

Rashid Ali al-Gailani

The Nationalist Movement
in IRAQ 1939-1941



**A Political and Military Study
of the British Campaign in Iraq and
The National Revolution of May 1941**

Dr Walid M S Hamdi

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PREFACE

The material for this thesis comes largely from a variety of primary sources. Thus it was drawn especially heavily on British and German archival material. The most relevant British archives are the Foreign Office, the Air Ministry, the War Office and the Cabinet Files together with Colonial Office records. Other primary sources used included collections of private papers of the Middle East Centre of Oxford University, the Birmingham University Library and the Public Record Office. The German archives used were very largely those of the Foreign Ministry.

As regards Iraqi sources, no use has been made of the Iraqi National Archive Centre, as all of its materials have been removed from Baghdad for security reasons, in view of the hostilities with Iran. Therefore, reliance has mainly been placed upon such published sources as memoirs and diaries and also upon personal interviews. But the weakness of these sources — and especially of the memoirs — is a strong vein of self-justification and national bias. Accordingly, one had to be careful when dealing with them.

In effect, this study is an interpretation of Britain's interaction with the radical nationalist movement in Iraq between 1939 and 1941. A key question has to be whether Germany and Italy planned to drive the British out of that country and so out of the whole Fertile Crescent, this in collaboration with Rashid 'Ali and the coup leaders of April 1941. Correspondingly one has to explore whether the British were right in their assessment of what Rashid 'Ali intended to do.

SYNOPSIS

This book addresses the political and military aspects of the Anglo-Iraqi conflict of 1941, this in the wider context of the Grand Strategy of World War Two. It examines in depth the British military campaign in Iraq, and also the mood of the people in the aftermath of the suppression of the revolt.

In its introductory chapter, the book examines the historical background from since Iraq came under Turkish rule to its foundation as a nation state under a British mandate in 1920; and then through the termination of the mandate in 1932. The creation and evolution of the Iraqi army, under the insistent guidance of the British Advisory Military Mission, is a particular aspect of this study. Just before and during the post-mandate period, the Iraqi army witnessed the emergence within itself of politicised groupings, especially the 'Four Colonels' (the Golden Square) who later became a determining factor in every change of government in the country. The social and political structure of Iraqi society is another subject which will be dealt with in this chapter. Furthermore, the first military *coup d'état* in Iraq in 1936 and the mysterious death of King Ghazi also merit particular attention. The chapter explores, too, the rise of Rashid 'Ali and his dialectic with the British Embassy, then his resignation and return to power by military coup in April 1941.

Chapter two considers British policy and Axis aims in Iraq and the Middle East as a whole. It asks whether, in the spring of 1941, the Germans and Italians were actively seeking to displace the British in Iraq.

Chapter three examines the strategic importance of the Near and Middle East; reviews British and US Grand Strategy in the region; and assesses German and Italian aims and options in the Fertile Crescent.

Chapter four deals with the British military campaign in Iraq in the spring of 1941, including the battles of Habbaniya and Falluja and up to the armistice of 31st May and the return of the Regent Abd al-'Ilah to Baghdad.

Chapter five explores the restoration of British and monarchical control over Iraq. The chapter also examines the machinery whereby the British established their control, the attitude of the Kurds, the purge of the army, the breakdown of order in Baghdad, the 'Farhud' and the mood of the Iraqi people in the aftermath of the war.

Finally in Chapter six some conclusions are drawn.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply thankful for having had the opportunity to be supervised by Professor Neville Brown whose invaluable guidance, criticism and, most important of all, his encouragement and incisive comments have helped me to reinforce my own investigation and accomplish this study. His seminars have been a stimulating experience. I also gratefully acknowledge the generous help of Mr. R. R. Mellor (now retired) of the Reading Room Office at the Public Record Office, London; Mr. George Clout of the Department of Printed Books, Imperial War Museum; and Mr. W. D. Symington, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Library and Records Department, London. I am likewise deeply grateful to the Staff of Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University; the Staff of the Middle Centre of Oxford University; and the Staff of the Birmingham University Library. My thanks go to Sir John Glubb and Elizabeth Monroe for answering enquiries. I am also most grateful to Professor Albert Hourani for his reading of my script with helpful comments on parts of the text, and for his encouragement, guidance and generous concern.

In Baghdad, I am indebted to the late General Nur al-Din Mahmud and his family for their generous hospitality and for being allowed access to his books and private papers. My thanks are due as well to General Rafiq Arf and to Major-General Hasan Mustafa and Mr. Najdat Fathi Safwat for giving me interviews. I should like to express deep appreciation to Mr. Jamil Abu al-Timman for his support and encouragement and to my father and my wife who have supported me throughout the successive stages of my studies in Britain since 1976.

ABBREVIATIONS

ADM	Admiralty Records
Air	Air Ministry Records
A/A	Anti-Aircraft
AOC	Air Office Commanding
AT	Anti-tank
Bty	Battery
Bde	Brigade
Cab	Cabinet Records
C in C	Commander-in-Chief
CO	Colonial Office Records
Coy	Company
Div	Division
DGFP	Documents on German Foreign Policy
Fd	Field
FO	Foreign Office
GFM	German Foreign Ministry
GHQ	General Headquarters
GOC	General Officer Commanding
GR	Gurkha Regiment
HMAS	His Majesty's Australian Ship
HMS	His Majesty's Indian Ship
IPC	Iraq Petroleum Company
KORR	King's Own Royal Regiment
Lieut	Lieutenant
Lt	Light
MMG	Medium Machine-gun
MT	Mechanical Transport
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
OKW	Oberkommando des Wehrmacht (High Command of the German Armed Forces)
RAF	Royal Air Force
RE	Royal Engineers
Regt	Regiment
STFS	Service Training and Flight School
Sqn	Squadron
TJFF	Transjordan Frontier Force

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The Historical setting

Iraq became a separate territory in 1920, having previously been a province within the Ottoman Empire. In the immediate aftermath of the First World War the territory was administered by Great Britain through a Civil Commissioner. But from 1920 it was a League of Nations Mandate under the tutelage of Britain (after the distribution of the Near Eastern Mandates at San Remo in April, 1920). Iraq's location and, from 1927, an ever-rising output of oil gave her great geostrategic importance, not least as seen either from London or from New Delhi.

After Iraq gained her formal independence in 1932, her political system was to be disrupted four times by coups. Starting off with a Westminster model government in 1924, Iraq became in 1936 the first Arab country to witness a military *coup d'état*.

So let us consider first the geographical location. Iraq lies astride the ancient land of 'Mesopotamia' (see below), between the southern border of Turkey and the 'Upper Gulf'. On its Eastern borders lies Iran and on its western frontier lie Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

It can be divided into three physical regions. The north and north-eastern zone comprises a succession of mountains which constitute part of the Armenian and Zagros ranges. The central flattish region embraces the capital, Baghdad; the provincial capitals, Ramadi and Kut; and the holy cities, Karbala and Najaf. Then there is the lower Tigris-Euphrates delta. Deserts extend west, south and east from the Tigris and Euphrates valleys.

Iraq's total area is 175,000 square miles with a population which (on the basis of extrapolation from British official estimates)¹ can be put at about 3.75 million in 1941. Demographically, the northern part of the country is a Kurdish domain except for Mosul and Kirkuk, towns which are predominantly Arab and

¹ Naval Intelligence Division, *Iraq and the Persian Gulf*, Series B.R. 524 (London, 1944) pp. 3 & 352.

Turcoman respectively. Outside the immediate vicinity of the towns, the whole population of the country was tribal.

Ethnically, Iraq is a country of many religious and ethnic minorities which embraces different creeds, races and origins. Apart from the Kurds and the Muslim Arabs with their Shi'a and Sunni sects (of which the former were in a majority, an estimated 55 per cent * and probably rather higher by 1941), there were the non-Muslim minorities. They lived in all these three regions and constituted according to the 1947 census (the first official and governmental census Iraq ever had) 6.7 per cent of the population — namely the Christians, the Jews, the Yazidis, the Shabaks and the Sabaeans (see p. 24).

The term 'Mesopotamia' is a Greek compound of two words, 'middle' and 'river'. It refers to the upper part of the valley between the two rivers — the Tigris and Euphrates — and north of the region of modern Baghdad and Falluja. This name was well known by historians, archaeologists, and geographers in the ancient Middle East. Under Turkish rule, the term 'Mesopotamia' meant the Wilayets* of Baghdad, Mosul and Basra.

The Arabic word 'Iraq' means 'the bank of a great river'.² This ancient name has been used by the Arabs ever since their victory over the Persians in the battle of Qadisiyah in 637 A.D.

Because of her water supply and soil fertility, Iraq was always a tempting target for people inhabiting less rich neighbouring lands. The history of Iraq was one of repeated conquest. It was raided successively by the Sumerians (in 4000 B.C.), the Akkadians, the Amorians, the Elamites, the Babylonians, the Mongols, the Turks and the British. Each of these nations influenced the country and left behind it a distinctive pattern of culture. Not until 637 A.D. did the Arabs establish their rule in Iraq. Then Muslim Arabs conquered Ctesiphon, the capital of the Persian Sassanid Kingdom, and established their realm. It was during the Abbasid Caliphate that Iraq and, indeed, the whole Islamic world reached a dazzling peak. At that time, Iraq enjoyed perhaps the most brilliant period in its history. Baghdad became one of the world's most renowned cities, and was called 'the city of thousand and one nights' under her caliph, Harun al-Rashid. It was the capital of a great empire, a great emporium of trade and an important centre of Arabic culture. But the Mongol invasion of 1258 brought about

* Rough census taken in 1920-1931 according to Baghdad High Commission File, National Archives — New Delhi in Peter Sluglett's, *Britain in Iraq, 1914-1932* (The Middle East Centre, St. Anthony's College, Oxford, 1976) p. 300 App. 1.

* Wilayet means an Ottoman administrative division (Province).

² William Yale, *The Near East* (USA, The University of Michigan Press, 1958) pp. 305-306.

the disintegration (material, social and political) of Baghdad and the whole of Iraq.

Iraq Under Turkish Rule 1534-1914

In 1534 the Turks invaded Iraq and made it a province within the Ottoman Empire. After 1873 the Arabs constituted a clear majority in the expanded Empire.³ Their communal rights and culture were to some extent denied. And with the formation of the Committee of Union and Progress (C.U.P.), which carried out a revolution and restored the constitution of 1876 in 1908, a new hope for more autonomy or better administration arose among the Arabs.

Subsequently the Iraqi Arabs in particular became disappointed as the 'Young Turk' movement began to demand subservience to Turkish civilization and also to declare among themselves that the Turcomans, the Tartars and the Caucasians were more akin and hence of more value, to them than the other people of the Empire. Thus the Young Turks sought to 'Turkify' the empire on the basis of Pan-Ottomanism or Turanism. This affirmed the idea of Turkish nationalism at the expense of Islam which had till then been a bond between the two races. This made the Arabs, not least the Iraqis, re-examine their future.

Consequently, as Turanism or Ottomanism became more identified with nationalistic, imperialist objectives, a wave of embryonic Arab nationalism swept the Arab-speaking lands — especially Iraq, Syria and Egypt. Those concerned began to form their secret and public societies. *Al-Muntada al-Adabi* (the Literary Club), a public club, was established in 1909 in Constantinople. The Ottoman Decentralization Party of Cairo was founded in 1910; it had branches in Syria and was in favour of local autonomy within the Empire. *Al-Qahtania* Society was founded secretly by army officers in Constantinople in 1909. It was led by an Egyptian Officer in the Turkish army, Major (later General) Aziz Ali al-Masri. He called for an Arab Kingdom within the Turkish Empire.

The *Al-Fatat* (Young Arab) Society was founded in Paris in 1911 and moved from there in 1913 and 1914 to Beirut and Damascus respectively. The *Al-'Ahd* (Covenant) Society was founded secretly in Constantinople in 1913 also by al-Masri. But it embraced only army officers. *Al-'Ahd* included a number of Iraqi officers who were serving in the Turkish army, most notably Ja'far al-Askari, Yasin al-Hashimi, Nuri al-Sa'id, Jamil al-Madfa'i and Mawlud

³ T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (London, 1926) p. 44 and George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening*, (London, 1938) p. 104.

Mukhlis. Two branches of the *al-'Ahd* Society were established in Iraq (in Mosul and Basra respectively). In 1915 these two secret societies, *al-Fatat* and *al-'Ahd*, established contact with each other in Damascus and pooled their resources together to support the Arab revolt under Faisal's leadership.⁴

All these organizations played a major role in diffusing nationalist feeling in the Arab lands — not least Iraq, which became a hotbed of Arab nationalism. Iraqi nationalism was more influential than the Europeans recognized since they considered Egypt to be the fount of such sentiment. Reinforcing it were two factors which accentuated the rise of feeling against the Turks. First, the Ottoman army embraced scores of Arab officers including Iraqis, some of whom played (as already indicated) a prominent part in diffusing Pan-Arabism. This, of course, is in line with Arnold Toynbee's later thesis that, in the developing countries, armies could often be modernizing forces.⁵ Secondly, in part of the Hijaz, the then ruler of Mecca, Sharif* Husain, covertly supported this nationalist movement along with his four sons — Ali, Abdullah, Faisal and Zaid. They were to play a major role in Arab politics later on.

In Iraq itself the three Wilayets of Baghdad, Mosul and Basra witnessed a great deal of enthusiasm for the national movement. Several leading nationalist figures, notably Yusuf al-Suwaidi, were arrested in Baghdad in 1913 by the Wali (Governor) of Baghdad on account of their anti-Turkish activities.⁶ In Basra, Sayyid Talib al-Naqib Pasha, a prominent political and patriotic personality of a distinguished family, formed his National Defence Committee in 1913 which called for immediate reforms in Iraq.

With the outbreak of the First World War, a British-Indian Expeditionary Force went to 'Mesopotamia' (it landed near Basra on 6 November, 1914) to protect the Abadan oil installations and the Anglo-Persian oilfields from any Turkish attack from Iraq, an attack which might also have threatened the pro-British Shaikhs of Mahammara and Kuwait. It is amazing that, when writing *The World Crisis*, Winston Churchill made no mention of the oil source he himself had seen as potentially most important for the Royal

⁴ FO 371/45241, *The History of the Arab Nationalist Movement and the Origins of the Arab League*, pp. 6-9, George Antonius, *op. cit.* pp. 108-119, Ghassan R. Atiyah, *Iraq: 1908-1921 A Socio-Political Study* (Beirut, The Arab Institute for Research and Publishing, 1973) pp. 61-62 and Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* (London, Oxford University Press, 1962) p. 285.

⁵ Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, vol. VIII (London, New York, Toronto 1954) pp. 234-238 and Manfred Halpern, *The Politics of Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1963) p. 254.

* Sharif is a religious title meaning honourable which was borne by descendants of the Prophet Muhammad.

⁶ S. H. Longrigg, *Iraq 1900-1950* (London, 1956) p. 46.

Navy. Provision of an outlet for trade and emigration (not least in recognition of India's sacrifice in the war) was the aim of the government of British India under whose responsibility British interests in the Gulf came.⁷ The benevolent neutrality or, at best, the active co-operation of the Arabs was a prerequisite for these aims.

Britain's objective was to take over the province of Basra which was done by 22 November, 1914; and then to continue its campaign to control the whole country. Despite their military setbacks in Gallipoli (April-November, 1915) and then the surrender in Kut al-Amara in April, 1916 of Major-General Townshend with his garrison (2750 British and 6500 Indian soldiers),⁸ the British were eventually able to bring the whole of 'Mesopotamia' under control. Following the capture of Baghdad on 11 March, 1917, the British Commander, General Stanley Maude, confirmed in an announcement that, though Basra Wilayet was to be administered by the British, the Baghdad Wilayet was to become an Arab province governed by a local ruler or government. But due to a failure to find friendly Arabs to run Baghdad province, the British administration continued on the same line as was being followed in Basra, subject to the ultimate control of the Government of India in Simla. In July, 1917 Sir Percy Cox, the Chief Political Officer to the G.O.C.-in-Chief in Mesopotamia was appointed the Civil Commissioner but he still remained subject to the supreme authority of the Army Commander.

Obviously, the Arabs' desire for independence and freedom, and especially their animosity towards the Pan-Ottoman centralization sought by the Young Turks, had pushed them to the Allies' side during this war against the Ottoman Empire and the Central Powers. Hence the famous Husain-McMahon correspondence which culminated in the Arab revolt of June, 1916. But in Iraq itself there appears to have been no direct involvement in the armed revolt of 1916-1918 and, indeed, no organized opposition there.⁹ The British for their part promised to endorse and support the independence of the Arab-speaking lands subject only to minor reservations.

This made Husain and all other Arab activists believe that, after the war, no Arab-speaking territory would be under foreign

⁷ Air 23/5980, secret, from Combined Intelligence Centre, Iraq, Baghdad to Force H.Q. 10 July, 1941, *Brief History of Iraq 1914-1941*, and Brigadier General F. J. Moberly, *Mesopotamia Campaign, 1914-1918*, vol. I. (London, 1927) p. 88.

⁸ S. H. Longrigg, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

⁹ FO 3712774, *Foreign Secret Telegrams*, from General Lake, Basra, 25th July 1916 (Repeated to Foreign, Simla) p. 28.

control. Instead, independence turned out everywhere to be subject to British or French overlordship.

The secret Sykes-Picot Agreement signed in May, 1916 by Francois Georges-Picot for France and Sir Mark Sykes for Britain and that September by Serge Sazanov for Russia was to form the main basis for the post-war order in Asia Minor, an order resting on the division of the Arab area in particular into separate territories.

Thus, the two Wilayets of Baghdad and Basra were, according to this agreement, to be under British control: the 'Red Area'. Mosul Wilayet was to be included within the 'A Area', under French control.¹⁰ However, the Sykes-Picot accord was annulled, following the outbreak of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 and Russia's renunciation of the agreement.

Another event in 1917 was to have tremendous effect on nationalist feeling throughout the Arab-speaking territories. On 2 November, 1917, the British Foreign Secretary, Arthur James Balfour, sent a personal letter — 'the Balfour Declaration' — to the President of the Jewish Community in Britain, Lord Rothschild, expressing His Majesty's Government's support for the establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine. T. E. Lawrence in his *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* bitterly referred to the revolt that had begun on false promises and that if Britain won the war these promises would be 'dead papers':—

... had I been an honest adviser of the Arabs I would have advised them to go home and not risk their lives fighting for such stuff...¹¹

To allay Arab misgivings certain assurances were given by the British Government. In November, 1918, Great Britain and France announced a joint declaration to the effect that they would encourage 'the establishment of National Governments and administrations drawing their authority from the initiative and free choice of the indigenous population' and they agreed 'to encourage and assist in the establishment of indigenous governments and administrations in Syria and Mesopotamia, Colonel Sir Arnold Wilson (now Cox's deputy), the then Deputy Civil Commissioner in Mesopotamia, was against such a statement which ran contrary to the policy formulated by the Government of India and being

¹⁰ FO 800/211, *Future of Mesopotamia*, ff. 220-221 and Zein. N. Zein, *The Struggle for Arab Independence* (Beirut, 1960) pp. 13-14.

¹¹ T.E. Lawrence, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

implemented by him. For this always favoured the evolution of an Arab government in Mesopotamia under close British control.¹² Wilson had always opposed the plans of the India Office in London to carry out immediate constitutional reforms leading to the complete independence of the country. Already then, the special concern of Simla with the strategic control of the region was making itself manifest. On the other hand Wilson himself, in Professor Briton Cooper Busch's words, was the product of Indian attitudes and systems of government.¹³

Iraq Under British Occupation and Mandate 1914-1932

By 1918 seven British and Indian divisions were operating in Iraq. Together with support troops, they comprised 270,000 men.¹⁴ Meanwhile, due both to external (not least the Wilsonian approach to self-determination) and to internal developments the Arab nationalistic movement was gaining ground. At this time, it centred round the Emir Faisal and was concentrated primarily in Damascus. For the Emir had been opposing the French in Syria ever since the entry of the first Arab contingent into Damascus in 1918; and in March, 1920 the Syrian Congress (elected in 1919) had proclaimed him King of Syria. He considered Syria as part of the independent Arab State pledged, as he believed, by Great Britain to his father Sharif Husain.

As far as Iraq was concerned, the active Arab nationalists were in several distinct groupings. But these were collectively represented by a committee formed in 1920 to conduct negotiations with the British Foreign Office and composed of six members based in Damascus (where they were serving under King Faisal's administration). For they perceived Sir Arnold Wilson as a hard negotiator, somebody who was best approached jointly.

On this Mesopotamia National Committee were the Emir Faisal, Ja'far al-Askari, Yasin al-Hshimi, Naji al-Suwaidi, Mawlud Mukhlis, Ali Jawdat al-Ayyubi, and Nuri al-Said, all of whom were members of the *al-'Ahd* Society with Faisal as its President.

In April, 1920, Great Britain received a mandate to govern Iraq from the League of Nations. Meanwhile, however, events had continued to move apace in Mesopotamia. Sir Percy Cox, who in September, 1918 had become His Majesty's Minister in Tehran, was told in June, 1920 to return to his old post in Mesopotamia. But he was also instructed to proceed first to London to discuss

¹² Peter Slugett, *Britain In Iraq 1914-1932* (London, 1976) pp. 22-28, 35, 38 and 40-41.

¹³ Briton Cooper Busch, *Britain, India and the Arabs 1914-1921* (California U.P., 1971) p. 421.

¹⁴ Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis, 1911-1918*, Vol II (London, 1932) p. 924.

various aspects of the situation in Mesopotamia. An announcement about his transition was to be made a few days later by Sir Arnold Wilson.

Yet now (after two years of military occupation) resentment ran high so nothing could have prevented an explosion of unrest. Within several weeks, disorder prevailed and a revolt had broken out on the Lower Euphrates.

As a result of a deadlock over the talks between the nationalists and Sir Arnold Wilson — and against a background of propaganda by the Sharif and the Iraqi officers in Syria — the nationalist movement in Iraq began to gain impetus. Thus, the nationalists led by Muhammad al-Sadr, a religious figure, began to encourage tribal leaders through the *'Ulama* (religious leadership) to revolt.

The situation was further aggravated by the announcement of the mandate in June, 1920. For to radical nationalists that was only tantamount to an old-fashioned protectorate. So for the first time in the territory's political history, the Shi'a and the Sunnis joined forces together, in an alliance of tribes and townsmen from the Euphrates valley, and launched a full-scale revolt against the British administration on 30 June, 1920. Since the Shi'a clergy wielded great influence among the tribes, *Jihad* (Holy War) was declared throughout the country.

To many Iraqis, this revolt, although soon crushed and having lacked a generally accepted leadership, had been a national and popular war of liberation. Correspondingly, it can be argued that, despite the primitive weapons and tactics employed, it made the British Government hasten the implementation of the policy towards which they had become committed, that is, the establishment of an Arab state in Mesopotamia.

This mass uprising was eventually to engulf the whole of the middle and lower Euphrates valley. It spread to the Holy cities of Najaf and Karbala, where the *'Ulama* had a considerable impact.

In their sermons they preached revolt against the British in the name of Iraq's independence and of Islam. Several British officers were murdered by these insurgents. But by the end of the summer, the British army had begun to regain control over the disturbed areas. But it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss the 1920 revolt more fully.*

By the time Sir Percy Cox returned to Baghdad that October the conflict had died down. British army casualties were 426 dead;

* For more details on the revolt of 1920 see W.O. Nadhmi's thesis, *Intellectual and Political Roots of the Iraqi Independence Movement of 1920* (Durham University, Ph.D. 1974)

1228 wounded; and 615 missing or prisoners.¹⁵ The revolt had required a force of 65,000 men to suppress it; and a sum of \$100 million had been needed to maintain the said campaign.¹⁶ The casualties among the Iraqis had been 8450.¹⁷

The outcome was the regulation of Anglo-Iraqi relations on a treaty basis. On 26 October Sir Percy Cox secured the formation of provisional government under the presidency of the Naqib of Baghdad, Abd al-Rahman al-Gailani. His public prestige and the respect in which he was generally held made him eminently suitable to hold this position until such time as a National Assembly could meet and decide upon the future form of government. The British officials secured advisory positions by becoming Secretaries to the Iraqi Ministers.

Nevertheless, this was still considered in Iraqi circles as a step towards full independence. In February, 1921, the Middle East Department of the Colonial Office was established specifically to deal with Middle Eastern mandated territories. Hence Iraq became its responsibility, having previously been administered partly by the India Office (through the Civil Commissioner) and partly by the Foreign Office. In the meantime, Winston Churchill, who had received the portfolio of the Colonial Office on his transfer from the War Office, was in favour of reducing Britain's high spending and military involvement in Iraq and elsewhere. So in order to determine how to combine maximum influence in the Middle East with the lowest financial and military burden, the new department convened a conference at Cairo in March, 1921 to discuss the future political, financial and military policy in the mandated territories, Iraq included. In this regard the Conference approved the following lines of policy:—

- a) Supporting the nomination for the throne of Iraq of Emir Faisal, whose family owed its political fortunes to British support.
- b) Exercising influence upon the government through officials and advisers to the Cabinet and, most directly, through the High Commissioner.
- c) Gradually relinquishing power while retaining influence through successive treaties.
- d) Retaining an effective military presence not in the form of army garrisons in big cities or a big naval base at Basra but

¹⁵ *London Gazette*, Appendix 5, p. 5347 in P.W. Ireland's *Iraq: A Study in Political Development* (London, 1937) p. 273.

¹⁶ Ernest Main, *Iraq from Mandate to Independence* (London, 1935) p. 76.

¹⁷ *London Gazette*, Appendix 5, p. 5347 in Ireland *op. cit.* p. 273.

rather low-key and financially less burdensome: namely, R.A.F. squadrons operating from bases well away from large centres of population.¹⁸

In fact the R.A.F. did not actually take control until 1 October, 1922 when Air Vice-Marshal Sir John Salmond was appointed G.O.C. military and air forces in Iraq. His vigorous air action from that date put an end to Turkish aggression against Iraq's northern districts (especially Rania and Rowanduz) as a direct consequence of the Mosul dispute and an indirect consequence of the Greek-Turkish conflict.¹⁹

Then, on 23 August, 1921 Faisal was enthroned as King of Iraq. Subsequently, negotiations took place between the two countries about the signing of a treaty to include the obligation laid on Britain as the mandatory power. The Treaty which was signed on 10 October, 1922 was originally to last for twenty years though its span was to be shortened to four years by a protocol signed in 1923. This foreshortening came as a result of strong opposition in Iraq and also in Britain. Yet in 1926, following the settlement of the Mosul dispute through the good offices of the League of Nations, British mandatory control was extended beyond the protocol period by the signing of a twenty-five year treaty as stipulated by the League.

Further treaties, with Iraqi independence and the termination of the mandate as their ultimate objectives were signed in 1927 and 1930. However, it was not until 30 June, 1930, that the really decisive treaty was signed. Under the terms of this treaty Iraq became formally independent and, on 3 October, 1932, a member of the League of Nations. The air bases at Sha'iba and Habbaniya (which were to replace those in Mosul and Baghdad) plus a line of communication from Basra to Palestine could be used by British forces in peace and wartime. It was to last for twenty-five years.

The Formation of the Iraqi Army and its Evolution in 1921-1932

The actual formation of the Iraqi army was a step taken after the establishment of the Provisional Government by Sir Percy Cox in October, 1920. All the same, Iraq's experience with military service extended back to the Ottoman era. During that time, a large Army Headquarters was located in Baghdad, it being

¹⁸ FO 371/6364, *Report on Middle East Conference Held in Cairo and Jerusalem, March 12th to 30th 1921 with Appendices.*

¹⁹ Air 40/30 and 'Historical Summaries by Major-General Sir Percy Cox' in *The Letters of Gertrude Bell*, edited by Lady Bell, Vol. 2 (Pelican Books, Great Britain, 1939) p. 525.

directly linked with the War Ministry in Constantinople. Added to that, there were several military training schools at Baghdad, including a school for Warrant Officers.²⁰

A large number of Iraqis were admitted to the Military College in Constantinople, their numbers being far larger than those coming from other Arab Wilayets. Indeed, several Iraqi officers reached high-ranking positions within the Ottoman army, notable among whom were Generals Ja'far al-'Askari and Yasin al-Hashimi. As a result of the centralizing and discriminatory policies of the Young Turks, the Arab officers (including the Iraqis) organized themselves in a more cohesive way by establishing, as already mentioned, secret societies — the *al-Fatat* and the *al-'Ahd*. They sought not just to counter the Young Turks but to promote the creation of a Pan-Arab Kingdom and emancipation from the Ottomans.

Most of these Arab officers were transferred to distant places in an attempt to destroy their solidarity and obstruct their efforts for the realization of their nationalist ideals. So in 1916, most of them left the Ottoman army in desperation, and joined the army of Sharif Husain in the Hijaz. General Ja'far al-Askari became the Commander-in-Chief of the Arab army in the Hijaz, which also embraced a large number of other Iraqi officers.

With the formation of the first Iraqi Government in October under Abd al-Rahman al-Naqib as Prime Minister (as already indicated), Ja'far al-Askari became the Minister of Defence. He invited colleagues who had abandoned the Ottoman army in favour of the Sharifan army as well as some who had remained in Iraq to join him in the establishment of an Iraqi army.

According to the instructions issued by the Foreign Office to Sir Percy Cox, the 'Iraqi Ministry of War' was clearly much too important to leave in Iraqi hands. At all events, its Minister had to be denied any authority over the British garrison which was to be left in Iraq to guard the imperial line of communication. Thus, the British garrison was to be left under the direct authority of the British Representative (the High Commissioner) when the Arab Government was formed in Iraq. This was, of course, because Iraq was not able at that time to protect the British interests in question.²¹ Added to that, the inadequacy of the Iraqi army obliged Britain to vest the overall security of the country in the hands of the R.A.F. and the Iraq Levies. The latter were largely composed of the

²⁰ Abd al-Razzaq al-Hilali, *Tarikh al-Ta'lim fi al-Iraq fi al-'Ahd al Othmani 1638-1917* (History of Education in Iraq During the Ottoman Era, 1638-1917) Baghdad, 1959) p. 162.

²¹ CO 730/32, from War Office, Feb, 1922 to Major-General Sir T. Frazer and Cabinet, F.C. 48, Finance Committee, Draft Instructions for Sir Percy Cox.

Assyrians who came to Iraq from Hakkari in Turkey as refugees, following the massacre of their people by the Turks in 1915. They joined the British forces in Mesopotamia in 1918 and formed three battalions of infantry troops. From 1922 they were retained as an integral part of the Imperial garrison.

The Iraqi Minister of War was simply responsible for the organization and deployment of the indigenous formations of a military or para-military nature, aided by such British instructors as might gradually replace the British Army of Occupation. Added to that, Sir Percy Cox was advised that, as High Commissioner in Iraq, he would be the only channel through which the General Officer Commanding would communicate with the Arab Government in Iraq on the one hand regarding the control of the future British Garrison and with the British Government on the other. Ja'far al-Askari then proceeded with the formation of his Ministry which initially embraced only ten Staff Officers. Added to that, the Council of Ministry issued a proclamation on 6 January, 1921 regarding the formation of the Iraqi General Staff; and Nuri al-Sa'id was appointed Chief of Staff.

The passing of the overall command in Iraq from the British army to the R.A.F. was expected to lead on to a reduction of annual expenditure from about £32 million in 1920-21 to £27 million in fiscal year 1921-22 and then to as low as £4 million in 1926-27.²² In accordance with the decisions of the Cairo Conference, Britain was to continue to defend the country jointly with Iraq against any external and internal menace, with her imperial resources, until such time as Iraq's own national forces were ready and able to assume this responsibility.

So for the maintenance of peace and order in the country it was decided that six squadrons of the Royal Air Force should be stationed at strategic points. Also the Levies were to be retained as a separate service, financed by the British in spite of their personnel being Iraqi: Kurdish, Arab and Assyrian. These forces were to be increased from 4,000 to 7,500 and to be controlled by the High Commissioner, this in order to offset the reduction of the British Army. Added to which, the Iraqi Government was initially to allocate 15 per cent of her revenue to defence, a proportion which was to be increased later to 25 per cent.²³

A comprehensive Military Agreement, derivative from the

²² Sluglett, *op. cit.*, p. 259 and Parliament Debates, H. of C., 5th series, vol. CXLIII (1921) p. 271 and vol. CLI (1922) p. 1547 in Philip Ireland *op. cit.*

²³ *Comd.* 2120, 1924, *Protocol of 30 April, 1923 and Agreements Subsidiary to the Treaty with King Faisal.* Article IV of the Military Agreement and Article IV of the Financial Agreement signed in 1924 subsidiary to the Treaty of 10 October, 1922.

Treaty of 1922, was signed in 1924. It stipulated that Iraq would take over responsibility for defence against external aggression as well as for the maintenance of peace and order not later than four years from its coming into effect.²⁴ To develop Iraq's military establishment and assist in training and armament, Britain undertook to:-

- a) Provide for military and aeronautical instructions of Iraqi officers in the United Kingdom so far as this may be possible.
- b) Provide in sufficient quantities arms, ammunition, equipment and aeroplanes of the latest available pattern for the Iraqi army.
- c) Provide British officials whenever they may be needed by the Iraq Government within the period of the Treaty.²⁵

Correspondingly, the Officer Commanding the British Forces in Iraq was to inspect the Iraq forces and to make recommendations regarding them. Also, the Iraq Government should give effect to any of the recommendations made by the High Commissioner concerning the movements and disposition of the Iraq Army; and a British Commander should assume the command of any operations in which British forces in Iraq participated.²⁶

Thus, the Military Agreement effectively deprived Iraq of any functional autonomy in military matters.

At this time (1921-22), the dominant presence was, of course, that of the British and Indian military establishment: thirty-three infantry battalions, six cavalry regiments, sixteen artillery batteries, and six R.A.F. Squadrons plus some independent sapper and armoured-car companies, to which must be added two battalions of Levies.²⁷ Alongside these British Imperial troops, there were the newly-born Iraqi army and the Police.

In its initial stage, the Iraqi army was designed on British lines, as witness its reliance on voluntary recruitment. Its number rose from 3,500 men in 1921 to 7,500 in 1925 and to 12,500 in 1932.²⁸ Meanwhile, the British army garrison was progressively reduced to seventeen battalions in October, 1921; six by 1923; three by 1926; two by 1927; one by 1928 and then none in 1929.²⁹

The R.A.F. had four squadrons in March, 1921. The number

²⁴ *Ibid*, Article I

²⁵ *Ibid*, Article II

²⁶ *Ibid*, Article IX

²⁷ Sluglett, *op. cit.*, p. 270, Notes on Chapter VII (1).

²⁸ Sluglett, *op. cit.*, p. 260 and Longrigg, *op. cit.*, p. 166

²⁹ Sluglett, *op. cit.*, p. 270 and Longrigg, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*,

was raised to six and then eight between 1921 and 1926: this in response to Turkish, Kurdish, and Saudi belligerency. Then it was reduced to five in 1928 and to four in 1930.³⁰ Meanwhile, the Levies were to serve under R.A.F. control as guard for the airfields in Iraq. The number of their battalions was raised to four in 1923, and then reduced to two again in 1928.³¹

Meanwhile, rapid development was taking place in the Iraqi police, whose strength grew from 3,000 men in 1921 to 8,000 in 1930. This force was almost entirely British-officered at first but the number of Iraqi officers increased from two to sixty during the same period. Correspondingly, British police officers were reduced from twenty-two to twelve.³²

On the question of the organization of the Iraqi army in the light of the experience of the 1920's (1924-1928) dominated by clashes with the Kurds, Turks and Saudis (see below), the British military experts envisaged a new stratagem. It averred that Iraq would undoubtedly one day have to deal with troubles on her frontiers, either among the Kurdish tribes in the mountain country or with the attacks by the Saudi raiders in the southern desert. It added that Iraq would be called upon (after the termination of the mandate) to defend herself against an organized attack by a force of all arms with modern weaponry. She would also from time to time have to deal with uprisings among the tribes in the river valleys of the south or in the towns. Thus it was suggested that the first thing to do was to provide forces to deal with the three requirements mentioned above.

For operations in the mountains of Kurdistan the troops were to be recruited from hillmen such as the Kurds and the Assyrians or, if drawn from the plains, they must be recruited on a sufficiently long enlistment to enable them to be trained in hill work. It was considered that five years colour service was preferable for this and certainly not less than four. It was also suggested that certain garrisons were required in Kurdistan to support the civil power in the maintenance of law and order. Added to which, reserves were required to enable mobile columns (each with not more than two battalions with a section of guns) to be rapidly formed in any one area where disturbances were threatened.

For the defence of the desert and the maintenance of order therein in normal times, units with special characteristics were required. It was recommended that aircraft and armoured cars

³⁰ Sluglett, *op. cit.*, p. 167

³¹ Sluglett, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*,

³² Longrigg, *op. cit.*, p. 168

were to be used against the raids by the Saudi *Ikhwan* tribes.

