of power between the Iraqi leaders did not necessarily follow Western ways. The Iraqi throne had power over elections and the election results. Controlled democracy was

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119 Hitchcock, 58-59.
the Iraqi way of ensuring that the parliamentary majority would be on the palace’s side. This method did not encourage any natural development inside the ruling class, of course, and consequently, the British officers were afraid that the Iraqi elite would transfer their disagreements to the Parliament, which would then dissolve into mostly personal disagreements.

On other hand, Arab nationalism lifted political aspirations. The election results were a big shock for the nationalism movement as the old ruling class continued its firm dominance of the political scene. In addition, the invention of the expert system helped to maintain the status quo control. However, the British and Iraqi powers realized that Arab nationalist demands for participation and power required changes in the system. Thus, they agreed to reduce the number of experts in the Iraqi government to appease the Arab nationalists, which in turn helped accelerate the collapse of British control of the Iraqi government. On the other hand, it also contributed to inefficiency of the Iraqi government because of the limited experience the Iraqis had with the Western style of governing. Bevin depended on the British Office for the implementation of development projects that attempted to bridge this lack of experience, but the result was disastrous failure, because all the development projects had been delayed by the Iraqi government for several years.

While the Labour Government had started its administration with full control over the Middle East, taking its time to discover their options in Iraq, to succeed with their programs the British had to collaborate with different Arab countries. Britain also had to ensure that Iraq would accept their defense policy with other Arab countries. The British were afraid that Iraq would forget the reason for War World II and would
focus on their national demands. The British wanted to ensure that the countries in the area were guided in following British strategies, which did not necessarily involve the best interests of the people in those countries. The British aims were to win the cooperation with the Iraqi rulers and governments and to help them in turn create political stability. Moreover, the British were so afraid of internal and external dangers that they insisted on having complete control of the military bases.

The key for the new Labour government was the development of stable governments in Iraq which would allow for success of the economic and social development programs. Geographically, Iraq was in the middle of British policies, partly because Iraqi oil fields were very important for the British fossil fuel supplies. Moreover, Iraq's location allowed to it to transfer oil through pipelines to Haifa in Palestine. The British did guarantee their friendship with the Iraq government, which then led them to become involved in political matters and allowed the Iraqi palace to involve itself in all elected governments.

Back in the Foreign Office, Ernest Bevin noticed two major differences in views about the military treaty between Britain and Iraq. The first opinion was supported by the regent and the former sharifian officers who wanted a modification of the treaty. The regent did not accept British exclusive control of the air bases, preferring instead that the Iraqi government share control over the air bases without evicting the British military from Iraq. The Iraqi nationalists, on the other hand, wanted Iraq to function without any foreign forces. Bevin was afraid the refusal of any kind of flexibility would weaken the Iraqi regime and allow for a new regime to take the power in Iraq. He
therefore realized the importance of being flexible with the Iraqi regent without losing British dominion.

The British military officers, however, wanted to finish the struggle over Palestine and Egypt before they started a new military agreement with Iraq. Bevin decided, however, that it would be better to open an official conversation concerning the Anglo-Iraqi treaty before finishing the other conflicts because he believed that the nationalist movement against the treaty was so strong that Britain could not hold out for long against the pressure to renegotiate the treaty. The Iraqi government in 1947 was friendly toward Britain, but the British realized that they could face rejection in the future if they waited to renegotiate the treaty until the official cessation of the treaty in 1952. Lastly, Britain could not handle another diplomatic fight in the region over the military bases because it would increase the anti-British feeling among the Iraqi people.¹²⁰

Because of the worsening economic and social conditions, the British decided to focus development in Iraq on raising the standard of living of the Iraqi people before they started to discuss any security agreement with the Iraqi government. In 1949, the British did not have a clear idea about the future of the Arab-Israeli conflict, so the main British target was to keep the friendship of both sides.

¹²⁰ CAB/129/21 Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 3 October 1947.
CHAPTER IV
BRITISH-IRAQI POLITICAL POLICY

In 1945 the Labour government came to power in Great Britain while the Allies were still fighting in World War II and found itself responsible for a large empire. Labour had a very strong majority in the British Parliament, which allowed it to manage domestic and foreign policies without sharing power with the other parties. Ernest Bevin, who was a very well-known Labour leader, became the foreign secretary who used his own vision to design the British foreign policies. At the same time, Iraqi Regent Abd al-Ilah had been in power since 1939.

The two men governed the relationship between Great Britain and Iraq while Bevin used British influence over the regent to keep British dominion over Iraq. Moreover, British officers worked to support the regent’s power in Iraq. The relationship between the British government and Iraq’s regent led to an increase in unstable political scenes in Iraq. Also, Bevin failed to understand the nature of the region and its problems, which led to decreases in British influence and power in Iraq. The result for the Labour government was a disaster for the Hashimi and the British power in Iraq.

Ernest Bevin decided to redirect the British Policy in Iraq after he came to the Foreign Office, especially after the death of King Faisal, who had been able to exercise control over Iraq during his lifetime. Faisal died in 1933, which opened the door the sharifian officers who helped him in the Arab Revolt against the Turkish Empire in 1916 to come to power (the British used to name the Ottoman officers the “Old Gang”). King Ghazi, the only son of Faisal, stayed in power only for six years. The British had a
difficult time in Iraq during Ghazi rule, because Ghazi supported the Arab nationalist movement in the Arab countries. He worked to have a strong army, which allowed for the first time for the Iraqi army to become involved in the Iraqi political scene in 1936. Between 1933 and 1939, the British Embassy in Baghdad was busy with the growing Arab nationalist movement.

To keep the situation under control, the British embassy supported Nuri al- Said to be prime minister in 1938 despite the fact that al-Said and Ghazi during those years did not have a good relationship. At the same time, the British Ambassador in Baghdad wasn’t comfortable with the king’s policies and characters:

For King Ghazi there is very little to be said. . . . But he is immoral, cowardly, treacherous, unbalanced and impulsive -- the impulse being, not the engaging quality of youth, but the artificial product drawn from High and Haig to which he has here courage at every moment of mental stress.\(^\text{121}\)

The British ambassador agreed with al-Said about the young king, but he could not make a decision without contacting the Foreign Office because he knew the risk from such movement.

The British Embassy started to receive requests from al-Said to make changes in the Royal Palace – “cleaning up”\(^\text{122}\) the palace -- so the British Embassy contacted the British Foreign Office to get their instructions. The British Embassy seriously thought to remove the king from the throne, but the British ambassador was worried about who might take his place: “The point at which we must at least try to apply the brakes is dethronement of Ghazi. I would not change him for Abdul’Illah and I’m not yet sure that I would change him for Zeid,” he commented. The British officers were


\(^{122}\) Ibid.
already making the necessary changes to the throne to keep their influence in Iraq. Moreover, the British embassy doubted al-Said’s ability to keep the peace if he removed the king. The Foreign Office shared the British Embassy’s fear about dethronement and decided to delay the project.123

Al-Said was pushing hard to remove the king because in 1936 the king, he alleged, caused the death of his brother-in-law, the minister of defense, and forced the government to resign. The Iraqi army forced al-Said to leave the country in 1936, and the king supported the army’s demand to form a new government. For a short time al-Said was exiled from Iraq, but he came back into power after his loyal officers took charge of the army. The British Embassy knew about the conflict between the king and al-Said, but they were not ready to help the latter at that time. However, after King Ghazi died in a car accident in April 1939, the Iraqi government, under al-Said’s control, announced that Prince Abd al-Ilah would become regent. Abd al-Ilah found support from his sister, who was Ghazi’s wife, and the king’s mother. The Iraqi government under al-Said also supported him.

During World War II, the British government had to deal with two main threats to its influence in Iraq. First, the power of the Iraqi army, led by the Iraqi nationalists, increased and became involved in the government. Second, the Axis powers started to contact the Iraqi government under Rashid Ali Al-Gailani. The Army forced the regent to flee from Iraq. The Iraqi government replaced Abd al-Ilah with another member from the royal family. As a result, the British army occupied Iraqi for a second time in May 1941 because the British government did not trust the new Iraqi government. The

123 Ibid.
regent came to the power again, this time with the British help. The relationship between the al-Hashimi dynasty and the Arab nationalists changed for good after the second occupation. The Iraqi nationalists could not trust the regent after he took revenge policy against them:

The Regent’s return on June 1 was not welcomed by all classes. Rashid Ali’s forceful propaganda had made too deep an impression for so sudden a change of public feeling to be possible. The army and police were largely sullen and resentful and the people in streets looked angrily at those who passed on their return from greeting His Highness at the palace.¹²⁴

The regent made a big difference in the Iraqi political scene when he gave himself the power to dismiss the Iraqi prime ministers. King Faisal I and his son, King Ghazi, did not have this power under the constitution, but they could ask the prime minister to resign, which the majority of the Iraqi prime ministers did if they found themselves without Crown support. In contrast, Regent Abd al-Ilah could not dismiss the Rashid Ali Al-Gailani in 1941, so when the regent came to power again he worked to obtain this right. The British army was still in Iraq at that time because the second occupation of Iraq occurred after the Rashid Al-Gailani movement in 1941. Regent Abd al-Ilah became more powerful after he changed the Iraqi constitution to his liking.

At the end of the World War II, British Ambassador Sir Cornwallis recommended to the Foreign Office that it depend on the regent more to extend British influence although they knew that he lacked the leadership skills:

The Regent, although he showed considerable personal courage in 1941, and although his affection for Britain is beyond question in nine the less no leader. . .

It must always be born in mind that the regent is far from being a more figure-head. In fact, though not in theory, almost every appointment, every measure of administration, is subject to his personal wish. . . . Our real influence should be inside the Government, through British officials.125

It was not hard for the British Embassy to persuade the regent to hire British experts, and the regent worked hard to get more British experts into Iraq.

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.126

From Bevin’s viewpoint, Britain should make new policies in the Middle East as well as in the rest of her protectorates/colonies 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

125 Ibid., 642-645.
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 Abd al-Illah especially. The regent had the crown power, which allowed him to create 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 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.\(^\text{127}\) 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.

However, it became apparent that the British had to deal with local problems in Iraq. The British challenge in Iraq was divided into two elements. First, the local element was the government administration. The Iraqi government could not succeed

with its economic programs, which forced the British government to provide the Iraqi
governments with economic aid. The British officers knew that Iraq would have
difficulties transitioning from a war-time economy to a peace-time economy after World
War II. To avoid that, Britain had to depend more on British experts to help Iraq with its
development programs. The problem for the British was that there were not enough
experts who wanted to work in Iraq. Moreover, British did not even have enough
experts in the motherland.

Second, the British Foreign Office had to deal with the new, young Arab
nationalist movements. Iraqi leaders like al-Said and the regent held advantages from
their strong relationships with the British governments to stay in the power. The end of
World War II brought with it very strong challenges for the both the British Foreign
Office and the Iraqi leaders. Bevin took the responsibility of making a new public policy
in the Middle East. He tried to persuade the Arabs that he was on their side. Moreover,
his vision of the future of the British Empire depended on making creating markets in
the Middle East to replace India.

The British officers in 1945 found themselves responsible for very close
personal relationships with Iraqi elites, whom they decided to use to keep their
influence in Iraq. Moreover, the Foreign Office thought that Iraq could become its way
to take control over the region.

On the other hand, how did the Old Gang and the Iraqi nationalists see the
British influence in Iraq? The Iraqi nationalists wanted the British to withdraw from Iraq.
On the other side, the Iraqi elites, who were under the British influence, became more
and more worried about being so close to the British policies in Iraq and the Middle
East because of the British failure in the area. But the regent wanted to break his relationship with the British because he did not trust the Iraqi Elites. Moreover, al-Said saw in the British weakness a chance for an advantage for Iraq. He became more interested in getting economic and military aid from the British government. The regent found many young politicians who wanted a role in Iraqi political life, and they were ready to deal with the British Embassy to rule Iraq, but they were more interested in their personal careers than in developing Iraq. The British officers in the British Embassy became disillusioned about this group.