Regarding the disturbances among the tribes of the lower Euphrates and Tigris, it was felt that aircraft and mobile troops were the most effective means to deal with the situation. Thus it was recommended that Britain would increase the number of R.A.F. squadrons of aircraft and armoured cars and the Levies.³³

Regarding the expansion of the Iraqi army, many reservations were expressed by the British authorities. A bigger, more balanced and more autonomous force would strengthen the hand of the King and his entourage, especially in times of confrontation. Having a strong national army would lessen the reliance of Iraq on the British. Besides, a strong army would become a focus of radicalism and the associated political intrigue if Iraq became more unstable. Furthermore, Iraq had too limited a financial capacity to raise a large army unaided.

Therefore, limiting the army and having its duties effectively confined to internal security were high British priorities.

Conversely, the nationalist school of thought favoured a steady expansion of the army, diversification of its composition and modernization of its military equipment. But the retention of the Levies helped to offset the withdrawal of the British army from Iraq. From 1922 to 1931 they were still used to counter Saudi, Turkish and Kurdish challenges. From 1932 they were retained for the ground defence of the R.A.F. bases. Even Nuri al-Sa'id indicated that he would have expected this garrison role to have been performed by special units of the Iraqi army.

During the whole mandate period the Iraqi army proper was never to show great prowess. Thus it performed badly during the Kurdish revolts of 1930-1932. Indeed, only a series of R.A.F. strikes prevented its collapse.³⁴

However, the Iraqi officer corps began to grow as Iraqi officers who had served in either the Sharifian army or the Ottoman army began to enlist. The former numbered 206 and the latter 313: a total of 519 officers in 1921-22. They included two ex-Generals (Ja'far al-Askari and Yasin al-Hashimi), two ex-Major-Generals (Mawlud Mukhlis and Nuri al-Sa'id), five ex-Brigadiers, four ex-Colonels, fifty-eight ex-Captains, two hundred and sixty-one ex-Lieutenants and eight ex-Warrant-Officers.³⁵

³³ *Air 8/94. Iraq Army Organization*, 20 March, 1928.

³⁴ Sluglett, *of. cit.*, p. 261, and Paul P.J. Hemphill, 'The Formation of the Iraqi Army, 1921-33' in Abbas Kelidar's, *The Integration of Modern Iraq* (London, 1979) p. 105.

³⁵ Dr Raja' Husain al-Khatib, *Ta'sis al-Jaish al'Iraqi Wa Talawwur Dawruhu al-Siyasi min 1921-1941* (The Establishment of the Iraqi Army and the Development of its Political Role 1921-1941) (A published Ph. D. Thesis, University of Baghdad, 1979) p. 36 and Appendix II pp. 321-331.

Moreover, in April, 1921 a Senior Officers School was established in Baghdad to raise the efficiency of its army officers and improve their operational understanding of modern military techniques. A British Military Mission, headed by Colonel P. Joyce, was established in Baghdad in 1921. It comprised twelve officers, their task being to supervise and advise on the formation of the Iraqi army and its training. This body was attached to the Iraqi Ministry of Defence.

The other development was the establishment of a Royal Iraqi Military College. This was opened on 19 July, 1921. It was closed in January, 1923 due to financial stringency, then reopened in 1924. The College was modelled on the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst. An English Translation Department was established within the Iraqi army and was attached to the College. For the season 1922-23, ninety-five cadets joined the College.

Then, in 1927, a military Staff College was opened to improve further the military thinking of the Iraqi officers, and was likewise modelled on British lines — those of Camberley.³⁶ In the year 1924 the first set of military rules and regulations for the Ministry of Defence had been drawn up. Then, in 1930, the Royal Iraqi Air Force was formed, with five light aircraft to start with. In 1935, a River Navy Force was established.

In order to consolidate Britain's controlling influence, it was decided that the supervision and training of the Iraqi army would be vested in the British Military Mission. Its role would be carried out by filling the following posts in the Iraqi army by British officers:—

- a) A British Military Inspector-General would be appointed as Advisor to the Ministry of Defence.
- b) A Staff Officer with Liaison Officer at the General Staff.
- c) A Staff Officer with Liaison Officer in every military district.
- d) Instructor Officers in every military district with more than two artillery batteries.
- e) A British Officer with executive powers in every military unit of the Iraqi army.³⁷

Hence, the total number of British Officers assigned to the Iraqi army had gradually risen to forty-six. And despite Iraq's desire to

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 87 and 91.

³⁷ Iraq National Archives Centre, Serial No. 1598, No. of Document 12. Note by the British High Commissioner in al-Khattab. *op. cit.*, pp. 45-46.

decrease the number, Britain remained adamant. Indeed her financial aid to the Iraqi Government was made conditional upon its consent to the figure shown above.³⁸ But the persistent curbing by the British Government of the expansion of the army came at a time when the country was experiencing political turmoil, on account of opposition to the mandate. This led to the emergence within the army in 1927 of a grouping of young nationalist officers known as the Nationalist Officers Bloc. It included Captain (later Colonel) Salah-al-Din al-Sabbagh and Captain (later Colonel) Fahmi Sa'id. Its object was to resist British policies designed, these two officers averred, simply to obstruct the development of the Iraqi army and its expansion.³⁹

No doubt these several factors influenced Britain's decision not to recommend Iraq's candidature of the League of Nations in 1928.

A stipulation in the Treaty of 1926 had been that this be reviewed in January that year and thereafter four-yearly. Samuel Hoare, the Secretary of State for Air, was in favour of transferring full autonomy to the Iraqi Government by 1930-31, rather than 1928. Hoare was, of course, on the Tory Right.

Additionally, the National Service Bill of 1927, which was introduced by Prime Minister Ja'far al-Askari, became yet another thorny issue as the British Government stood out against it. Ironically enough, the opposition to the bill expressed by the tribes on the Euphrates valley as well as by the Kurds in the north played straight into Britain's hand and eventually caused al-Askari's resignation. In this regard, the British High Commissioner informed the Iraqi Government:—

If the Iraqi Government desire to press on with the project of conscription, H.M.G. will not oppose it, although fully aware of the great difficulties which lie in its way. But in their judgement conscription is not in present circumstances essential and it should be possible for the Iraqi Government to maintain and pay for a sufficiently efficient army on the voluntary system. If the Iraqi Government nevertheless insists on attempting to apply conscription, British forces will not be available for the purpose and Iraq must rely on her own forces.⁴⁰

³⁸ *Ibid* p. 46.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 51.

⁴⁰ CO 730/126, 58003, 1.2.1928.

The Tribal Legacy

In addition to the problem of ethnic minorities which affected the stability of the country, there was another division within the social mainstream — i.e. the contrast between the urban communities and a tribal domain which embraced many different classes: the Landowners (the Mallaks), the Shaiks, the Aghas*, the Chalabis (a title given to rich merchants of high social standing) the peasants, the religious leadership ('*Ulama*), the old aristocracy of officials, and the army officers.⁴¹

From the time of King Faisal's death in 1933 until after their big military setbacks in 1935 and 1936, the tribes were a continual threat to the stability of governments in Baghdad. Within one year alone, 1933-1934, they caused the collapse of five governments:⁴² not to mention their subsequent confrontation in 1935 and again in 1936, following the implementation of the National Service Bill. Between 1921 and 1932, the R.A.F. was asked to assist the Iraqi army against uprisings on 130 separate occasions.⁴³

Even though socially divided, Iraq was an integrated polity. For one thing, one Iraqi in every seven lived in Baghdad. Yet a wide social and psychological barrier did persist between tribal and urban Arabs. More specifically, the life of most tribal societies was characterised by patriarchy set within the context of Shi'a Islam and strict tribal customs, whereas that of the urban (very prominently Sunni) Arabs was controlled, in Batatu's words, by 'Islamic and Ottoman laws'⁴⁴ and regulation. Furthermore, while the urban Arabs adapted their life to the new western and Turkish wind of cultural change taking place amongst the intelligentsia, the tribes remained immune. Even now to belong to a tribe is something of an honour, even in the urban cities. Some families keep their family tree, their origin and the tribe from which they descended — as a matter of custom, pride and tradition — from generation to generation.

And for the tribes, ever since Turkish rule, government was a challenge to their power and independence. They always sought to weaken and disobey government. In 1910, a Baghdadi deputy wrote thus to the Ottoman Parliament:—

To depend on the tribe is a thousand times safer than

* A title given to Kurdish tribal Chiefs.

⁴¹ Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movement of Iraq* (Princeton, University Press, New Jersey, 1978) pp. 53, 63, 163, 211, 224 and 319.

⁴² Muhammad Faraj, *Al-Ummah al-Arabiyya, ala al-Tariq ila Wihdat al-Hadaf* (Arab Nation on the Way Towards the Goal of Unity) (Cairo, 1970) p. 161.

⁴³ Mohammad Tarbush, *The Role of the Military in Politics, A Case Study of Iraq from 1936-1941* (A Ph.D. Thesis, St. Catherine College, 1977) p. 23.

⁴⁴ Batatu, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

depending on the government, for whereas the latter defers or neglects repression, the tribe, no matter how feeble it may be, as soon as it learns that an injustice has been committed against one of its members readies itself to exact vengeance on his behalf.⁴⁵

With the coming to the throne of King Faisal I, the heart of the problem was how to find a solution to the two-fold pattern of conflict which engulfed Iraqi society: that between the tribes and the cities on the one hand, and among the tribes themselves on the other. Maintaining a balance between the two main sectors was deemed by the British the best way to safeguard their interests in the country at the lowest possible cost. Hence, recognition of tribal and, above all, of Shaikhly identity and autonomy was a guiding principle behind much British-backed promulgation of laws and decrees — e.g. the Tribal Disputes Regulation first issued in 1916, and reissued in 1918 and ratified by Royal Decree in 1924. It gave the Shaikh absolute judicial authority over his tribe. In addition to that, Article 113 and 114 of the Iraqi Constitution excluded the tribal areas from the jurisdiction of national law. Furthermore, the Land Settlement Law and the Law Governing the Rights and Duties of Cultivators, passed in 1932 and 1933 respectively, were other initiatives which changed the relationship between the Shaikh and the tribesmen making the former a landlord and the latter a mere cultivator.⁴⁶ So was the 1938 Land Rights Law which, together with the 1932 Land Settlement Rights Law, formed the basis for the power of the tribal Shaikhs and facilitated the evolution of both State and tribal lands into Shaikhly property.

Yet the result was that, by 1933, the government was at the mercy of its tribes. For one thing, the latter were far stronger than the former in terms of the sheer number of personal weapons in their possession. In a memorandum, King Faisal explained how his government was militarily weak in comparison with the huge stocks of arms which were in the hands of his people. He judged there to be more than 100,000 rifles in the country at large, as against a mere 15,000 at the government's disposal. He gave as an example of what such an imbalance could mean, Shaikh Mahmud's armed clash with the government in 1931, a clash which showed how weak were the forces Faisal had available.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Baban, *From Istanbul to Baghdad*, p. 25 quoted in Batatu, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁴⁶ David Pool 'From Elite to Class, The Transformation of Iraqi Political Leadership' ed. Abbas Kelidar, *The Integration of Modern Iraq* (London, 1979) p. 81.

⁴⁷ Abd al-Razzaq al-Hasani, *Tarikh al-Wizarat al-Iraqiyya* (History of Iraqi Cabinets) Vol. III, 5th ed. (Beirut, 1978) *King Faisal's Memorandum* p. 316.

Then he concluded his memorandum by giving a detailed recommendation apropos the raising of a large and strong army designed to crush armed rebellion occurring simultaneously in two separated areas. On the question of tribalism and its effects on the stability of the country⁴⁸ Faisal stated in this memorandum:—

...the big difference among religious minorities which are instigated by corrupters and the tribal power of the Shaikhs and their fear of the Government's strength which might threaten to end this power, all of which disturbed the stability of the country.⁴⁹

But while the Iraqi monarch thus concentrated on trying to unify all his people under one law and as one nation, the tribal chiefs kept defying and evading any submission to the government's domain. In other words, the King was at once the symbol and the advocate of the integration and cohesiveness of Iraq as a nation state, whilst the tribes were the opponents of such a trend. On the other hand, the notion of 'one Iraqi people and Iraq for Iraqis' was more acceptable to those non-Arab minorities in the country than that of one Arab people which was raised by the Iraqi nationalist intelligentsia, sometimes with the support of the King himself and his ex-Sharifian officers.

Although the vast majority of the Iraqi peasants (both Arabs and Kurds) were manifestly of tribal origin, by far the greater proportion was by now settled in towns and villages. Nevertheless, the personage of the Shaikh continued to play a central role in their way of life socially, economically and, of course, politically. He was the landlord, lawgiver, arbitrator and tax collector. In him resided ultimate tribal authority.

Still, new means of communication and media had affected the tribal life, not least by subjecting it to a cash economy and a rising tide of reformist ideas. The most striking fact was that those Shaikhs who had acquired vast estates, maybe facilitated by the British authorities in Iraq, had become strong supporters of British presence during the mandate, as witness them remaining outside the Anglo-Iraqi conflict of 1920. Furthermore, they gave their support to the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930.⁵⁰

As far as British tribal policy during Faisal's era is concerned, three factors have to be taken into consideration: the King and his

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 320.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

⁵⁰ *Batatu, op. cit.*, p. 82.

army, the nationalists and the tribes. Therefore, the British High Commissioner (Ambassador from 1932 onwards) was always trying to use one factor against another for the furtherance of British interests. To select just one example, in 1922 when King Faisal had aligned himself with the nationalists against mandatory status for Iraq, the British High Commissioner incited Shaikh Addai al-Jaryan of Albu Sultan tribe in Hilla province and fifteen other Shaikhs from the Hilla river region to protest in a telegram to the High Commissioner against the King's schemes. Meanwhile, the Shaikhs of Bani Rabi'a tribe in Kut province and the Shaikh of Dulaim, Ali Sulaiman, plus forty other tribal chiefs met King Faisal and confirmed that their allegiance to him was conditional upon British guidance being accepted.⁵¹ And if a strong Shaikh, say, opposed either the King or the British High Commissioner, then force or other punitive means would be applied to teach him a lesson or, in Batatu's explicit words, 'even to bomb his villages, burn his crops and disperse his tribe'.⁵² To play off Shaikh against Shaikh was another tactic, a means of balance which the British used to consolidate their grip over the country.

Conscription was a looming issue which the British authorities in Iraq always challenged. No doubt this was partly because mass induction into a national army had been a theme on the revolutionary left ever since 1789. But it was more specifically to prevent an undermining of the notion of Shaikhs being paramount in the tribes and so keep tribalism a live theme.

Thus, consolidating the position and authority of the Shaikh, a precept denied during the Ottoman era, became an important element in British tribal policy. Correspondingly, incorporating the Shaikhs in the machinery of government was another stratagem used by the British to give the otherwise waning position of the shaikh a revived image and weight and to secure the State's control over the tribal areas. One school of thought believed this policy positively sought the creation of 'a bulwark against the urban nationalists'.⁵³ But it could be argued that its objective was simply to appease and thereby neutralize key tribal Shaikhs. Such it was, in fact, during the uprising of 1920 and again during the tribal revolts of the 1930's. Again some of these leaders — having been privileged under the British mandatory regime — had kept out of the conflict.

In the newly elected Iraqi Constituent Assembly of 1924,

⁵¹ Great Britain, (secret) *Intelligence Report* No. 9 of May, 1922, para. 263 in Batatu's *op. cit.*, p. 90.

⁵² Batatu, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

⁵³ David Pool's emphasis, see David Pool. *op. cit.*, p. 76 and Note 31.

thirty-four members out of ninety-nine were Shaikhs or Aghas.⁵⁴

It is not an overwhelming proportion. But it is significant and does owe something to the encouragement just alluded to.

Clearly, then, British tribal policy was very much in line with the underwriting of traditional local rulers that was also a theme in British imperial policy in India, Malaya, Africa and so on. But it was quite the reverse of that implemented in Iraq by the Ottomans. For they had sought to liquidate the power of the Shaikhs through the possession and control of the land. Under the *Tanzimat* reforms initiated in the years after 1839, the Ottomans were able to reassert the rights of the central government and to bring the provinces more closely under their control. The Land Law of 1858 was one of the cornerstones of the system confirming the rights of the Ottoman Government as the sole owner and lessor of all land. Only by the purchase of *Tapu Sanads* (deeds) can one acquire this kind of immovable property. Accordingly, when the British took over they legalized Shaikhly ownership of huge tracts of land held *de facto* without *Tapu Sanads*: this for any of a variety of specific reasons but basically because of a distrust of Turkish designs and an apprehension of taxation and conscription. Thus, leasing these lands to tribal shaikhs became the mechanism whereby the latter were able to retain effective control over these properties. So, under the system of land tenure promoted by the British, the Shaikh restored his position socially, politically and economically, while the peasant or tribesman became much more subordinate. As much was confirmed by the 1933 Law Governing the Rights and Duties of Cultivators No. 28 and the Tribal Disputes Regulation.⁵⁵ The advantage to the British was that such a system was quite cheap to administer, and that chieftains who were granted this kind of official recognition thereby became more dependent on the central administration.

Consequently, when armed conflict took place between Britain and Iraq in May, 1941 the tribes remained, in the main, aloof from the struggle. Thus the British failed to raise the Euphrates tribes to armed rebellion against Rashid'Ali and his allies. Most of these tribes (such as the Tigris Shaikhs of the Rabi'a tribe, the Bani Tamim and the other Amara tribes)⁵⁶ stayed out of the conflict. Meanwhile others (like Shaikh Habib al-Khaizaran of Diyala province and

⁵⁴ Batatu, *op. cit.*, p. 95 and Table 6-1 p. 103.

⁵⁵ Mudhaffar Abdullah Amin, *Jama'at al'Ahali, Its Origins, Ideology, and Role in Iraqi Politics 1932-1946* (A Ph. D. Thesis, Durham University, 1980) p. 30 and Sluglett, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

⁵⁶ FO 371/27068/E 2043, From C. -in-C. Middle East to the War Office. Most immediate D. 3.5.1941 and *Ibid.*, From War Office to C. -in-C. Middle East. 3.6.1941. Immediate and Batatu, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

Shaikh 'Abd al-Wahidal al-Haj Sikkar of al-Fatlah tribe) supported the revolt fully. They brought their tribesmen to Baghdad to join the revolt as a response to Rashid 'Ali's call to the *Jihad* in a radio broadcast station on 8th May. Then, at the very end of the revolt, the Zoba' tribe of Dulaim province deployed tactically around the Abu Ghraib Regulator (small canal) under its Shaikh Khamis al-Dhari, whose father had been condemned to death for the murder of Colonel Leachman in 1920.⁵⁷

Cautiously examining tribal attitudes in the Lower and Middle Euphrates before the outbreak of the Second World War, a British intelligence report⁵⁸ recommended the pre-emption of any 'embarassing manifestation' of the sort which might be manipulated through propoganda and bribery either by the Iraqi opposition or by foreign interests. Perforce this would involve a swift control and very firm response to any disturbance, not least to ensure the free movement of British troops inside Iraq. One truth the report stressed was that these tribes 'can still be exploited by interested political parties in the capital'. In particular, it noted that — prior to the military coup of December, 1938 — Nuri al-Sa'id had made many intimations that in return for the overthrow of the Madfa'i Government, he was prepared to make concessions to the tribes as regards the implementation of the National Service Bill and the taxation of tribal products.⁵⁹

Thus by 1933 the tribes were a leading force in the political life of the country. They were a decisive factor behind every change of government. However, the political option of deliberately inciting the tribes against the government was a new phenomenon; and one which the report saw as 'peculiar to Iraq'.⁶⁰

Yet the tribesman was stereotyped by the report as being sympathetic towards foreign overtures because he was 'conservative in outlook and ... not easily impressed by statements'. Nevertheless, the report warned against infiltration by foreign agents proffering money. For this could even induce these tribes to damage lines of communication by organizing raiding teams. It specifically accused German commercial firms of political intrigue in the tribal areas while promoting the purchase of their products of machinery and pumps.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Bataat, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-118, Air 23/5933 secret from A.O.C. Iraq to Middle East, I.C. NO. 9350, 17 May 1941 and WO 161/1224, Weekly Intelligence Summary Ending 7.6.1941.

⁵⁸ FO 37/123692/E 5963, Air Ministry, secret, 24 August 1939, to P.M. Crosthwaite F.O. enclosed with the intelligence report by Air Staff Intelligence, Iraq date 5.7.1939.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

The Social and Political Structure of Iraqi Society During the Monarchical Era - General Survey

So Iraq was still a decidedly pluralistic society in terms of classes, races and creeds. According to the 1947 census, in fact, the Muslim Arabs constituted about 71.1 per cent of the population (4,564,000) while the Muslim Kurds were about 18.4 per cent. Other non-Arab Muslims, including Persian Shi'a, Turcoman* Sunnis and Shi'a, and Faily Kurds Shi'a, between them came to 3.8 per cent. Added to which were the non-Muslim minorities: Christians*, Jews, Yazidis*, plus Shabaks*, and also the Sabaeans*. They constituted 3.1; 2.6; 0.8; and 0.2 per cent respectively.⁶²

Christians and Jews were found in almost every sizeable town (though especially in Mosul, Kirkuk, Basra and Baghdad), whereas Yazidis and Shabaks inhabited the north and north-west of Iraq. The Sabaeans settled at the southern part of the country, but especially in Amara. As regards the degree of involvement of these minorities in the army, it is fair to say that the Iraqi army was pretty solidly Islamic, though with a few Christian officers in relatively minor positions. The Jews were excluded from military service. These estimates excluded the nomadic tribesman which were reckoned at 170,000. They were mainly Sunnis located near the Saudi Arabian and Jordanian borders.

All these ethnic and sectarian groupings within the context of the country's economic and social backwardness made coherent and strong government in Iraq hard to achieve. Thus, after the end of the mandate, the Christian Assyrians waged their revolt in 1933 against the newly independent statehood which they greatly feared.

But the Kurds, who inhabited the north and north-east of Iraq, were the largest minority in the country. Their aspiration for self-determination was expressed often and through many channels. Many revolts were waged in a vain attempt to make successive governments meet their demands. The Kurds' attitude towards the British-Iraqi conflict will be discussed Chapter V.

The situation of the Jews was stable until the rise of Zionism and its claim to much of Palestine. This affected their position in Iraq,

* The Turcomans are relics of the central Asian Turcomans.

* The Christians are composed of Chaldeans, Armenians and Assyrians.

* The Yazidis are of Kurdish origin; the centre of their religion is concentrated in Shaikan near Mosul which embraces the tomb of their spiritual leader Oudai. In 1935 they rose against the government in protest against conscription.

* The Shabaks are also of Kurdish origin and Yazidi allegiance.

* The Sabaeans are a gentle community. They are a very small and compact body and consider flowing water as the life-creativity force on the earth.

⁶² Batatu, *op. cit.*, p. 40, Table 3-1.

as witness the affair of June, 1941 (See Chapter V).

The Political Parties

No political parties, in any developed sense, existed as yet. Political parties were based almost entirely on personal motives rather than motivated by ideology or programme. Nevertheless, many political groupings were in the arena during the 1920s. Among them were *al-'Ahd* (Iraqi branch) and *Haras al-Istiqlal* (Independence Guards) which had already been active under Ottoman rule.

After the establishment of the mandate there were several political parties: *al-Watani* (National) Party headed by Ja'far Abu al-Timman; *al-Nahda al-Iraqi* (Iraqi Renaissance) Party led by Amin al-Charchafchi; and *al-Hurr* (The Free) Party headed by Mahmud al-Naqib. These were the first three parties to be established, in 1922, during the monarchical era.⁶³ In 1925 another two parties were to emerge — namely, *al-Taqqadum* (Progressive) Party, led by 'Abd al-Muhsin al-Sa'dun; and *al-Sha'b* (People's) Party, led by Yasin al-Hashimi.⁶⁴

Of these parties only *al-Watani*, *al-Nahda* and *al-Sha'b* represented the opposition in the country, their main objective being the early termination of the mandate. *Al-Hurr* and *al-Taqqadum* were pro-government. They advocated co-operation with Britain, justifying this in terms of the weakness of Iraq at that time.

But most of the Iraqi people were still excluded from the political process. For though the Iraqi political system was a constitutional parliamentary régime, in reality it was in the hands of the Sharifian elite. Cabinets were formed and forced to resign by direct intervention from the King, from the Residency or through internal dispute. Parliamentary democracy was little more than a façade. About fifty families governed the destinies of Iraq. Parliament represented their interests and intense personal rivalry and mistrust among the Iraqi ruling class was the underlying cause of the recurrent change of government.

Following the conclusion of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of Alliance in 1930, Iraqi politicians polarized between pro- and anti-treaty. Nuri al-Sa'id led the former school, and Yasin al-Hashimi led the latter. In October, 1930 Nuri al-Sa'id established the *'Ahd* Party. So Yasin al-Hashimi responded by establishing *al-'Ikha al-Watani* (The National Fraternity).⁶⁵

⁶³ Al-Hasani, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, 5 ed. (Beirut, 1978) pp. 115-116.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. II pp. 24-26.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. 111 pp. 98-99.

Shortly afterwards, *al-Watani* Party led by Ja'far Abu al-Timman and *al-'Ikha al-Watani* under al-Hashimi fused their leadership. In November, 1930, they signed a common manifesto, known as the *Wathiqat al-Ta'aKhi* (Fraternity Document). This attacked the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930 and demanded its drastic amendment, together with the dissolution of Parliament.⁶⁶

But this new alliance was dissolved in 1933 soon after the establishment of the Rashid 'Ali cabinet. Rashid 'Ali himself was a member of *al-'Ikha al-Watani*. Hence his government would not commit itself to amending the 1930 Treaty. Accordingly, *al-Watani* Party under Ja'far Abu al-Timman announced its withdrawal from the alliance in protest against Rashid 'Ali's betrayal of his accord with them.⁶⁷

Then there was *Jama'at al-Ahali* (People's Group), founded in 1931. This was composed of some leftists, socialist intellectuals and educated youth. Their first newspaper, *al-Ahali*, was licenced and issued in January, 1932. Also an Iraqi Communist Party had been established secretly in 1934. Finally, *Jami'at al-Islah al-Sha'bi* (The Association of Popular Reform), led by Kamil al-Chadirchi, emerged in 1936 after the military coup led by General Bakr Sidqi. Their main goal as stated was the achievement of political, social and economic reforms in Iraq.⁶⁸

All these parties lacked a clear ideology of programme. Moreover, free elections and inter-party competition were curbed by the controlling elite. Most of their leaders were little more than spokesman for their particular tribes, religion, prominent families or military cadres. Likewise, the Iraqi Chamber of Deputies was not truly representative in that no really free elections were held. Twenty-five per cent of the Deputies in 1925 were tribal shaikhs, while landowners (Mallak) made up 57 per cent of Chamber in that year.⁶⁹ Most of the Deputies were government candidates.

No Member of Parliament, no matter what honourable services he rendered to his country, could be re-elected unless the government approved his re-election. Parliament and even the government were unable to challenge the High Commissioner's power and influence during this period.⁷⁰ On the same subject a British Intelligence Report explained:—

1. That a private intimation of the candidates preferred by the

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 100-101.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 101.

⁶⁸ Al-Hasani, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV pp. 311-312

⁶⁹ Tarbush *op. cit.*, p. 70

⁷⁰ Al-Hasani, *al-Asrar al-Khaffiya fi Harakat al-Sana 1941 al-Taharruria* (The secrets of the Liberation Movement of 1941) 3rd ed (Sidon, 1971) p. 11

Government was almost always sufficient to guarantee their return.

2. That the two political parties (the Watani and the al-l'kha al-Watani) have exercised no influence whatsoever and have not succeeded in returning their respective presidents.
3. That no candidate or party put forward any political programme. Candidates have been returned on their official backing and their individual merits and position.⁷¹

Equally remarkable was the fact that every new government used to dissolve the preceding parliament so as to bring a new one into being to ensure its own survival. Hence elections lost their value and Parliament became merely a tool of the government, a facade of a democratic institution. There was little chance of a government being pushed out of office by a vote in parliament. The only ways a government could be changed were:-

- (a) By the intervention of the King or the British Residency (Embassy from 1932 onwards).
- (b) By an effective opposition outside the government inciting public opinion or intriguing among the tribes to rise against the government until it resigns.
- (c) By a military *coup d'état*.⁷²

The first alternative seemed unlikely as King Ghazi (who succeeded his father in 1933) was young, immature and inexperienced, a circumstance which resulted in the decline of the monarchy as a political institution and so encouraged the army to interfere in politics. King Ghazi was 22 and had been a failure at Harrow. He inherited none of his father's rapport with the tribes. He was the only Hashemite ruler who seems to have been incorrigably unfriendly to the British, and of them all he was the most popular ruler with his people. He refused to accept advice from anybody, Iraqi or British, and went on his own headstrong way. The second method was out of the question as there were hardly any politicians outside the government strong enough to arouse public opinion. Under General Bakr Sidqi in 1935 - 1936 the tribes received a damaging blow from the army, a blow which effectively ended the era of Iraqi tribal revolts. The episode was significant. Yasin al-Hashimi, who, as opposition leader, had actively backed and instigated the 1934 rebellion, was called upon

⁷¹ FO 371/10833, Intelligence Report, No 12, 11th June 1925.

⁷² Air 23/5980, secret, from Combined Intelligence Centre, Iraq, Baghdad to Force H.Q., 10.7.1941
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to put this one down. He proved willing and, thanks to Sidqi, able to do so.

Consequently the government's prestige stood high and Bakr Sidqi became still more of a popular hero. This brings us to the third alternative, change by military *coup d'état*. Between 1936 and 1941 there were seven coups (including an unsuccessful one in 1940) and counter-coups staged or contemplated by army personnel.⁷³

The Expansion of the Iraqi Army and its Role in Iraqi Politics 1932-1939

It was only after independence and the termination of the mandate in 1932 that the size and shape of the Iraqi army changed because it was deemed insufficient for national needs. Recognition of Iraq's responsibility for the maintenance of its own internal security and defence against external aggression (possibility from Turkey, Persia, or Saudi Arabia) was confirmed in the new treaty signed in 1930 to supersede the treaties signed in 1922, 1926 and 1927. Nevertheless, it guaranteed the continuation of the British presence in Iraq.

As far as the military aspects of the 1930 Treaty were concerned, Britain enjoyed the right, under Article 5, to maintain her forces in two strategic bases, though no exact number was given for the aircraft in question. Various undertakings were confirmed by the Iraqi government, under Articles 4 and 7 and in the Annexure as to the facilities which Britain was to be offered for the transit of her troops, supplies and arms in peace and war.

The most ambiguous provision was, in fact, a passage in Article 4 whereby Iraq was committed to come promptly to the aid of Britain in the event of her engagement in war, by furnishing on its territories all facilities in its power. For one thing, it was not clear whether these British troops in transit across Iraq were allowed to stay an unlimited time on Iraq's soil. At all events Iraq did not enjoy the same prerogative in respect of British assistance because the British apprehended that granting this would encourage her to pursue a more aggressive policy towards her neighbours, especially Ibn Sa'ud in Arabia.⁷⁴ (This was on account of Ibn Sa'ud's continual raids on Iraq's southern boundary between 1924 and 1928.)

⁷³ Majid Khadduri 'The Army Officer: His Role in Middle Eastern Politics', *Social Forces in the Middle East*. Ed. Sydney Nettleton Fisher (New York, 1955) p. 173.

⁷⁴ FO 371/14504/2028. Telegram 21. 5.4.1930. Humphrys to Lord Passfield in Khadim Hashim Niama's Thesis, *Anglo-Iraqi Relations During the Mandate* (A Ph.D. Thesis, University of Wales, 1974) pp. 314-315.

Still, the Treaty did not specifically refer to a need for a formal declaration of war by Iraq if Britain was engaged in war with a third party. Further, Iraq was obliged, according to Article 4 of the Annexure to the Treaty (see Appendix 'A') to provide Britain with special guards (at the request and expense of the British Government) for the protection of the British bases.⁷⁵

However, this article remained no more than ink on paper as, in practice, Britain insisted on using her own soldiers for this purpose.

For its part, the British Government was to provide Iraq with up-to-date arms, a military advisory mission and facilities for the training of Iraqi army officers in Britain.⁷⁶ As seen from London, however, the Treaty had to cover two different aims. In the first place, there were commitments which were derived from Britain's obligation towards Iraq. Secondly, there was a need to secure imperial communications and economic interests, especially oil.

Moreover, seeing that the Iraqi army was to take over the responsibility for the defence of the country after the evacuation of the British garrison, the question of conscription came on the scene again. Nevertheless, voluntary enlistment looked promising through 1925. As early as 1922, indeed, a decision had been taken by the British authorities to reduce the pay of soldiers by 25 per cent in order to strike a balance in enlistment between supply and demand. Correspondingly, recruitment centres were closed down at Khadimain, Shamiya, Baghdad, 'Anah, Ramadi, Kut, Diwan-iyah, Samawa, Hindiyyah and Daltawah.⁷⁷

Then, in another step to curb the wave of recruits, the British Military Advisory Mission obtained maximum quotas of a hundred a month as from July, 1926. Thus, in comparison with the figure for 1921 which was 2809 and for 1925 which leaped to 3337, the recruit intake dropped in 1926 to 2310. Broadly speaking, the bulk of the Iraqi army, between 1930 and 1934, remained organized within two divisions. But, after the introduction of the National Service Bill, the order of battle gradually expanded.⁷⁸

The fierce political battle over conscription was, in fact, about to be won. The National Service Bill introduced by al-Askari's Government in 1927 was eventually passed in 1934. Then it was sanctioned by the King, making it operative from 12 June, 1935. The period of enlistment was 18 months with a reserve obligation

⁷⁵ CO 730/151/78025, Part 2. file X1 *New Treaty with Iraq, Future Relations with Iraq.*

⁷⁶ Appendix 'A'; Article 5 of the Annexure to the Treaty of 1930.

⁷⁷ Al-Khattab, *op. cit.* p. 103.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, p. 104 Table (c) and *Mudhakarat Taha al-Hashimi* (Beirut, 1969) p. 29.

of six weeks per annum. Due to the introduction of national service, the Iraqi army expanded from 11,500 officers and men in 1933; then to 800 officers and 19,500 men in 1936; and to 1,426 officers and 26,435 men in 1939.⁷⁹ But a population of 3.75 million (subject to both a high birth rate and a high death rate) would give a minimum intake of the order of 75,000 a year. Just over half would be females and so not liable for military service. Nevertheless, it looks as if exemption on genuine medical grounds or else through bribery and other forms of evasion meant that no more than half of the annual recruiting base was actually inducted.

Therefore, the Iraqi army was more of an elite than a conscript army may be in more advanced countries. This is likely to have increased its political consciousness.

Likewise, the Royal Iraqi Air Force — similarly bolstered by conscription — grew in 1936 to four squadrons with seventy-two aircraft.⁸⁰ The R.A.F. was no longer expected to lend tactical support to the Iraqi army simply to maintain its two bases in Iraq and the associated training programme.

As regards the involvement of the Iraqi army in politics, a combination of factors were conducive to this, especially after the death of King Faisal in 1933. They culminated in the emergence of the officer corps as a key arbiter of the political life of the country. In the nineteen-thirties the service was dominated by a large number of Pan-Arabist and anti-British young officers who opposed the terms of the 1930 Treaty. They had hoped it would put an end to the British control over the army and over its equipment and expansion programmes. Yet, in fact, the sole remaining barrier to full co-ordination between the Iraqi army and the British Military Mission was mutual suspicion.

Iraqi officers looked at the Military Mission as the major obstacle to their plan to create a modern army capable of performing its duties externally as well as internally, not just a police force founded to combat internal troubles. Thus General Ibrahim al-Rawi, the Officer Commanding the 4th Division in Diwaniya and an ex-Sharifian officer, expressed his views in his memoirs. He explains how the army at all levels resented the control of the British Military Mission over every sphere within it. No promotion or retirement nor any purchase of arms or other equipment could be decided on without the mission's prior approval.⁸¹ In this

⁷⁹ FO 371/20013/E6769/1419/93, Minutes by J.G. Ward, 30 October, 1936 and FO 371/23217/E2372/72/93, Quarterly Report No. 26 by The British Military Mission on the Iraqi Army and Royal Air Force, Feb., 1939.

⁸⁰ Al-Khattab, *op. cit.* p. 68.

⁸¹ Ibrahim al-Rawi, *Min al-Thawra al-Arabiyya ila al-Iraq al-Hadith, Dhikrayat*, (From the Arab Revolt to Modern Iraq) (Beirut, 1969) pp. 150-151 and 161-163.

connection Major John Glubb (later General Sir John Glubb) has observed during his stay in Iraq that a dislike for the Arabs had been openly voiced by some of these British Officers in the Mission.⁸² This tension between the Iraqi officers and the Mission was to escalate by the end of 1940 during Rashid'Ali's first crisis with the British Embassy. As much was confirmed by General Taha al-Hashimi, the then Defence Minister.

Moreover, this barrier of distrust and discord was made the more impenetrable by discriminatory policies adopted by the Mission. Thus the aid and patronage which the Levies were receiving from the British authorities in Iraq made the Iraqi army jealous. Initially, their pay was better, though this was equalized later. Important tasks — eg. border patrols — were given to the Levies, a practice the Iraqi army considered a further blow to its prestige. Added to that, most of British documents on the Iraqi army tended to question its combat ability and military efficiency.⁸³ This would have been partly due to the army's poor performance in 1930 and 1932, against Shaikh Mahmud and Mulla Mustafa al-Barzani respectively. However, the rising tide of nationalist feeling among Iraqi officers could be another factor which strengthened British doubts about the army's dependability in their terms.

Many politicized military cabals prepared the ground for such an outcome. Firstly there was the 'Nationalist Officers Bloc' (mentioned above), whose number increased between 1927 and 1933 especially when al-Sabbagh and Fahmi Sa'id occupied influential positions in the army as instructor officers at the Military College and at the Military Staff College. During this period they drew up their *Arab National Charter*. Their main goal was to get rid of 'all corrupt elements' in the Arab world and unify all Arab countries within an Arab union embracing politics, economics, culture and military strength. Their means to this end were to control the army, control the politics of the country at all levels and co-operate with the Kurds. Thus they believed that the Kurdish cause would not contradict the Arab cause in that they (the Kurds) were ambitious to realize their national aspirations at the expense of Persia and Turkey.⁸⁴

Secondly, there was 'the Tawfiq Husain Bloc' which was established immediately after the death of King Faisal in Septem-

⁸² FO 624/261589, secret, *A Report on the Role Played by the Arab Legion in Connection with the Recent Operation in Iraq*, 10 June, 1941, f. 13 and Taha al-Hashimi *op. cit.* p. 366.

⁸³ FO 371/20013/E 6783, from Iraq, the British Embassy to F.O. 20 December, 1936, No. 265 f. 147 in Khattab's *op. cit.* p. 141

⁸⁴ Al-Khattab, *op. cit.* pp. 146-148.

ber, 1933, being headed by Major Tawfiq Husain. He was an ex-Ottoman officer, gazetted in 1913 from the Military Academy in Constantinople and appointed as an instructor at the Iraqi Military College in 1930. He was a keen admirer of Mustafa Kamal. He kept insisting on the necessity of organizing political groupings in the Iraq army and on analysing the nature of the developments in the Arab world. He was the author of a book titled *Arab Leadership*, published in 1936. In this Husain accused King Husain of Hijaz and Ibn Sa'ud of being traitors. By 1934 Husain was able to gather into this faction a total of 70 officers. But it lacked a clear ideology and programme, which could have focused them and given them impetus. Eventually it dissolved, most of the members joining al-Sabbagh's bloc.⁸⁵

Finally, there was the 'Bakr Sidqi Bloc', which was founded in the aftermath of the Assyrian crisis in 1933, just before the death of King Faisal. This bloc will be discussed in the following section because General Sidqi staged the first military coup in Iraq in 1936.

All these groupings had the notion that the army was the symbol and protector of the people. They saw their intervention in politics as an inevitable result of the weakness and corruption of successive governments and the absence of a strong politician to lead the country. This was due to the political vacuum which was left after the death of King Faisal. He had been a great national leader and politician, his greatest political virtue having been his ability to bargain and knowing when to compromise. Notwithstanding the judgement by Tawfiq Husain quoted above, Faisal was a shrewd and wise ruler. He was able to maintain the balance between the British and the Iraqi nationalists; and also between rival factions, races and sects within Iraq itself.

Moreover, the race between rival politicians to fill that gap by resorting to illegitimate methods — namely, inciting the tribes to revolt against their government — was an important factor which was later to enhance the bitterness of the army leaders towards politicians. Thus, since the army was used to suppress these political upheavals, its prestige stood high. It had become an indispensable element in any government's strategy for continuation in office.

Lastly, the love of power and, in some cases, the sheer opportunism of army leaders in pursuit of personal ambition was another factor militating in favour of intervention. Of the former trait, the

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p. 150 Note (41) and pp. 151-152 and Mamud al-Durrah, *al-Harb al-Iraqiyya al-Britaniyya 1941* (The Iraqi-British War, 1941) (Beirut, 1969) pp. 48-49.

Chief of Staff, General Husain Fawzi, was a clear example as witness his intense rivalry with General Taha al-Hashimi, the Minister of Defence in 1940. General Sidqi was an example of the latter trait. For Sidqi had abandoned his loyalty to Prime Minister Yasin al-Hashimi in 1936 to stage a coup simply to become Chief-of-Staff.

Meanwhile, the current of political events around the world served further to heighten the political awareness of the army officers in Iraq. The rise of Fascism and Nazism in Europe, the Civil War in Spain, the reforms and modernization process of Turkey and Persia under General Kamal and Reza Shah respectively, all affected the Pan-Arab movement in the 1930's. Further, the troubles in Palestine and Syria which were to culminate in the armed revolt in Palestine in 1936-1939, had particularly important effects on the attitude of the Iraqi army and its leaders, encouraging the latter to take the reins of government. They were, of course, further encouraged by Dr Fritz Grobba, the German Ambassador. Also, when the Assyrian crisis broke out in July, 1933, the army seized the opportunity to redress the humiliation suffered at the hands of the Kurdish rebels in 1930-1931 and 1932.

The Assyrians were considered a serious threat to the integrity of the infant nation. Hence, when they waged their revolt against the 'Ikha government under Rashid 'Ali in an attempt to secure administrative autonomy⁸⁶ for their community (under the leadership of their religious and political spokesman, the Mar Shimun), they were ruthlessly crushed, during August, 1933, by the army led by General Sidqi. It is not the task of this thesis to discuss the Assyrian crisis. Nevertheless, to touch on the background to this affair is deemed necessary because it was a factor in emboldening the army's hand and giving an impetus to other punitive campaigns against tribal uprisings in the lower Euphrates valley. Britain was accused by militant Iraqi nationalists in the Press and elsewhere of being implicated. Accordingly, a wave of anti-British feeling swept the country⁸⁷ and General Sidqi emerged as a national hero.

Then, with the untimely death of King Faisal, Iraq became like a ship of state without a captain. With the accession of King Ghazi to the throne in September, 1933, the country became prey to military coups and tribal uprisings. Its stability was seriously threatened by new radical elements with their roots set deep

⁸⁶ Tarbush *op.*, p. 127.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

among the Euphrates tribes. Moreover, bitter rivalry and intrigue among the politicized elite further harmed the country. Ghazi was not able to keep the balance the way his father had done simply because he was too inexperienced and immature.⁸⁸ Therefore, when tribal revolts broke out, in 1934, 1935 and 1936, the army again became the guardian of law and order. Thus, with the atrophy of the political parties during this period, the army stepped into a vacuum.

Majid Khadduri, the Iraqi historian, observed in this respect that:—

The Iraqi system of government had certainly failed to impress the army, and the politicians had lost their prestige through their intrigues. The disillusionment of the army officers was reflected in voicing certain grievances such as that the army was excessively used to put down inspired tribal uprisings, while the politicians were to gain the fruits of victory. Why should not the army itself, it was whispered among the army officers, put an end to the quarrel and vices of the politicians and rule the country through a military dictatorship?⁸⁹

The Military Coup of 1936, the Consequent Military Interventions and the Death of King Ghazi in April, 1939

General Bakr Sidqi, acting in collusion with Hikmat Sulaiman and the *al-Ahali* group, organized that first military intervention in politics in October, 1936. But there was no connection between his coup and the anti-British feeling in Iraq resulting from events in Palestine. As already explained, Bakr was admired by his followers as an able and fearless officer. Bakr had further strengthened his popularity within the army itself by aligning with the *al-Ahali* group to which Hikmat Sulaiman belonged, having abandoned the *'Ikha* Party. Hikmat became the opponent of Yasin al-Hashimi's government and party, as a result of their personal rivalry and the consequent failure of the latter to offer him the interior portfolio.

So then Hikmat led a campaign of opposition. He submitted petitions to King Ghazi protesting against Yasin al-Hashimi's repressive measures and asking the King to dismiss his government. Bakr shared his animosity to the Yasin al-Hashimi régime, for a variety of reasons. It seems, too, that both Hikmat and Bakr were well aware that the King was smarting under al-Hashimi's

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁸⁹ Majid Khadduri, *Independent Iraq*, 2nd ed. (London, 1960) pp. 77-78.

control of his private life and was eager to get rid of him. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss in detail the military coup of 1936. Suffice it to note that it was a setback to Pan-Arabism. Its military leaders had been trained in Turkish and German academies while Hikmat had completed his legal training in a Turkish law school. Moreover, Hikmat and Bakr were of Turkish and Kurdish family backgrounds respectively. The main motives behind it appear to have the following:—

- a) The failure of the British Government to fulfil her pledge under the 1930 Treaty, as regards supplying the Iraqi army with arms.
- b) The exceptional tyranny and corruption of the Hashimi Government.
- c) General Bakr was probably seeking to emulate Mustafa Kamal. Always he looked towards Turkey for inspiration.

Hence the coup was heralded in Iraqi political circles as a radical change in political style and approach. But thenceforward military coups became a dominant phenomenon in the political life of the country. The absence on a state visit to Turkey of the Chief-of-Staff, General Taha al-Hashimi (the Prime Minister's brother) had left General Bakr, then the Officer Commanding the 2nd Division in Kirkuk, as the Acting Chief-of-Staff, for he had higher seniority than the other Generals. So he swiftly enlisted the support of General 'Abd al-Latif Nuri, the Officer Commanding the 1st Division in Diyala (and a member of the Ahali Group) and also of Lieutenant-Colonel Muhammad Ali Jawad, the Officer Commanding the Royal Iraqi Air Force, for a strike against the government.

The subsequent coup cost the life of one veteran Sharifian soldier, General Ja'far al-Askari. He was shot, on Bakr's orders, when he tried to bring about a compromise between Bakr and Yasin al-Hashimi. Ja'far was the Minister of Defence in the Hashimi Government. He had been a prominent figure of the Arab renaissance before 1918. Ja'far had later played a major role in the creation and expansion of the Iraqi army. He had served under King Faisal in the Arab revolt and, indeed, had been one of its pioneers.

Following Yasin al-Hashimi's resignation, Bakr became the Chief-of-Staff, while his ally Hikmat became Prime Minister. Four other members of the socialistic *al-Ahali* Group were appointed ministers but later resigned in protest against Bakr's policies.

Further, all Bakr's nationalist rivals fled the country to avoid liquidation by him.¹⁰⁷ Yasin al-Hashimi, Rashid 'Ali al-Gailani, Nuri al-Sa'id and Jamil al-Madfa'i were among those who thus escaped.

As far as King Ghazi's reaction to Bakr Sidqi's coup was concerned, no evidence yet proved his involvement. It was true that the private life of the King was under considerable strain because Yasin al-Hashimi had become a self-appointed counsellor on such matters. But Ghazi was a playboy, a young man of twenty-five whose main hobbies were motor-car racing, flying, broadcasting and the cinema. One singular fact was that one of his sisters had eloped with a Greek servant when on holiday abroad and then married him. This brought disgrace on the Royal Family and hence to the Hashimi Government. Against this background the British Foreign Office minuted:—

Incidentally, it is possible that the Iraqi King was privy to the *Coup*: he has been smarting under Yasin Pasha's control of his private life and has always been very 'thick' with the Iraqi army.¹⁰⁸

In another minute, the British Government was advised to be careful in dealing with the new régime until it showed its true leanings.¹⁰⁹ Meanwhile, Yasin al-Hashimi had confirmed that he had been warned by General Bakr, following the outbreak of the plot, that 'the movement had the knowledge and approval of the King'. However, King Ghazi had immediately denied that.¹¹⁰

As regards Britain's reaction to the coup, it seems to have come as a complete surprise to her. This Heino Kopietz attributes to the:—

frequency of staff changes, and the little interest many, if not most, British diplomats had in Iraq.¹¹¹

This interpretation is, of course, somewhat incompatible with the notion of tight British functional control over Iraq. Still, another school of thought believes that some members of the British Military Mission in Baghdad had expected General Bakr's

¹⁰⁷ Al-Hasani, *op. cit.* Vol. IV 5th ed. (Beirut, 1978) pp. 256-258 and Tarbush, *op. cit.* p. 222.

¹⁰⁸ FO 371/2001366784, *Iraqi Coup d'état*, Minute by J.W. Ward, 29 October, 1936.

¹⁰⁹ FO 371/200131E67971419193, *Iraqi Coup d'état*, Minutes by J.W. Ward, 30 October, 1936, f. 155.

¹¹⁰ Khadduri, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

¹¹¹ Heino Kopietz, 'The Use of German and British Archives in the Study of the Middle East: The Iraqi Coup D'état of 1936'. *The Integration of Modern Iraq*, edited by Abbas Kelidar (London, 1979) p. 55 and FO 371/19994/E7600 f. 131 Ext. from Cabinet Conclusion 63 (36) 4th November 1936.

coup ever since he had changed the positions of the commanding officers of his battalions during military manoeuvres in Qaraghan barracks which had been attended by the British Mission.¹¹² In Fleet Street *The Daily Herald* was the only newspaper which referred to the possibility of German and/or Italian involvement in the coup. Officially, Anthony Eden confirmed that he had no such information.¹¹³

Finally, General Bakr was shot in Mosul on 11 August, 1937, together with the Officer Commanding the Royal Iraqi Air Force, when on his way to Turkey to attend army manoeuvres. His assassination was the prime outcome of a counter-nationalistic military coup brought off by the other major bloc, that is, the Nationalist Officers Bloc, which then became the real power in the country. This bloc was led and influenced then by seven leading officers: Generals Husain Fawzi and Amin al-'Umari; Colonels 'Azis Yamulki, Salah al-'Din al-Sabbagh, Kamil Shabib, Fahmi Sa'id and Mahmud Salman. Then, on the removal of the first three, as a result of the abortive coup of February, 1940, the four remaining Colonels became known as the 'Golden Square'— a British-inspired label.

The rift between Bakr and this bloc had been sharpened by Bakr's anti-popular attitude and his enmity towards Pan-Arabism (presumably on account of his Kurdish origins) and his plans to purge all Pan-Arabist officers in the army.¹¹⁴ In the reaction against this prospect, the membership of the nationalist bloc effectively doubled. Bakr's assassination was instigated by this officers' movement, some of whom were in Mosul Garrison, under the directives of Colonel Fahmi Sa'id (now serving in Mosul) and on the orders of Colonel al'Sabbagh.¹¹⁵ Then, when Hikmat ordered the arrest of the actual assassins, the Officer Commanding the Mosul Garrison, General Amin al-'Umari, defiantly refused to carry out these orders. Instead he proclaimed a mutiny against Hikmat's Government. Realizing the strength of the opposition, and robbed of the support of General Bakr on whom he had relied so much of late, Hikmat resigned.

Consequently, a new government was formed under Jamil al' Madfa'i, duly returning from exile. General Husain Fawzi became the Chief-of-Staff. However, al'Madfa'i was appointed by the

¹¹² Al-Khattab, *op. cit.*, pp. 169-170.

¹¹³ FO 371/20013/E6940, Minutes by J. W. Ward, 6th November, 1936.

¹¹⁴ Al-Hasani, *op. cit.*, Vol IV 5th ed. (Beirut, 1978) pp. 332-365 and Fadhil al-Barrak. *Dawr al-Jaish al-Iraqi fi al-Difa' al-Watani wa al-Harb Ma'a Baritaniyya Sanat 1941*. (The Role of the Iraqi Army in the Government of National Defence and the War with Britain in 1941) (A published Ph.D. Thesis, Institute of Arabic Studies, Moscow) (Baghdad, 1979) p. 163.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 163-164.

King on the recommendation of the nationalist officers after undertaking to fulfil all the army's demands and serve the Pan-Arab cause.¹¹⁶ These promises were:-

- (a) To support the nationalist officers who had the real power in their hand.
- (b) To cease the negotiations which had been going on since Bakr's time with Persia regarding the borders dispute, including the Shatt al-Arab river.
- (c) To curb Zionist propaganda and activities in Iraq which was aggravated by troubles in Palestine.¹¹⁷

However, al'Madfa'i was in favour of pursuing a policy of 'forgive and forget' which he thought would satisfy all factions and classes, ignoring all the pledges he had made to the nationalist officers who put him in power. Thus al'Madfa'i was bent on undermining those officers to keep them out of the political arena.

The other factor exacerbating the rift between him and the 'Nationalist Bloc' was the appointment of an ex-army officer from outside the bloc, Colonel Sabih Najib, as the Minister of Defence. This post had previously been reserved by the Prime Minister for himself. The reaction was bitter. For this appointment was, in their eyes, an insult, seeing that they were all senior to the new Minister in rank. And what of their ally, General Taha al-Hashimi, who was kept out of al'Madfa'i's government?

Colonel Najib closely followed Sidqi's policy of counterbalancing the nationalist officers. He established a counter-group who believed in the slogan of 'Iraq for the Iraqis'. This further angered the bloc, believing as it did in Pan-Arabism, with Iraq as its birth-place.

However, it was the cessation of arms supply and financial aid to the Palestine revolt which had the most damaging effect on al-Madfa'i's standing. Resentment ran high within the army where a 'wind of change' was now rising. Added to that, under a treaty signed with Persia on 4 July, 1937, part of the Shatt al-Arab was lost. Demonstrations broke out in Baghdad when al-Madfa'i's Government ratified the treaty.¹¹⁸

All these developments weakened al-Madfa'i's position and led to another military coup in December, 1938. Keypoints were

¹¹⁶ Salah al-Din al-Sabbagh, *Fursan al-Uruba fi al-Iraq* (Knights of Pan-Arabism in Iraq) (Damascus, 1956) p. 53.

¹¹⁷ al-Hasani, *Tarikh al-Wizarat al-Iraqiyya* (History of Iraq Cabinets) Vol. V 3rd ed. (Sidon, 1966) p.

¹¹⁸ Longrigg, *op. cit.*, p. 272.

occupied in Baghdad on the orders of the 'Golden Square' and a new government under Nuri al-Sa'id, who had aligned himself with the four Colonels, was formed. This was due to Taha al-Hashimi's refusal to form a government as he preferred to be Minister of Defence rather than Prime Minister. Rashid 'Ali became Chamberlain of the Royal Office. The reason for Nuri al-Sa'id's alignment with the 'Golden Square' was his dislike for al-Madfa'i who had kept him out of office and who was against Nuri's vengeful attitude to Sidqi's followers. During al-Madfa'i's premiership, Nuri had lived in Egypt. He returned to Baghdad on 25 October, 1937, following a contact his son had made with the four Colonels. The 'Golden Square', Taha al-Hashimi, Rustam Haydar and Nuri al-Sa'id agreed that the formation and dismissal of cabinets and the nomination of Prime Ministers should be approved by the army. Thus, the army was to fill the political vacuum left by the death of King Faisal and hence became the dominant element in the country.¹¹⁹

For Nuri al-Sa'id, the 'Golden Square' had represented the only avenue through which he could hope to return to power, after his resignation as Prime Minister back in 1932. His hostility to the Sidqi faction, some of whom were still in power, induced al-Sabbagh to bring Nuri to his side to form a strong front against Bakr Sidqi's erstwhile followers.

In Nuri's term of office, the year 1939 was an exceptionally eventful year. Conditions in Palestine were continually deteriorating. It was the year of the Palestine Conference (The Round Table Conference), also of the death of King Ghazi and the outbreak of the Second World War. As regards the first-mentioned event, Nuri al-Sa'id represented the country during the early sessions. It had become evident during the 1930s that the Palestine mandate was not viable. The Jews were not content to remain a minority within Palestine and the Arabs refused to concede them more. British foreign policy in Palestine reached an impasse, reflected in vacillation.

Since 1933 or thereabouts, the problem had been aggravated by two external factors. First, the rise of Arab nationalism in neighbouring countries on account of the failure of the mandatory powers, particularly in Palestine and Syria, to fulfil the obligations imposed by the mandate. In his speech in London Nuri al-Sa'id referred to Article 2 of the Mandate which anticipated the development of self-governing institutions which had never, in

¹¹⁹ Al-Sabbagh, *op. cit.*, p. 76 and p. 133.

fact, come into being.¹²⁰ Secondly, the persecution of Jews in Germany and elsewhere in Europe had increased Jewish pressure for sanctuary, as witness the British Government's doubling of the immigration rate.

On 1 March, 1939, following Nuri's return from the Palestine Conference, an army plot was discovered, so Nuri al-Sa'id alleged, to dethrone King Ghazi and put Prince Abd al'Ilah in his place. In the court the Prince denied having had any links with the plotters. Nuri informed the King and the British Ambassador, Sir Mauric Peterson, that fifteen officers had been involved with the ex-Prime Minister, Hikmat Sulaiman. The latter was arrested with these officers, described as 'Bakr Sidqi's gangsters' in Peterson's telegram to the Foreign Office.¹²¹ Sir Maurice Peterson expressed, in this telegram, his anxiety about Hikmat's arrest.

In Iraq the plot was widely seen as a fabrication by Nuri in order to avenge for Ja'far al-Askari's assassination (his brother-in-law) by the Hikmat and Bakr entourage. Hikmat was condemned to death, through his sentence was commuted to five years' imprisonment after pressure from the British Ambassador and certain Iraqi politicians. Another eight defendants were found guilty and seven of them were sentenced to death, six of them being army officers. All the death sentences were later commuted to long-term imprisonment.

The next shock was the death of King Ghazi in a motor crash at 11.30 pm on the night of 3 April. His death was announced on the 4th, it being said to have resulted from a severe fracture of his skull.

The King's death aroused bitter feeling in the country. For he had come to be seen by his people as a nationalist hero in the light of his suppression of the Assyrian revolt in his father's absence, his claim on Kuwait and his support for the Palestine revolt. Accordingly, the Germans took this opportunity to promote anti-British feeling and this resulted in the British Consul at Mosul being murdered by mobs. Dr Grobba duly denounced British allegations of direct German involvement in this affair.¹²²

Still, one result was the deportation of the German archaeologist, Dr Julius Jordan, from Iraq.¹²³ Nevertheless, German propa-

¹²⁰ Nuri al-Sa'id, Speech by Nuri al-Sa'id at the Palestine Conference in London on 13 February, 1939, *Arab Independence and Unity* (Baghdad, Government Press, 1943.) pp. 50-51, 55-58.

¹²¹ FO 371/23200/E 1640/E 1742, Telegram No. 59 from Sir Maurice Peterson (Baghdad) to F.O. 1st March, 1939.

¹²² Fritz Grobba, *Rijal wa Marakiz Quwa' fi al-Sharq* (Men and Power Centres in the East) (Baghdad, 1979) p. 312, Translated from German into Arabic by Farouk al-Hariri.

¹²³ Unpublished German Foreign Ministry records deposited at The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London; Serial Number 59, Frame Number 39622. Hereafter cited as GFM, followed by the Serial and Frame Number.

ganda continued strongly to influence Iraqi public opinion. Grobba and his wife played a major role in spreading this propaganda throughout the country, using all political and social contacts to influence the people.

Dr Grobba's first priority was to get Nuri al-Sa'id removed from power because he was so pro-British. Prince Abd al-'Ilah was the son of King Ali of the Hijaz, King Faisal's brother. King Ali had succeeded his father, the Sharif Husain, in 1924 and then was ejected from the Hijaz with the whole Hashemite House by Ibn Sa'ud in 1925. So he had come to live with his brother Faisal in Iraq. Under pressure from the British and Ibn Sa'ud, Sharif Husain abdicated in 1924 in favour of his son, King Ali, and went to exile in Cyprus until 1930. He then settled in Transjordan with his son Prince Abdullah where he died the following year. Abd al-'Ilah became the Regent in accordance with the testimony of Queen Aliya (the King's widow) and Princess Rajha (daughter of King Faisal) that 'King Ghazi had often said that, in the event of his death before Faisal II came of age, he wished Abd al-'Ilah to be the Regent'. This was accepted by the Cabinet and Abd al-'Ilah was duly appointed.¹²⁴

In some circles it had been rumoured that Prince Zaid (brother of King Faisal I) might become the Regent. Indeed, some politicians — for instance, ex-Premiers Ali Jawdat and Jamil al-Madfa'i — supported his claims, as being more mature and experienced. But Prime Minister Nuri al-Sa'id was against these aspirations. He considered Zaid to be most unsuitable on account of his wife, who seemed to completely dominate him and because he had pro-German inclinations.¹²⁵ Furthermore, Colonel al-Sabbagh states in his memoirs that he and his army officers were supporting Abd al-'Ilah and claims that 'the army was the firm hand which resolved that complication'.¹²⁶

In his confidential despatch to the Foreign Office Sir Basil Newton (who replaced Sir Maurice Peterson in March, 1939) expressed his views regarding the King and the new Regent. One extract from his rather long report is as follows:-

While this tragedy, with the crown passed to a small boy of four, was a great test for the young kingdom of Iraq, and even now renders the future somewhat uncertain, it cannot be denied that it removed a ruler who was not

¹²⁴ Sir Harry C. Sinderson Pasha, *Ten Thousand and One Nights* (London, 1973) p. 171.

¹²⁵ FO 371/23021/E2606 Telegram No. 132, From Houston-Boswall (Baghdad) to F.O. 6th April 1939.

¹²⁶ Al-Sabbagh, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

calculated to lead the country to great heights. King Ghazi was not anti-British; indeed, he co-operated on the whole well with His Majesty's Government and their representatives. Although only a few months before his death his vanity led into espousing, on his private wireless, the 'cause' of certain 'liberal Arab elements' in Kuwait who were being 'ground down' by a reactionary shaikh behind whom, of course, stood His Majesty's Government. But he had neither the application nor the stability of character to make him a fitting ruler of so politically-minded a people as the Arabs of Iraq.

Happily, the appointment as Regent of his cousin, the Emir Abd al-'Ilah, a more serious member of the Hashemite family, has encouraged the hope that Iraq will transverse the minority of King Faisal II without injury and perhaps even with profit.¹²⁷

But what of the backlash against the British and pro-British politicians? *The Arab Unity Youth Society* in Baghdad circulated a pamphlet calling on Arabs to rebel and avenge the death of their King. They put the blame on the British, who, in their eyes, had conspired with Nuri al-Sa'id, 'the advocate of British rule in Iraq who worked to give a footing for that rule and his right-hand man, Rashid 'Ali al-Gailani, also an advocate of imperialism.'¹²⁸ Surprisingly enough, despite all these suspicions there is no serious evidence within the British archives to prove that the crash was anything other than an accident. But my judgement would be that the particulars of the crash were such as inevitably to arouse suspicion.

Moreover, both Naji Shawkat (an ex-Prime Minister) and Rashid 'Ali were of the opinion that King Ghazi's death might well have been arranged by 'Nuri al-Sa'id and Abd al-'Ilah and the British Embassy' when the King became too much involved in radical politics, through, as already mentioned, his claim on Kuwait and his support of the Palestine revolt; and also through a propaganda campaign against the British by his radio station at his al-Zuhur Palace.¹²⁹ To which one might add that Sir Maurice Peterson gave his opinion of King Ghazi, before his departure from Iraq in March, 1939:-

¹²⁷ FO 371/24559/E500/93, No. 31 from Sir Basil Newton, Iraq to F.O. 5th February, 1940.

¹²⁸ FO 371/23201, f. 156.

¹²⁹ Naji Shawkat, *Sira wa Dhikrayat Thamanin Amma, 1894-1974* (The Story and Memoirs of Eighty Years, 1894-1974) (Baghdad, 1977) pp. 357-358 and Rashid 'Ali's Memoirs in *Majalat Akher Sa'a* (Cairo 20th February, 1957).

... That King Ghazi must either be controlled or deposed had become obvious and I hinted as much in a farewell visit which I paid to the Emir Abd al'Ilah, the present Regent. The solution, had I but known it, lay only a short month ahead.¹³⁰

Following the King's death, Nuri's Government resigned but the Regent ordered him to reform his cabinet on 5th April, 1939. This turned out to involve the return of just the same cabinet members and programme as before. Meanwhile, however, new parliamentary elections were arranged.

Nuri al-Sa'id's Government and the War

Above all, the international situation, from the Munich Agreement to the outbreak of war, badly compromised Nuri's Government and the political stability of the country. Opinion was divided as to the attitude of the Arabs should their countries be drawn into the war. The fall of France was bound to strengthen the nationalist camp and further deepened the rift between those who advocated alliance with Britain and those who preferred to side with Germany in an attempt to achieve independence. The Arab nationalists perceived that the conflict in Europe would offer them an opportune time to put their demands and then compromise with their masters.

Nuri's declared policy was to align with Britain and with neighbouring Arab countries and to foster friendship with Turkey and Persia, the two signatory countries to the Sa'ad Abad Pact of 1937. Nuri's policy, therefore, aroused the criticism of the Arabs.¹³¹ Moreover, when the Second World War broke out, without consulting his colleagues or, more importantly, the 'Seven' — Generals Husain Fawzi and Amin al-Umari and Colonels Salah al-Din al-Sabbagh, Mahmud Salman, Kamil Shabib, Fahmi Sa'id and Aziz Yamulki — he severed Iraq's diplomatic relations with Germany, even before South Africa and Canada (two member countries of the Commonwealth).¹³² Nuri also informed the British Ambassador, Sir Basil Newton, of his intention to declare war on Germany.¹³³ He believed that this was in fulfilment of Iraq's obligations under the treaty of 1930. The Pan-Arab group (including the Mufti of Jerusalem Amin al-Husaini, who arrived in Baghdad in October, 1939, Rashid 'Ali and the 'Seven' officers)

¹³⁰ Sir Maurice Peterson, *Both Sides of the Curtain* (London, 1950) p 151.

¹³¹ Khadduri *op. cit.* p. 144.

¹³² Tarbush, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

¹³³ Al-Durrah *op. cit.* 106.

were against Nuri's pro-British policies. They wanted to extort concessions from Palestine and Syria in return for Iraq's full fulfilment of her treaty obligations.

Finally on 5 September Iraq broke off diplomatic relations with Germany. I believe that the Cabinet's decision not to declare war on Germany as Nuri wished to do was subtly affected by the examples of Egypt and Turkey, neither of which had entered into a state of war with Germany.

Moreover, the arrival of the Mufti in Baghdad together with a number of Palestinian and Syrian exiles (300-400) had opened a new chapter in the development of the Pan-Arab movement in Iraq. He was *persona non grata* with the British authorities, having been considered the arch instigator of the Palestine armed revolt of 1936-39. His presence in Iraq was the most persistent irritant of all as far as the British were concerned. With the settlement of the Mufti in Baghdad a new element of strength was added to the Arab nationalist movement in Iraq with the Mufti as effectively its director. Thus the Mufti and other Palestinians and Syrian exiles were considered an added force to the opponents of Nuri al-Sa'id's pro-British policy.

Nuri's position was further weakened by the assassination of his Minister of Finance, Rustam Haydar.¹³⁴ He used this opportunity to clamp down on some of his opponents. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine in detail the Rustam Haydar affair which has already been dealt with by Khadduri and Tarbush and many other sources.

Realizing the weaknesses of his position and the strength of his opponents (on the army's side from the 'Seven' and on the political side from Rashid 'Ali and the Mufti) and the unpopularity of his pro-British policies, Nuri al-Sa'id began to toy with the idea of resigning and replacing his government by one headed by Rashid 'Ali, the Chamberlain of the Royal Diwan. Nuri and General Taha al-Hashimi were to serve as Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Defence respectively.

Nuri al-Sa'id tendered his resignation on 18 February, 1940, and it was accepted by the Regent Abd al-Ilah. But subsequent developments, coupled with the rising power of the 'Four' Colonels (the most politically active amongst the Seven) al'Sabbagh, Shabib, Salman and Sa'id, deterred his successor, Rashid 'Ali, from forming a new government. The crisis which ensued as a result of the split among the army (including the Chief of Staff

¹³⁴ Haydar was regarded as an upholder of pro-British policy; for more detail see Khadduri, *op. cit.* p. 151 (footnote 1).

Husain Fawzi) on the question of the inclusion of Nuri and Taha in Rashid's Government, further complicated the situation.

As a result of the rivalry between the Chief-of-Staff and the Minister of Defence, General Taha al'Hashimi (the 'Four' Colonels were in this case on Taha's side), a new development took place. General Fawzi, with the support of General Amin al-'Umari (the Officer Commanding the 1st Division in Baghdad) and some other officers, advised the Regent to exclude Nuri and Taha from Rashid's Government. They believed that this should be done in order to keep the army out of politics. But this can hardly be said of General Taha whose main interest was military affairs, though he was closely associated with Nuri al-Sa'id.

Realizing that the majority of the army officers were with Nuri and Taha, especially the 'Four', the Regent ruled out the General Fawzi's advice and released him on pension with his supporters. Thus Nuri succeeded in breaking up the solidarity of the 'Seven' and the whole affair played into his hands.

Moreover, an attempt at a military coup led by General al-'Umari on 20-21 February was foiled by the 'Four'. The army remained loyal to the Regent and its leaders throughout the country had confirmed their allegiance to Abd al-'Ilah. Then, utterly unable to find a new Prime Minister (after Rashid 'Ali and the President of the Senate, Muhammad al-Sadr, had declined to do so) the Regent asked Nuri al-Sa'id to stay in office for another term. He accepted.¹³⁵

On many occasions Nuri was more than willing to relinquish his premiership owing to his failure to achieve his objectives and to contain the 'Four'. Nuri was willing to resign and serve as the Minister for Foreign Affairs under Rashid 'Ali. Undoubtedly, this was to ensure a continuation of his policy, pursued in wartime on pro-British lines. He believed that his inclusion in Rashid 'Ali's Government would give him a better chance of receiving the endorsement of the army leaders.¹³⁶

Rashid 'Ali's Government

Subsequently and after much reluctance, Rashid 'Ali was persuaded by the Mufti to form a government. To my mind, this move was urged on Nuri al-Sa'id by the British Ambassador who had seen Rashid 'Ali as the stabilising factor who could succeed in curbing the influence of the 'Four' and the radical nationalists associated with them. It was a move similar to that applied in Egypt

¹³⁵ Al-Durrah, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-112.

¹³⁶ Al-Sabbagh, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

when Sir Miles Lampson, the British Ambassador in Cairo, forced King Faruk, in February, 1942, virtually at gun point, to accept the appointment of Nahas Pasha as the new Prime Minister. This was to appease the Egyptian nationalists in order to secure stability inside the country at a time when preparations for the decisive battle of al-Alamain were under way.

Rashid 'Ali's government was the first constitutional and all-party government since the military *coup d'état* of 1936, having been formed without any military pressures.¹³⁷ But my belief is that the inclusion of Nuri al-Sa'id in Rashid 'Ali's Government was a big mistake on the latter's part. For, through his post as the Foreign Minister, Nuri became aware of all the Prime Minister's moves on the international scene. Thus Rashid 'Ali's position was seriously affected and weakened when he was trying to compromise with the two adversary powers (Britain and Germany) in the summer of 1940.

Rashid 'Ali's brief term of office (31 March, 1940 - 31 January, 1941) was overwhelmed by his dispute with the British Embassy and the Regent over the question of severing Iraq's diplomatic relations with Italy after her entry into the war in June, 1940 on Germany's side. With Syria and Palestine in turmoil and under foreign control, Rashid 'Ali and the four Colonels, together with the Mufti, were anxious to follow a Pan-Arab policy and make Britain satisfy the aspirations of the Arabs of Palestine and Syria before they could commit themselves fully to her side. But, with Winston Churchill's formation of the Coalition Government in May, 1940, the British view overtly became that all these matters should be shelved until after the end of the war.

Moreover, the German victories coupled with the failure of the British Government to understand Arab viewpoints on many issues gave rise to neutralist tendencies in Iraq. This was backed up by radical nationalists and, in fact, by the bulk of Iraqi politicians. Undoubtedly advocacy of neutrality could rest on the argument: if Britain wins Iraq shall be safe anyway. If the Nazis were going to win, Iraq's only hope was to do nothing to offend them now. Therefore, so long as the issue was undecided, the Axis had the benefit of the doubt.

Granted, these several factors encouraged Rashid 'Ali and his Pan-Arabists to follow his non-aligned approach. Moreover, the failure of British foreign policy in Palestine and its insistence on a non-conciliatory position in regard to the Palestine problem was one of the elements exploited by the Germans to win over the

¹³⁷ S.H. Longrigg, *Iraq, 1900 - 1950* (London, 1956) p. 282.

Arab world to their Nazi cause. German propoganda made the Arabs believe that in the event of their victory, Germany would support them to achieve their independence. As much was vaguely intimated by the Italo-German declaration on 23 October, 1940. It simply expressed sympathy with the aspirations of the Arab people. In the meantime, the 'Four' were themselves in touch with the Axis powers through the Italian and Japanese Ministers in Baghdad.¹³⁸ Nationalism was now tinged with militarism.

Meanwhile, with the rise of such neutral trends and the disregard of the letter and spirit of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930 by Rashid 'Ali's Government, Britain began to reconsider a tougher line in dealing with Iraq in order to secure British interests and block any German designs there. Two alternatives were considered: direct military intervention or to have the British Ambassador exert his influence, through the Regent and Nuri al-Sai'id, to remove Rashid 'Ali. A new government would be formed which would accede to Britain's demands,¹³⁹ not least to grant her the military facilities agreed upon in the Treaty of 1930.