Challenges by the nationalist 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 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.\(^{128}\) 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 on a state-wide basis. Al-Said and the regent

\(^{128}\) Batatu, *Old Classes*, 35.
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.

In September 1945, Ernest Bevin received a long report from the British Embassy in Baghdad. Bevin had extensive experience in European policy, but his knowledge of the Middle East was lacking. He knew that he had to have personal relationships with the Arab leaders, but he depended on the British officers in Baghdad to manage the local policies. The Embassy counted one hundred twelve political men in Iraq.\(^{129}\)

The British had to find a solution for the nationalists’ demands if they wanted to stay in Iraq, which forced the British policymakers to start to listen to the demands, which were very well known by the British officers. Unfortunately, the British embassy failed to negotiate with the nationalists directly. The conflict between the Pan-Arabs in Iraq and the British were over two main issues: the British policy in Palestine, and the British support for the Old Gang. As for the local policies for the British in Iraq, the British faced a very strong refusal to house two British bases in Iraq. Moreover, the

\(^{129}\) G. Thompson to Bevin, 14 September 1945. *Record of Iraq*, vol. 9, 435.
British knew that the Arab nationalists asked for free elections and the right to establish parties.

Secondly, as is unfortunately still the same case today, was the Palestine question. The British under the Labour government failed to find any solution that would bring a peaceful conclusion to the Palestinian case. As a result, anti-British and anti-Jewish attitudes increased in Iraq. In 1931, the British officers in Baghdad believed that anti-Jewish feeling was not strong in Iraq, but with time the Iraqi people started to make connections between the unfair British policies, as they saw it in Palestine, and the Jewish immigration to Palestine.

Since 1943, during World War II, the British had routinely received the Iraqi regent in London as their way of ensuring direct contact with the Iraqi interests. After the war, the British embassy encouraged the regent to visit London and Europe to see and share the Allied victory.

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.\textsuperscript{130} 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 out bribery from the administration, in embarking on schemes of social reform. Nor can he ever forget a political friend: if he is asked

\textsuperscript{130} The Tudeh Party is an Iranian communist party established in 1941.
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.\textsuperscript{131}

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 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.\textsuperscript{132}

Nuri al-Said was no exception in this issue. He and the Hashimi officers had brought 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 Faisal’s death. Additionally, they did not want to create more difficulties in the political life inside Iraq, especially after 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

\textsuperscript{131} Chancy to Eastern Office Department, 16 July 1946. FO 371/ 52315/ E 7045.
\textsuperscript{132} Bird to Bevin, 28 March 1947. FO 371/61589/ E 2695.
maintain their influence over the country without 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.

At the end of the war, the Iraqi government under Hamdi Al-Pachachi had to resign in January 1946. During the Labour government years of 1945 to 1951, Iraq knew ten different governments, which not only did not allow for the Iraqi government to have any stable programs, but also did not give the British a chance to process their plans in Iraq.

1. Tawfiq al-Suwaidi (February 1946-May 1946)
2. Arsid al-Umari (June 1946-November 1946)
4. Salih Jabir (March 1947-January 1948)
5. Mohammed al-Sadr (January 1948-June 1948)
6. Muzahim al-Pachachi (June 1948-January 1949)
8. Jaudat al-Ayyubi (December 1949-February 1950)
9. Tawfiq al-Suwaidi (February 1950-September 1950)
10. Nuri al-Said (September 1950-July 1952)

The British supported the regent in forming a new government with new political and economic programs, but the regent complained to the British officers that he did not trust the Iraqi leaders. “He has often complained to me that he is surrounded by
self-seeking persons and that there is really no one in whom he can trust."\textsuperscript{133} The regent trusted only the British advice, an influence over the regent that unfortunately helped to feed the conflict in Iraq, because the regent did not try to develop his own independent policy.\textsuperscript{134}

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,\textsuperscript{135} 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).”\textsuperscript{136} 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,\textsuperscript{137} 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

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 157.
\textsuperscript{136} Bevin to Eyres, 15 January 1947. FO 371/ 52365/ E12303; Bevin to Bird.
\textsuperscript{137} Louis, \textit{British Empire}, 309.
Iraqi political life,¹³⁸ so he was depending on British help and advice to remain in the power. The regent started acting as the 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 Abd al-Ilah for the regency.¹³⁹ 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.¹⁴⁰

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

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¹³⁸ The regent did not practice his full authority during the war because Iraq was under the British occupation and because he was spending most of his time traveling inside and outside Iraq.


¹⁴⁰ Quoted in Louis, *The British Empire*, 311.
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.\footnote{Bird to Bevin, 25 March 1947. FO 371/61589/ E 2695/3/93.} For example, during the regency’s fourteen years of power from 1939 to 1953, there were 25 different cabinets.\footnote{Al-Hasani, \textit{The History of Iraqi Cabinets}, vol. 7, 4.} 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.\footnote{Matthew Elliot. \textit{Independent Iraq: The Monarchy and British Influence, 1941-1958}. Library of Modern Middle East Studies, vol. 11. (London: I.B. Tauris Academic Studies, 1996), 15.} 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.\footnote{Louis, \textit{The British Empire}, 17-20.} Members of the British Embassy in Baghdad began searching for new names for the second generation 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.\footnote{Elliot, \textit{Independent Iraq}, 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\footnote{Ibid.} 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, and consequently, 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 more than a month.\textsuperscript{147} 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 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.\textsuperscript{148} 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.\textsuperscript{149}

\textsuperscript{147} Batatu, \textit{Old Classes}, 530.

\textsuperscript{148} 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.

\textsuperscript{149} Al-Suwaidi joined the Liberal Party after he was forced to leave the cabinet in 1946.
Al-Suwaidi’s government, which had more liberal perspectives than the British had in mind, opened the door for the Iraqi nationalists to express their ideas and plans for the development their country, and allowed them to establish their own newspapers and parties. The nationalists used the new freedom in Iraq to present their programs and views, which included the new parties 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 Stonehewer Birdwood had his doubts about the developments that could be accomplished if the Iraqi parties failed to become “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.

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,

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150 Lord Stonehewer Birdwood was the British Ambassador to Iraq from 1945-1948.
151 Bird to Bevin, 17 April 1946. FO 371/52401/E3735.
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.\textsuperscript{152} The regent did not support the al-Suwaidi government because of his personal disagreement with the prime minister.\textsuperscript{153}

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 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.

\textsuperscript{152} Daniel Silverfarb. \textit{The Twilight of British Ascendancy in the Middle East: A Case Study of Iraq, 1941-1950} (New York: St. Martin Press, 1994), 82-84.
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.”

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 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. 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 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.

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

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155 Sir Douglas L Busk (1906-1990) was the Oriental Counselor in the British Embassy in Baghdad. He became in charge in the British Embassy in 1947 after the ambassador’s illness.

156 Busk to Bevin, 19 September 1946. FO 371/52402/E 9585.

157 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.

158 Bird to Bevin, 23 May 1946. FO 371/52402/E 4943.
supported Salih Jabir, a new young leader who could prove himself in the Iraqi government. Busk described Salih thus: “I have seen much of him recently and I am impressed by his ideas and forcefulness.”

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 because 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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159 Salih Jabir (1900-1957) was the first Shia 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 opponents.

160 Busk to Bevin, 19 September 1946. FO 371/52402/E 9585.
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 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.\(^{161}\)

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 supporters 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 parties law allowed the middle class to join the leftist parties.

The regent decided to allow Arshad al-Umari\(^{162}\) to head the cabinet in June 1946, which was a surprise for the Iraqi majority and made them suspicious about the regime’s design toward the new freedom. Al-Umari led the opposition against the al-

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\(^{161}\) Ibid.

\(^{162}\) 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. He served as Baghdad mayor several times. He was one of the most conservative of the Iraqi prime ministers during the monarcy.
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.

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. 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. 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.

\[164\] Ibid.
\[165\] Batatu, *Old Classes*, 533.
The regent supported al-Umari’s polices in Iraq, including trying to counter the danger from the left, but the British Embassy though that it was not a wise policy because the Iraqi opposition started to work against the government.\textsuperscript{166} 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.\textsuperscript{167} Al-Umari’s behavior turned the British and the Iraqis against him leading the regent to hesitate about replacing al-Uman 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.”\textsuperscript{168}

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.\textsuperscript{169} Moreover, Busk tried to

\textsuperscript{166} Silverfarb, \textit{The Twilight}, 87-89.
\textsuperscript{167} Busk to Bevin, 16 August 1946. \textit{Record of Iraq}, vol. 10, 159.
\textsuperscript{168} Busk To Foreign Office, 5 September 1946. FO 371/52402 E8881/226/93.
\textsuperscript{169} Foreign Office to Baghdad, 11 September 1946. FO 371/52402 E 8881/226/9.3.
make the regent play a more function in the Iraqi administration. The regent was trying to escape from the Iraqi political problems by being absent from Baghdad, which served only to increase the political troubles. 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 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.

Public opinion in Iraq shared the British Embassy’s opinion about the government, but they believed that the British were behind the regent actions. 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.” 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

170 Busk to Bevin, 6 September 1946. Record of Iraq, vol. 10, 163.
171 The Regent Abd al-Illah was used to going on vacation in summer to London and in winter to the North of Iraq.
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.\footnote{Busk to the Foreign Office, 3 October 1946. FO371/52402/ E 9922/226/93.} 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.\footnote{Al-Hasani, \textit{History of Iraqi Cabinets}, vol. 7, 127.} 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 National Parties, to join his cabinet, and he was able to make agreements with them to hold free elections.\footnote{Elliot, \textit{Independent Iraq}, 58.} 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. 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. 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.

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. The election kept the opposition outside parliament, which made the left use the streets and the coffee shops as places for their protest and activities against the government. The majority in Iraq thought that the government would win, especially outside Baghdad. 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.

179 Bird to the Foreign Office, 23 December 1946. FO 371/52405 E12426/226/93.
180 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.
The British noticed that the Salih Jabir government started to attack the United Nations policy over the Palestine partition before announcing the new Treaty Agreement. In addition, the British lost the control over the whole interior situation in Iraq in early 1948. While the British tried to prepare the public about the negotiation, the Iraqi prime minister arrested many of his opponents, especially students, before leaving for Great Britain to sign the new treaty. Salih Jabir’s Cabinet was forced for resign after 1948 riot, and the British plans for modernization collapsed. The British did not want to make any new political plans during the years after 1948 which led to a decrease in their influence with time.

The British policy in the Middle East had major effects on the Iraqi programs because most of the Iraqi governments were reactions to the British programs in Iraq and the Middle East. During the time Tawfiq al-Suwaïdi established his second government, which was the first one during the Labour government, Suwaïdi could not work with the regent because the regent didn’t trust him, which led the regent to force Suwaïdi to resign. Moreover, the British were not very helpful in promoting Iraqi government stability. The al-Umari government implemented policies against the Arab nationalists and political parties in 1946, with the regent’s support, which made the British Embassy put pressure on the regent to ask al-Umari to resign.

The British Embassy in Baghdad did not know how to stabilize the political scene. Bevin transferred the problems to the British representative in Baghdad to solve the problems, but Ernst did not listen to the changing demands of the Iraqi elites, who started to lose their confidence in the regent. Al-Said started to see troubles with the regent in 1947, and therefore resigned every time he felt that he did not have crown
support. In 1947, al-Said told the British Ambassador that he could not win regent support for a long time while he was in the Cabinet: "I fear from conversation which he has had lately with me and members of the that his real reason for not wishing to continue in power is his belief that he cannot count on regent’s support over a long period." This problem every prime minister had with the regent during his regency.