Consequently, and according to Eden's memoirs, the immediate need of the Sudan for some British reinforcements, in the light of the Italian invasion of British Somaliland, made the dispatch of a brigade to Iraq unfeasible. The War Office ceased preparing for intervention in Iraq. London decided it had to rely only on diplomatic and economic pressure.¹⁴⁰

Undoubtedly the postponement of dispatching these troops to Iraq was definitely in response to the advice given by the British Ambassador in Baghdad, Sir Basil Newton. He thought that the presence of these troops would be unwelcome, owing to the strong anti-British feeling in Iraq at that time.¹⁴¹

Over the next two months the British Ambassador continually pressed for the removal of the Italian Legation from Baghdad. Though this pressure became more forceful and direct, Rashid 'Ali refused to yield. With British pressures exerted upon him, the Regent demanded Rashid 'Ali's resignation. Thus the breach between the throne and the government deepened. Rashid 'Ali's government managed to stay in office until the end of the

¹³⁸ Al-Sabbagh, *op. cit.*, p. 143, for a further account of Iraq's contacts with the Axis and Naji Shawkat's and 'Uthman Kamal Haddad's trips to Berlin and Rome, see Naji Shawkat, *op. cit.*, pp. 402-410, and 'Uthman Kamal Haddad, *Harakat Rashid 'Ali al-Gailani, 1941*, (Rashid 'Ali's Movement, 1941) (Sidon, 1950).

¹³⁹ Tarbush, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

¹⁴⁰ Anthony Eden, *Memoirs: The Reckoning*, (London, 1965) p. 242

¹⁴¹ *Air 8/549*, Iraq, Notes on the Changes in the Situation in Iraq and the Consequent decision taken by the War Cabinet, Defence Committee and the Chiefs of Staff, 9 October 1940-6 May 1941.

month during which a number of resignations were tendered by most members of the Cabinet late in January, 1941. They feared that the escalation of the dispute between Rashid 'Ali and the Regent, backed by the British Embassy, might end in civil war. They wanted to release themselves beforehand and also to force Rashid 'Ali to resign.

Finally Rashid 'Ali resigned his office when the Regent left the capital and went to Diwaniya to escape pressure from Rashid 'Ali and the 'Four' colonels to dissolve parliament.¹⁴²

Taha al-Hashimi's Government, February - April, 1941

Now the Regent sent for Taha al-Hashimi to form a new government on the understanding that he would improve Iraqi relations with Britain and make a determined effort to control the colonels. During the last two years here being considered — mid-1939 to mid-1941 — al-Hashimi was the most important military and political figure in Iraq. It will be remembered that al-Hashimi had been the army's Chief-of-Staff for the last seven years preceding the Sidqi coup.

Among the sensational political events which took place during al-Hashimi's premiership was the meeting between (a) the Minister for Foreign Affairs Tawfiq al-Suwaidi (a politician well-known for his anglophile views, whose inclusion in al-Hashimi's Government was seen as a gesture to the British) and (b) the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden — this taking place in Cairo in March, 1941. According to his memoirs, al-Suwaidi explained to Eden the reasons for the growth of anti-British feeling in Iraq, not least the part Axis propaganda was playing. Al-Suwaidi suggested the release of new arms to the Iraqi army, the cost of these being met by long-term instalments; the training of Iraqi officers at British military institutions; the granting to Iraq of financial loans, and, in general the adoption of a steady and more friendly policy towards Iraq. All this would, al-Suwaidi averred, ease public resentment of Britain.¹⁴³

In his reply Eden observed that 'Anglo-Iraqi relations were far from satisfactory'. He criticized the Iraqi government for not carrying out their obligations under Article 4 of the treaty in the letter and spirit and said they were 'not behaving like loyal allies such as Egypt, Turkey and Greece'. Eden pointed out that it was impossible for him to ask the British Government to provide

¹⁴² For more details on Rashid 'Ali's ministerial crisis see Khadduri, *op. cit.*, and Tarbush *op. cit.*

¹⁴³ Tawfiq al-Suwaidi, *Mudhakarat, Nisf Qarn min Tarikh al-Iraq wa al-Qadha al-Arabiyya* (My Memoirs, Half a Century of the History of Iraq and the Arab Cause) (Beirut, 1969) pp. 336-338.

dollars and other Iraqi requirements so long as the Iraqi Government harboured, as he put it, 'this Italian centre of intrigue'. Al-Suwaidi replied that the rupture of diplomatic relations with Italy was a most sensitive and difficult issue in need of careful preparation, especially in view of the army's attitude to a break with Italy at Britain's request.¹⁴⁴ Al-Suwaidi added that it was difficult to secure the army's collaboration in this regard until the question of arms supplies to Iraq was resolved. It seems that al-Suwaidi was pretty sure that he could not do anything to improve the situation unless the British took the lead and made a gesture. It seems, too, that al-Hashimi had come to the conclusion that the continuation of Iraq's diplomatic relations with Italy had become a 'bone of contention' out of all proportion to its intrinsic importance. Thus it had become a major obstacle to resolving Iraq's immediate problems — namely, rearmament, and the restoration of the normal convertibility to dollars etc, of Iraq's sterling assets.

According to his memoirs, al-Hashimi now began preparing to sever Iraq's diplomatic relations with Italy in pursuit of the national interest, thus abandoning his previously adamant opposition to any immediate rupture.¹⁴⁵ Needless to say, this conclusion was the outcome of his failure to bridge the gap between the Regent and the 'Four' and due to the pressure put upon him by the Regent and the British Ambassador. So he decided to shatter the alliance of these officers by ordering the removal of two of the 'Four' from Baghdad.¹⁴⁶ Colonel Shabib was to be transferred to Diwaniya and al-Sabbagh to Diyalah (32 miles north of Baghdad). Hence this half-hearted step to displace two members of the 'Four' was to result, in the end, in the Regent and his supporters being driven from Baghdad. This move had led to a state of affairs in which suspicion, tension and distrust prevailed and a loss of confidence between al-Hashimi and the 'Four'.

On 28 February, 1941 a secret meeting of the 'Arab Committee', headed by the Mufti and attended by Rashid 'Ali and the 'Four', was held at which the policy of al-Hashimi's Government was reviewed. It was decided, *inter alia*, to resist any move to break off diplomatic relations with Italy which was considered inconsistent with Arab interests. And if al-Hashimi went ahead with that policy he should be asked to resign and replaced by Rashid 'Ali.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ FO 406/79, Enclosure 1 in No. 12, Record of Conversation between the Secretary of State and the Iraqi Minister for Foreign Affairs on 7 March, 1941 and Geoffrey Warner, *Iraq and Syria, 1941*. (London, 1974) p. 85.

¹⁴⁵ *Mudhakarat Taha al-Hashimi* (Taha al-Hashimi's Memoirs) (Beirut, 1969) p. 412.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 402-403.

¹⁴⁷ Khadduri, *op. cit.*, pp. 208-209.

Rashid 'Ali Return to Power, 2 April, 1941

However, following the prorogation of Parliament on 31 March, the 'Four' sensing that al-Hashimi was determined to go ahead with his plans and reject that Arab Committee's decision of 28 February, they decided to take the reins into their hands. They staged their coup on 1 April, 1941, and demanded al-Hashimi's resignation which he submitted accordingly. It was a desperate move carried out in order to enhance their own prestige by the return of Rashid 'Ali to power. In addition, the order transferring the two Colonels outside Baghdad, together with the rumours which prevailed among the public that Abd al-'Ilah was determined to punish them and to destroy their power, were also factors behind the subsequent flare-up. Meanwhile, the other army divisions had tacitly endorsed the coup by taking no countervailing action against it. Rashid 'Ali's new move gained support and enthusiasm among the people and a number of young men volunteered for service.¹⁴⁸

When the coup leaders discovered that the Regent had escaped from the capital, to Basra and then to Transjordan, assisted by the Americans and the British, they considered this move a pre-arranged action with a large British plot aimed at undermining the sovereignty of the country. They proceeded with the setting up of the Government of National Defence to discharge the affairs of the country during the Regent's absence. This was headed by Rashid 'Ali himself and was otherwise composed of the four Colonels, Yunis al-Sab'awi and the Chief-of-Staff, General Admin Zaki.

Given the visible support of the Regent by the British Government, Rashid 'Ali began to pursue a policy of 'pin pricks', to use the words of Sir Kinahan Cornwallis who had arrived in Baghdad on the eve of the coup to replace Sir Basil. He refused to present his credentials to Rashid 'Ali's régime which he considered as unconstitutional in the absence of Abd al-'Ilah.

However, in spite of Rashid 'Ali's favourable overtures, Sir Kinahan did not trust him. Rashid 'Ali offered the following suggestions:-

- a) To accept the resignation of Taha al-Hashimi and Rashid 'Ali to form a new government. The government would appoint Sharif Sharaf to act on the Regent's behalf as deputy during his absence for a period of four months

¹⁴⁸ Khadduri, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

(this is the maximum period stipulated in the constitution). The appointment of Sharif Sharaf as an acting Regent was an alternative to his impending appointment by Parliament as a permanent Regent of the country due to the deposition of Abd al-'Ilah who had left his post.

- b) In return Rashid 'Ali would take the following anti-Axis steps:-
- (i) To broadcast immediately and from time to time in the future against German propoganda that his régime was pro-Axis
 - (ii) To discharge the obligations of the Anglo-Iraqi Alliance on a larger scale than heretofore.
 - (iii) That there would be no demands for implementation of the White Paper until the end of the war or any action afterwards directed against the British Government.
 - (iv) To entrust the British Adviser with authority of supervision over propoganda and immigration of Palestinians.
 - (v) To campaign for public support for a rupture of diplomatic relations with Italy, following her defeat in Greece and in the Western desert, as the time was now ripe for that step.¹⁴⁹

Rashid 'Ali's move had been interpreted by Sir Kinahan as being activated either by his difficult position or under instructions from his German friends not to stir up trouble at that time. This misinterpretation of the situation further contributed to the escalation of the crisis.

Thus, due to the change in circumstances which had resulted from the failure of the Regent to create effective resistance to the well-established régime of Rashid 'Ali, Sir Kinahan was now trying to press his government to recognize Rashid 'Ali's régime in order to gain time until the arrival of British troops in Iraq.

Outmanoeuvred by the Regent's escape, Rashid 'Ali, with the full support of the army, proceeded to depose the Regent and to assume full political leadership in order to legalize his régime. In Parliament Sharif Sharaf was elected on 10 April as the new Regent of Iraq after a motion to depose Abd al-'Ilah was unanimously passed.

¹⁴⁹ FO 371/27063/E1343 from Iraq, Baghdad, to F.O. Sir Kinahan Cornwallis, No. 291, 8 April 1941.

Moreover, although Rashid 'Ali spared no time in making public his intention to respect Iraq's international obligations, and in particular the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of Alliance of 1930, the British remained suspicious of him personally. To put Rashid 'Ali's goodwill to test Churchill decided to send troops to Iraq to make sure of Masra, as the U.S. was keen on constructing a great assembly base there. Since the summer of 1940, Rashid 'Ali had already agreed to grant military facilities for the disembarkation of British troops in Basra in order to open the line of communication between the Gulf and Haifa.¹⁵⁰ When these troops arrived in Basra on 18 April, 1941, without showing any sign of moving out to Palestine (as was promised by the British Ambassador), much anxiety was engendered among the people in general and inside the army in particular. Under pressure from the army, Rashid 'Ali put his conditions for the landing of any further troops. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss in full detail the controversy over the landing of British troops in Basra, which is already examined in other sources.¹⁵¹ Thus one has to infer that the dispatch and perhaps a permanent stay of these troops had precipitated the siege of Habbaniya by the Iraqi troops and further escalated the crisis and led to the ensuing hostilities between the two sides in May that year.

¹⁵⁰ FO 371/24560, Enclosure No. 1 in Baghdad Despatch No. 370 7.8.1940, No. 2670/2670/5/14/58, from Nuri al-Sa'id to Sir Basil Newton.

¹⁵¹ For a fuller account see Majid Khadduri, *Independent Iraq* 2nd ed., (London, 1960) and Mohammad Tarbush, *The Role of the Military in Politics, A case Study of Iraq from 1936-1941*, (University of Oxford, 1977).

CHAPTER II

British Policy and German Intentions in Iraq and the Middle East

British Interests in Iraq

The purpose of this chapter is to explain why Britain did not accept the *coup d'état* and decided to intervene in order to suppress it; to explore whether the British were right in their assessment of what Rashid 'Ali intended to do; and finally, to examine German intentions in Iraq and throughout the Middle East.

By the Treaty of 1930, Britain had retained her political and military influence in Iraq after relinquishing mandatory power in these two spheres. There was one essential difference between the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930 and those that preceded it; previous treaties had been aimed at preserving essential imperial interests and enabling the British effectively to discharge the international obligations which they had assumed in respect of Iraq. Great Britain could not have any responsibility whatsoever for the discharge of Iraq's international obligations after her entry into the League of Nations in 1932. Thus the British thereby confined themselves to safeguarding residual imperial links and avoided all direct or indirect responsibility for the protection of foreign interest other than their own in Iraq (See Appendix A). Undoubtedly, oil as much as other strategic considerations were decisive factors in dominating British official thinking towards Iraq. According to one German report on the strategic significance of Iraqi oil, total deposits were estimated at 500 million ton in 1941.¹ Iraq, the report said, was exporting via Haifa two million tons a year and through Tripoli 2.7 million tons. The report stressed the importance of the Iraqi oil for an Axis advance towards Suez via Turkey.

Granted, there were other concerns: commerce, investment, air routes and a large number of resident British expatriates. But

¹ GFM, 71/50783.

Iraqi and Persian oil were playing a crucial role in supporting Britain's war effort in the Middle East and elsewhere. Iraq's oil was pumped directly to the Mediterranean via Tripoli in Syria, and Haifa in Palestine. The Iraqi port of Basra lay close to the border with Iran and the vital oil refinery at Abadan. However, once the British Ambassador, Sir Kinahan Cornwallis, had received Iraq's conditions for any further landings of troops, Iraqi forces proceeded to occupy the oilfields of the IPC at Kirkuk. They stopped the flow to Haifa, and reopened the pipeline to Tripoli which had been closed since the capitulation of France. British sources stressed that this step may have been taken after the alleged conclusion of a secret agreement at Baghdad on 25 April, 1941, between Rashid 'Ali and the Italian Minister, who was also acting again as a representative of Nazi Germany. Putatively, it was the most prominent of a number of concessions which Iraq was to grant to the Axis powers in return for their military and financial aid. This putative accord stipulated that Italy and Germany were to recognize Rashid 'Ali's régime and support Iraq in her effort to rescind the Treaty of 1930, even if this led to hostilities with Britain. Reportedly, the agreement also provided for the recognition by Italy and Germany of a proposed merging of Iraq and Syria into one single kingdom under the King of Iraq (the text did not explore how this was to be achieved or whether it was the wish of the two peoples). Italy and Germany would grant Iraq up to 10 billion lire as well as long-term credits for the supply of arms, aircraft, tanks and other military requirements for the conduct of war against Britain.

In return for all this and as an extra guarantee, Iraq was to provide a mortgage on her oil wells and also to accept Italian and German financial advisers for the reorganization and supervision of the Iraqi Ministry of Finance. Iraq was also to undertake to nationalize the whole of her oil industry and to create a 'Special Exploitation Board'. However, Italy and Germany would have 75 per cent. participation in the management of this board, on the basis of a treaty understanding which would be signed as soon as the Iraqi oil industry was nationalized. In addition, Iraq was to grant Italy and Germany concessions for the construction of fresh pipelines to the Syrian coast which were to be leased to these two countries. Moreover, after the union of Iraq and Syria, the new kingdom would lease to Italy and Germany, for a period of 40 years, at least three ports on the Levant coast, each within a 25 kilometres radius. The treaty further stipulated that Italy and Germany would have the right to use these ports as military, naval

and air bases. The treaty also gave Italy rights of religious protection over the Christian population in the future united kingdom of Iraq and Syria.

Finally, this secret treaty referred to the necessity of its being superseded, after the realization of the union of Iraq and Syria, by a new treaty along similar lines.² In addition Germany and Italy had concluded another secret treaty whereby each party was to secure 50 per cent. of the Iraqi oil in the event of the success of the Iraqi revolt against Britain.³

Surprisingly enough, no reference has been made to the main treaty in any Arab sources or even by those anti-Rashid 'Ali politicians whose memoirs have been published recently, namely, Tawfiq al-Suwaidi, and Ali Jawdat al-Ayyubi. In his *Auchinleck, A Biography of Field-Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck*, John Connell made a brief and superficial reference to it but without giving any conclusive evidence. Elie Kedourie has also hinted at the conclusion of this alleged treaty with no substantial evidence.⁴

My own belief is that this Iraqi-Axis treaty was a mere British fabrication intended to destroy Rashid 'Ali's image and reputation as a nationalist leader. Despite the suppression of the revolt and the brutal means used to liquidate all nationalist elements in Iraq who followed Rashid 'Ali's movement, the British remained apprehensive of a possible German thrust toward Iraq and Rashid 'Ali's return to the country. For by the late summer of 1941, the Germans stood on the frontiers of Egypt and were soon to reach the Don Basin in their thrust along the Black Sea littoral of the U.S.S.R.

The British wanted to wage a political campaign based on the selling of the country to the Axis powers by Rashid 'Ali. Fascist sympathy had become an alibi for any critical opinion, whether honestly or dishonestly held. To go back to the origins of this alleged agreement, Major Dodds (former British Consul at Nice who was attached to the U.S. Consulate General at Marseilles after the armistice) had provided the FO with the French text of the treaty. He said that it was obtained from a member of the Italian Armistice Commission at Marseilles. Accordingly the FO asked Sir Kinahan Cornwallis to give his advice as to whether or not the document was genuine. The FO commended the text as containing some good material for its propaganda, assuming it was

² FO 371/27079 The French Text of the Treaty, 12 August, 1941.

³ Heinz Tillmann, *Deutschland Araberpolitik im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, (Berlin, 1965) p. 241.

⁴ John Connell *A Biography of Field-Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck*, (London, 1959) p. 209 and Elie Kedourie *The Chatham House Version and other Middle Eastern Studies* (London, 1970) p. 221.

genuine. Sir Kinahan advised the FO to ignore the matter.⁵ One basic question here must be whether Hitler would have been psychologically capable of signing a treaty with an Arab government. It would not have worried Franco, nor Mussolini, nor Hirohito in Japan. But Hitler, with his racialist ideology, makes the conclusion of such an accord problematic.

With the fall of France in June, 1940, and Italy's entry into the war, shipping conditions has so deteriorated in the Mediterranean as to preclude any production of oil by the IPC in excess of what could be processed at the Haifa refinery. There was a severe cut-back in crude oil production with the stoppage of all pumping on the northern line to Tripoli in order to deny Vichy France, under whose control Syria and Lebanon came, the use of Iraqi oil.⁶

In their report to the War Cabinet, of 1 November, 1940, on the implications of a German advance through the Balkans and Syria to the Middle East, the Chiefs-of-Staff stated that the situation in Iraq required the firmest handling owing to Rashid 'Ali's contacts with Germany and his refusal to sever his country's diplomatic relations with Italy.

They recommended that plans, which should be kept secret from the Iraqi Government, should be prepared for the destruction of the Kirkuk oil wells and the pipelines across Iraq, Syria and Palestine. Their attention was drawn at the end of November to the importance of using the word 'denial' rather than destruction in connection with the oilfields. All the same, they averred that destruction by fire might lead to the oil fields burning for ten years and to the permanent loss of these valuable wells.⁷ Churchill would not then have lost his previous sense of the strategic importance of Gulf oil. In *The World Crisis*, he laid great emphasis on his efforts as First Lord of the Admiralty before 1914 to establish the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. He wrote:

The first step was to set up a Royal Commission on Oil Supply (in June, 1912). We would only fight our way forward, and finally we found our way to the Anglo-Persian Oil agreement and contract, which for an initial investment of two millions of public money (subsequently increased to five millions) has not only secured the Navy a very substantial proportion of its oil supply, but has led to the requisition by the Government of a controlling share in oil properties and interests.⁸

⁵ FO971/27079, 12 August, 1941.

⁶ S.H. Longrigg, *Oil in the Middle East*, (London, 1961) p. 117.

⁷ AFR 81549, Notes on the changes in the situation in Iraq, 9 October, 1940 - 6 May, 1941.

⁸ Winston Churchill, *World Crisis*, Vol. 1, pp. 132-134 and Sluglett, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

Towards the end of April General Wavell asked for clarification of his responsibility for ordering the destruction of the Kirkuk oilfields and pipelines. Given the dependence of the Royal Navy on Kirkuk oil, the Chiefs-of-Staff instructed him that he must retain the ultimate responsibility for ordering the demolitions, for which the executive orders would be given by the General Officer Commanding in Iraq.

On 30 April the Chiefs of Staff studied a memorandum by Professor Frederick Alexander Lindemann, the scientific adviser Churchill always held in high regard. Professor Lindemann proposed certain steps to be taken at once to deny the Germans the use of Iraq oil. The schemes hitherto drawn up had been based on seeking Iraqi assistance. But if oilfields were destroyed at once, it was suggested, this would remove the main reason for the German move into Iraq. However, this would entail fighting the Iraqis.

On 2 May (following the outbreak of hostilities between Britain and Iraq), the Chiefs-of-Staff instructed General Wavell to have everything made ready to carry out the destruction of the pipelines and booster stations as soon as ordered. They asked him to report whether he thought the destruction should be carried out at once. They had before them a report by the Joint Planning Staff in the light of terms of reference which has been given to them on 30 April: to examine the existing schemes for demolitions; a plan for destroying the oilfields and pipelines in the face of Iraqi opposition; the opinion of experts on Professor Lindemann's proposals and the estimates of results; and the effect of putting the Kirkuk oilfields out of action on the Royal Navy's oil supplies and on oil tanker commitments.⁹ It was estimated that the destruction of the oilfields would take some three months, but that it was possible to carry out quickly the destruction of the booster stations and part of the pipelines. And, in the event of Iraqi resistance, a limited amount of destruction could still be carried out, but the result would not prevent the Germans from bringing the oilfields into operation again within a short period, if they had any chance to enter Iraq. The experts did not agree with Professor Lindemann's proposal of exploding small charges in the bottoms of the various oil wells, partly because this might well increase the flow of oil. They also dismissed his suggestions for destroying the pipelines. The destruction of the booster stations was considered the most effective way of preventing oil reaching the coast, as these would take many months to repair. The Royal Navy would then

⁹ *Air 8/549, Notes on the Changes in the Situation in Iraq, 9th October 1940-6th May 1941.*

need seven more tankers in the Gulf, which would take three months to arrive. Supplies to the U.K. would be reduced by about 300,000 tons a year.

On 5 May General Sir John Dill suggested that Wavell draw up a plan for air action against Kirkuk. But the Chief of the Air Staff warned that this might result in aircraft being earmarked for the purpose and so kept from the work, and might have the further effect that preparations for destruction on the ground, which would be more effective, might not be pressed on with. It was then agreed that the suggestion was unacceptable. Two days later military patrols took over several booster stations. At that stage it seemed that there was no middle course between attempting to destroy the oil installations and pipelines by air action of which the results would be doubtful, and destroying the oilfields for ever by setting the wells alight.¹⁰

Were the British right in their assessment of what Rashid 'Ali intended to do?

As early as October, 1940, the feeling against the British in Iraq had become so strong that the then Ambassador, Sir Basil Newton, thought the presence of HM Forces would be unwelcome. He apprehended, indeed, that the necessary invitation from the government in Baghdad would not easily be obtained. The remedy suggested by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, with which General Wavell agreed, was to take a strong line both in diplomacy and propaganda. It was recommended that diplomatic pressure, backed by a threat of economic sanctions though not military force, should be exerted on the Iraqi Government to make them end anti-British activities; to reaffirm publicly their loyalty to the British; and, if not to break off diplomatic relations with Italy altogether, at least to eject her legation and intern all Italian subjects. It was then considered that the dispatch of a British force to Iraq, even though not fully equipped, would be better than nothing and that the situation might be steadied by the arrival of a small mission headed by someone well-known and respected in Iraq.¹¹ As no forces were immediately available, the Chiefs-of-Staff, in their report to the War Cabinet of 1 November, 1940, recommended the removal of Rashid 'Ali by diplomatic means; the elimination of the Mufti; financial and economic aid; the dispatch of a special mission and the securing of the line of communication between Basra and Haifa, all in order to show that Britain was

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

determined to exercise her treaty rights and to concentrate her troops and intervene and topple Rashid 'Ali if need be.

During November the Foreign Office were urged by the War Cabinet to take action in pursuance of these recommendations. The Foreign Office hoped that the Regent Abd al-'Ilah and Nuri al-Sa'id would manage to remove Rashid 'Ali and form a new government. But their hesitation and consequent failure to make Rashid 'Ali tender his resignation disappointed London. All the same, Nuri al-Sa'id, with the blessing of the British Embassy, was now attempting to create a domestic crisis for Rashid 'Ali. He submitted his resignation and urged other cabinet members to do likewise.

Early in January, when there was a threat of civil war erupting in Iraq consequent upon the Regent taking refuge in Diwaniya in order to escape from the government's pressure upon him, Sir Basil Newton warned the Foreign Office that a revolt against the Regent might take place at any time and asked for permission to take action without previous reference to them. The Foreign Office, enthusiastic about escalating the crisis and toppling Rashid 'Ali, had granted this discretion and had also asked the War Cabinet what support could be given to the Ambassador. The Chiefs-of-Staff wanted more definite information as to what Sir Basil had in mind. And, owing to the critical military situation and the need to defend Greece, the Chiefs-of-Staff made it clear that they were not prepared to send troops to Baghdad and that it would be difficult to say what action they could take on arrival there.¹²

On 31 January, 1941 — the day Rashid 'Ali resigned — the situation in Iraq was discussed with the Foreign Office. The Chiefs-of-Staff were against the FO's proposal of carrying out an air demonstration over Iraq to inhibit the government and the people. Clearly, such air action could have resulted in hostilities at a time when the situation would be so confused that suitable targets for air strikes would be lacking. They believed that the landing of one infantry division at Basra would only be a bluff, since a force of at least three divisions would be required. The conclusion reached was that an attempt to humiliate the Iraqi Government by a demonstration with land and air forces would be unwise at that junction. They agreed that the Regent, with sufficient British funds, should be able to bribe his way out of the situation.¹³

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

But the question which arises is this: Why did the British change their strategy and decided to topple Rashid 'Ali by force when he resumed the political leadership in Iraq after the military coup of 2nd April, 1941? Many considerations and factors were behind that decision:—

- (a) Rashid 'Ali's return to power by military coup and his alliance with the army leaders and the Mufti group was considered a challenge which the British were not then prepared to tolerate,
- (b) The German campaign in Greece was seen as a co-ordinated step with the coup leaders in Iraq in order to embarrass and threaten British vital interests in the region. The British perceived that a successful conclusion of the Balkan campaign would threaten the whole British stake in the Middle East if the campaign was to extend through the Mediterranean to the Syrian coast. A far more imminent danger, which Churchill feared, was Syria, where German airborne troops might land after refuelling at Rhodes. Churchill believed that such forces, once installed in Syria, could soon 'penetrate and poison' both Iran and Iraq, and threaten Palestine.¹⁴
- (c) The deposition of the Regent, Adb al-'Ilah, on 10 April and the election of Sharif Sharaf. This made the British more determined to overthrow Rashid 'Ali.
- (d) Rashid 'Ali's refusal to give access to any further British landing at Basra unless certain conditions were met (see Chapter I).
- (e) Rashid 'Ali's flirtations with the Axis Powers and his refusal to eject the Italian Legation from Baghdad. Granted, from what he later said, Rashid 'Ali appears to have been willing to abide by the terms of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930. In the meantime he advocated non-belligerence as the overriding principle of his foreign policy.¹⁵ He felt that a policy of reinsurance with the Axis powers would be prudent in itself as a means of extorting concessions from Britain. Rashid 'Ali always complained about Britain's departure from the letter and spirit of the treaty of 1930, by her continual concentration of troops and reinforcement of

¹⁴ Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill, Finest Hour, 1939-41*, (London, 1979) p. 1073.

¹⁵ Al-Hasani, *al-Asrar al-Khaffia fi Harakat al-Sana 1941 al-Taharruria*, (The Secrets of the Liberation Movement of 1941) 3rd ed. (Sidon, 1971) pp. 79-80.

her airbases at Habbaniya and Sh'aiba, by the evacuation of all allied subjects from Iraq, and the withdrawal of her staff from administration of the railways. He saw these steps as signs of impending aggression which had engendered much anxiety among the people. He averred that his government felt obliged to take counter-measures, not with the intention of fighting Britain but to allay public fear.¹⁶

Rashid 'Ali was to confirm that this had been his attitude, when he was imprisoned in 1959-60 in Baghdad, during the ascendancy of Qasim, accused of plotting against the latter's régime. He explained to Dr Fadhil al-Jamali, an ex-Foreign and Prime Minister who was imprisoned with him, that he had been against any military conflict with Britain. He insisted that it had been the four colonels who had dragged Iraq into a confrontation against his own judgement.¹⁷ It was Rashid 'Ali who was behind the Turkish offer of mediation to end the conflict. He requested the Turkish Ambassador in Baghdad to urge his government to mediate in an attempt to prevent a disaster.¹⁸

Churchill's obsessional concern with the possibility of losing Iraq to the Axis made him refrain from following a policy of political settlement and appeasement. He wanted, as it were, to 'seize the bull by the horns'. Already aware of Rashid 'Ali's flirtations with the Axis Powers and his mistaken perception that Hitler's new drive was towards the Middle East. Churchill felt that only force could restore the situation. This is in line with Professor Albert Hourani's assessment that western thinking believed that 'Orientals only respect force'.¹⁹ It was also in line with Churchill's perception of the need for a British victory after the recent Axis success in the Balkans and the Western Desert.

Moreover, one can question Britain's military involvement in Iraq in the light of the sequence of events. For instance, one may ask why was it that the situation in Iraq deteriorated to such an extent and why it was that Britain was intransigent and inflexible in handling the crisis.

In the light of the evidence on the crisis, one has to infer that the successive British Ambassadors, Newton and Cornwallis, were the main factors behind the escalation of the situation. Sir Basil lacked

¹⁶ FO 371/27067, from Turkey, to FO, No 1045, 3rd May, 1941.

¹⁷ The author's interview with an ex-Iraqi diplomat, Najdat Fathi Safwat in Baghdad on 2 January, 1981, who explained what Dr Jamali had told him personally about his conversation with Rashid 'Ali in prison.

¹⁸ FO 371/27067 from Turkey, to FO, No 1645, 3rd May, 1941.

¹⁹ Albert Hourani, "The Decline of the West in the Middle East" in R.H. Naotle. *The Modern Middle East*. (New York, 1963) p. 52.

experience of the East²⁰ and misinterpreted events by urging his government into a showdown with Rashid 'Ali's régime in an attempt to restore the Regent. Sir Kinahan harboured great hatred for Rashid 'Ali who had been behind his dismissal from Iraq in 1935. Sir Kinahan was then the British Adviser to Rashid 'Ali as the Minister of the Interior in Yasin al-Hashimi's Government.²¹ Rashid 'Ali's opponents had exercised a great deal of influence on both Ambassadors to call for military intervention in order to bring back the Regent and to restore their lost influence without regard to the feeling of the rest of the people who stood firmly behind Rashid 'Ali.²² Moreover, Sir Kinahan warned his government that unless British troops were sent to Iraq the country would fall in German hands.²³

The British could not accept the *coup d'état* and decided to intervene to suppress it before German military aid could have the chance to reach Iraq. Indeed, when the crisis developed in its early stages in 1940 London had become impatient with Rashid 'Ali and considered his overtures with the Axis Powers pure opportunism devoid of sentiment or gratitude for Britain's past services to Iraq. Instead of following a policy of conciliation and understanding, or one of a combination of pressure and mediation, they endeavoured to force a showdown. Thus when Rashid 'Ali offered to collaborate with Sir Kinahan in order to end the crisis (his suggestions on 7th April included, among other things, the rupture of relations with Italy, and denunciation of association with the Axis²⁴) the British Ambassador remained suspicious and aloof. The British also perceived that by this time he was not in control of the situation and the effective power was in the hands of the army officers, the 'Golden Square'. Sir Kinahan flattered Rashid 'Ali with promises of recognition in order to gain time until the arrival of the British troops at Basra.

German Intentions and Policies Towards Iraq

From all evidence we now have about Germany's operational intentions towards Iraq and the Arab countries it may, in retrospect, be said that the British campaign against Iraq was not needed to thwart those intentions. Hitler's eyes were fixed on the

²⁰ Freya Stark, *East is West* (London, 1945) p. 139

²¹ Al-Hasani *op. cit.* pp. 142-3.

²² Ayad al-Qazzaz, 'The Iraqi-British War of 1941': A Review Article, in *International Journal. Middle East Studies*. (California, 1976) p. 593 and *al Istiqlal*, 15, 16, 18 & 20, April 1941.

²³ Great Britain. Central Office of Information, Paiforce, *The Official Story of the Persian and Iraq Command 1941-46* (London, 1948) p. 20.

²⁴ FO 371127063 From Iraq to FO Sir Kinahan Cornwallis, No. 291, 7 April 1941.

Soviet Union and Churchill's fears of an imminent German pincer movement against Egypt from the west and north, exploiting the unrest in Palestine, Syria and Iraq were not well founded.

Ultimately, however, the situation might have developed along such lines if the Germans had crushed the USSR with despatch. Furthermore, the dominant belief in Western military and diplomatic circles in the summer of 1941 was that the Soviet Union would hold out for only four to seven weeks.²⁵ Ever since March, 1941, when German troops began moving east against the U.S.S.R., Churchill perceived that this could only mean that Hitler intended to attack Russia.²⁶ Naturally it was assumed that, once the Soviets were defeated, the Germans would drive southward toward Iran, Iraq and Syria, taking over the oilfields of Iraq and Iran as a good springboard for further deployment. Churchill was right in his predictions. His military and political advisers were wrong in their contrary belief that German mobilization against Russia was simply designed to put pressure on her into making concessions and might well succeed. As has already been indicated, Churchill was further alarmed by the fall of Greece. He feared that German and Italian influence, already deeply rooted in Vichy Syria, would extend to Iraq and Iran and threaten the Indian Empire and the Gulf.

It would, of course, have been most unwise to ignore the threat of a German advance towards Iraq, but it does not follow that use of force was the only solution. In retrospect, one has to conclude that the British were wrong to escalate the crisis and wage war against their ally, Iraq. Most of the Nazi leaders were not interested politically in Iraq nor in the Middle East as a whole. Britain had over-reacted to the tide of events in Iraq ever since the proclamation of the Italo-German declaration of 23 October, 1940. Germany had no specific designs nor a grand strategy vis-à-vis Iraq. Indeed, she lacked a master plan everywhere, except in respect of the 'New Order' in Europe. She regarded Iraq simply as an added distraction for Britain. As an individual, Hitler did not have the same interest in conquering the ancient civilizations of the Near East that, say, Alexander or Napoleon had done. He also found that theatre (Greece included) very confusing in terms of his racial stereotypes. Less confusing, he thought, was to revive the historic pressure of Teuton on Slav by invading the U.S.S.R. For Hitler to have intervened too forcefully in Iraq in

²⁵ Anthony Eden, Earl of Avon, *Memoirs: The Reckoning* (London, 1965) p. 269.

²⁶ Warner, *op. cit.*, p.p. 159-161

May, 1941, would have been to make Stalin distrust his general intentions (see below).

German Plans and Preparations in the Middle East

With the expulsion of British forces from continental Europe, it became clear, as Churchill predicted on 3rd September, 1940, that apart from a possible invasion of Britain, 'the only major theatre of war which can be foreseen in 1940-41 is the Middle East'.²⁷

Essentially speaking, the Middle East was a nodal geographical triangle stretching between the Mediterranean, the Black Sea and the Indian Ocean. The Suez Canal and the shipping lanes westward through the Mediterranean, eastward to India and southward around the Cape were the heart of an area coming to be seen to contain the richest oil deposits in the world, a crucial surface and air network between Europe and Afro-Asia. The Middle East was not only the barrier between the two expanding ends of the Axis — in Europe and Asia — but it was the gateway to Europe through the Balkans, the back door to the U.S.S.R. through the Dardanelles and over the Caucasus, the road to India through Iraq to Iran and Baluchistan, and the main route to Central Africa along the Nile Valley. So from the strategic point of view it was the most important geostrategic area of the war. But despite all that, German perceptions did not coincide with this and the Middle East region remained a low priority to them.

Yet German designs on the Middle East can be traced back to 1898 when Kaiser Wilhelm visited Constantinople to encourage developing relationships with the Ottomans, as a stepping stone on the route to British India. The Kaiser, looking towards the commercial riches of the British East, obtained in 1903 the assent of the Turkish Sultan for the construction of the Berlin to Baghdad railroad. By 1913 the German railway had reached the northern borders of Iraq and was also completed between Baghdad and Samarra, 70 miles north of the capital. Berlin deployed agents as far as Kuwait, Persia and Afghanistan²⁸ in furtherance of its influence and in an attempt to challenge British and Russian hegemony in the Gulf theatre as well as British and French hegemony elsewhere in the Middle East.

For most of the nineteenth century, British officialdom had been obsessed by the perceived threat to India through the Gulf from Russia. But around 1906 this perception waned dramatically.