The case of Palestine was a really a big failure for Bevin’s policy in the Middle East. Bevin had to face a strong Zionist movement for a homeland in Palestine for the Jews, but the case of Palestine seriously damaged Bevin’s relationship with the Arabs. Moreover, the bad management of the British officers weakened the Hashimi ally rule in Iraq. Without doubt Bevin understood how important Palestine was for the Iraqi regent and Nuri al-Said. The British allies in the Iraqi regime knew that they could not allow a Jewish state to exist in Palestine. Moreover, the Iraqi elites convinced the public in Iraq that they would stop any effort to establish a Jewish state, and that they were ready to go to war to stop the Jewish immigration to Palestine.

The regent through Bevin threatened to sever the relationship with Britain if the Jewish state were created. Bevin tried twice to resist pressure from the Zionists and from the U.S. government: First, during Jewish attempts to emigrate 100,000 Jews to Palestine in 1946; then again when the partition plan came to the United Nations. The Arab leaders refused the partition plan. Bevin was under the pressure to maintain British influence in the Arab world by listening to their demands. However, the he could

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not stay in Palestine without American financial aid, and President Truman pushed strongly for the partition, which was agreed to in 1947.

Bevin put the Hashimi dynasty in a serious crisis because the Arab nationalists asked for serious and strong policy against the British treachery. The Iraqi regent failed to deliver on his promise, or his threat, to the British. Instead, he continued working on his project of negotiating a new treaty with Great Britain in January 1948. Bevin relied on the regent to stop any violent reaction to the Iraqi government. The British knew they had influence inside the Iraqi government, but they did not know how long any Iraqi government could stay in the power if a war with the Jews ensued.¹⁸⁵ The Iraqi army defeat in the Palestine war in 1948 brought a major change in the relationship between the Iraqi nationalists and Regent Abd al-Ilah. The Iraqis saw the regent as a traitor over the question of partitioning Palestine. Moreover, he failed to stand up to British influence after the war, thus allowing the British to keep their military bases. Bevin took advantage of the weaknesses of the Iraqi throne to keep Iraq under British influence.

Nuri al-Said started to work on removing the regent, in whom he had lost confidence because of the latter’s behavior during the riots against the Portsmouth Treaty. Busk, who was the main support for regent in the British Embassy, also waived his support for the regent. Al-Said asked to replace Regent Abd al-Ilah with his uncle,

¹⁸⁵ Record of Iraq, vol. 10, 279.
Amir Zaid,\textsuperscript{186} but Busk failed to obtain a response from the Foreign Office for al-Said’s proposal.\textsuperscript{187}

The British wanted to separate Iraq from the Arab world, and the Arabs accused the British of exactly that policy, which was evident in 1949 when the British did not support the regent’s plans to unite Iraq and Syria.\textsuperscript{188} Of course, as this was one of the regent’s plans to secure another throne for himself,\textsuperscript{189} British lack of support should not have been surprising. The British government did not want to have trouble with the Arab nationalists over Syria,\textsuperscript{190} either, and even the Iraqi regime started to lose its support among the Arab countries when Iraq withdrew from Palestine front.

Britain’s main strategy during the Labour Government was to keep British control over the Iraqi governments by using British advisors and civil servants, whose numbers increased during the war.\textsuperscript{191} British were behind the inflation that Iraq had after the war, which made Iraq depend on British supplies to survive.

The Iraq communist party became very strong after World War II despite the failed attempts by the British and the Iraqi governments to control it. Consequently, because living conditions for the Iraqi people were very difficult, the Iraqi people were ready to support any movement against the Iraqi government. The communist party

\textsuperscript{186} Record of Iraq, vol. 10, 239-240.

\textsuperscript{187} I did not find any response about removing the Regent from the power in 1948 in any archive I used. I believe that the British discussed this idea in Whitehall, but I do not have any official documentation about what happened.

\textsuperscript{188} Record of Iraq, vol. 10, 765.


\textsuperscript{190} Record of Iraq, vol. 10, 769.

was more organized than any other political party, even though the Iraqi government did not allow the communist party to officially exist.

The Iraqi monarchy under Regent Abd al-Illah started encouraging young Iraqi politicians, with the support of British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin. The British exerted their influence through the British Embassy in Baghdad, led by the British embassy’s oriental counselor, who had direct contact with most of the Iraqi elites.¹⁹²

The British government under the Labour party wanted to have a relationship with Iraqi leaders, so it developed new plans for the Iraqi regime to have new political classes. British support allowed the Iraq regime to have free elections officially. Iraq allowed political parties to establish again in 1946 after stopping for several years. As a result, British-friendly activists dominated the official parties in Iraq. The Iraqi nationalists found that it was hard for them to have an official party. The Iraqi government did not allow the communist party to have official party status.

Iraqi leaders relied upon the British to help them establish political parties.¹⁹³ The Iraqi elites could not stabilize their government enough to be able to carry out the programs it wanted in place because Iraqi political life did not allow the Iraqi government officials to stay in the cabinet for normal lengths of terms. The main reason instability of Iraqi governments were the disagreements between the political classes in Iraq. As the British were involved in the internal policies in Iraq, British friends in Iraq asked the British to allow the removal of the Iraqi regent, Abd al-Illah, as

¹⁹³ Ibid., 151.
a means of stabilizing the government.\textsuperscript{194} The Iraqi regent was very weak, but the British supported him, allowing him to stay in power.

In addition, the British Foreign Office held two conferences to discuss the best British policy for the Middle East, one conference in 1945 and the other in 1949. The conferences explained the importance of Middle East to the British Empire.\textsuperscript{195} In order for the British to have a friendly regime in Iraq, they were forced to support the Iraqi monarchy.

\textsuperscript{194} Ibid., 154.
\textsuperscript{195} Ibid., 148.
CHAPTER V

BRITAIN’S MILITARY POLICY IN IRAQ

Britain essentially designed the new Middle East, partly because of its interest in Middle Eastern oil and a secure route to India. The British elites decided to use indirect rule in Middle East to achieve their goals, also deciding that it would be in their best military and political interest to use their influence over their allies to secure the British targets. In Iraq, Britain decided at the Cairo Conference in 1921 to bring Prince Faisal Bin-Husain from Al Hejaz and give him the Iraqi crown.

British influence in Iraq started with creation of the new state in 1921. The British dominated Iraq militarily and politically, using their political influence over the Iraqi monarchy to maintain political superiority. To ensure military domination, Britain limited Iraq with an Ally Treaty, which allowed to Britain to keep two military air bases in north and south Iraq after ending the mandate in 1932.

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 retention of military bases\textsuperscript{196} 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,

\textsuperscript{196} Mr. Harrid to the Foreign Office, 20 November 1945. FO 371/45255/E 9213/175/65.

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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.\textsuperscript{197}

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.\textsuperscript{198}

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 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.

\textsuperscript{197} William Roger Louis. \textit{The British Empire in the Middle East 1945-1951: Arab Nationalism, the United States and Postwar Imperialism} (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), 324.
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 1952.199

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.

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 1930.200 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

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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 though 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.\(^{201}\) 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 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

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\(^{201}\) The election took place a year later in 1947.
steps toward renegotiating the treaty by naming a committee of four ministers to make a new proposal to submit to the British government, 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 so he decided to focus on the Egyptian problem before turning toward the Iraqi request. The British foreign minister in mid-1946 was very optimistic 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 agreement. 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

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203 Foreign Office to Busk, 4 March 1946. FO 371/52401 E 2995/226/93.
205 Bevin to British Embassy in Baghdad, 16 April 1946. FO 371/52401 E 2831/226/93.
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.206

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.207 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 the west. The British also needed the military bases

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206 Bevin to Bird, 19 July 1946. FO 371/ 52402 E 6928/226/G.
207 Silverfarb, Twilight of British, 125-127.
in Shaiba to secure the oil fields in the Middle East,\textsuperscript{208} 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.\textsuperscript{209}

The British were interested in 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 bloc, and 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,\textsuperscript{210} 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.”\textsuperscript{211} The Iraqi foreign minister assured

\textsuperscript{210} Colin McInnes, \textit{Hot War, Cold War: The British Army's Way in Warfare, 1945-95} (London: Brassey's, 1996), 5-7.
\textsuperscript{211} Bevin to Bird, 18 September 1946. FO 371/52402 E 9355/226/G.
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 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.\textsuperscript{212}

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.\textsuperscript{213} 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

\textsuperscript{212} Memorandum for the Foreign Office, 20 December 1946. FO 371/52403 E 10671/226/G.
\textsuperscript{213} Elliot, \textit{Independent Iraq}, 56.
the Iraqi army because he believed that he could rely only on a royal army.\textsuperscript{214} 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 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.\textsuperscript{215} The regent and al-Said ignored the proposal that the al-Suwaidi committee created, and they did not tried 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

\textsuperscript{215} Bird to the Foreign Office, 22 November 1946. FO 371/52403 E 11474/226/G.
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.216

The regent agreed with the British suggestion about opening unofficial negotiations with the British. Moreover, the British were thinking to solve the “military aspect”217 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

216 Memorandum for the Foreign Office, 10 December 1946. FO 371/52403 E 211712/226/G.
217 Bird to the Foreign Office, 22 November 1946. FO 371/52403 E 11445/226/G.
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.”

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.

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. 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 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.

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218 Busk to the Foreign Office, 5 October 1946. *Iraq Defence Intelligence*, vol. 4, 204.
219 Louis, *British Empire*, 324.
220 Renton to the Chief of the General Staff, 18 September 1946. *Iraq Defence Intelligence*, vol. 4, 196.
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.\(^\text{221}\) 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.

The new Iraqi election gave a majority to a-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.\(^\text{222}\)

\(^{221}\) Memorandum for the Foreign Office, 3 December 1946. FO 371/ 52403 E 11693/226/ G93.

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 equipment to give the Iraqi army 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,

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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.” 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 counties so they could share military defense schemes with Britain. Baghdad’s negotiations with Britain did not generate a favorable result for the Iraqis because the British did not want to leave their bases. 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.

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224 From Commander in Chief to the Chief of Staff, 16 May 1947. FO 371/61590 E4274/3/G.
225 Busk to the Foreign Office, 19 May 1947. FO 371/ 61590 e4252/3/G.
226 Silverfarb, Twilight of British, 130.
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.227

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,"228 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.

227 Louis, British Empire, 257.
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.229

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.230

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

230 Bevin to the Cabinet, 17 September 1947. Iraq Defence Intelligence, 276.
behavior with the Iraqi elites and weak economy. The struggle between the Iraqi politicians was main reason in the past 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. Busk continue to send warnings to the Foreign Office about the increasing importance of the nationalists in Iraq.

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 Iraq’s independence.” 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

233 Memorandum by Bevin to the Cabinet, 7 October 1947. Record of Iraq, vol. 10, 685.
bases from the Iraqi government to the “last possible moment”\textsuperscript{234} 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. When the British withdrew from Palestine and notified the United Nations of their 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.\textsuperscript{235}

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.”\textsuperscript{236}

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

\textsuperscript{234} Memoranandum by the Chief of Staff, 16 October 1947. \textit{Iraq Defence Intelligence}, vol. 4, 285.
\textsuperscript{236} Busk to the Foreign Office, 14 December 1947. \textit{Record of Iraq}, vol. 10, 64; Louis, \textit{British Empire}, 330-331.
Jabir ignored the people’s request.\textsuperscript{237} 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 Embassy noticed that barley, which was used to make bread in Iraq, was exported to Lebanon, and the government was criticized for that.\textsuperscript{238}

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 publics 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 meetings were held in the regent’s palace on December 28, 1947,\textsuperscript{239} and January 3, 1948. In the meetings 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

\textsuperscript{237} Al-Hasani, History of Iraqi Cabinets, vol. 7, 209.
\textsuperscript{238} Report for the British about the Iraqi economy, 1 November 1947. FO 371/61661 E10869/641/93.
\textsuperscript{239} Al-Hasani, History of Iraqi Cabinets, vol. 7, 224.
Iraqi elites. In the meetings the prime minister continued refusing to give any kind of information for the Iraqi elites. Neither were the Iraqi political parties invited to the meetings. 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.