²⁷ Winston S Churchill, *The Second World War*. Vol. II (London 1948-54) p. 407

²⁸ S.C.L. Sulzberger, 'German Preparations in the Middle East', *Foreign Affairs*, 20 1941-42, p. 663.

Russia's humiliation in the war with Japan (1904-5) was one reason. Another was a growing concern to unite with France and hence with Russia in order to contain Germany. So long as Russia was seen as the main threat to India, Persia seemed to be the most critical territory in the forward strategy of Gulf defence. As Germany displaced Russia, Iraq became the focal territory instead. Before the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, German diplomats and military leaders envisioned the military and strategic significance of the Middle East and its largely Muslim population as an anti-British factor. German political strategists (such as Professor Max von Oppenheim, who became the Oriental Secretary to the German consulate-general in Cairo in 1914) were considering the possibility of a Holy War (Jihad) against Britain and her allies by the local people, stirred up and organized by German agents and the Caliphate in Constantinople.²⁹

German Propaganda in Iraq

German ambitions were reactivated in Iraq and their old plans for eastern expansion were revived after the termination of the British mandate in 1932 and the accession of Hitler in 1933. Dr Fritz Grobba, the then German charge d'affaires in Iraq, was an accomplished diplomat who spoke Arabic, Persian and Turkish fluently. Moreover, the personalities and sociability of himself and his wife impressed the Iraqi people. Accordingly, he was able to establish more cordial relations, especially once he had become accredited as Minister in Baghdad on Iraq's achieving its independence that year. There were three key themes which Grobba grasped to further his country's influence in Iraq and to ferment anti-British feeling in the country. These were Great Britain, France, and Zionism. The German Legation at Baghdad used many avenues through which it was able to stir up anti-British, anti-French and anti-Zionist feelings. In a translated letter within the British Foreign Office based on a letter in Arabic in which the name of the writer was not revealed a full explanation and analysis of German propaganda process and its influence in Iraq was given. To sum up the activity of the German Legation in Baghdad the document pointed out that these activities were channelled through five avenues:-

1. To maintain personal contacts with all political personalities and establish friendly relations with them. The report gives the

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 664

late Yasin al-Hashimi as an example of the political impact of the German Legation in that he secretly supplied a sum of twenty-thousand dinars to the leaders of the Palestine movement to wage a revolt in Palestine. Added to that, the German Legation encouraged the people to avenge themselves against the Jews in Iraq which culminated in daily attacks against them. Hikmat Sulaiman and Bakr Sidqi, who concluded their arms deal with Germany following their failure to secure arms from Britain, were in co-operation with the Germans in this regard.

2. By stirring up nationalist feeling among Iraqi youth through German teachers employed to teach in Secondary and High Schools and by spreading German propaganda to criticize and attack French, Zionist and British designs on Arab countries. It was during al-Madfa'i's premiership that a party of Iraqi youths went to Berlin to attend the massive Hitler Youth rally in Nuremberg in September, 1938, at the climax of the Sudetenland crisis. They were received in person by Hitler.

3. To maintain among the Iraqi people the hatred and dislike for Jews and induce the government to promulgate laws which limited Jewish activities, to nationalize transport and to establish new Arab banks to circumvent financial control by Jews.

4. To exploit Arab grievances in Palestine to their benefit by maintaining strong links with the Palestine Defence Committee in Baghdad, which, from 1938, was headed by General Taha al-Hashimi, and supporting it morally and materially. The German Legation was also able to win the Iraqi Press to their side through their relations with the Iraqi Director of Propaganda and Publications.

5. An agreement was reached between the German Legation and the Director of Propaganda and Publications for the establishment of a telegraphic news agency in Damascus, to serve as an information centre and to exchange news with the German company, DNB.³⁰

And, as another British report³¹ confirmed, the Nazis had used the following means, *inter alia*, to further their objectives in Iraq:-

(a) *The Press*

In order to arouse public opinion against Britain, many newspapers were used, in one way or another, to promote

³⁰ FO 371/23202/E/2914, Confidential, No. 251 ff. 219-23 British Consulate, Damascus, to F.O. London, 14 April, 1939.

³¹ FO 624/24/448, *Nazi Propaganda in Iraq*, ff. 12-15. (No date appears on the document).

anti-British feeling by writing didactic articles. The well-known Baghdad paper *Al-'Alam Al-'Arabi* (The Arab World) was the first to start such a campaign. *Mein Kampf* was translated into Arabic and published in newspapers. Many other moderate papers, so it was rumoured in Baghdad, were receiving German subsidies.

(b) *The Muslim Clergy*

The clergy (both Sunni and Shi'a) were the second important element in the propaganda machinery of the Nazis, allegedly being in the pay of the German Legation. The report went on to aver that the leading religious men were, indeed, subsidized by the Germans. They were receiving monthly payments for their religious sermons in the mosques on Fridays. Their speeches were mostly 'devoted to anti-British and anti-Semite political propaganda'. Their weekly magazine, the report said, *Al-Nashi'ah Al-Islamiyyah*, which was issued by Kamal al-Din al-Tai'y, was their instrument to spread these feelings and propaganda among Iraqis.

(c) *Clubs and Societies*

Since 1936, the Germans had encouraged and subsidized, as the report claimed, any anti-British clubs and societies in Iraq. In that year the *Nadi al-Muthana Club* was founded in Baghdad by Dr Amin Ruwaiha, a Palestinian nationalist, Dr Sa'id Shawkat, a brother of the former Prime Minister Naji Shawkat, and Shaikh Madhi Kubbah, a founder member of the *Istiqlal* Party. In 1937 another club was founded in Mosul, under the name of *Nadi al-Jazirah*, by Najam al-Din Chelmiran. Shortly afterwards, yet another club, know as *Nadi al-Muhalab*, was founded in Basra by Dr Sa'ad al-Din. All these clubs were forming platforms for promoting nationalist feeling and spreading anti-British movement. And it was rumoured that all these three clubs were founded by the Nazis for propaganda purposes.³² Meanwhile, many other political societies were mushrooming, and British Intelligence believed that most of them were also receiving money from the German Legation. Among these were *Jam'iat al-Shubban al-Mislimin* (The Society of Muslim Youth), and *Jam'iat al-Hidayah al-Islamiyyah* (The Society of Islamic Guidance). Added to which were the

³² *Ibid*, F. 13

Syrian *Jam'iat 'Usbat al-Amal al-Qawmi* (The Society of the League of National Action), founded in Damascus and now with a branch in Baghdad; *Jam'iat al-Jawal al-Arabi* (The Society of Arab Scouts) and *Jam'iat al-Difa' 'an Falsteen* (The Society for the Defence of Palestine), founded by Dr Darwish al-Miqdadi and Said al-Haj Thabit respectively.

All these societies, the report stressed, were active in promoting Nazi propaganda.³³ The majority of the Iraqi intelligentsia, the report conceded, were either active members or associates of such clubs and societies. Many of them were in influential government posts or otherwise of good social and financial standing. One illustration, given in the report of the membership of these clubs and societies, is that several doctors from the Royal Hospital at Baghdad belonged to one or the other of them. The report goes on to note that the same thing was true of staff in the Ministries of Education, Defence, Communications and Public Work, Economics and Foreign Affairs.³⁴ My own belief is that this report went too far in its assessment of pro-Nazi influences upon the Iraqi intelligentsia, especially at governmental level, most of whom were educated in the west and were pro-British.

German designs for fomenting anti-British feelings and arousing Iraqis against their Prime Minister Nuri al-Sa'id and the Regent as alleged stooges of British imperialism and anti-Arabism were discovered in a document captured before the outbreak of war. The Germans were planning, according to this, to raise an anti-British movement in Iraq with the hope of involving Saudi Arabia as well as Syria and Palestine. Naturally, these designs were considered ill-conceived, since Abd al-Aziz Ibn Sa'ud had committed himself to the British ever since his deal with the then British Political Resident in the Gulf, Sir Percy Cox, in 1915, a relationship reaffirmed by the Treaty of Jeddah in 1927. The same was true of the Iraqi Prime Minister, Nuri al-Sa'id, and his government.

By mid-1939 the improved situation in Palestine, as a result of the publication of the White Paper in May that year, had greatly disappointed the Germans. It was a measure to placate the Palestinians and the Arabs in general before any war broke out with Germany. It provided for one united and independent Palestine within ten years which would accommodate and embrace the two races (Jews and Arabs); and it fixed the number of Jewish

³³ *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

immigration to 75,000 within a period of five years after which there would be no immigration unless the Arabs were willing to acquiesce to it. But later both the Jews and the Arabs rejected the White Paper and this played into German hands. So it was never implemented.³⁵ Meanwhile, the German national Press was an additional instrument for inciting the Arabs everywhere. Take the murder of the British Consul, Monck Mason, at Mosul. The influential *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* commented that the affair was the outcome of the sentiments which prevailed in an Iraq dissatisfied with British policies in Palestine and the Near East. The paper, as the British Ambassador in Berlin reported, suggests:—

that the outburst of anti-British feeling amongst the Iraqi population is clear proof of the state of mind which England's post-war policy has put the Arab population both in Palestine and the Near East and to throw responsibility for King Ghazi's death on the criminal intrigues of agents of a nation, which for many decades believed it possible to purchase from Arab nations their freedom.³⁶

In another German paper, the *Hamburger Fremdenblatt*, there was a report on 11th April on the situation in Iraq. It was based on a despatch from its Cairo correspondent. The gist of the article was duly reported by the British Embassy in Berlin to the Foreign Office. The article had mainly focused on the British Secret Service's alleged role in King Faisal's death. It suggested he was poisoned by the agency and that the assassination of General Sidqi was instigated by the British as well. The report goes on to explain how the paper had interpreted King Ghazi's death in similar terms:—

Under these circumstances, it is suggested, it is not without significance that it should be widely believed in Iraq that the Secret Intelligence Service was behind King Ghazi's death as well. Great Britain will certainly seek to use the murder of the British Consul in Mosul to extend her grip on the country.³⁷

³⁵ Air 23/5980, f. 13, Secret, From Combined Intelligence Centre, Iraq, Baghdad, 10 July, 1941, to Force H.Q.

³⁶ Fo 371/23202/E2551, f. 7, Telegram No. 128, from Sir G. Ogilive-Forbes (Berlin) to F.O. 5 April, 1939.

³⁷ FO 371/23201/E2720, f. 33, Telegram No. 131 from Sir G. Ogilive-Forbes. (Berlin) to F.O. 12 April, 1939.

Dr Julius Jordan, an archaeologist employed in the Baghdad Museum for many years, was another agent of Nazi propaganda. It was alleged by the Prime Minister, Nuri al-Sa'id, that the killers of the British Consul in Mosul were in contact with this German scholar.³⁸

Meanwhile, C. J. Edmonds, the British Adviser to the Ministry of the Interior, informed the British Embassy about the discovery by the Iraqi police of a society within the *Young Muslim Association* in Baghdad, the aim of which was to support and propagate Nazi ideas among Iraqi youth.³⁹ Edmonds also informed the Embassy about the reaction of the Minister of Interior, Naji Shawkat, to the arrest of the members of the *Muslim Youth Association*. Edmonds describes him and his family as known to have pro-German sympathies.⁴⁰ Further, Nuri al-Sa'id criticized and attacked Dr Grobba's propaganda activities in an audience with the British Ambassador who accordingly informed his government.⁴¹ Nuri intimated that he would take serious steps to halt Grobba's activities. Among them might even be to close the Iraqi Legation in Berlin and make the Germans withdraw theirs from Baghdad.

One of the factors to which the British Ambassador attributed the success of the German propaganda in Iraq was the 'deterioration of the situation in Palestine and Syria',⁴² which was true. Then again, Prince Zaid and Sabih Najib (Minister of Defence in al-Madfa'i's last government) explained to the British Ambassador the Prime Minister's anxiety over the situation.⁴³ But, as regards countering the German propaganda, it seems that Edmonds was putting too much confidence in Sayyid Alwan, the Commandant of the Iraqi Criminal Investigation Department, and Major Wilkins, a British officer attached to it, who were collaborating closely and actively to that effect.⁴⁴ A memorandum about German propaganda among the tribes before the outbreak of the Second World War was written by Air Staff Intelligence, Iraq, in consultation with the British Embassy in Baghdad. It reviewed the tribal situation in the lower and middle Euphrates areas. The report emphasized the need for effective governmental control over these areas to prevent subversive action encouraged by foreign propaganda supported by large sums of money. The

³⁸ FO 371/2302/E2817, f. 312, No. 150, British Embassy to F.O. 11th April, 1939.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 313.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, ff. 313-314

⁴² *Ibid.*, f. 314.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 315.

report went on to endorse Nuri al-Sa'id as a reliable person for maintaining stability. Given 'any change of government', it said, 'an immediate review of the military aspect of the tribal situation will become necessary.' Still, the only evidence of these tribes being bribed by agents working for Germany was what the British Ambassador in Baghdad had heard in this regard. Before his enforced departure, the German Minister in Baghdad had allegedly drawn some £25,000 from local banks for this purpose.⁴⁵ Additionally, Sir Basil Newton explained in this rather long confidential report that:—

The German Minister in Baghdad, with the assistance of money, a host of agents and broadcasts in Arabic on the German wireless, worked unceasingly to spread pro-German, if not pro-Nazi, ideas among public opinion in Iraq, particularly the army, the students and the tribes, and naturally did not fail to make use of the Palestine question in his efforts to blacken the British name in this country. The Kuwaiti controversy also came as grist to the German mill, and, when, at the height of it, King Ghazi met with his fatal accident, the opportunity which this combination of circumstances offered to the German propagandists was too good to be missed.⁴⁶

Evidently, then, the political events which led to the revolt of the Iraqi army in 1941 were influenced by this propaganda campaign by the Germans, and, of course, their Allies. Naturally, the Italians assumed a major role in this campaign when the Germans were expelled from Iraq and their Embassy closed down after the outbreak of the war in 1939.

Axis Aims in Iraq and in the Arab Countries

While negotiations and overtures continued between the pan-Arab leaders and the Axis powers regarding the independence of Iraq and the other Arab countries, Germany was already negotiating with other powers, namely the Soviet Union, Japan and Italy, on how to divide and define their spheres of influence in the Arab countries.

During his conversation with the Italian Foreign Minister, Count Galeazzo Ciano, on 7 July, 1940, Hitler recognized that the

⁴⁵ FO 371/23202/E5963, f. 72, secret, Air Ministry, to F.O. and FO 371/23202, British Embassy, Baghdad, 30 September, 1939, Secret to F.O. f. 137.

⁴⁶ FO 371/24559/E500/500/93, Confidential, No. 31, Sir Basil Newton to F.O. 5 February, 1940.

Mediterranean and the Adriatic had from old times belonged to the historic sphere of interest of the Italian peninsula.⁴⁷ Over and beyond which, Italy was seeking to acquire France's colonies in North Africa, to extend her influence and power to Lake Chad in the South, to connect a wide portion of the Sudan to Ethiopia and to enlarge Italian Somaliland by absorbing French and British Somaliland.

In July, 1940, in an annex to the memorandum entitled 'The Situation in the area of the Mediterranean and Near East' the Director of the Political Department of the German Foreign Ministry put his comments regarding German aims and interests in the Arab world. He was of the opinion that Italy must be given absolute precedence in reshaping the Arab countries. He averred that Germany had no claim to leadership in the Arabian area, nor a division of that claim with Italy. He went on to say that that political *désintéressement* did not mean that Germany would renounce any economic interest in that area, in which connection two questions, namely air routes and the oil of Iraq, were of great importance to her. In this regard, he pointed out that Germany would be able to reach an understanding with Italy. Even Hitler was keen on taking the Mosul oilfields at any cost to deprive the British of their use.⁴⁸

Yet, in the wake of the visits to Berlin and Rome of the Iraqi Justice Minister Naji Shawkat and the Private Secretary of the Mufti, 'Uthman Kamal Haddad, the German Foreign Ministry instructed its Embassies, Legations and Consulates not to seek any discussions with leading Arab personalities on the question of the future political organization of the Arab area and, if pressed, to take a noncommittal attitude. The circular of the German Foreign Ministry of 20 August, 1940, which specifically addressed this matter, further stressed the broad outline of the Italo-German attitude towards the Arab countries:—

Germany pursues no political interests in the Mediterranean area, whose southern and eastern part is formed by the Arab world. Germany will therefore let Italy take the lead in the political reorganization of the Arab area. This consequently rules out any German claim to political leadership, or the sharing of leadership with

⁴⁷ DGFP, 1918-45, Series D, Vol. X (London, 1957, pp. 154-155). For more details on these contacts see Khalid al-Jamil's PhD thesis, *Nationalism in Iraq 1936-1941: Rashid 'Ali and Foreign Involvement* (University of Keele, 1978) and Majid Khadduri, *op. cit.* pp. 177-192.

⁴⁸ DGFP *op. cit.* Vol X p. 261-62 and *Hitler's Secret Conversations, 1941-1944* (Farrar, Straus and Young, New York 1953) p. 499.

Italy in the Arab territories which consist of the Arabian peninsula, Egypt, Palestine, Transjordan, Syria & Lebanon and Iraq.⁴⁹

This is evidence of Germany's reluctance to take a clear-cut stand towards the Arab cause in an attempt to avoid any embarrassment and clash with Italy, publicly manifest in the vague Italo-German Declaration of 23 October which did not commit either of these two powers to the independence of the Arab countries. If either was to support Arab independence it would be in contradiction with the policy of the German Foreign Ministry as outlined in the memorandum: 'The Situation in the area of the Mediterranean and Near East'. The memorandum endorsed the establishment of a northern Arab empire under the leadership of Iraq and proposed that either Germany or Germany and Italy together should assume the protection of this greater Arab empire.⁵⁰ Thus one can infer that, without this protection, such an empire should not be allowed to emerge.

Further, the Reich made it clear that it would take a positive attitude towards the question of supporting Iraq and recognizing the independence of the Arab countries. The Nazi Government also pointed out that only 'in certain circumstances' would it be prepared to help with captured arms and money, but would proceed only with agreement with Italy. This, of course, was Germany's response to Naji Shawkat's and 'Uthman Kamal Haddad's proposals which they put to the Reich Government regarding the Arab demands in return for their support to the Axis powers.⁵¹

Meanwhile, top-level negotiations took place between Germany and the U.S.S.R. in November, 1940. In a conversation between the Reich Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, and the Chairman of the Council of People's Commission of the U.S.S.R. and People's Commission for Foreign Affairs, Vyacheslav Molotov, held in Berlin, the former stressed Germany's desire to encourage the Soviet Union to extend her influence towards the direction of the Gulf, the Arabian Sea and Central Asia.⁵² Molotov was not convinced and he brought up Russia's historic claims to Finland, the Dardanelles, to Roumania, and in the direction of Bulgaria.⁵³ It may be argued that, if Germany would have given way

⁴⁹ DGFP, *op. cit.* pp. 515-516.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 261-262

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. XI pp. 44-46

⁵² *Ibid.*, *op. cit.* p.p. 533-538

⁵³ F.W. Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship*, (London, 1962) p. 93

at that time, the Soviets would have struck against Finland and then against the Roumanian oilfields, leaving Germany in an untenable position.

The U.S.S.R. was not prepared to accept these German proposals. She considered the Gulf and Central Asia as secondary aims. It seems clear that the Arab leaders were not at all aware of what was going on between Germany and these powers who were plotting to inherit their lands after the defeat of Britain and France. Italy was always against recognizing the Arab right to independence through a confederal state. She always considered the Arabs incapable of protecting such independence. Therefore, all statements and declarations made in the Press and on the Axis radio were merely to serve the Axis propaganda machine.⁵⁴ The Arabs themselves were already dubious of Italian designs.⁵⁵ In a discouraging note on German policy in Arabia (Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Saudi Arabia and Egypt) the head of the political division VII at the German Foreign Ministry, concluded that there was no reason at all for Germany to be sentimental about the Arabs whom he considered as 'basically anti-European and torn by religious, family and tribal differences.... Germany must not jeopardize her prestige here if she does not wish to suffer most severe reverses for a long time to come'.⁵⁶ But, taking all the evidence available, one can infer that Germany's belligerent attitude towards Britain and France, her lack of enthusiasm and interest in the Middle East and her declared animosity against the Jews, rendered her a natural and potential ally to the Arabs. As regards Germany's reaction to the military *coup d'état* of 1941 in Iraq, it seems that the Germans no less than the British were taken by surprise. There is no firm evidence of a prior plan or any military understanding between Rashid 'Ali and the Axis powers as to that particular step and nothing was contemplated to involve Iraq in a conflict with Britain.⁵⁷ Even at the time the British Ambassador in Tehran, Sir Reader Bullard, wrote to the Foreign Office:—

Our evidence suggests Germans here were taken by surprise by the *coup d'état*. No information of intentions yet, though plenty as to their interest in the situation in Iraq.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ DGFP., *op. cit.*, vol. IX p.p. 826-829

⁵⁵ Naji Shawkat, *op. cit.*, p. 404

⁵⁶ DGFP. *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*

⁵⁷ Ernst von Weizsacker's *Memoirs*, (London, 1951) p. 247, DGFP vol. XII Woermann's memorandum, Berlin, 7 March, 1941, and F.H. Hinsley, *British Intelligence in the Second World War* (London, HMSO, 1979) p. 410.

⁵⁸ FO 371/27064/E1465, from Iran, (Persia) from Tehran, to Baghdad. Sir Reader Bullard, No. 63, 10 April, 1941.

On many occasions the Nazi Government repeatedly confirmed that the Iraq Government should by no means be induced to enter into a state of hostilities against Britain until it was certain that Iraq was strong enough, with Axis aid, to challenge the British.⁵⁹

Woermann made it clear that any premature resistance against Britain would have only a brief success if not a humiliating failure which would in the final outcome simply lead to a strengthening of British prestige. Woermann also averred that Iraq should strike when the overall military and political situation made such action desirable. And that would only be possible, Woermann pointed out, when German troops were astride the 'Fertile Crescent' land bridge or if the moment of Britain's collapse everywhere was near.⁶⁰

So, notwithstanding Germany's invasion of Greece and Crete, there was no hope for Iraq as long as the Germans remained unwilling to involve themselves and access through neutral Turkey was barred. For one thing, a strong presence of the British naval fleet in the eastern Mediterranean was acknowledged to make sea movement in this theatre and near the Syrian coast impossible.⁶¹ Thus, it may be said that the failure of the German scheme to extend the Balkan campaign across the eastern Mediterranean into Syria, Palestine and Iraq was clear evidence of their disinclination to involve themselves in Iraq and the Gulf. Added to that Germany's preparations to invade Russia further tied her hand and Operation Barbarossa interfered in rendering the Iraqi Government the effective support that the Germans promised and the Arabs expected. Germany's only interest was to keep the situation ripe for internal revolt and to foster general instability in the Middle East, ready for exploitation should the day ever come for a full campaign in that area. But no such prospect existed until the U.S.S.R. had been defeated.

⁵⁹ *DGFP*, Vol. XII p.p. 655-656

⁶⁰ *Ibid* p. 242

⁶¹ *Franz von Papen's Memoirs* (London, 1952) p. 476

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CHAPTER III

Perceptions of Strategy

a) **British and American**

Historical Antecedents of Contemporary British Strategy in the Near and Middle East

In the nineteenth century the British adopted the term 'Near East' to embrace South-West Asia and North-East Africa. Occasionally, India was included as well.¹ Quite often, too, the Balkans would be. In fact, the term 'Near East Proper' was sometimes applied to them.²

After the final collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, that regional identification gradually came to appear less useful. So by 1940 it was being overshadowed by 'Middle East' in British Commonwealth parlance if not yet in American. A fair indication of what this term was usually deemed to embrace is afforded by the ambit of the Middle East Supply Centre established by the British in 1941. This extended from Malta and Libya eastward to Iran and southward to the Somalilands.

In British strategy the Near and Middle East remained an important element in the overall British imperial defence system. It was an important *place d'armes* for sea and air communications thither and as a route to India and the East via the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal.

In British strategy, too, India ranked next after the Royal Navy as a component of British strength:—

The British Naval Empire is pre-eminently a great Naval, Indian and Colonial power.³

One aspect of the relationship between India and the Near East is that the Indian Army was seen as a strategic reserve for dispatch

¹ P.E. Cove, *Webster's Third International Dictionary*, (G & C Merriam, Springfield, London, 1961)

P. 150.

² L.E. Seltzer (Ed) *The Columbia Lippincot Gazetteer of The World* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1952). P. 1293.

³ First report of the Committee of Imperial Defence; quoted in Lord Hankey, *The Supreme Command; 1914-18*, vol. I, (London, 1961) p. 46

to the Near East-Mediterranean theatre (and also to the Europe, Southern Africa and Far East). The first example of its dispatch to the Mediterranean-Near East theatre was during the Russo-Turkish war of 1878 when Indian troops went by sea to Malta. But another axis of deployment could be sea and land via India-Iraq-Transjordan-Palestine-Egypt. In a sense, of course, the campaign into Mesopotamia in the First World War was, among other things, an attempt to use the Indian Army to take pressure off the Suez Canal.

Delhi made policy in its own right, including foreign policy. It was not bound to refer matters to London. By means of annexations, alliances and the exercise of influence the Government of India was able to turn south Asia into a single unit for defence purposes. This was to be extended to the Near East. Aden was annexed in 1839 as a guarantee against Egyptian expansion; and from 1820, treaties were signed with the shaikhs of the Arabian coast on the Gulf recognizing Britain as the paramount power in the region and promising to keep other powers out. India also handled relations with Lower Mesopotamia (where its representatives long used the Indian title of 'Resident' rather than 'Consul'). It dealt with Afghanistan and Persia where all British consular and diplomatic posts in the south and east of Persia were staffed from India, while London handled Tehran, Tabriz, Isfahan and Shiraz. Indeed, British world power revolved round India until its independence in 1947 when Britain's status as a great power began to disintegrate.

Ever since the Gallipoli campaign of 1915 British schools of strategy remained divided on the question of the importance of the Near East. After 1915 it became a bone of contention between 'Easterner' and 'Westerner' adherents. The former, and above all Churchill and David Lloyd George, who were very much 'Easterners', sought a strategical solution in a flanking attack in another theatre — via Gallipoli, Salonika, Mesopotamia and Suez — when the Allied armies were bogged down on the Western Front in the bloody stalemate of trench warfare in the Great War. Liddell Hart is very much the intellectual bridge between the First World War and the Second, as far as the Eastern School is concerned. His book *The British Way in Warfare* reflects this strongly. His main theme is based on abandoning continental military commitments and the use of sea power to bring about economic pressure on the enemy.⁴

⁴ Brian Bond, *Liddell Hart, A Study of his Military Thought* (London, 1977) p. 70

Ever since his attachment, as a young officer, to the British forces serving in India and Sudan in 1896 and 1898 respectively, Churchill began to show his deep interest and enthusiasm for the East and Near East. In *My Early Life* Churchill shows how steeped he was in the imagery of Omdurman and of India. It was he who applied to join the British Field Force in India to fight against the revolt of the Pathan tribesmen on the Indian frontier. In this regard Churchill wrote:—

Most people would have said 'He is going out to India'; but to that generation the East meant the gateway to the adventures and conquests of England.⁵

Churchill always wanted to go on active service. And when Lord Salisbury's Government determined to advance to Khartoum he applied again to join the campaign under Sir Herbert Kitchener, the Sirdar of the Egyptian Army. He wrote:—

My application to join that army, although favoured by the War Office, was refused, while several other officers of my service and rank were accepted.... I decided to proceed without delay to the centre of the Empire and argue the matter out in London.⁶

On the question of the importance of Turkey as an access to the East Lloyd George wrote:—

As a feature of the general strategy of the war the elimination of Turkey from the ranks of our enemies would have given us that access to Russia and Roumania which was so disastrously lacking, and without which they were driven out of the war.... The Turkish Empire lay across the track by land or water to our great possessions in the East.... It was vital for our prestige in the East, that once the Turks declared war against us we should defeat and discredit them without loss of time.⁷

The 'Westerners' were always against heavy diversions of strength to the East which would weaken the Western Front. Nevertheless, the polarization between 'Westerners' and 'Easter-

⁵ Churchill, *My Early Life*, (London, 1947) p. 120

⁶ *Ibid* p. 160-61

⁷ David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, (London, 1933-36) Vol IV pp. 1802-1803.

ners' did not continue unmodified after 1918, if only because circumstances were changing all the time. By 1941 it was more a question of various differences of emphasis rather than any clear-cut divergence of strategy. For there was no front in France.

During the inter-war period two developments strongly affected the strategic situation in the Mediterranean. First was the increased military potential of air power and secondly from 1937 the clear tilt of two Mediterranean powers, Italy and Spain, towards Germany. The expansionist policies of Mussolini (e.g. Abyssinia) and the creation of a seemingly formidable Italian Navy and Air Force raised the possibility that the Mediterranean might become an 'Italian Lake' and no longer an area of British strategic mobility. Before war broke out Britain decided to divert her merchant traffic from the Mediterranean to the Cape route because she could not guarantee the command of the sea in the central Mediterranean in the face of the Axis air force.⁸

For most of the period between September, 1939, and Italy's actual entry into the war (June, 1940), the British authorities were less worried with the danger from Italy than with two other possible threats to the Middle East—a German move through the Balkans and a Russian advance against the Anglo-Iranian oilfields.⁹

British Strategy in the Second World War

The overall British strategy for the conduct of the war had been concerted with the French in London at the end of March, 1939, when it was assumed that the British and the French could be ranged against a coalition of Germany and Italy. Anglo-French strategy covered a set of commitments towards Europe primarily, taking into account of the obligations incurred to Poland, Roumania, Greece and Turkey, and of the effect of possible Japanese intervention. Agreement was also reached on naval strategy and the broad lines upon which deployment and operations should be conducted in the Middle East, the Mediterranean, North Africa, the Red Sea, West and East Africa and the Far East.

The two sides agreed that strategic objects in the Mediterranean and Middle East would be made the basis of meetings between French and British commanders in North Africa and Palestine at which operational implications were examined.¹⁰ As regards Iraq, it was decided to open the line of communication between the Gulf and Haifa if need be.

⁸ Sir Arthur Hezlet, *The Submarine and Sea Power* (Peter Davies, London, 1967) p.137

⁹ Hinsley, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

¹⁰ Major-General I.S.O. Playfair, *The Mediterranean and Middle East* Vol. 1 (HMSO, London, 1954) p. 23-24.

The broad strategic policy for the conduct of the war was based on: the early defensive phase, the elimination of Italy after the conquest of Italian East and North Africa, and the final defeat of Germany, with the active assistance of the US.

The essential naval task was to protect the merchant ships carrying the cargoes on which depended the economy of the Allied Powers and the capacity to make war. 'On land, it had been agreed that Anglo-French strategy should aim primarily at maintaining the integrity of French territory.'¹¹ In appreciating the strategic situation, in February, 1939, Egypt was accorded a paramount strategic importance. To control the Suez Canal the security of Egypt as a whole was a top priority. And since the defences of Malta against air attack were inadequate, Alexandria was considered a key operational base for the British Fleet.¹² Palestine was also strategically important from various aspects, as a *place d'armes* from which Egypt and Iraq could be reinforced. Haifa was a British outlet of the southern oil pipeline from Iraq. The northern pipeline at Tripoli in Syria was a French responsibility.

At sea the French and British navies were to control respectively the western and eastern areas of the Mediterranean, and perhaps the Aegean. Therefore, the first task of the R.A.F. in the Sudan, Aden and Horn of Africa theatre would be, in co-operation with the navy, to confront the Italians in the Red Sea.

As regards India, the British were unduly conscious that ever since the Aryan invasion of 3,500 year ago, all the big invasions of India had been from the north-west. Among the invaders who had marched down the Khyber Pass were Alexander the Great, Tamerlane, Babur, Mahmud of Ghazni and Nadir Shah. And even in 1918-1939, holding the Khyber Pass against Pathan tribesmen was one of the most celebrated of the army and R.A.F. imperial police roles. Therefore such obsessional concerns were revived again when Nazi incursions were taking place via Iraq in 1941.

Throughout the reign of Queen Victoria the British Raj in Delhi and London worried perennially about the security of India. It was also deeply distrustful of Russia's autocratic policy and medieval society. Accordingly, every Russian move that seemed to threaten the approaches to India aroused singular anxiety. The perception persisted, however erroneously, that ever since the

¹¹ J.R.M. Butler, *Grand Strategy*, Vol II (London, 1957) p. 14.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 15

time of Peter the Great's and Catherine the Great's expansionist policy on the Black Sea, Moscow had been obsessed to gain control over the warm-water ports to the Gulf and the Mediterranean. Watched by the Government of India, Russia kept pushing its spearhead forward to Khiva in 1864, to Bokhara in 1865, to Tashkent and Samarkand in 1867, to Merv in 1884. This was the way sought by Moscow to put pressure on London to yield on the Straits.¹³ In London and Delhi fears arose that the Russians would not halt until British India was theirs too.

Even after 1939 the British saw that the most serious regional danger was a potential Russian threat to India, Afghanistan and Persia, home of the strategic Anglo-Persian Oil Company. The Chiefs-of-Staff believed that it was very difficult to meet India's demands for defence against Russian air attack. They felt that the most effective way in which Britain could strike against the U.S.S.R. would be to attack the Caucasian oilfields from Mosul. The Caucasian oilfields covered 80 per cent of Russia's needs. But the problem was that there were no suitable squadrons in the Middle East available for this operation at that time.¹⁴ The raid on the Roumanian oilfields at Ploesti in August, 1943, was launched from Italy as an extension of the strategic air offensive against Germany itself; and it was not a success. Still, the British Foreign Secretary in 1939-1940, Viscount Halifax, was persuaded that the USSR feared Germany and did not want to see her too strong.

He thought it was not in Britain's interests to be at war with the U.S.S.R.¹⁵ The other perceived threat to the British presence in India was from within, at the time when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour and brought the war almost to India's door. The Indian National Congress Party under Mahatma Ghandi was the chief organ of the nationalist movement and was practicing civil disobedience. The Congress Party resigned from the government in protest against the Viceroy's proclamation of India being at war with Germany in September, 1939, without consulting the Central Legislature prior to his announcement.

With the collapse of France in June, 1940, (another Mediterranean Power with very large naval presence, including a squadron in Alexandria) the danger was doubled. The fall of France threatened the naval balance in the Mediterranean. Although marginally superior in battleships (seven against six) and possessing two aircraft carriers against none, the British Mediterranean fleet

¹³ Elizabeth Monroe, *Britain's Moment in the Middle East, 1914-71* (London, 1981) p. 18

¹⁴ *Cab 65/6*, War Cabinet 66(40)1. 12 March, 1940.

¹⁵ *Cab 65/6*, *op.cit.*

was significantly outnumbered by the Italians in cruisers and destroyers. The Italian navy had the largest submarine fleet in the world and ten land-based aircraft for every one which the RAF could spare for the Mediterranean theatre. And, if the French fleet actively joined the war on the Axis side, Britain might well be swept from the Mediterranean.¹⁶

From the entry of Italy into the war to the battle of al-Alamein the whole British policy in the Middle East and the Balkans turned on the decision of the War Cabinet to keep a strong British Fleet in the Mediterranean, including Force H at Gibraltar to underpin the army and air force centred on Egypt. Undoubtedly, Italy's failure to dominate the Mediterranean or to gain any notable victory, especially between June and December, 1940, might well be attributed to a multitude of factors: (a) The aircraft did not prove to be the decisive weapon (b) Italian power did not live up to its fears and expectations. Italy, although aspiring to drive Britain permanently from the Mediterranean, lacked a strategic plan to achieve her aims.

With the elimination of France, Britain was faced with the threat of invasion. She was forced to keep the greater part of her armies at home, and such air and sea strength as could be sent to the Mediterranean and Middle East had to be divided into two groups, one in eastern basin and the other in the western (Force H), subject to attack in detail by the Italian Fleet which was deployed at the centre. British forces deployed in Egypt and Palestine numbered about 36,000 and 27,000 men respectively. There was no British garrison in Iraq except for two airfields in Sha'iba and Habbaniya, west of the Euphrates river.

The Emphasis on the Near and Middle East

In October, 1940, the Defence committee endorsed the reinforcement of Malta and agreed that, should October pass without invasion, Britain would start reinforcing the Middle East by the Cape route. Finally, it was widely agreed that reinforcement of the Middle East was urgent.¹⁷ Therefore, it was decided to fight for Alexandria and Gibraltar and to beat the Italian mastery of the Central Mediterranean which was considered one of the great Churchillian decisions of the war. Yet, in spite of the weakness of the British army at home, two Matilda infantry tank regiments were sent to Egypt in September, 1940, while the Battle of Britain was

¹⁶ Peter Calvocoressi/Guy Wint, *Total War* (London 1972) p. 128

¹⁷ Butler, *op. cit.*, p.p. 365-66

still undecided. This aid was dispatched to Egypt when reports from the British Special Intelligence Service, British Service Attachés and U.S. sources confirmed that Germany was planning to move to the Mediterranean and that Hitler was considering the possibility of sending armoured aid to Libya¹⁸. And again in April, 1941, Operation Tiger brought in 43 Hurricanes and 238 tanks, despite objections raised by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Sir John Dill, who was in favour of reinforcing Singapore.

The tanks that Churchill sent to Egypt in 1940 were of great value during the ensuing offensive in that they broke down Italian defences based upon the small towns and ports along the coast of Cyrenaica. By doing so they destroyed the assumptions on which the Italian defence had been based. In October that year the Chiefs-of-Staff recommended that the first commitment of British land forces, after the security of Britain, should be the security of Egypt and the safeguarding of British interests in the Mediterranean and Middle East as a whole. These two areas were important as an active theatre for domestic morale to mobilize British society behind the war effort all the more fully and to impress the Americans.

In the Middle East lay Britain's main interests. Iraq was easily Britain's most important source of oil within the sterling area. The Suez Canal was the vital waterway to India, Australia, the Far East and East Africa via the Red Sea. In 1940 the Red Sea was rendered unsafe because of the Italian naval base at Massawa, and until the conquest of Italian East Africa in April, 1941, Britain was obliged to provide strong escorts for her Red Sea merchant ships, the only route by which war supplies from the U.S. could be safely sent to the British army in Egypt. If the Middle East were lost the British empire would be split, vital oil resources would be lost to the Axis Powers and there would be no way of forcing them to fight on two or more fronts simultaneously. In British strategy the Middle East was considered as a forward zone for the defence of India and the protection of vital oilfields.

The pre-war order of grand strategic priorities put Britain first, the Far East second, and the Middle East third. Now the Middle East ranked second to Britain.¹⁹ Therefore Churchill sought an early opportunity of attacking the Axis Powers through an offensive against the Italians in North Africa. The British effort in the

¹⁸ *Ibid* p. 365 and p. 453 and Hinsley, *op. cit.* p. 382

¹⁹ Correlli Barnett, *Britain and her Army* (London, 1970) p. 43

Middle East was a final and magnificent demonstration of British strength as a great sea-power. The Royal Navy was able to achieve domination over the U-boat which enabled the constant convoys of cargo and troopships to sail around Africa and reinforce the Middle East theatre.

The strategic situation in the Mediterranean and Middle East had for many years been conditioned by the attitude of Rome. It had been British policy to encourage the neutrality not only of Italy but also of the Balkan Entente. It was evident during the winter of 1940 that there existed a threat of further penetration into the Balkans either by Germany or Italy (the latter had already occupied Albania in April, 1939) and possibly by the U.S.S.R. (whose eyes were fixed on Bessarabia). Germany had her interests in Roumanian oil as well. Moreover, Italian designs on Yugoslavia and Greece, with the long outstanding Hungarian and Bulgarian hopes for recovering their former territories from Roumania, made confrontation inevitable. And following Russia's occupation of Bessarabia in June, 1940, the Roumanian Government was becoming more pro-Axis.²⁰ She was compelled to yield large areas of her territory to both Hungary and Bulgaria, Germany and Italy guaranteeing the integrity of what remained. In the aftermath of the settlement of the territorial claims, Roumania had sometime previously appealed to Hitler to send a military mission to Roumania. The Führer consented by sending in September that year army and air missions to that country. Hitler's real objectives, which were to be kept secret, were to protect Roumanian oilfields at Ploesti and to prepare the ground for operations by German and Roumanian forces in case Germany was forced into war with Russia.²¹ In reality Germany's strategic penetration of the Balkans began well before the Second World War. The method adopted was domination of the foreign trade of the countries concerned. Thus Hitler was peacefully strengthening his grip over the Balkans. And in November that year Roumania, Hungary and Slovakia all joined the Tripartite pact.

Moreover, in November, 1940, after the Italian failure against Greece, the Germans began preparations for the occupation of Greece with the immediate object of preventing British attacks on the Roumanian oilfields. The British immediately assumed that Hitler was bent on something more ambitious — a thrust through Turkey into the Middle East. In fact, his concern was simply to

²⁰ *Wo 208/2257*. MI, Weekly Commentary of 6th June, 1940

²¹ Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 362

secure that Roumanian oil and the southern flank of his projected invasion of the U.S.S.R. (see below). Yet Whitehall continued to believe that Germany was planning to advance to Iraq and Suez via Turkey and Syria partly to seize British oil and partly to divert British resources from the defence of the United Kingdom.²²

The Situation in Iraq, Syria, Persia and Turkey

Although most of the Middle Eastern governments were well disposed towards Britain — despite the growing unrest in Iraq, Palestine and Syria — it was essential for military, strategic, logistic, economic and political reasons that British power and influence be consolidated. It was for this reason (and latterly so that help could more easily be given to the U.S.S.R.) that Churchill insisted that General Archibald Wavell, much against his will, and General Claude Auchinleck should use force to eliminate Axis influence in Iraq, Syria and then Persia (in August, 1941). From Cairo, Wavell was operating a very complicated Grand Strategy within a political environment in which the situation of the British and their allies was becoming unstable²³. At the beginning of April, 1941, Wavell was fighting on three fronts (Cyrenaica, East Africa and Greece). Therefore, he had no desire to open another front in Syria or in Iraq.²⁴ He had been most reluctant even to give aid to Greece which had critically weakened his forces in Libya.

Herein lay much of the importance of Iraq, Syria, Persia and Turkey. They afforded the strategic depth for the defence of the Suez Canal, the approach to India and the Persian oilfields, while across Iraq passed the Mediterranean pipeline and the line of communication between Basra and Haifa.

Iraq's membership of the 'sterling area' from 1939 was another important element in British strategy. This monetary bloc constituted the economic bedrock for Britain's war effort. It was an informal grouping of countries which kept a considerable proportion of their monetary reserves in the form of sterling in London and had a common interest in co-ordinating their respective monetary finances.²⁵ For reliance on gold to underwrite the world economic system was receding fast. However, a general restoration of fixed exchange rates plus the emergence of several fairly informal but highly functional currency blocs (first and

²² Hinsley, *op. cit.*, p. 347

²³ Charles de Gaulle, *The Call To Honour, 1940—42* (London, 1955) p. 175 and p. 181

²⁴ Martin Gilbert, *Winston Churchill*, vol. VI (London, 1979) p. 883

²⁵ William Ashworth, *A Short History of the International Economy, 1850-1950*, (London, New York, Toronto, 1952) p. 225.

foremost the sterling area), served to buttress the international monetary system.

Moreover, British imperial interest in Iraq may be defined as follows:

- (a) Safe and open communications between the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf and free transit for those communications in peace and war.
- (b) (The) predominance of British influence in Iraq and at least, protection against any other foreign penetration or interference.
- (c) The preservation of legitimate British interests in Iraq, to which must be added, to some extent, foreign interests, if (b) is to be fully secured.²⁶

In an attempt to secure all these interests the treaty of 1930 was supplemented by a military annexure.²⁷ Moreover, in Britain's imperial strategy, Iraq had also come to occupy a nodal place in respect of strategic air mobility, one similar to that held by the Suez Canal in British maritime thinking. The strategic air mobility of Iraq had developed in two phases:—

- (a) Before 1939 it was a linch-pin in the Imperial Airways route England to Australia, a route developed partly as a romantic expression of Empire but more particularly in order that it could provide the infrastructure for military air mobility. In this regard Guedella wrote:—

The Cairo decision of 1921 was related strictly, like most British decisions, to the business in hand. But it was full of larger implications of strategy. The same conference decided to ensure the mobility of British air power in the Middle East by establishing an air route between Cairo and Baghdad, along which the squadrons could be switched almost instantaneously from the Nile valley to RAF stations in Iraq and, by way of the Persian Gulf, to India, and the resolve to safeguard the oil of Iraq and Persia from the air.²⁸

- (b) With Italy's entry into the war Iraq's strategic importance as an oil source and a strategic air corridor was doubled. It

²⁶ Air 8/105 The Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930

²⁷ See Appendix 'A'

²⁸ Philip Guedella, *Middle East, 1940-42* (London, 1944) p. 56

became as a stepping-stone for switching air power between different theatres in the Middle East and India.

Because of Iraq's geostrategic position in the Middle East, a severance of this link in the chain of air routes to the east, would mean that the levels of air strength to be maintained in both the Eastern Mediterranean and the Indian subcontinent would have to be raised, since the system of rapid reinforcement upon which the security of those regions rested would become impossible. Iraq was also one of the finest R.A.F. training areas, containing permanent accommodation constructed at high cost and offering the only possible *place d'armes* for the location of the central reserve upon which hinged the flexibility and ubiquity of British air power.

Moreover, the presence of a strong British air force in Iraq was seen as an important element in the security of the South Persian oilfield. Indeed, it acted as a deterrent to potential threats to British interests in Persia and Arabia generally, and to any hostile action against British India from Central Asia. To secure this strategically valuable region from 1937 onwards 14 out of the 27 R.A.F. squadrons stationed abroad were maintained in Egypt, Palestine and Iraq.²⁹

Towards the end of March, 1941, Basra acquired special value as a possible port for the transshipment of U.S. supplies for the Middle East, particularly aircraft. Churchill, after discussions with Averell Harriman, President Franklin Roosevelt's special emissary, stressed the importance of opening Basra as a base for the assembly of aircraft which would be shipped direct in American vessels. This concern for Basra also related to the increasing concentration of the war in the Middle East theatre, not least the strategists' expectations of an eastern trend in its development.³⁰ Basra was considered ideal as an alternative base to Suez should the Red Sea be rendered unsafe by enemy action. In particular, American ships might be sent there without too readily arousing an isolationist backlash in Congress. The maintenance of the line of communication to Turkey (which, as Churchill well recognized, was vulnerable to German superiority in the air and in the Aegean Sea) was another reason.³¹

It seems, therefore, that an overriding British interest lay in securing the establishment of a large base at Basra. All other

²⁹ Major D.H. Cole, *Imperial Military Geography*, 9th ed. (London, 1938) p. 33 and p. 187

³⁰ *Cab 80/27*, secret. C.O.S. (41) 229, 8 April, 1941, *War Cabinet, Chiefs of Staff Committee, Iraq, Annex 1*, Prime Minister, Personal Minute, the *Secretary of State for India*.

³¹ W.S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol. III (London, 1950) p. 227.

priorities were subordinate to that aim, particularly in the light of President Roosevelt's Lend-Lease programme of March, 1941, and other tokens of a gradually deepening American involvement. Thus, in April, 1941, the 'Neutrality Patrol', as it was rather oddly termed, was extended across the Atlantic as far as longitude 25° West. What this meant was that everywhere between that longitude and the American coast itself U.S. warships would protect by force the movement of supplies to Europe. Further east, they still could not do so. Here the point is that Churchill and Roosevelt were working together to draw the US ever closer to full-scale hostilities with Germany without generating a reaction into isolation on the part of the American public.

Moreover, in the spring of 1941, with the apprehension of an energy shortage which resulted in the appointment of the Secretary for the Interior, Harold Ickes, as Petroleum Co-ordinator for national defence, the U.S. attitude to oil supplies, especially from the Middle East (Saudi Arabia), was undergoing a 'sea change'. This process, too, was to be gradual but insistent. In 1943 Saudi Arabia was to become eligible for Lend-Lease assistance under Executive Order No. 8926, in order to solve the problem of what was then called the 'strategic shortage' by developing the Saudi Arabian petroleum resources.³²

Although Iraq would have difficulty in disposing of the oil from Kirkuk to any purchaser other than Britain, a hostile government in Baghdad might cut off supplies none the less. Moreover, such overt hostility might reinforce the anti-British elements within Persia and hence put in jeopardy the oil supplies from Abadan. If Iraq and Persia came completely under the Axis, the latter would be at the gates of India. Yet there was no British army garrison in Iraq to show that Britain was still a power with which to reckon. British military prestige there was low, that of the Axis Powers corresponding high.

Churchill perceived that through the build-up of a Balkan Front, comprising Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey, impending German aggression could be blocked which might affect the attitude of the U.S.S.R. favourably.³³ He also believed that with a stable Iraq on her southern flank Turkey might the better withstand the pressures of the Nazi Government and be left secure.

Because of her vulnerability to air attack and her military

³² *The Sunday Times, Weekly Review*, 8 November, 1981 and Harold Ickes, the Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes, *The Lowering Clouds*, 1939, Vol. II (London 1955) pp. 528-590

³³ Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. III (London, 1950) p. 83

weakness, Turkey could not raise to this challenge*. Moreover, the Turks were concerned lest they should be attacked by the U.S.S.R. if they became involved in war with Germany. Turkey was then, and was long to remain, the key to the whole British position in the Near East. A treaty of mutual assistance between Britain, France and Turkey, which had been initialled, along with a military convention on 28 September, 1939, was eventually signed on 19 October.

The Treaty was to run for fifteen years. The most important articles of the political agreement were the first three, which provided for French and British assistance to Turkey in the event of aggression by a European power either against Turkey or leading to a war in the Mediterranean theatre in which Turkey became involved. They also provided for her rendering assistance to Britain and France should they become involved in the Mediterranean theatre as a result of aggression by a European power or of a breach in the guarantees to Greece and Roumania. Needless to say the treaty was aimed at strengthening Britain's position in the Mediterranean in the even of a crisis and at deterring Germany and Italy from committing further aggression against the signatories or against Greece and Roumania. Needless to say, the Italian invasion of Albania was the chief reason for Turkey signing this treaty with Britain and France, not to mention the German subjugation of Czechoslovakia.³⁴

On 1 November, 1940, the Chiefs-of-Staff perceived that the Germans might intend, after the occupation of Bulgaria and Greece, to attack Turkey through Thrace and establish bridge-heads on the further side of the Straits, and they would advance into Syria and perhaps into northern Iraq.³⁵ German advance by land through Syria was a serious threat to Britain's hold on Egypt; it would cut the British alternative line of supply via Iraq and Palestine and would ultimately force the army of the Nile to fight on two fronts. But it seems that British Intelligence was not aware of Hitler's limited aims in the Near and Middle East.

On 4 and 12 November that year the Germans reassessed and reviewed their immediate plans in the region following Hitler's meetings between 22 and 28 October with Laval, Pétain, Franco and Mussolini in the aftermath of the Italian attack on Greece on 28 October. They decided that no help would be given to Italy in

* All the documents on Turkey's attitude to the war were retained by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and are not available: FO371/30089, 30090, 30091, 30092, 30093, and 30094

³⁴ FO371/23297, British Embassy, Angora, 10 July, 1939, to FO.

³⁵ WO 190/982, Minutes of 6 November, 1940

Cyrenaica until the capture of Mersa Matruh and that no collaboration would be sought from Pétain, beyond his consent to the discussion of measures for the protection of France's colonies in Africa. Likewise, in Spain it was believed that an advance on Gibraltar as means of strengthening Italy's position in Libya was a high priority.

As regards the Balkan States, Hitler decided that there was to be no action against Turkey and beyond, as this, he believed, would clash with the preparations for attacking the USSR.³⁶ And as a result of the British intervention and reinforcement of Greece following the Italian invasion of that country and the fear that the British might attack the Roumanian oilfields at Ploesti, the German military mission in Roumania was reinforced and preparations begun for the occupation of Greece with 19 divisions via Bulgaria. Hitler had already assured the Turkish President on 4 March, 1941, that he had no intention of approaching the Turkish frontier.³⁷

By a secret protocol which was communicated to the U.S.S.R., it was agreed that Turkey's obligation would not compel her to wage war on the Soviet Union. And despite her declared neutrality and contrary to British wishes, Turkey signed on the eve of Barbarossa (June, 1941) a ten-year non-aggression pact with Germany. Turkey insisted that this pact would not contravene any previous commitments. What it bespoke was a desire on the Germans' part to secure their southern flank in a war with the U.S.S.R. In October, 1941, a trade agreement was also concluded, providing for shipments of various materials to Germany, including chrome ore.

With the collapse of France on 22 June, 1940, and even before the conclusion of the Franco-German armistice, the Turks decided to adopt an attitude of non-belligerency, invoking the provision in the Tripartite Treaty of 19 October, 1939, that Turkey would be required to take action to involve her in a war with the Soviet Union.

In view of the dubious attitude of Yugoslavia and Turkey (the latter had rejected Britain's offer of January, 1941, of sending forces, particularly three fighter and seven bomber squadrons³⁸) General Wavell, General Sir James Marshall-Cornwall and Air Vice-Marshal T.W. Elmhirst (the last two being members of a mission to Turkey for staff talks) took the view, which Dill did not

³⁶ Hinsley *op. cit.*, p. 250-1

³⁷ Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 449

³⁸ Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 383

share, that Turkey would be more of a liability than an asset. They believed that, in any case, Turkey would not fight at British bidding and they preferred her to remain neutral. As regards to Yugoslavia, these officers perceived that she would not fight the Germans unless Turkey did.³⁹ Above all, neither Turkey nor Yugoslavia would separately combine with Greece and Britain against Germany.

The Foreign Office had always been against the line taken by the Chiefs-of-Staff that pressure should be exerted on Turkey to come into the war as soon as possible.⁴⁰ The Cabinet hoped that Turkey could be persuaded to join Yugoslavia in a common front against German aggressions. In this regard Churchill wrote:—

We want Turkey to come into the war as soon as possible. We are not pressing her to take any special steps to help the Greeks, except to make it clear to Bulgaria that any move by Germany through Bulgaria against Greece, will be followed by immediate Turkish declaration of war.⁴¹

But it may be argued that a Turkish declaration of war on Germany might have worked out very badly for Britain. If Turkey could remain neutral, she could serve as a land buffer for Syria, Suez, Iraq, Iran and the Gulf.

When hostilities erupted between Britain and Iraq in the summer of 1941, Turkey came to figure largely in staff discussions, as she had in 1940. In British eyes the political effects of losing Iraq to the Germans would be most unfavourable to Egypt and Turkey. The only way to halt this was for Turkey to hold fast against German pressure to allow the passage of German troops and aid into Iraq and to deal at the earliest possible moment with the situation in Iraq and in Syria.

Eden was in favour of encouraging the Turks to occupy the northern part of Syria at the time when the Turkish troops were concentrating on the Iraqi and Syrian borders. They (the Turks) were asking the British how to deal with the situation in these two countries.⁴² Eden believed that the recovery of the situation in Iraq might compensate for the British loss of Crete and that its effect upon the Middle East would be crucial.⁴³ But it seems that the Turks were not prepared to do more than move troops and heavy

³⁹ Eden, *op. cit.*, pp. 196—200 and p. 208

⁴⁰ Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 374

⁴¹ Churchill *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 484

⁴² Eden, *op. cit.*, p. 247

⁴³ *Ibid* p. 244

artillery to the Syrian frontier in order to avoid any embarrassment with the Arabs and owing to their special relationship with Iraq as a member of the Sa'ad Abad Pact.

To sum up the critical strategic situation in the Middle East on the eve of the Barbarossa operation it is fair to quote Major-General Sir John Kennedy, the British Director of Military Operations. He wrote:—

Whether we can now hold on to the Middle East depends on one thing and one thing alone — whether the Germans concentrate seriously against us there. If they do, they will be able to develop their attacks in considerable strength from the west through Libya, from the north through Turkey, and possibly from the north-east through the Caucasus and Persia. We can not produce sufficient strength in the Middle East in the near future to secure our position in face of serious attack from even one of these fronts.

Even if we had the forces available for dispatch to the Middle East, which we have not, we have not the shipping to transport them or maintain them. The fact of the matter is that the maintenance of the forces already in the Middle East constitutes a drain on our resources which we can ill afford in face of the threat to the British Isles and to ill-defended key points, in particular, West Africa and Malta. If we hold on in the Middle East over an appreciable period it will therefore be only because the Germans are fully occupied elsewhere.⁴⁴

The Influence of Churchill

Churchill was the most experienced warlord in the 20th century, in the sense that he had been in politics since 1900 when he became a member of Parliament (with only a brief gap in 1922-4) and in the Cabinet on and off since 1908. He also had had experience of failure: his failure at Gallipoli cost him his job as the First Lord of Admiralty since he had enthusiastically espoused the Dardanelles strategy.

His Prime Ministerial career began in May, 1940, after the resignation of Neville Chamberlain in the aftermath of the unsuccessful British campaign in Norway — a failure, for which Churchill bore the operational responsibility far more than Chamberlain.

⁴⁴ Major-General Sir John Kennedy, *The Business of War*, (London, 1957) p. 137

He presided over the Committee of the Chiefs-of-Staff which embraced the Chiefs of the three services, and made himself the Minister of Defence and thus exercised a complete authority over the whole sphere of war and influenced all decision-making. A few generals and high-ranking officers could have resisted his urgings — for example, Alan Brooke, who became the Chief of the Imperial General Staff in December, 1941. (See Chapter IV on Churchill's influence on the events in Iraq).

Churchill's personality was a combination of impatience and changeable mood. He always bullied his generals. He sacked Generals Wavell and Auchinleck, the former perhaps the most distinguished British general of the war. He humiliated others. He demanded the dismissal of Admirals Cunningham, Somerville, Forbes, Tovey and Harwood, but he did not succeed in this.

With the collapse of France and Greece and Rommel poised on the frontier of Egypt, the Axis Powers regained the initiative. The point of greatest danger at that moment was thought to be Egypt. To Churchill, who was heart and soul in the war in the Middle East, Egypt was the theatre from which he could strike at the Axis forces. He was eager not to lose any opportunity of doing so, which was what made him so impatient with his commanders-in-chief.⁴⁵

On discovering Wavell's contingency plan to withdraw from Egypt, the Prime Minister urged the Defence Committee to hold a meeting on 28 April.⁴⁶ Churchill insisted on the need of fighting every inch of the way on this front. In a directive on the same day he demanded that this should be impressed on all ranks of the army of the Nile. He was alarmed lest the fact that the possible evacuation of Egypt had been secretly considered should become known.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Sir John Dill, differed with the Prime Minister on the question of the priority accorded to Egypt and the defence of the Middle East as a whole. He considered that the Prime Minister was overestimating the comparative importance of Egypt. Sir John attached great importance to the defence of the U.K. and Singapore against invasion. He regarded the defence of Singapore as more important than that of Egypt. Of course the effect of Japan's entry into the war would recast all of Britain's strategic priorities in the Far East. Singapore, Burma, New Zealand and Australia would be the first targets the Japanese would strike at. But since the prospect of Japan's entry

⁴⁵ Playfair, *op. cit.*, p. 207

⁴⁶ Geoffrey Warner, *Iraq and Syria 1941* (London, 1974) p. 167

into the war was not immediate, Sir John's fears were unjustified and Egypt was to remain the keystone of Churchill's strategy in the Middle East. From the beginning, Churchill had been against the idea of building the Singapore base. He considered that without U.S. support British power in that part of the world would be ineffective.⁴⁷ In this regard Churchill wrote:—

Singapore must hold out until the Mediterranean was safe and the Italian fleet liquidated.⁴⁸

American Perceptions of the Middle East: The Role of Roosevelt

President Franklin Roosevelt argued that further British losses in the Near and Middle East, North Africa and the Mediterranean would not mean the defeat of the Allies. Roosevelt maintained that the outcome of that struggle would be decided in the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans. Never mind the new-found concern with imported oil, betokened by the Ickes appointment mentioned above. He regarded all British withdrawals in Greece and other parts of the eastern Mediterranean as part of a plan to shorten British lines and greatly extend the Axis lines and compel them to expend great quantities of men and equipment.⁴⁹ Although Roosevelt may have struck a casual attitude towards the defence of the Middle East, the Australians and New Zealanders did not. They did not think that the Indian Ocean basin could remain secure if the Middle East had been lost.

It is fair to say that the occupation of Egypt and the Middle East by the Axis Powers would not necessarily have been a preliminary to the successful maintenance of a prolonged oceanic war. Needless to say, the attitude of Japan, Turkey, Spain, Vichy France and many Arab countries would also be determined by the outcome of the struggle in this theatre of war.

The American military advisers opposed British Middle East strategy and regarded it a mistaken one. They put the defence of Britain first, the defence of Singapore and the sea lanes to Australia and New Zealand second, the defence of the ocean trade routes in general third.⁵⁰ In July, 1941, Roosevelt's personal adviser, Harry Hopkins, visited London. He said that the US military advisers saw that the British position in the Middle East was 'quite hopeless' and to send further reinforcements there was like 'throwing snowballs into hell'. Therefore they thought that

⁴⁷ Michael Howard, *The Continental Commitment*, London, 1972) pp. 140-41

⁴⁸ Churchill, *op. cit.* vol. II p. 326

⁴⁹ Warner, *op. cit.*, pp. 170-71

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 171

the U.S. would not be prepared to supply large numbers of tanks, etc., if they were to be sent to the Middle East. However, the U.S. had no interest in the Middle East or in India.

Undoubtedly U.S. suspicions of Britain's ulterior motives in the Middle East reflected Washington's belief that, despite her informal alliance with London, she was also still dealing with the old imperial power. With a major presence in the Middle East, Roosevelt and his advisers did not want to see the British presence in the Mediterranean and the Middle East preserved after the war, as witness U.S. opposition to British involvement in Greece in 1944. Yet this strategic disagreement unmistakably reflected more than a quarrel between strategists, and more even than the natural geopolitical attraction the British had for their imperial route to India and the U.S. for their trans-Pacific interests. It reflected more the disparity in sheer military size and potential between the two allies on the one hand and between the two rising superpowers of the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. and the declining world power of Britain on the other.⁵¹

b) German and Italian Decision-making in Nazi Germany

The Reich system of government was based on the 'leadership principle', each minister being responsible personally to Hitler. There was no collective Cabinet responsibility. German foreign policy and strategy in the Nazi period were influenced, even more than with Prussia in the time of Frederick the Great or the new German Empire under Bismarck, by the world view (*Weltanschauung*) of one man, the Führer. Every decision setting up the course of German external relations and strategic aims from 1933 on was made by Hitler personally and it was he who set the exact timing of every important action.⁵²

German military as well as political conduct of the war was characterized by a continental strategy and a poor comprehension of the paramount importance of the Mediterranean theatre. It was often said that the Germans were too land-minded; they did not understand naval strategy and they failed to grasp the importance of the Mediterranean which was considered one of the main reasons for their defeat. Undoubtedly such a view is highly exaggerated. Apart from the air battle against Britain and the Battle of the Atlantic, the whole German war effort had always

⁵¹ Paul Kennedy, *The Realities Behind Diplomacy* (London, 1981) p. 355

⁵² Dewitt C. Poole, "Light on Nazi Foreign Policy", *Foreign Affairs* vol. 25, 1946-7. p. 130 and Hinsley, *op. cit.*, p. 500.

been directed solely against the continental powers in Europe: Poland, the Low Countries, France. It was only after the defeat of the Luftwaffe over Britain that Hitler began to look towards the Mediterranean, Britain's most important supply route after the Atlantic, though Hitler's instincts were towards the invasion of Russia. Only when the inferiority of her Italian ally had become manifest did Germany herself feel obliged to intervene in the Mediterranean and Middle East. Moreover, for strategic, political and psychological considerations, Hitler decided to give aid to his ally. Directive 22 of 11 January, 1941, provided for a German blocking formation to go to Africa about 20 February. From bases in Tripolitania the Luftwaffe was to attack the ports and unloading harbours on the coasts of Egypt and Cyrenaica. Hitler and his generals regarded the African front as an important theatre for they feared that a final Italian defeat there would enable the British to use their forces on other battlefields such as the strengthening of the Balkan front and threatening both Italy and ultimately Roumania. After the fall of Tobruk in January, 1941, Hitler decided to send the 15th Armoured Division, instead of a block unit, to provide a greater capability for mobile armoured warfare. With the previously designated 5th Light Motorized Division, it was to constitute a *Deutsches Afrika Korps* with General Erwin Rommel as commander.

However, Hitler's failure to defeat Britain itself made him anxious to attack the British presence in the Mediterranean and Middle East.⁵³ Thus, at the end of October, 1940, he abandoned the idea of invading Britain and turned to the strategy of war operations in the Mediterranean and Middle East (the theatre where the Italians were supposed to operate). Nevertheless, his top priority remained the invasion of the U.S.S.R. ever since he made his secret decision on 1st August, 1940, to attack her.

The German naval staff believed that the capture of Alexandria and the development of the situation in the Mediterranean might well determine the outcome of the war in Germany's favour. They further stressed that for strategic and economic reasons it was necessary to control the eastern part of the Mediterranean as well as the western.⁵⁴ In the early autumn of 1940 Grand Admiral Erich Raeder tried to direct Hitler's interest to the Mediterranean. His grand strategic argument was that Axis control of the Mediterranean would not only bring about humiliation for Britain but also

⁵³ Lucasz Hirszwicz. *The Third Reich and Arab East*, (London, Toronto, 1966) p. 95

⁵⁴ Memorandum of the naval staff of 14th October, 1940, on the situation in the Mediterranean, quoted in Hirszwicz, *op. cit.*, p. 95

blunt any attack from the east alleged by Hitler.⁵⁵ But it is doubtful whether Hitler was prepared to commit a large force in North Africa or the Mediterranean for a large-scale operation at this time, since his definitive order to prepare to attack Russia reached the General Staff on 18 December, 1940.⁵⁶ Some of Hitler's generals (Student, Heusinger, Paulus and Gehlen) believed that there should be a concerted attack on North Africa with German participation, and against Greece and with other military operations in the direction of Bulgaria, Turkey and Syria; that is, with an advance on Suez from the North.⁵⁷ It does appear that the above-mentioned strategic plans were considered during the period between the 'Battle of Britain' and Operation Barbarossa against the U.S.S.R.

Under interrogation, during August to November, 1945, by a small group of American officials sent to Germany for the purpose, Field-Marshal Hermann Goering explained his own ideas about the strategy which ought to have been followed in the fateful summer of 1940. He averred that, after the defeat of France, he urged Hitler to move against the Mediterranean and take Gibraltar, perhaps having eliminated or humiliated Britain first. He added that, with Gibraltar conquered, Suez could easily have been taken. Meanwhile the Germans would move southwards and take Dakar and from there, the Mediterranean being closed, they could threaten allied shipping around the Cape. Goering added that, if the U.S. showed any readiness to intervene, Germany then would be able to occupy the Azores.⁵⁸ He also envisaged the invasion of the Balkans and of Asia Minor through Turkey, and an invasion of Egypt through Cyrenaica.⁵⁹ The Führer then began to consider conducting war operations in the Western Mediterranean, first with Gibraltar as the main target, and then following up with the conquest of the western part of the North African coast. This would facilitate the blocking of the Mediterranean and the destruction of all British bases there.

However, Hitler's negotiations with Vichy France and Spain in October that year failed to reach an agreement against Britain, especially in France's North African possessions, or on conducting the joint operation 'Felix' with Spain for attacking Gibraltar and expelling the British forces from the Western Mediterranean.

⁵⁵ Cajus Bekker, *Hitler's Naval War*, (London, 1974) p. 257

⁵⁶ Poole, *op. cit.*, p. 145 and Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 535

⁵⁷ Halder, *Kriegstagebuch*, vol. II pp. 151-3 quoted in Hirsowicz *op. cit.*, p. 51

⁵⁸ Poole, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

⁵⁹ Raymond de Belot, *The Struggle for the Mediterranean, 1939-45* (Princeton University, New Jersey, 1951) p. 21.

The ageing Pétain pretended not to understand what Hitler was talking about. Early in December, 1940, General Franco not only refused to co-operate, but even declined to approve a German assault on Gibraltar unless Hitler gave him French Morocco, but the latter desisted.⁶⁰ Franco probably realized that it was an impossible demand. Hitler already had promised Pétain and Pierre Laval that the French colonies would be kept intact.⁶¹

Frustrations in the Western Mediterranean made Hitler explore the alternative approach of an offensive strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean and the possibility of blocking the Mediterranean from the direction of Suez.⁶² The closing of the Suez Canal to British traffic was seen to be the most important strategic measure, while the invasion of Egypt was to be postponed till the autumn of the following year (1941).

No doubt Mussolini's failure in Greece from October, 1940, precipitated Hitler's decision to send German troops there in the spring of 1941. He saw it as a blow to the Axis alliance. Hitler understood that victory for Greece would enable Britain to acquire air bases there from which to attack the Roumanian oilfields, Albanian ports and southern Italy. Undoubtedly, German intervention in Greece was a mere defensive operation to safeguard the Roumanian oilfields and the southern flank of Germany's projected invasion of Russia.

In Hitler's thinking, a campaign in the Mediterranean and an invasion of the U.S.S.R. were to be two successive and supplementary phases of the German strategy of the war. Hitler expected that with the conclusion of the Balkan campaign in the spring of 1941 and the conquest of Gibraltar with the aid of Spain, with the Suez Canal paralysed and with the subjugation of Russia, the question of the Mediterranean would eventually be solved by the invasion of Egypt and the occupation of the territories under British control (Iraq, Palestine and Transjordan).⁶³

The Preoccupation with the U.S.S.R.

While Hitler's eyes were fixed on the U.S.S.R. the British were obsessed with the possibility of a gigantic pincer attack against Egypt from the north and west, making use of the turmoil in Iraq, Palestine and Syria. They (the British) felt that, given their overstretched and dispersed forces, it would not have been

⁶⁰ Poole, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*,

⁶² Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 387.

⁶³ Hirszowicz, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

difficult for the Axis powers to divert some of their forces to these countries and bring them under their control.

It was envisaged that, after the rapid defeat of Russia, the German armies would strike through the Caucasus at Iraq and onwards to a 'Napoleonic rendezvous' with the Italians and Rommel's *Afrika Korps* at Alexandria and Suez. Draft military directive no. 32 of 30 June, 1941, entitled 'preparations for the time after Barbarossa' spoke of 'the fight against the British position in the Mediterranean and Near East by a concentrated attack from Libya through Egypt, from Bulgaria through Turkey, and also, under certain circumstances from Transcaucasia through Iran.'⁶⁴ This was one of the motives behind the 'broad front' strategy to the invasion of the U.S.S.R. The directive fixed the late autumn of 1941 and winter 1941-42 as the deadline for carrying out these strategic operations by the Wehrmacht.

The directive designated General Helmuth Felmy's 'Special Staff' F, which had been set up under the military directive no. 30 in the form of a military mission to Iraq, as 'the central office in the field to take part in all planning and measures in the Arab area'. It stressed that 'this area was to be given the best experts and agents'.

However, following the outbreak of hostilities between Iraq and Britain on 2 May, 1941, and on the special request of Grobba (who returned to Baghdad on 11 May as Germany's Ambassador), the Wehrmacht approved the assignment of General Felmy to Iraq as the head of the German military mission and military adviser to the Iraqi Government. Unfortunately, Felmy arrived in Syria on 1 June, after the collapse of the revolt in Iraq.⁶⁵

Yet this gap between the appointment and the arrival in Syria of General Felmy and the date on which directive no. 30 was issued reflects the slowness and indifference of the German Government to events in Iraq. It may well be interpreted as a deliberate move to wait and see the outcome of the Turkish offer of mediation between Britain and Iraq at a time when the Iraqi forces were in retreat.

However, there is no evidence which proves a readiness and a willingness of the German leadership to involve itself in any military operation in Iraq before the invasion of the U.S.S.R. had been concluded.

It must be said that the symbolic German aid to Iraq came about

⁶⁴ Deakin, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

⁶⁵ Grobba, *op. cit.*, pp. 401-403.

after a considerable number of meetings and debates which had taken place between the German Foreign Ministry and various department of the OKW. As a result only a squadron of Me-110s and one of He-111s, with twelve aircraft each, were assigned to Air Commander, Iraq.⁶⁶

Thus, the Italo-German declaration of 23 October, 1940, together with this minor military aid, were no doubt designed as part of the German peripheral strategy and propaganda against the British in the Arab world. And when the revolt collapsed owing partly to the delay in sending German and Italian aid and its insufficient quantities, as was circulated in some reports, the German Foreign Ministry responded nervously. It instructed the legation in Tehran to counteract such allegations by pointing out that the timing of the outbreak of hostilities in Iraq took them by surprise and came at an inconvenient moment on account of operations in Crete which required all available German resources.⁶⁷ This was the only excuse and justification the Germans offered to defend themselves against Arab critics.

German High Command's view

In July, 1941, after the collapse of the revolt in Iraq and the invasion of the U.S.S.R. Field-Marshal Walter von Brauchitsch, the Commander-in-Chief of the German army, submitted a detailed plan for the invasion of the Middle East, including Iraq, from the north through Turkey.⁶⁸ Brauchitsch assumed that, in case of Turkey's resistance, Germany would require a relatively large force for the operation (five armoured divisions, three motorised and twelve infantry). This, of course, would be the biggest drain on Germany's resources. He stressed that the operation could not be launched until 1942. Brauchitsch's estimates of the individual orders of the battle required for deployment through Turkey seem high on mechanized troops and low on infantry, because of the hard terrain and unavailability of any good axis for advance, not to mention the natural defences in eastern Turkey.

In addition, large lakes and high mountains would hamper the deployment of a mobile force because it would be difficult to deploy more than ten divisions on any one axis or more than twenty-five along the whole Turkish front.⁶⁹ Constantinople would

⁶⁶ *DGFP.*, vol. XII, No. 523, p. 834.

⁶⁷ *GFM.*, 71/50863.

⁶⁸ Warner, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

⁶⁹ Neville Brown, *Strategic Mobility* (the Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 9163) p. 226 and p. 229.

have constituted a formidable defence zone, one that the Turks might well have fought for street by street.