The British and the Iraqis decided to talk about the treaty in January 1948. 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. In the meeting the regent lost his judgment and agreed to assure the Iraqi

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240 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.
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 support except from minor leaders, which forced him to make the speech.241 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.242 The regent did not get the army support when he tried to send the army into the streets.243

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-Suwaiti 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 effects 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.

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 though that he had secured responses to the Iraqi demands and that British and Iraqi people would have a new, equal relationship.

The pan-Arabs failed to understand the importance of the new treaty for the Iraqi army. Iraq had no capability to win a war in 1948, but the Iraqi government and the British officers believed that the Iraqi army could win any war against Jewish troops. The Iraqi government under Salih Japer worked to persuade the public about their ability to defeat the Jewish army. But in the domestic arena Salih failed to solve
the economic problems. He was looking for personal victory and he failed to work for the poor people.  

The Portsmouth Treaty rejection proved that Bevin did not really understand Iraqi politics or society. The British could not successfully use their influence to pass the Treaty, but they did increase the political power of students, nationalists, and communists. The Iraqi political scene became unclear after the treaty was rejected because the crown's power became weaker than ever. Bevin had to confess to the British Parliament that he had serious problem with Iraq because of the Treaty:

There must have been some misunderstanding in Baghdad, but the Iraqi delegates should be able to remove it upon their return. . . . Neither I nor the Iraqi Prime Minister would have set our signature to any document which ignored the aspirations of the people of Iraq.

On another hand, the Iraqi opposition who worked against the Treaty failed to understand how important it was to get military aid from the British government before the war over Palestine broke out a few months later. The Iraqi army, as Nuri al-Said and Salih Jabir understood, needed the military equipment it so sorely lacked in late 1947. In fact, Bevin had to get involved personally in securing the newest military aid for the Iraqi army, even though by rejecting the treaty the Iraqis gave up the chance to modernize their army. The Arab nationalists lost a chance to benefit from the special relationship between the British government and the Hashimi Royal Family.

In April 1948 the British Embassy warned the British government about the dangerous atmosphere in Baghdad because of Palestine issue. The British officers

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246 *Record of Iraq*, vol. 10, 781.
were afraid of the rising of the anti-British feeling, and British supporters in the Iraqi
government were afraid of supporting the British policy in the region. Iraq would then
have to go to war without any support from the British army and without a stable
government. It was a suicidal decision for Iraq to go to war in Palestine. The British
recognition of Israel did not help their influence in Iraq. The British had been forced
to stop supplying Iraq with military aid as they were negotiating the Treaty of Ally
because the United Nations had forbidden any country to provide military supplies to
the countries involved in the war. Al-Said understood that, so he waited until in 1949 to
withdraw the Iraqi army from the Palestinian front. The regent had to support the al-
Said plan because he had no idea about what Iraq should do.

The British continued working on 1932 Treaty. After Arab-Israel war, the British
started to rebuild the Iraqi army, but the nationalist feeling inside the Iraqi army
opposed Western power. The political problems in Iraq stopped any serious
development of the Iraqi army during the British Labour Government.

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247 Ibid., 784.
248 Ibid., 787.
CHAPTER VI

THE BRITISH ECONOMIC POLICY

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 presence 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), which assisted local governments in development projects by providing technical help and sending British advisers to the region. 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.”249 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 own financial problems after the war.250 During

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250 Ibid., 19.
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 Sail Jabir cabinet that received 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.\textsuperscript{251} The BMEO, opened in February 1946, was tasked with solving the problem of flood control, a big problem in modern Iraq.\textsuperscript{252} 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 development of the oil industry in Iraq did find a big space in Bevin strategy. Arab 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 focused on improving on the peoples’ lives and standards of living in view of the degree 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 countryside to the big cities. The British

\textsuperscript{251} Stonehewer to Bevin, FO on 25 April 1947 FO 371/61621/ E 3836.
\textsuperscript{252} Kingston, \textit{Britain}, 99.
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.²⁵³ Bevin’s policy is known in Middle East history as the Peasants Not Pashas Policy.

Challenges by the nationalist movement, however, made changes very difficult. The nationalists were vehemently opposed to any policies that did not serve their interests. Publicly, local political names and behaviors remained the same. Britain’s previous encounters with the nationalist movement had not been very successful. The Foreign Office was well aware that the nationalist movement was growing in strength and numbers, particularly in the new middle 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 1947.²⁵⁴ During World War II, inflation rose uncontrollably, leaving the Iraqi economy very weak.

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 that he needed to take the BMEO seriously.\textsuperscript{255} For example, during the regency’s fourteen years of power from 1939 to 1953, there were twenty-five different cabinets.\textsuperscript{256} Many British policymakers began to believe there was a need to reform the political elites.

Britain’s problems were not limited to supplying the BMEO with necessary funding only. 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.\textsuperscript{257} Stonehewer pushed Bevin for an increase in the 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 Iraqi 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 Shaii Iraqi prime minister, and expected him to play a major role in implementing new policies in Iraq.

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{256} Abd Al-Razzaq Al-Hasani. \textit{The History of Iraqi Cabinets}, vol. 7 (Baghdad: Public Culture House, 1988), 4.
\item \textsuperscript{257} Stonehewer to Bevin, 29 May 1947. FO 371/61621/ E 3774.
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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. 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 the Palestine controversy heated up 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 by Regent Abd al-Ilah, who 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. Consequently, 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. Moreover, the 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.

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258 Ibid., 101.
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. 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.

The British Foreign Office under Bevin’s leadership started to manage the British relationship with their allies among the local powers in the Middle East. The British policymakers had to find ways to manage their influence in Iraq (which was very strong over the Hashimi monarchy, especially with Regent Abd al-Ilah in power) to find a good way to solve the local economic and political problems in Iraq. The British did not find a reasonable solution for the Iraqi problems, but they increased the Iraqi and the Arab crises. Moreover, they depended more and more on their influence over the regent to keep control of Iraq and to spread their influence to the other Arabic counties.