The Anglo-Soviet occupation of Iran, which was to take place in August, 1941, was of great importance. The aim of securing Persia as a supply route to the U.S.S.R. counted far more than the fear of Nazi penetration, although the latter explanation was proffered at the time. Therefore a good deal of development of Iranian communications took place after the occupation. When the northern route from the Atlantic proved unsafe, the U.S. and Britain made a great effort to develop the Iranian corridor as an alternative route.⁷⁰ So the estimate Liddell Hart makes of troop deployment from the Caucasus via Iran would be higher than the Germans or Russians would have found possible in 1941.

Then again, Brauchitsch argued that if Turkey was willing to co-operate, these forces assigned to the operation would be reduced by half and the task carried out in the winter of 1941-42. He fixed the spring of 1942 as the deadline for proceeding with the advance from Transcaucasia through Iran to the Gulf.⁷¹ And with the failure to reach a decision on the Soviet front by the winter of 1941 and even by the spring of 1942, any operational planning, other than for the Russian front, was abandoned.

With the entry of the U.S. into the war the Germans and Italians were faced at the beginning of 1942 with the inadequacy of the *Blitzkrieg* doctrine and tactics.

Since Hitler's generals were against the idea of fighting on two fronts, they envisaged an alternative plan to that of Barbarossa. Instead of Russia, the naval staff had urged concentration upon the eastern Mediterranean. But one must not discount the reality that German naval staff opinion was a minority. In this regard Admiral Kurt Assmann of the German naval staff wrote a memorandum outlining the overall strategic situation after the conclusion of the Balkan campaign and the occupation of Crete:—

The British power position in the eastern Mediterranean is under the severest pressure as a result of the Balkan campaign and the occupation of Crete, but it is not yet broken. All the signs indicate, moreover, that the British are in no way inclined to give up their position in the eastern Mediterranean. On the contrary, England appears determined to maintain her

⁷⁰ Kent R. Greenfield, *Command Decision* (London, 1959) p. 158 and Liddell Hart, *Deterrent or Defence* (Stevens, London, 1960, and Praeger, New York, 1960) p. 158.

⁷¹ Warner, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

position in this area by every means. This is based, as in all other areas of decisive importance for the British Empire, upon the exercise of control of the sea by the British battle fleet.... It alone is in the position to protect the maximum lines of communication which are essential for the control of the eastern Mediterranean position and to secure the power and political influence in Egypt, Palestine, Iraq and to a considerable extent in Turkey, with its ramifications in the African, Indian and even Far Eastern region. Upon its shoulders, too, rests the prestige of the British Empire in the eastern Mediterranean. As always, therefore it remains the aim of German-Italian strategy to destroy the British fleet as the controlling factor, to drive it out of the eastern Mediterranean, to eliminate its bases and operational possibilities in the Mediterranean.⁷²

Admiral Assmann stressed that, instead of Russia, Germany should concentrate as much as possible on the Near East and not be content just with an increase in Italian activity in the Mediterranean. One advocate of such strategy was Grand Admiral Erich Raeder, the Commander-in-Chief of the German navy. In a personal interview with Hitler on 26 September, 1940, he urged the Führer to take action in the Mediterranean (as indicated before) by taking Gibraltar and Suez and crippling the Royal Navy there during the winter of 1940-41, before the U.S. would have time to intervene. Raeder also considered that an advance from Suez (after its capture) through Palestine and Syria as far as Turkey was necessary. He argued that in order to stop the U.S.S.R. seeking an influence in the Balkan region, the Russians should be encouraged to advance toward the south, or against Iran and India, in order to gain an outlet to the Indian Ocean.⁷³ No doubt the attainment of all these war aims were dependent on the good will and co-operation of other powers — namely, Vichy France, Spain and the U.S.S.R.

The Debate about the Fertile Crescent

Raeder also urged Hitler that September to let the German army advance through Turkey into the Middle, East, penetrating Anatolia, Syria and possibly northern Iraq. This would be followed

⁷² *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

⁷³ Bekker, *op. cit.*, pp. 244-5 and Warner, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-9.

by a further thrust southward into Palestine or eastward into Iraq.⁷⁴ This campaign had to be concerted with an attack on Suez from the north. But Italy's defeat that winter made Hitler launch his campaign against the Balkan states which he thought was decisive. If Greece fell into British hands, the R.A.F. would have been able to threaten the Roumanian oilfields, Germany's southern flank and Italy proper. Therefore, anything more ambitious was ruled out for the moment.

In October, 1940, General Franz Halder, the Chief-of-Staff of the German army, said that Egypt and Crete must be taken simultaneously. He added that Turkey and Bulgaria should be induced to allow German forces to enter Syria across the Bosphorus.⁷⁵ Halder seems to have ignored Cyprus and Malta as the two most important stepping-stones to the Syrian and North African coasts.

It may be argued, as Churchill did,⁷⁶ that a German airborne landing in Syria and Iraq, instead of the large casualties suffered in Crete (over 4,000 specialist airborne troops and 170 Ju 52s were lost), would have given Germany these two countries and even Iran, which harboured strong German influence. Meanwhile the German offensive in the Low Countries, followed by the biggest airborne operation against the Netherlands, was an example of this military paradrop. The assault, also by parachute and glider, on the Isthmus of Corinth in Greece late in April, 1941, blocked the withdrawal of several thousand Allied troops. In this connection, the question of a sea-lift to Syria depended on total Axis control of the eastern Mediterranean which was beyond their naval strength due to their lack of surface warships.⁷⁷

Undoubtedly the British navy was overwhelmingly superior to the Germans in strength and in numbers.⁷⁸ The more or less perpetual British naval supremacy in the eastern extremities of the Mediterranean would be a serious impediment but not necessarily absolute. Even in 1942, for instance, some Axis supply vessels were finding their way from Greece to Cyrenaica. But a sea-lift to Syria was improbable without the establishment of a 'stepping-stone' in Cyprus. The Chiefs-of-Staff in London believed that a simultaneous attack on Crete and Syria was unlikely on account of the German shortage of transport aircraft. The Chiefs-of-Staff also thought that Crete was a likely German objective and that the Germans might be aiming at Cyprus as a stepping-stone to Syria

⁷⁴ Warner, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁷⁶ Churchill, *op. cit.*, Vol. III p. 236.

⁷⁷ Bekker, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

⁷⁸ Churchill *op. cit.*, p. 323.

and beyond.⁷⁹ But all these predictions proved to be far from attainment as Hitler's main preoccupation was still the invasion of Russia and nothing else. And probably the heavy paratroop losses in Crete, coupled with Hitler's diversion of aircraft for the Barbarossa operation, saved Cyprus from similar assault. In this regard General Kurt Student, commander of the Wehrmacht's airborne forces, explains how he wanted to take Cyprus after Crete, then close on the Suez Canal by means of Rommel advancing from the west, with paratroops landing to the east, presumably near Gaza, in concert with other operations in the direction of Palestine, Syria and Iraq. He says:—

My plan was at any rate shattered by the heavy losses incurred in Crete.⁸⁰

However, the supplying factor was very important. The security of the line of supplies was mainly dependent on sea control in the eastern Mediterranean dominated and controlled by the British fleet with its bases in Alexandria and Cyprus. Turkey's neutrality also compromised the possibility of supplying Iraq with the aid required.

Undoubtedly adopting the alternative strategy to that of Barbarossa by committing Germany's main strength to the Mediterranean and the Levant coast which would give the Luftwaffe a lot of scope, would have achieved considerable strategic advantages: (a) German domination of the Near and Middle East would have threatened the British position in eastern and southern Africa; (b) the possibility of occupying Egypt and of operating in the Middle East and also of exploiting the anti-British ferment in Iraq, Palestine and Syria and among the Arab people; (c) being able to save the main part of the forces and equipment committed to the Russian theatre and to the defence of the southern frontiers of Europe and also avoiding the burdensome operation of conquest and subsequent occupation in the Balkans; (d) exploiting all the resources of North Africa and the Middle East along the most economical sea route of the Mediterranean; (e) achieving, perhaps, unforeseen advantages by developing the conflict in the direction of the Caucasus and India. Yet Germany would have taken Iraqi oilfields as well as the Iranian which would have covered its actual consumption in 1941.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Hinsley, *op. cit.*, p. 416.

⁸⁰ Maurice Tugwell, *Airborne to Battle*, (William Kimber, London, 1971) p. 355.

⁸¹ Warner, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

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CHAPTER IV

The Military Campaign in Iraq

This chapter is essentially concerned with the military dimension in the Anglo-Iraqi conflict. The military situation, the Indian and Middle East Commands' attitude towards British policy in Iraq, the battles fought, the Turkish offer of mediation and the Axis aerial intervention will all be examined.

The Strategic Value of Habbaniya

The R.A.F. base at Habbaniya was one of the finest operational flying stations in the Middle East, with facilities for both land and seaplanes. Yet it lay entirely exposed a hundred and fifty feet below a plateau, the edge of which was a mile or so from the airfield. It was located between the river Euphrates and the main Baghdad-Damascus and Baghdad-Amman road, and between a bend in the river and this Habbaniya plateau, so named for its proximity to the Habbaniya Lake which lies near the west bank of the Euphrates, four miles to the south of the camp. This large lake, some two hundred square miles in area, provided an excellent landing place for the flying-boats* of Imperial Airways *en route* from London to India and Australia via Alexandria, Habbaniya Lake, Baghdad and Basra. Habbaniya was connected with Baghdad, sixty miles to the east, via Falluja town (some eleven miles east of Habbaniya) by a road running across the desert to the capital. The whole construction of the camp including the airfield was begun in 1933 and was completed in 1937. Its perimeter extended for some two and a half miles along the Euphrates. The camp embraced the Iraq Command R.A.F. Headquarters, No. 4 S.F.T.S. (Service Flying Training School) with accompanying services, and the Iraq Levies for the protection of the R.A.F. facilities. The Levies comprised nearly a thousand Assyrians, Arabs and Kurds and was officered by twenty Britons.

The Air Defence Force, which was composed of the Iraq Levies

* Since January, 1937, there had been one R.A.F. Flying Boat Squadron stationed in Iraq.

and one company of R.A.F. armoured cars, was responsible for the ground defence of the base and was commanded by the Officer Commanding Iraq Levies.¹ The camp included a high water tower, two intersecting tarmac runways 600/800 yards long and 50 yards wide, six hangars (each 300 feet by 150 feet), an aircraft depot, a hospital and a meteorological station, administration offices, and barrack blocks. The base was also supplied with all the amenities of a peacetime cantonment – a social club, swimming pool, golf course, polo ground, and lines of shady trees which were planted along all the avenues of the camp. There was also an electric power station which provided the cantonment with all electric facilities, including those concerned with the water supply.

On its southern and western flanks the base was dominated by a plateau with no natural protection in the event of a ground attack from those directions. On its northern and eastern sides, however, it was covered by the Euphrates, which provided a strong barrier against incursions towards the camp. Its only man-made shield was a seven-mile perimeter of unclimbable steel-fencing for protection against plunderers. The camp was protected by fourteen block-houses (some 800 yards apart) along this perimeter fence, each being manned by two non-commissioned officers and six soldiers. For defence purposes, the camp was divided into three parts, each covered by one company of Levies and the remaining two companies were used as a mobile reserve.² The Iraq Levies were composed of five Assyrian companies and one Kurdish company, each of 125 men. Early in the war all combat aircraft had been removed from Iraq; and only obsolete and training aircraft remained in the flying training school, where most of the pilots were pupils. Owing to the growing crisis, it became difficult to keep open the line of communication from Basra to Baghdad by rail and thence by road across the desert to Haifa, which had been prepared early in the war as an alternative line of communication to the Middle East, should the Red Sea be rendered unsafe by an Axis threat. The air base was therefore compelled to rely on its own resources for maintenance.

At Sha'iba, sixteen miles south-west of Basra, there was No. 244 Bomber Squadron RAF, equipped with Vincents.³ There was also a Base Supplies and Transport Depot at Basra with the civil airport at Shatt-al-Arab river.⁴ Apart from these two R.A.F. bases

¹ Captain A. Graham, 'The Iraq Levies at Habbaniya', *The Army Quarterly*, Vol. XLIV (London, 1942) pp. 249-250.

² *Ibid.*, p. 250.

³ *Cab 44/122.*

⁴ *Air 41/30 p. 13.*

in Iraq, there was the British Military Mission with the Iraq army.

On 2 April, the day on which the Regent fled from his palace at Baghdad, armoured car patrols and observation parties were sent from Habbaniya as far as Falluja, as a precautionary deployment. Air reconnaissance was carried out and a large-scale photographic 'map' made of the cities of Baghdad and Ramadi and photographs of most of the important targets within striking range were taken as well. In order to meet that state of emergency which might arise in case of hostilities, many other precautionary measures were taken to maintain and secure supplies of food and petrol at Habbaniya and Sha'iba air bases. On 10 April, a sub-supply depot was established at Sha'iba and three months' reserve rations were stockpiled there. As regards fuel, the total stock of petrol at Sha'iba was doubled to 24,000 gallons, including 10,000 gallons of 100 octane fuel which could be mixed with D.T.D. 230 petrol to make 90 octane petrol if appropriate. At Habbaniya there was three months' supply of aviation petrol stocked in two separate dumps. In the light of the growing tension and in view of considerable movements of Iraqi troops in the Basra and Baghdad areas on 8 April, every effort was made to convert No. 4 S.F.T.S. into a fighting force, and practice flights were carried out over Ramadi and Falluja with all speed.

Because of the new Axis operations in Libya and the German invasion of Yugoslavia and Greece during April, no reinforcements were available except for one Wellington bomber and six Gladiators which arrived at Habbaniya on 19 April. So the trainees were given extra hours of bomb-aiming and air-gunnery practice, and all training aircraft were fitted with racks to carry various types of bombs.

The Deployment of Iraqi Forces and their Local and General Strength

The overall disposition of the Iraqi Army on the ground is given in the map in appendices 'F' and 'M'. It is important to consider in detail the encirclement of the British air base at Habbaniya which took place on 29/30 April. The forces involved were under the command of Colonel Fahmi Sa'id who was then working directly under the command of Colonel al-Sabbagh, Commander-in-Chief of the newly formed Western Command, comprising the 1st and 3rd Infantry divisions and the Mechanized Force.

In detail, the order of battle around Habbaniya was as follows:—⁵

⁵ Al-Durrah, *op. cit.*, pp. 268-9 and *Air 41/30*, II, Siege of Habbaniya. In an interview with the author on 7/1/81, General Rafiq Arf averred that the siege of Habbaniya was a one-man decision effected by Colonel al-Sabbagh without the knowledge of the Chief-of-Staff, General Amin Zaki.

Investment Force

1st Infantry Brigade (less one battalion) (in Ramadi)

4th Infantry Brigade (just deployed from Kirkuk)

Two Anti-Aircraft/Anti Tank batteries (with 20mm. cannon)

One Field Artillery brigade (Twelve 18 pounders and four 4.5" howitzers)

The Mechanized Force

Two Mechanized Battalions

One Mechanized-Artillery Regiment (Twelve 3.7" howitzers)

One Tank Company (with twelve Fiat tanks)

One Armoured Car Company (with fourteen armoured cars)

One Mechanized-Engineering Company

One Machine-gun Company

One Mechanized Signal Company

The 1st Infantry Brigade was ordered to move from Baghdad to Ramadi on 2 May, its assigned task being to block any British advance from Transjordan to Habbaniya. One of its companies was ordered to move west of Habbaniya to complete the encirclement of the air base from that direction.

On 29 April the 11th Infantry Brigade was ordered to move from al-Mansur barracks to Baghdad. On 1 May its 1st Battalion arrived in Baghdad and then proceeded to Falluja to act as a tactical reserve. One of its companies plus an artillery platoon (two guns) took up a position at Sadr al-Surriya (on the north bank of the Euphrates) to oppose any British movement across the river. The rest of the brigade, having arrived in Baghdad on 2 May, likewise continued to Falluja, where it assumed a defensive position behind the 4th Infantry Brigade which took its position on the plateau around the base.

As regards the strength of the Royal Iraqi Air force, there were 60 first-line serviceable aircraft, (for more details and types see Appendix 'G')⁶ including some U.S. bombers and also some Italian fighters (Savoia) superior to the British aircraft at Habbaniya.⁷ The Air Force was organised into seven squadrons: Squadron No. 1 (Army Co-operation) located at Mosul; Squadron No. 2 (General Purpose) at Rashid; Squadron No. 3, reduced to cadre status; Squadron No. 4 (Fighter) at Kirkuk; Squadron No. 5 (Fighter Bomber) at Rashid; Squadron No. 6 (Medium Bomber) at Rashid;

⁶ Air 41/30 Appendix 'A', Summary of Strength and Serviceability-Aircraft of Royal Iraqi Air Force as at 15/2/41.

⁷ Air 23/5855, The Defence of Habbaniya and the subsequent Air Operations during the Iraqi Rebellion - May, 1941.

Squadron No. 7 (Fighter Bomber) at Rashid also. There were also a Flying Training School and an Aircraft depot at Rashid.⁸

The strength of the Iraqi Army, composed of four infantry divisions plus a Mechanised Force converted during the hostilities to a Fifth Division, was 1745 officers and 44,217⁹ other ranks, early in 1941, according to al-Durrah. British sources gave the total actual strength of the Iraqi Army on 31 May, 1940 as 3,686 officers and 32,136 other ranks.¹⁰ (See Appendix 'L')

The Iraqi forces investing Habbaniya were mainly deployed on the plateau and astride the Baghdad road, with the one artillery platoon stationed across the Euphrates opposite the British camp. From the tactical point of view, the Iraqi forces dominated the camp with their firepower.

British Local and General Military Strength in Iraq

As already mentioned, the only units of the R.A.F. stationed in Iraq were No. 4 S.F.T.S. at Habbaniya and No. 244 Bomber Squadron (with twelve Vincents) at Sha'iba air base, these being under the command of Air Vice-Marshal H. G. M. Smart. The S.F.T.S. (see Appendix I), consisted of 70 aircraft, 56 of which were serviceable.¹¹ There was also a Communication Flight of three Valentia aircraft. The number of pilots available at the base was only 35.¹²

On 1 May the aircraft of the School were organized into an air Striking Force under the command of Group-Captain Saville, the Officer Commanding No. 4 SFTS. This was formed into four squadrons:—

'A' Squadron — Oxfords and Gordons

'B' Squadron — Audaxes

'C' Squadron — Audaxes

'D' Squadron — Gladiators¹³

At the same time Group-Captain Saville was ordered to take command of the operational activities of all aircraft at Habbaniya and to assume control of any air reinforcements dispatched from Sha'iba air base or elsewhere.

Group-Captain MacDonald was to command (under A.O.C.,

⁸ *Air 41/30, Appendix 'A'.*

⁹ *Al-Durrah, op. cit., p. 243.*

¹⁰ *WO 201/1257 Appendix 'C', Order of Battle Iraq Forces As Known on 31.5.1940.*

¹¹ *Air 41/30, Appendix 'E'.*

¹² *Air 25/5855, op. cit.,*

¹³ *Air 41/30, The Siege of Habbaniya.*

Iraq) the reinforcement detachment of No. 37 and No. 70 Squadrons (Wellingtons) at Sha'iba airfield.¹⁴

As regards the British land forces at Habbaniya, these were composed of the following:—

- Two obsolescent 4.5" field howitzers
- One Infantry Battalion of the King's Own Royal Regiment
- Six Companies of Iraq Levies
- Three Sections of R.A.F. Armoured cars (18 armoured vehicles)
- One Composite Company of R.A.F. personnel — formed into a Mobile Infantry Reserve

There were altogether 1,000 Royal Air Force personnel. The service personnel totalled about 2,220 men. On 1 May Colonel O. L. Roberts of the 10th Indian Infantry Division at Basra was appointed commander of these forces.

Apart from these two air bases and their garrisons, the following British ground forces had arrived in Iraq from India between 18 April and 6 May and were concentrated at Basra for the purpose of opening the line of communication:—

Composition of First Echelon (arrived on 18 April)

- H.Q. 10th Indian Division
- H.Q. Divisional Artillery
- H.Q. Divisional Engineers
- H.Q. 20th Indian Infantry Brigade with signal section and Employment Platoon
- Three Indian Infantry Battalions
- One Anti-Tank Artillery Battery (with 18 pounder guns)
- One Air-Portable British Battalion
- 3rd Field Royal Artillery Regiment
- Two Field Engineering Companies
- One Field Ambulance
- One Field Hygiene Company
- One Indian Divisional Troop Transport Company
- One Indian Brigade Transport Company
- Two Mobile Workshops Companies
- One Field Post Office

Composition of Second Echelon (Arrived on 29 April)

- H.Q. Line of Communication

¹⁴ *Ibid, loc., cit.*, No. 244 Bomber squadron at Sha'iba was under the operational control of The General Officer Commanding troops, Basra.

H.Q. Work Base Sub-area
One Artisan Works Company
One Section Railway Survey Company
One Docks Section
Supply Personnel Company and 3 Supply Personnel Sections
Field Bakery and Field Butcher detachments
One Motor Ambulance Section
One GP Transport Company
One Depot Medical Stores
One Combined General Hospital
Base Ordnance Detachment
Depot and Base ammunition
One Field Account Office

Composition of Third Echelon (Arrived on 6 May)

H.Q. 21st Indian Infantry Brigade plus a Signal Section
Three Indian Infantry Battalions
One Field Company
One Field Park Company
H.Q., Supply Personnel
Nucleus Base Engineer Staff¹⁵

After discussion with his senior officers and with the British Ambassador, Sir Kinahan Cornwallis, the A.O.C. had decided to strike the Iraqi forces at dawn on 2 May, 1941, without issuing an ultimatum. His prime object was the relief of the Habbaniya air base and, in particular, the clearing of the plateau of the Iraqi artillery which had taken up position there. Instructions were issued to get all available aircraft in the air before light and to begin bombing at dawn.

The subsequent course of the British-Iraqi war and the general outline of operations can, in retrospect, be divided into the following phases:—

1. The investment of the British air base at Habbaniya; the action at Sin al-Dhibban; the withdrawal of the Iraqi Army from the plateau.
2. The Attack on Falluja and the Iraqi counter-attack.
3. The advance on Baghdad and the armistice of 31 May, 1941.

The Situation on 1st May, 1941

In an audience with the Turkish Minister at Baghdad on 1 May,

¹⁵ FO 371/27069/E2171 from C.-in-C. India to C.-in-C. Middle East. Secret, 5293, Cypher, 8/5/41 and Air 23/5928, Most Secret, 14 April, 1941, 10th Indian Division.

Rashid 'Ali explained the situation and his dispute with the British Ambassador at Baghdad. He complained that the British had broken the letter and the spirit of the treaty by insisting on keeping troops indefinitely on Iraqi soil. He stressed that under the treaty obligations the passage of British troops had to be approved and monitored by the Iraqi authorities. In his telegram to his Foreign Minister, the Turkish Minister at Baghdad reported:—

It was impossible that Rashid 'Ali should appear to accept a British occupation.¹⁶

Rashid 'Ali complained that the British had continued the reinforcement of their base at Habbaniya, had evacuated their subjects from Iraq, and had instructed their staff to withdraw from the administration of the railways. These steps were seen as signs of impending aggression and so engendered much anxiety among the Iraqi people. He went on to say that the Iraqi Government had felt obliged to take counter-measures, not with the intention of fighting Great Britain but to allay public fears. He also went out of his way to say that everyone in Baghdad, including even himself, had come to believe that a British air attack was imminent. Then if that was the case why did the Iraqis not take the initiative and attack Habbaniya? One answer is that Rashid 'Ali reckoned that the British would submit without this.

He had asked the Turkish Minister to try and prevent a disaster, to contact his Government and urge it to make Britain understand that Iraq was determined to discharge faithfully her treaty obligations. It was important to explain Iraq's difficulties to the British.¹⁷ He had concluded by outlining Iraq's terms for resolving the present differences as follows:—

- (a) The newly appointed British Ambassador should present his diplomatic letters
- (b) Troops which had already arrived should deploy in small numbers. Others could land later.
- (c) If, however, operational military considerations rendered it needful, the Iraqi Government was perfectly prepared to enter into discussions with a view to mutual agreement on certain measures.¹⁸

¹⁶ FO 371/27067/E1912, from Turkey, From Angora to F.O. No. 1045, 3 May, 1941, Immediate.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, loc., cit.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, loc., cit.

These vague but not unhelpful observations were duly passed on by the Turkish Foreign Minister to the British Ambassador, who referred the matter to the Foreign Office.

The Outbreak of Hostilities

The war at last broke out on 2 May, and for the next several days the situation at Habbaniya air base was critical for the British. Meanwhile, Sir Kinahan Cornwallis was confined to his Embassy in Baghdad. Flying the British flag over the embassy was banned on orders from the Iraqi Foreign Ministry on the grounds that, since Britain was waging war on Iraq, the sight of the British flag might well provoke an incident.¹⁹

Fighting broke out at 0500 hours with a major air strike by 18 Audaxes, 8 Oxfords and 6 Gordons together with the 18 Wellingtons of No. 70 and 37 Squadrons detachment, which had been deployed from Sha'iba to act as the heavy strike force. The Iraqis replied with anti-aircraft fire and by shelling the airfield itself and also the cantonment with their 18-pounder field guns and 4.5" howitzers. The Iraqi artillery was able to damage forty British aircraft, twenty-two of which were rendered unserviceable.²⁰ No damage was caused to the Habbaniya aerodrome tarmac on that first day, but well-directed shellfire was able to interfere with British aircraft taking off. No Iraqi tanks or armoured cars were damaged, Moreover, the War Office wrote:—

Iraqi morale was higher than had been expected and showed no signs of cracking.²¹

By nightfall British casualties were 13 dead and 20 wounded, including four Iraqi Levies and nine civilians.²² and, in view of the damage to so many British aircraft, an urgent request for reinforcement (if possible with Hurricanes) was made to Air Headquarters in Cairo. In response a detachment of four Blenheim IVs of No. 203 (General Reconnaissance) Squadron was dispatched to Habbaniya from Egypt on 3 May. Soon afterward a detachment of six Gladiators and seven Hurricanes of No. 94 (Fighter) Squadron arrived from Egypt and No. 84 (Bomber) Squadron (comprising 13 Blenheim IVs) from Palestine.²³

¹⁹ FO 371/27077, *op. cit.*, f. 39.

²⁰ WO 169/1224, G.S. Cavalry Division, *The Investment of Habbaniya*, 2/5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

²² Air 41/30, II, *The Siege of Habbaniya*.

²³ *Ibid.*, f. 17 footnote (3)

At the end of that first day of war, the Iraqi troops showed no sign of either evacuating the plateau or of attacking the base. For one thing the Iraqis had suffered heavy casualties and damage because, in addition to the main strikes against units on the plateau, air attacks had been directed against their airfields. Then on 3 May, the Wellingtons operating out of Sha'iba attacked the Rashid air base at Baghdad, destroying no fewer than 29 of Iraq's Savoia and Breda aircraft.²⁴ In attacks on Baquba and al-Musayyib a further 13 aircraft were destroyed, while a rifle factory was set ablaze.²⁵

Over the next few days air raids continued against Iraqi positions on the plateau. The A.O.C.-in-C. and General Wavell (C.-in-C., Middle East) were also considering whether to threaten to bomb Baghdad, if Iraqi troops set foot in R.A.F. Habbaniya, and then to hold Rashid 'Ali responsible for the outcome.²⁶ The A.O.C. Iraq was against such an action, his view being that to bomb Baghdad would be to unite its people against the British presence. He readily persuaded Wavell and his A.O.C.-in-C. to agree that there should be no bombing of Baghdad at least as long as the British Government saw prospects of a settlement through the Turkish and Egyptian offers of mediation. It was realized, too, that the bombing of Baghdad would also be inadvisable in that stocks of bombs at Sha'iba were already running low.

The British Ambassador in Cairo also expressed his opposition to a course of action which might affect adversely Egyptian opinion.²⁷ So instead 24,000 leaflets were dropped on Baghdad on 4 May. They had been drafted in Arabic by Sir Kinahan and urged the Iraqi people to abandon Rashid 'Ali and his 'Golden Square' of army officers.²⁸ (See Appendix 'R')

In the aftermath of the British attack on the Iraqi troops at Habbaniya, an urgent meeting of Rashid 'Ali's cabinet was held at Naji al-Suwaidi's house. At this the following decisions were adopted:—

- (1) A written protest against the British attack on Iraqi troops at Habbaniya should be lodged with the British Embassy in Baghdad, this being in formal reply to the Ambassador's

²³ *Ibid.*, f. 17 footnote (3).

²⁴ *Air 23/5855, op., cit.*, f. 7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, *loc., cit.*

²⁶ *Air 41/30, op., cit.*, f. 28

²⁷ *Ibid.* f. 29.

²⁸ *Air 41/30, Appendix 'C'*

letter of 2 May, 1941. It would confirm that Britain was responsible for all the consequences of her aggression.

- (2) To request Germany to send a diplomat to Baghdad as soon as possible in order to resume German-Iraqi diplomatic relations.
- (3) To establish diplomatic relations with the U.S.S.R. without any pre-condition. This move was initiated because Rashid 'Ali was desperately seeking help from any friend who would support his régime and his conflict with the British. Diplomatic relations were duly established on 14 May, 1941.
- (4) To broadcast an announcement by the Prime Minister himself in which an explanation would be given of the British aggression against Iraqi troops at Habbaniya.²⁹

On 2 May Britain took the further major measure of expelling Iraq from the Sterling Area, a step which was to cause serious financial problems. At the same time all foreign banks operating in Iraq were advised by the British Embassy to close their branches and have their personnel take refuge in the Embassy. This was, in fact, done, all the cash deposits being taken to Habbaniya.³⁰

The precautionary evacuation of British civilians from Habbaniya began on 3 May, three DC-3 (Dakota) aircraft being used to take all the women and children to Sha'iba; and by 7 May, 144 women and 106 children had been safely airlifted. On 2 May the Defence Committee (Operations) agreed that all operational control in Iraq should temporarily switch from India to the C.-in-C. and Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Middle East. C.-in-C., India, was informed accordingly and raised no objection.³¹ This switch was made on account of the proximity of Iraq to Palestine and the ready availability of staging posts for air reinforcement.

That same day General Wavell was informed of the new development and asked to send all possible help to A.O.C., Iraq.³² But with numerous commitments in Libya, Greece and East Africa and in view of his lack of air resources, he was unhappy with this new burden, and said as much in a telegram to the War Office on 3 May. His advice was that the crisis should be dealt with by strong diplomatic action supported by financial and economic sanctions and propaganda. In agreement with his A.O.C.-in-C., Middle East, General Wavell wrote:—

²⁹ Al-Hasani, *Tarikh al-Wizarat al-Iraqiyya* [History of Iraqi Cabinets] 5th ed. Vol. V (Beirut, 1978) pp. 261-2.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 267 and FO 371/27077, British Embassy, Baghdad, 6th June, 1941, to Anthony Eden, p. 7.

³¹ Cab 79/11 Secret, C.O.S. (41) 156th Meeting, War Cabinet, Chiefs of Staff Committee; *Minutes of Meeting held on 2 May, 1941*, f. 2 Iraq command f. 159.

³² *Cabinet Office, principal War Telegrams and Memoranda 1940-43 Middle East 1*, 1976, War Office to C.-in-C. India, Middle East. p. 41.

I can only advise negotiations with Iraqis on bases of liquidation of regrettable incident by mutual arrangement with alternative of war with British Empire, complete blockade and ruthless air action.³³

Four hours later, having discussed the situation with his staff and thought it over, he despatched another telegram outlining a plan to generate assistance. He said he would do what he could to make the Iraqi Government believe that there were preparations for a large-scale movement of forces to Iraq. He offered support from Palestine in the form of one mechanized brigade improvised from a cavalry division, one field regiment, one infantry battalion and some administrative support. A command unit and three mechanized squadrons of the Transjordan Frontier Force (T.J.F.F.) were also to hand but their attitude to an attack on their Iraqi Arab/Moslem brethren was uncertain. He stressed that he could supply no armoured cars or tanks and very few anti-aircraft or anti-tank weapons. In his considered opinion the force was inadequate and it would be at least a week before it could be on Iraqi soil. He added that with its departure, Palestine, where there was already the imminent threat of an uprising (by Haj al-Husaini's followers who were opposing Jewish immigration into Palestine), would be left dangerously weak. He concluded by urging the British Government to accept the offer of mediation by the Turkish Government in co-operation with the United States.³⁴

In reply the Chiefs-of-Staff made it abundantly clear that they were against Wavell's advice. They gave him detailed directives on how to help the A.O.C., Iraq secure their main objectives of restoring the situation at Habbaniya and securing the pipeline to the Mediterranean without affecting the security of Egypt, which remained the paramount consideration. Moreover, he was specifically instructed to direct his efforts to the following:—

- (a) The active defence of Habbaniya by all possible means.
- (b) The preparation for despatching a force to restore the situation at Habbaniya and control the pipeline to the Mediterranean.
- (c) Pressure on Iraq Government would be maintained through the British Ambassador at Baghdad and he was instructed

³³ *Cab 80/27, Secret, C.O.S. (41) 286, 3 May, 1941. War Cabinet, Chiefs of Staff Committee, Situation in Iraq, Report Annex 1, copy of telegram to the War Office from C.-in-C., Middle East, 3/5/1941.*

³⁴ *Ibid, Annex II, copy of telegram from the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East to the War Office 3/5/1941.*

to threaten the following action if the situation developed into active war:

- (i) Air bombardment of Baghdad
 - (ii) Destruction of the Saqlawiya Dam by air action
 - (iii) Destruction of the oil pumping stations
 - (iv) Complete blockade of Basra
- (d) Propaganda campaign would be maintained by all available means to the effect that Britain had no quarrel with her ally Iraq but merely exercising rights under the 1930 Treaty.³⁵

The Turkish Government was to be kept informed by the British Ambassador, who was to request it to put pressure on the Iraqi régime. Wavell's suggestion of accepting the Turkish offer of mediation was thus rejected out of hand.³⁶ Perhaps this was because the Chiefs-of-Staff perceived that the British landing at Basra had forced Rashid 'Ali into action before he and the Axis were ready. So time was on the United Kingdom's side.

On the question of Egypt's offer of mediation, the situation was that the Prime Minister, Husain Sirri, had offered his good offices to mediate. He approached the British Ambassador in Cairo, Sir Miles Lampson, and the latter, after consulting General Wavell, had accepted this initiative.³⁷

Obviously Wavell, being desperately anxious not to extend his commitments, was eager to terminate the Iraqi crisis as quickly as possible by military strategy of greater ruthlessness (especially through the use of air power) coupled with political strategy of greater conciliation. His instincts were towards conciliation but the overriding issue for him was the termination of the crisis. The evacuation of Greece had been concluded at the end of April, with the loss of all the tanks, artillery and transport involved. By the middle of April his troops in the Western Desert had lost all the ground they had gained in the winter offensive with the exception of Tobruk. The immediate reason for this was, of course, that Rommel and his *Afrika Korps* had quickly gone over to the offensive, having first arrived in the New Year.

John Connell wrote:—

From the middle of April onwards Wavell's anxieties

³⁵ *Cab 79/11*, Annex II, Telegram to Commanders-in-Chief in the Middle East, India, A.O.C. Iraq, East Indies, General Basra, S.N.O. Persian Gulf, From Chiefs of Staff No. 881, 4/5/1941, I. 216-217.

³⁶ *Ibid*, loc. cit.

³⁷ *Avon Papers FO 954/12*, From Cairo to Foreign Office, Personal, No. 1207, 3rd May, 1941, Most immediate and *FO 371/27068/E/1919*, From Egypt. From Cairo to F.O. No. 1203, 3rd May, 1941. Immediate, secret.

deepened; his weight of responsibility grew heavier; and even he, with all his resilience, could not overcome his mounting sense of strain.

His commitments increased and his resources to meet them were, in proportion though not in actual numbers, smaller than they had ever been. Action after action was demanded of him; and he had the greatest difficulty in finding the formations he needed to hold, let alone launch an attack from, his most vital front, the Western Desert. Yet as he and the War Cabinet both fully appreciated, on a secure grip on this front all else depended.³⁸

General Wavell cabled the War Office that he had now started to assemble, at H.4 near the Transjordan-Iraqi frontier, a mobile force commanded by Major-General J. G. W. Clark (codenamed Habforce). It would comprise one mechanized cavalry brigade, one field regiment (less one troop), 15 armoured cars, three squadrons of T.J.F.F., and 1st battalion, the Essex Regiment. He pointed out that they could not be ready before 10 May at the earliest and could not arrive at Habbaniya till two days after that, even without any of the resistance possible at Rutbah or elsewhere. About the ability of these troops to relieve Habbaniya, Wavell was very doubtful. He warned the War Office about the dangers of prolonging the fighting in Iraq which, as he saw it, might well endanger his defence of Palestine and Egypt. He concluded his telegram by repeating his recommendation for the settlement of the conflict by negotiation as soon as possible. He mentioned that Air Marshal Tedder also agreed with him on the negotiation approach. Finally, General Wavell urged the War Office to give the command of Basra back to India as long as reinforcements were directed from there.