The British had to provide Iraq and the Middle East with the necessary development management, but they did not have enough engineers and technicians to support the develop programs in Iraq. Moreover, the British had to find help from American engineers to fill the gap between what they had and what they needed, but they did not allow Iraq to obtain the necessary help from other Western powers. The British knew about the lack of engineers, and they saw the Americans as a way to fill

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260 Bevin to Stonehewer, 19 July 1946 FO 371/52402/E/ 6928/226/G.
the gap. In reality the British policymakers did not want to turn Iraq over to the United States.

The British officers in 1945 found themselves responsible for very close personal relationships with Iraqi elites, whom they decided to use to keep their influence in Iraq. Moreover, the Foreign Office thought that Iraq could become its way to take control over the region. The Middle East was very important for the British Empire because British oil companies had huge shares in the oilfields in the region, especially in Iraq and Iran. The British needed the oil money to earn dollars in international trade.\(^{261}\) Moreover, the two main oil producers during the war were the Soviet Union and the United States, which led Britain to use Middle Eastern oil to strengthen its economy. Britain was afraid it would be at the mercy of the Soviets and/or the Americans if it lost the British Middle East oilfields.

The British focused on trying to solve irrigation problems in Iraq but the development programs moved very slowly. By 1949, only one major survey had been made by the British Irrigation Development Commission. Iraq needed an emergency flood control project, and the British started to give Iraq loans for its projects. However, cuts in the British budget at home forced them to allow to Iraq to go to the International Bank for more loans.\(^{262}\)

In 1950 Bevin had to admit the hard fact that his development programs were not going well. The British government needed to make changes in the social and economic standards for the majority of people in the Middle East to avoid instability in


\(^{262}\) CAB/129/39 Memorandum by Ernest Bevin on 30 March 1950.
the area. The British Middle East Office experts were working on plans in Iraq, but progress was slow, mainly because, in the British view, the Palestine war distracted the Iraqi government from its own development plans. British officers also noticed social unrest in Iraq, for which Ernest Bevin blamed the Communist Party activity. In addition, the world economic situation put more pressure on Ernest Bevin by 1949.\textsuperscript{263}

It became apparent that the British had to focus on one particular project that they could focus their effort on in light of their limited sources. The British could offer only 10 million pound maximum for the entire group of Arab countries yearly, far too small an amount to be able to make big changes in lives of the people in the area.

The BMEO developed long-term plans for Iraq, starting in 1949 and ending fifty years later. The British experts tried to mobilize Iraqi resources to increase its ability to start flood control projects. The British estimated that Iraq needed around 88 million pounds to finance the fifty-year plans. Iraq had to go to the National Bank to get the needed money.

The British linked Iraqi economy with their sterling system, which allowed to Britain to be the main supplier of money and financing for Iraq. Because the Iraqi main industry was agriculture, oil production had to wait until 1950 to become the main source for the Iraqi income. The Iraqi discovering oil in southern Iraq, and by late 1951 commercial exports from the south started to increase the royalties available to the Iraqi government.

The British Empire deeply needed for the Middle East oil. The three big oil producers in 1945 were United State Soviet Union and Middle East. The British knew

\textsuperscript{263} CAB/120/34 Note by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs on 12 May 1949.
Middle East was growing importance in the world oil economy. The British Commonwealth depended on Middle East oil. In 1945, British predicted that the Middle East oil would be quadrupled in teen years. The British could have a clear illustrate about the oil industry in the Middle East because they had the most of the shareholding. Iraq and the Arab countries became more importance in the oil market. British expert knew that Arab country would take Persian place in the oil producers with time by 1950. In 1946 Middle East was supplying Britain with sixty percent from British needed. British Empire were using about twenty-five million tons of oil every year and they estimate that they would need eighteen million tons more by 1955. British had the knowledge that Middle East was the main oil producer in the future. Iraq was producing around five million tons oil in 1945, British estimate that Iraq would produce twenty million tons of oil by 1955. Arab countries together would more oil than Iran by 1955. British wanted more oil in cheap price, which made the political influence in Iraq and the Arab countries, was very important for the British Empire to secure their oil desired.

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264 Memorandum for Foreign Office about Middle East Oil FO 371/ E344/87/G.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The British Foreign Office under Ernest Bevin’s leadership in 1945 promised to start making deep reforms within British traditional policies, as the British Labour government wanted to keep British influence in the Middle East for a very long period, and to do that they needed to make change in British rule in Iraq and Middle East. The British Foreign Office had very ambition projects, such as increasing the middle class percentage to stabilize the political scene. Ernest Bevin understood that to have a stable political environment the British had to encourage more social justice inside Iraq. Unfortunately, his policies failed dramatically, especially after the Palestine war that force him to withdraw his proposals. After 1948 he decided to focus on economic improvement and he stopped improvements in the political and military realms. The result of Bevin’s withdrawal of projects was that the ally system that the British built after World War II disintegrated.

Bevin’s new strategy for the region also failed because of the very strong nationalist movement facing the British, and because of Palestine. Bevin’s failure to win the Arab nationalists to his side led to a direct conflict between the British influence in the area and the Arab nationalists, and the latter’s reaction to the British failure was very violent.

Iraqi social life was composed of new political and social classes. The two main movements in Iraq at that time were the Iraqi Communist Party and the nationalist movement. The rise of the two movements during and after World War II, when the two movements had common enemies in the current regime and British imperialism in Iraq,
made them the main challenges for Ernest Bevin. The emergence of the new generation of Arab nationalists became a prominent factor of Iraqi political life, and this did not allow for the new movements to make peace with the British during the monarchy period. Because British interests in the area did not match the local interests for the individual Arab states, British policy makers struggled to find successful policies. The British failure to succeed with their policies in the region opened the door for an extensive period of instability in the twentieth century.

British officers could not successfully govern in the presence of the Arab nationalist movement, resulting in a clear humiliation in Iraq and other Arab countries for Britain. The British tried to deal the region as one bloc, with Bevin attempting to connect the Arab countries with ally treaties, which would allow the British to dominate the region for a long time. The British policies failed anyway, leading the British to withdraw from the Middle East, decreasing the size of the British Empire, but saving the economy of the British Isles at the cost of losing a major portion of the empire.
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