Churchill's reaction to Wavell's response was clearly manifested in his telegram to the Chiefs-of-Staff. He wrote:—

How can a settlement be negotiated, as General Wavell suggests? He seems to have been taken as much by surprise on his eastern as he was on his western flank, and in spite of the enormous number of men at his disposal, and the great convoys reaching him, he seems to be hard up for battalions and companies. He gives me the impression of being tired out.³⁹

³⁸ John Connell, *Wavell, Scholar and Soldier*, (Collins, London, 1964) p. 424.

³⁹ Churchill *op. cit.*, Vol. III p. 228-9.

On the fourth day of the siege of Habbaniya, 5 May, British land forces made their first contact with the Iraqi troops. A successful attack was launched, inflicting some casualties on the Iraqi forces but they continued their shelling of the base, causing considerable damage to British aircraft, leaving No. 4 S.F.T.S. with only the following serviceable aircraft by the end of the day:—

19 Audaxes

20 Oxfords

3 Gordons

6 Gladiators

1 Blenheim bomber

3 Blenheim fighters of No. 203 Squadron Detachment.

17 Wellingtons of No. 70 and 37 Squadrons Detachment.⁴⁰

Yet at this stage of the conflict the lack of initiative on the part of the Iraqis, and the heavy casualties caused by the continuous air raids and offensive operations carried out at night by British infantry patrols, allowed the tactical situation to change in favour of the British. On the question of the lack of resolve of the Iraqi anti-aircraft gunners deployed around Habbaniya Churchill wrote:—

It was found that the enemy gunners would not stand to their pieces under air attack or even if our aircraft were to be seen overhead.⁴¹

This comment, of course, contradicts what the War Office wrote about the morale of the Iraqi forces on the first day of fighting (see p. 168). Formidable administrative problems also played a major part in affecting the balance of the war and weakening the Iraqi will to continue the fight. All their logistic needs of ammunition, food, water and so on had to be supplied from Falluja, eleven miles east of Habbaniya, which had been under continual air threat since the R.A.F. had achieved air dominance, and armed aerial reconnaissance from Habbaniya prevented any Iraqi movement, even by night, to or from Falluja.

Sha'iba air base had also received instructions to continue raids on the Iraqi Army and Air Force. They were ordered not to strike against Iraqi civilians. Unfortunately, however, these orders were violated, the civilian populations of Mosul and Falluja being bombed twice. Eighty sorties were carried out in the course of May 5, and nearly four tons of bombs were dropped on gun positions, military transport and armoured cars and troops in the Habbaniya

⁴⁰ *Air 41/30 op., cit.*

⁴¹ Churchill, *op., cit.*, vol. III p. 229.

area by No. 4 S.F.T.S. The Bleinheim fighters of No. 203 Squadron Detachment also executed four sorties and dropped 640 lbs. of 20 lb. bombs on Iraqi targets. In addition, several sorties were carried out by Wellingtons of No. 37 Squadron Detachment. They would carry 500 lb. bombs.

During the night of 5/6 May the Iraqi troops started to withdraw from the plateau. By dawn on the 6th British reconnaissance aircraft found the plateau fully cleared of Iraqi forces. British R.A.F armoured vehicles and infantry patrols were immediately sent out in pursuit, and clashed with the retreating Iraqi forces on the Falluja road and in the village of Sin al-Dhibban. Mopping-up operations ensued, with twelve Iraqi officers and over three hundred other ranks being captured.⁴² The morale of the Iraqi forces had been shaken as a result of the lack of supplies and continual air attacks. There was no sign of any Iraqi air activity over the battlefield by this stage of the fight, according to al-Durrah. Nor had there ever been much, thanks to the pre-emptive Wellington strikes against airfields.

Eight Iraqi armoured vehicles out of a column of fourteen were able to withdraw safely to Falluja on 6 May.⁴³ However, the other six were destroyed as a counter-attack was being prepared to recapture lost positions. Furthermore, the 4th Infantry Brigade, which had initially been holding the high ground on the plateau, had had to be replaced after only two days of fighting. Its replacement had been the 11th Infantry Brigade, less one battalion, which had been held in reserve in Falluja, together with the 7th Field Artillery Brigade.⁴⁴ These two brigades had to be withdrawn from the battle zone on 6 May, owing to their shaky morale and high casualties (see below). Then fresh troops had been brought in to defend Falluja (the 3rd and 6th Infantry Brigades of the 2nd Division and the 5th Artillery Brigade as well). The 3rd Infantry Brigade was ordered to occupy a defensive line in the Falluja area and to defend the town and its bridge, whereas the 6th Brigade was put in reserve behind the Falluja area in Khan Dhari. In addition, a Cavalry Brigade was deployed in Abu Ghraib on the outskirts of Baghdad to provide a screen for the defence of the capital.⁴⁵

The total estimated casualties of the Iraqi land forces involved in the Battle of Habbaniya up to 6 May had reached 1,000 men.⁴⁶ By

⁴² *Air 41/30, op., cit.*,

⁴³ Al-Durrah, *op., cit.*, p. 282.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 286.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 291 and pp. 304-5 and WO 2081585 Secret, Report No. 35 on the Iraqi army and Royal Air Force for the Period Ending 31st July, 1941. f. 9.

⁴⁶ Al-Durrah, p. 298 and *Air 41/30, II, The Siege of Habbaniya.*

this time the number of prisoners had reached 26 officers and 408 other ranks, including one battalion commander, Major Abd al-Karim al-Ansari, and his Adjutant, Lieutenant Abd al-Halim Abd al-Gaffur. Only one infantry company succeeded in avoiding surrender and arrived safely in Falluja.⁴⁷

Interestingly, the two obsolescent 4.5 inch field howitzers were reconditioned in time for operational use during the Sin al-Dhibban attack on 6 May. This made the Iraqis believe that artillery reinforcements had been lifted by air to the besieged camp.⁴⁸ Their alarm on this score is surely indicative of their shaky morale.

A few hours after the evacuation of the plateau, an Iraqi attempt was made to act on orders issued by the Iraqi O.C. in the Habbaniya sector, Colonel Fahmi Sa'id, to recapture lost positions at whatever cost.⁴⁹ A mobile column was improvised and proceeded from Falluja towards Habbaniya. This was composed of four armoured cars, the 2nd Infantry Battalion of the 1st Infantry Brigade, whose soldiers were transported in civilian cars, and the 5th Desert Artillery Regiment, composed of three 18 pounder batteries (horse-drawn). British air reconnaissance has spotted and reported the column leaving Falluja. Duly it was subject to low-level attack by 39 British aircraft from No. 4 S.F.T.S, plus a single Blenheim from No. 203 Squadron Detachment. Most of the vehicles were set on fire. A British pilot described thus the scene of the battle:—

.... the road was a solid sheet of flame for about 250 yards with ammunition exploding and armoured cars and lorries burning fiercely. The charred and battered remnants of this convoy which littered the road between Falluja and the Canal Turn remained for several weeks afterwards as evidence of the enemy's defeat.⁵⁰

On the same day, 6 May, the 21st Indian Brigade Group arrived in Basra. Meanwhile another 36,000 leaflets were dropped over Baghdad by six Wellingtons of No. 37 Squadron Detachment. Rashid and Washash barracks were attacked again, one hangar at Rashid being destroyed by fire along with several more aircraft. The losses suffered by the King's Own Royal Regiment during

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 298-99.

⁴⁸ *Air 41/30, op., cit.*,

⁴⁹ *Al-Durrah, op., cit.*, p. 299.

⁵⁰ *Air 41/30, op., cit.*,

this day numbered seven killed and twelve wounded. Three aircraft were also lost, one of which, an Audax aircraft of No. 4 S.F.T.S., actually being shot down.⁵¹

On the following day British ground forces occupied the positions evacuated by Iraqi forces the previous evening and collected abandoned war material. The Iraqi equipment captured thus far amounted to:—

- 340 rifles
- 4 x 20-mm cannon (one on an anti-tank mounting and three on anti-aircraft)
- 34 Bren guns
- 14 heavy Machine-Guns
- 10 Armoured Cars
- 1 Light Tank
- 6 x 3.7" Howitzers.⁵²

A number of motor vehicles of various types and large number of machine-gun spares and ammunition were also captured.

An air strike by a Blenheim on Baquba airfield (which was situated 30 miles north-east of Baghdad) caused the destruction of twenty-one Iraqi aircraft.⁵³ Thus by 7 May the Iraqi Air Force had been put completely out of action. Baghdad airport was also bombed during the same day by three Wellingtons of No. 37 Squadron Detachment, several buildings being demolished. With the end of the siege of Habbaniya airfield Churchill during the night cabled the A.O.C. Iraq the following signal:—

Your vigorous and splendid action has largely restored the situation. We are all watching the fight you are making. All possible aid will be sent. Keep it up.⁵⁴

Another telegram was signalled from the Admiralty which put at the disposal of Air Headquarters Iraq, HMS *Hermes*, a light fleet carrier of 10,950 tons laid down in 1917.⁵⁵ On this occasion, *Hermes* had a complement of 20 Swordfish torpedo-bombers, six of which had been shorebased at Sha'iba since 4 May, and was itself armed with six 5.5" and three 4" dual-purpose guns. Group-Captain MacDonald, who was operational commander of all R.A.F. units in

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, loc. cit., and WO 169/1224, op. cit., 6 and 7/5.

⁵² WO 169/1224 Phase 2, the Clearing of the Plateau and the Affair of Sin El-Dhibban, 7/5 and Air 41/30, f.

37.

⁵³ Air 41/30, II, The Siege of Habbaniya.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ ADM 53/114403, Ships' Logs and B.B. Schofield *British Sea Power*, (London, 1967) p. 151.

the Sha'iba airbase, was also to command this Fleet Air Arm element. The Swordfish were by no means ideal aircraft for operations deep over land, but they were as suitable as most of the planes in No. 4 S.F.T.S. Besides which, *Hermes* was well adapted to covering the evacuation of Basra as and when required.

On the following day, 8 May, successful air raids were carried out on Baquba, Shahraban, Khanaqin and Kirkuk airfields, twelve aircraft being destroyed at Shahraban. Meanwhile, a further 47 strike and reconnaissance sorties were carried out by the S.F.T.S. aircraft in the Falluja and Ramadi areas.

With the lifting of the Habbaniya siege, the British regained their freedom of action. No longer was the camp subject to recurrent Iraqi artillery and machine-gun fire. The morale of the garrison now rose high, even though Habbaniya still remained almost cut off from the outside world. In view of the Axis penetration of Syria, there was also some anxiety that German aerial and airborne intervention was soon to be expected. Indeed, the tendency, in the aftermath of Crete, was much to overrate the power and strategic mobility of the German airborne arm (see Chapters II and III). As Churchill later wrote:—

The Germans had of course at their disposal an airborne force which would have given them at this time Syria, Iraq and Persia, with their precious oilfields.⁵⁶

So the opening of the overland line of communication, together with the removal of Rashid 'Ali and his colleagues, was seen as the only way Habbaniya could finally be secured. A lack of troops at the Habbaniya base made it impossible to achieve Britain's main objective by advancing on Baghdad from that direction. The advance of 'Habforce' from Palestine, which had been launched by General Wavell on 5 May, was the only support move. The object was to re-establish communication across the desert and also to put out a vanguard in order to shield in depth the R.A.F. base at Habbaniya and then help restore the situation throughout the country.

With the Iraqi evacuation of the Habbaniya plateau and the successful defence by the base garrison, the first phase of the conflict was concluded. The Iraqi Army had lost the tactical initiative and, in any case, had proved unready to force their way

⁵⁶ Churchill, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

into the base, despite a sufficiency in men and equipment. As al-Sabbagh pointed out in his memoirs, the Iraqi Army was ten times stronger on the ground than the British at Habbaniya, to say nothing of the British lack of artillery. But what the Iraqi Army lacked was air cover, resolution and clarity of aim. All that they were told was that they were going on an exercise and that they were to dig in and take up positions around the camp.⁵⁷ Still, it is astonishing that no attempt whatsoever was made to force a way into the camp. Passivity never wins wars.

India and Middle East Commands' Attitudes Towards British Policy in Iraq

At this juncture it is worth looking at the divergence of views between General Wavell, who was still favouring diplomacy rather than military action in dealing with Rashid 'Ali's régime, and General Auchinleck, Commander-in-Chief in India whose overriding principle was an insistence on resolute military action and the occupation of Iraq. Though Auchinleck, like Wavell, was a modest, liberal and cultured man, he was hawkish on this issue because Iraq was on the historic route to India. To this Indian army officer, the Indian Empire was home.⁵⁸

This difference of opinion between General Auchinleck and General Wavell about both the purpose and the conduct of the operation in Iraq had reached its climax when Lieutenant-General Quinan, the designated Commander of Iraq Force at Basra, arrived from India on 7 May. He had been instructed by Auchinleck on 2 May (before, that is, the switch of operational command from India to the Middle East) to address the following tasks:—

- (a) The protection of the oilfields in northern Iraq and in south-western Iran.
- (b) The establishment of communications Basra-Baghdad, Baghdad-Mosul and Baghdad-Transjordan.
- (c) To lead a defensive campaign against possible German attack from Syria.
- (d) A forward advance towards Turkey should the necessity arise.⁵⁹

On 8 May General Wavell, having assumed operational command in southern Iraq that day, informed the Chiefs-of-Staff Committee that, without the co-operation of the local population

⁵⁷ Al-Sabbagh, *op. cit.*, p. 255, al-Durrah, *op. cit.*, p. 273 and Philip Guedella, *Middle East 1940-42, A Study in Air Power* (London, 1944) p. 140.

⁵⁸ Michael Howard, 'The Auk', *The Listener*, 16 April, 1981, vol. 105, No. 2708, p. 498.

⁵⁹ *Cab 44/122, Policy in Iraq: The Views of Middle East and India*, 7 May.

and tribes, his forces at Basra could not move northward. He added that 'Habforce' from Palestine would be able to relieve Habbaniya and approach Baghdad but that it would be difficult for this modest force to enter that teeming capital or consolidate itself there. He further pointed out that, owing to the lack of anti-aircraft guns, the Habbaniya air base and Basra might be in great difficulty if Axis air or airborne forces were to participate in supporting the Iraqis. He perceived that any translation of R.A.F. units from Palestine and Egypt would endanger the defence of the Middle East and he therefore urged again that a political settlement be sought.

In his reply of 9 May the Prime Minister was in favour of bold military action. He informed General Wavell that Rashid 'Ali and his faction were in 'desperate straits', and that he was actively to engage the Iraqi army with 'Habforce' and, after reaching Habbaniya, the Prime Minister wrote:—

you should exploit the situation to the utmost not hesitating to try to break into Baghdad even with quite small forces, and running the same kind of risks as the Germans are accustomed to run and profit by.⁶⁰

Churchill stressed that there would be no negotiation with Rashid 'Ali and argued that the ground forces which Wavell was to divert from Palestine to Iraq would not seriously affect the Western Desert theatre. He concluded his telegram by emphasizing that the role of the R.A.F. would be best performed covering both Iraq and Egypt. General Auchinleck sent a telegram⁶¹ on 10 May in which he urged the War Office to act boldly to control the situation in Iraq. He recommended the occupation of Baghdad and other key points, especially Mosul and Kirkuk, in order to preclude overt German intervention. In reply, Wavell explained his own view on Iraq policy which was that in view of the limited British resources, British interests in Egypt and Palestine were far more important than those in Iraq. He adumbrated Britain's specific interest in Iraq as follows:—

- (a) (The) Avoidance of a major conflict with the Arabs
- (b) (The) Security of the oil supplies from Abadan

⁶⁰ Churchill, *op. cit.*, p. 231 and Elie Kedourie 'Wavell and Iraq, April-May, 1941', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 2, July, 1966, No. 4, p. 382.

⁶¹ *Cab 79/11*, Annex I, From C-in-C. India, to the War Office 10/5/41.

- (c) (The) Security of the oil supplies from Kirkuk
- (d) (The) maintenance of the air route to India.⁶²

He stressed the effect that a large-scale Arab uprising in Iraq would have on the military position in the Middle East. It would damage general British interests and threaten the stability of Palestine, Aden, the Yemen, Egypt and Syria, perhaps necessitating thereby the commitment of large British forces to peace-keeping. He added that India could not be expected to appreciate the effect of a large-scale upheaval in Iraq on the military position in the Middle East.⁶³ He suggested that the best way to avoid such a consequence was to:—

get back to normal relations with a well-disposed Iraqi Government at a very early date. Suggesting that we propose to occupy country and suppress Iraqi independence will be exploited by enemy with serious results. Already loyalty of Transjordan Frontier Force is in grave doubt.⁶⁴ (This was to be proved true when some of its personnel refused to fight the Iraqi forces.) (see below)

Wavell gave an analytical explanation of how the supply of oil from Kirkuk to Haifa could only be secured by Iraqi goodwill. He stressed that the Iraqis were capable of destroying the oil refineries and of cutting off the supply of oil and that it would be difficult to secure the oil by military occupation. The flow of oil from Abadan also depended basically on the presence of British forces at Basra, to safeguard the refinery and to keep the Shatt al-Arab open for navigation. The air route to India through Iraq would be secure as long as Habbaniya and Basra remained in British hands.

He was against the idea of occupying Mosul and Kirkuk, as suggested by Auchinleck, because he thought the occupation of those cities was beyond British military capability at that time. As for Baghdad, Wavell stressed that its occupation could only be a temporary measure undertaken either to secure a friendly government or else at the request of the Iraqi Government. In view of German-Russian accord, the Nazi-Soviet Non-aggression Pact of 1939 and the Four Powers Agreement of November, 1940, on the delimitation of spheres of influence, Wavell believed that it was inconceivable that Germany would advance on Mosul and Kirkuk

⁶² F0 371/27069/E2175, Most secret, from C-in-C. Middle East, To, War Office, Immediate, Despatch 10/5/1941 received 11/5/1941.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

through the Caucasus. Therefore, in the event of a German advance through Turkey towards the south, Syria and not Iraq would be the main route to Palestine and Egypt.⁶⁵ He further thought that the occupation of Baghdad could be effected more safely and easily from Northern Palestine than from Basra, as the Basra-Baghdad road was dominated by Arab tribes whose attitude was in doubt. His final recommendations were:—

- (a) to do everything possible to secure political settlement on lines of C.O.S. 96 as soon as possible and to secure normal relations with Iraqi Government.
- (b) A force at Basra to secure and organize base and endeavour to establish good relations with tribes but not to move forward till strong enough to be effective which I do not feel it will be for some little time.
- (c) Habforce will move from Palestine to Habbaniya and then if situation permits on to Baghdad with view to influencing political situation.⁶⁶

From his discussions with Nuri al-Sa'id and the Regent, Wavell concluded that both were of the opinion that, once a friendly government was installed at Baghdad, there would be no need to keep any more British troops in Iraq than were required to maintain the line of communication.⁶⁷ However, in the immediate aftermath of the revolt, Iraq was veritably to be saturated by British troops. For instance, the 8th Division arrived between the 9th and the 30th June.

In reply to Wavell's telegram, Churchill assured him of the Cabinet's readiness to approve his idea of installing a friendly government in Baghdad. He pointed out that Britain did not seek any change in the independent status of Iraq,⁶⁸ and confirmed that his government was not interested in anything involving large-scale operations or advancing up the river from Basra. He stressed that 'Habforce' must push on to Baghdad as quickly as possible. Here Churchill's judgement could be challenged, for it was with the help of the advancing British troops from Basra towards Baghdad that the British were able to consolidate their grip on Iraq and then to attack Syria.

⁶⁵ *Ibid* and DGFP Vol. X No. 329 pp. 562 - 65.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ FO 371/27669/E2175, Prime Minister to General Wavell Personal and Secret. 12/5/1941.

The Situation at Rutbah and Ramadi and the formation of Habforce

But now the Anglo-Iraqi war entered its second phase, marked by the advance of 'Habforce' from Palestine and the Axis air intervention in the crisis. The township of Rutbah lay some 70 miles from the Iraqi-Transjordan borders and 180 miles west of Habbaniya. It was situated near the Iraq-Palestine pipeline* which extended from the Kirkuk oil-fields to Haifa. Rutbah and its vicinity was considered a nodal area in the context of this war. It was dominated and inhabited by Arab tribes.

Lieutenant-Colonel N. Hammond, Chief Engineer of the Haifa-Baghdad road (which was still under construction), had arrived in Rutbah on 29 April. On 1 May Hammond and his working party were attacked by Iraqi police together with some bedouin, who had occupied the small fort of Rutbah. Hammond himself was wounded, as were 11 other British, and his party was obliged to withdraw about 130 miles south-west to H.4, the pumping-station and airstrip on the Haifa-Baghdad road and pipeline route. The Middle East Command feared that the important landing ground at Rutbah might be used by a battalion or so of German airborne troops to seize control of the oil pipeline station at H.3, thirty-five miles west of Rutbah. Directives were issued on 2 May by the Palestine and Transjordan Command apropos protecting Rutbah and securing the landing ground there. General Wavell ordered that the H.4 oil pipeline station should be secured as an operational ground for the R.A.F. A company of the 1st Essex was flown immediately from Lydda in Palestine to H.4, while a mechanized squadron of the Transjordan Frontier Force, T.J.F.F., was also ordered to move there as once.⁶⁹

On the following day, 3 May, Group-Captain L. O. Brown arrived from Egypt and at once proceeded to H.4 to assume command of these forces and then secure Rutbah. A detachment of the Arab Legion (consisting of 350 men armed with rifles and a number of Vickers and Lewis guns) was also attached to the force, which was to be directly supported by four Blenheim bombers (No. 84 Squadron) and two more Blenheims fighters (No. 203 Squadron) from Palestine. On 4 May these aircraft and a ground party of the R.A.F. arrived at H.4. The following morning the T.J.F.F. detachment, covered by one Blenheim fighter, occupied

⁶⁹ *Air 41/30 III Operation in the Rutbah Area*, p. 45-46.

*The Iraqi Petroleum Company (I.P.C.) pipelines carried the oil from Kirkuk through two pumping stations, K.1 and K.2, to K.3. At K.3 the pipeline divides into two, one line running to Tripoli in Syria, on which are the stations T.1, T.2, T.3 and T.4 and the other line running to Haifa in Palestine on which are the pumping stations, H.1, H.2, H.3, H.4 and H.5.

H.3 and captured some Iraqi prisoners.⁷⁰

As a result of air and ground reconnaissance by the R.A.F. and the T.J.F.F respectively, it was ascertained that the Iraqi garrison at Rutbah was much smaller than had been supposed. It was estimated, in fact, that the garrison comprised only 100 men with eight machine-guns. It was also confirmed that no considerable Iraqi reinforcements had reached the fort. On 8 May it was decided to confront the garrison there. Leaflets were dropped which demanded that the Iraqis surrender within thirty minutes or face bombardment.

On the following day the attack began, the bombing of the fort being sustained from before dawn until midday. Three R.A.F. bombers were damaged by rifle fire from the fort. The attacks were continued on 10 May, when one Blenheim was shot down by Iraqi machine-guns and rifles. These attacks, plus probes in armoured cars, gradually undermined the morale of the defenders. So, before dawn on 11 May they evacuated the fort and the British forces took over. In the meantime Habbaniya had been reinforced by the arrival from Egypt on 8 May of six Gladiators (No. 94 Squadron).

West of Habbaniya the Iraqi garrison of Ramadi, also on the Haifa-Baghdad road, remained intact. However, it was cut off by the flood water of the Euphrates, the river's bank having been breached by the Iraqis to inundate large areas in order to obstruct the relief of Habbaniya by a British column from Palestine. Also during the night of 7 May a bridge on the main road eight miles west of Habbaniya had been partially blown up.

However, the relieving force from Palestine was therefore unable to advance on Habbaniya along the Haifa-Baghdad road. The only alternative was to detour along a track which passed south of the flood waters to where a bridge was under construction at Majora. This bridge was secured by a company of the King's Own Regiment despatched by Colonel Roberts, the Officer Commanding the ground forces at Habbaniya,⁷¹ and work on its completion was resumed on 10 May.

Between 10 and 13 May arms and war material were poured into Iraq from Syria by the French Army, as British intelligence soon became aware.⁷² Two trains consisting of 34 trucks of arms and ammunition and four cars comprising a battery were sent to Tel Kotchek on the Iraqi-Syrian border where the Iraqis took delivery

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Cab 44/122*, 6-12 May, Habbaniya, *Withdrawal of the Iraqi Forces.*

⁷² *Ibid.*, and Charles De Gaulle, *op. cit.*, pp. 182-3.

in the presence of French and German officers. Another two consignments of military aid were sent on 25 and 27 May; these included two train loads of aviation spirit and a battery of 155mm guns.

The tasks of Habforce were the following:—

- (a) To establish contact with the R.A.F. Station at Habbaniya and assist the garrison to secure its defences, communications and supplies;
- (b) To assist in any necessary evacuation of personnel;
- (c) To keep open the line of communication Transjordan-Habbaniya; to protect H.4 and operational landing grounds east of that station which might be required by the R.A.F.
- (d) To facilitate contact with the Arab tribes and with the counter-revolutionary activities being organised by G.H.Q.⁷³.

A flying column, codenamed 'Kingcol', under the command of Brigadier John Joseph Kingstone was formed to act as a spearhead for the main body of 'Habforce'. This column was able to reach H.4 in good time and crossed into Iraq on 12 May. The same day preparations were made to concentrate the remainder of 'Habforce' in Irbid, within Transjordan, to await extra transport coming from Egypt before moving across the borders. The control of operations eastward from H.4 was to be switched from Air Vice Marshal Smart, at Habbaniya, to Major-General Clark as soon as Advanced H.Q. 'Habforce' from Palestine had established itself at H.4. Also on 12 May Habbaniya was reinforced by four Blenheim IVs (No. 84 Bomber Squadron) from Palestine.

The attitude of Arab personnel of the T.J.F.F towards the crisis in Iraq had showed itself right from the beginning, when some elements refused to advance on Rutbah fort from H.3. On 9 May a number of Arab officers and men of the force made it clear that they were not prepared to cross the border and fight their fellow Arabs. Subsequently five officers and four NCO's were dismissed, accused of incitement to mutiny. In addition, 240 men applied to be discharged from the force and were allowed to leave.⁷⁴

The 'Habforce' main body was composed finally of the following units:—

- H.Q. 1 Cavalry Division
- H.Q. 4 Cavalry Brigade
- Wiltshire Yeomanry, less one Sqn.
- Warwickshire Yeomanry

⁷³ *Cab 44/122*, 8 May.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, *op. cit.*, *Formation of Habforce: The Move to the Iraqi Frontier, The Recovery of Rutbah.*

Mech. Regt. T.U.F.F
 Sqn. RAF Armd. Cars
 60 Fd. Regt., R.A., less one Tp.
 Independent A/TK Tp. R.A.
 Tp. Cheshire Fd. Sqn. R.E.
 One Sub. Sec. Boring Sec. R.E.
 1 Essex less Two Companies
 3 x Res. MT Coy R.A.S.C.
 552 Coy R.A.S.C.
 166 Lt. Fd. Amb.
 Cav. Bde. Gp Workshop
 1 Cav. Ord. Workshop
 Det. Cav. Div. Postal Unit
 1 Cav. Div. Sqn. less 2 secs.
 8 Ltd. Fd. Hy. Sect.⁷⁵

With regard to the 'Kingcol' force, this was composed from the 'Habforce' units:—

H.Q.4 Cavalry Brigade
 The Household Cavalry Regt.
 237th Battery/60th Field Regt. R.A.
 A/TK Troop, R.A.
 2nd Troop, Cheshire Field Sqn. R.A.
 Detachment, Boring Section R.E.
 2 Coys 1/Essex with carrier platoon
 Detachment R.A.F. Armed car (8 cars)
 166th Light Field Ambulance
 Desert Mech. Regt. Arab Legion Less Det.

In all, the flying column, Kingcol, numbered some 2,000 men and included no fewer than 500 vehicles. Initially, its concentration area was at Nathanya in Palestine, 35 miles south of Haifa. Its task was to dash across the Transjordan-Iraq frontier and reach Habbaniya as quickly as possible, crossing more than 470 miles from the Palestine frontier along the Haifa-Baghdad road. The remainder of 'Habforce' was to guard the line of communication between Iraq and Palestine.

On 11 May Kingcol arrived at Mafraq, on the edge of the desert, carrying rations for twelve days and water for five. It arrived at H.4 on the following day. It continued its advance, reaching Wadi al-Tarifa, on the Iraqi frontier and seven miles beyond H.4, on 13

⁷⁵ WO 169/1280, Secret, HW 1st Cavalry Division, 8th May, 1941, *Administrative Instruction No. 19 Mobilization of Habforce* and WO 169/1224, *Introduction, Formation of 'Habforce'*. The inconsistencies in presentation (e.g. 'Cav.' or 'Cavalry') derive from the primary source.

May at 1400 hours. At 1430 Brigadier Kingstone, accompanied by the Intelligence Officer, Lieutenant Somerset de Chair, and escorted by a motorized troop of the Household Cavalry, moved across the frontier towards H.3, arriving there at 1800 hours. At H.3 he met Squadron Leader Cassano who commanded the R.A.F. armoured cars. Cassano briefed the Brigadier on the situation and his action against Fawzi al-Qawuqchi and the Iraqi desert police in Rutbah, which had fallen on 11 May. Meanwhile, al-Qawuqchi (who had taken an active part in the Palestine revolt in 1936-39), gave his full support to Rashid 'Ali and joined the resistance movement with some Syrian volunteers, who called themselves 'the special Movement for the support of Iraq'. They had arrived in Rutbah to reinforce the Iraqi police fort there, but without success. As he had been an army officer in Hijaz in 1931, Rashid 'Ali gave Qawuqchi the temporary rank of Lieutenant-Colonel and instructed him to hamper the advance of the British troops from westward. Meanwhile in Egypt, General Azis Ali al-Masri, the Chief-of-Staff of the Egyptian Army, was arrested with two of his colleagues following an unsuccessful attempt to flee to join Rashid 'Ali in an aircraft which crashed after take off.⁷⁶ At 2100 hours Rutbah was reached by 'Kingcol' and by Major, later General, Sir John Glubb with his Arab Legion forces, who had been probing into the desert ahead of the flying column. Next morning, 14 May, the main body of 'Kingcol' arrived in Rutbah.

By now the main body of 'Habforce' was ready to move from H.4, having completed its concentration there. On May 15 the flying column left Rutbah to reach 'Kilo 25', about 15 miles west of Ramadi. While the column was still at Rutbah an intelligence report had been received giving news of seven unidentified aircraft passing over Aley, near Beirut, and heading for Iraq; and another 17 aircraft were reported to be refuelling at Mezze in Syria. The British suspected that these aircraft were German, sent through Syria to assist the Iraqis. A Squadron-Leader, who had arrived from Habbaniya in a Blenheim, reported that one of the British pilots on reconnaissance over Mosul had been shot down by a German aircraft.⁷⁷

The advent of German aircraft was definitely established by the British pilot who had been fired at while on reconnaissance over Mosul on 13 May. In fact, 'Kingcol' was attacked during its final

⁷⁶ *Al-Ahram*, Cairo Daily, 18 May, 1941, and Anwar al-Sadat, *Safhat Majhulah* (Unknown pages) (Cairo, 1954), pp. 88-92 and Hussein Sulfakar Sabry, *Sovereignty for Sudan* (Ithaca Press, London, 1982) p. 19.

⁷⁷ Somerset de Chair, *The Golden Carpet* (London, 1944) pp. 21-2.

move to Habbaniya, but this was by an Iraqi aircraft which machine-gunned the Arab Legion and the Household Cavalry Regiment and bombed the Essex Regiment, inflicting a number of casualties. The next day, 16 May, the column continued its advance towards Habbaniya. Due to floods, aggravated by the destruction by the Iraqis of a long culvert west of Ramadi on the road to Habbaniya, Brigadier Kingstone (informed of this by Habbaniya), decided to move south-east across the desert down Wadi Abu Faruk, which was about 30 miles away, and then south of the lake by the bridge which had been completed for this purpose at Majora on 12 May.

However, progress now became impossible because most of the column's lorries broke through the hard crust of the desert into soft sand, not to mention the high temperature, which approached 120° in the shade, and the shortage of water. Brigadier Kingstone signalled to Colonel Roberts in Habbaniya that he was withdrawing his whole force back to Kilo 25. The next morning, 17 May, however, the Arab Legion managed to discover a way through by starting south-westward from Kilo 25 and making a detour to Habbaniya by the Majora route. On 18 May a fresh start was made with an Arab Legion truck as pathfinder. At 1930 hours the tail of the column was machine-gunned and bombed by four twin-engined aircraft before it had left Kilo 25. Two men of the Arab Legion and three of the Household Cavalry Regiment were wounded. By 1800 hours the whole force was across Majora bridge and bivouacked 20 miles north in the wadis beside the lake to the south of the Habbaniya cantonment. Brigadier Kingstone then went into Habbaniya where General Clark had already arrived by air from his advance H.Q. at H.4; and preparations were made for an attack by air and land on Falluja which was the key to the capture of Baghdad.⁷⁸ On the same day Air Vice Marshal H. d'Albiac arrived at Habbaniya to replace Air Vice Marshal Smart who had been badly injured in a motor accident three days before and had had to be flown to hospital at Basra.

Axis aid and German Aircraft operating in Iraq.

Following the destruction of the Iraqi air force in the first week of the war, Axis assistance in the air was desperately needed. The constant British air raids on the Iraqi army had an adverse

⁷⁸ WO 169/1259, *op. cit.*, and Cab 44/122 16. 17 and 18.

effect on the morale of commanders and soldiers, especially in the aftermath of their retreat from the Habbaniya plateau on 6 May.

With the arrival of German aircraft, Iraqi morale did improve, though only for a time.⁷⁹ On 6 May, Rashid 'Ali had requested 'Uthman Kamal Haddad, the Private Secretary of the Mufti, to contact Berlin and inform them about the situation in Iraq and to ask that German aid should be sent urgently.⁸⁰ Haddad also relates in his Memoirs that al-Sabbagh, who had lost his nerve following the withdrawal of the Iraqi troops from Sin al-Dhibban, asked him to advise Germany that 400 British aircraft had attacked Iraq and that the situation was very critical.⁸¹ He goes on to explain how he managed with difficulty to contact Berlin via Ankara through the Iraqi Minister there who then informed von Papen.

The ex-German Minister in Baghdad, Fritz Grobba, relates in his Memoirs that Rashid 'Ali approached the Italian Minister in Baghdad on 3 May and urged him to ask that Germany and Italy send essential air support to Iraq following the decision to resist British operations there. He also requested the despatch of financial aid (see below) and several Axis squadrons to operate in Iraq accompanied by a German military mission to co-operate with the Iraqi General Staff, and the resumption of German-Iraqi diplomatic relations. Rashid 'Ali was naturally anxious to know the Axis reaction to his demands and how far they were prepared to help him. If they were reluctant to meet Iraq's demands, Grobba believed the Iraqi Government would have to change its tactics in dealing with the British authorities and try to enter into negotiations to gain time, despite Britain's evident concern to continue its policy and occupy Iraq as quickly as possible.⁸²

Many other contacts with German representatives in neighbouring countries were made to press Germany to help Iraq. The Japanese representative in Baghdad was approached; the Iraqi Minister in Tehran was also instructed to contact the German Minister there and inform him of Iraq's readiness to resume diplomatic relations; and an Iraqi diplomat, Talib Mushtaq, who arrived in Tehran on 4 May, was instructed to contact the German Minister there and confirm Iraq's request for urgent Axis air aid. Mushtaq affirmed:—

⁷⁹ Haddad, *op. cit.* p. 114.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

⁸² Grobba, *op. cit.* pp. 394-5 and *DGFP, op., cit.*, Series D., vol. XII No. 435, pp. 688-9.

- (a) An urgent need for some combat aircraft
- (b) That Iraqi aerodromes at Baghdad and Mosul were ready to receive Axis aircraft and
- (c) That air fuel was available for 200 aircraft for a period of six months.⁸³

Grobba arrived in Baghdad on 11 May via Syria. He had been instructed by his government not to submit his diplomatic papers to Rashid 'Ali until he had ascertained the strength of the Iraqi régime and the restoration of the situation at Habbaniya. Before his arrival in Baghdad he had discussed with the French Commander in Syria the question of supplying Iraq with arms aid from French stocks in Syria. Furthermore, he brought Rashid 'Ali financial aid to the tune of £20,000 in gold.⁸⁴ Before he left for Baghdad he had also suggested to General Alfred Jodl, the Chief of the Wehrmacht Operations Staff, that he appoint Helmuth Felmy, General of the Luftwaffe, head of the German Military Mission to Iraq and military adviser to the Iraqi Government.⁸⁵ General Jodl agreed to the assignment of General Felmy but suggested that Grobba's proposal should be submitted by the Iraqi Government to the Germans, since the approval of such an appointment rested with the Führer alone. Unfortunately, Felmy did not arrive in Syria until 1 June, 1941, after the suppression of the revolt in Iraq.

Grobba was instructed by his government to keep his mission to Baghdad secret. He travelled under a false name, Frank Gehrcke, in order to confuse British intelligence. On his arrival in Baghdad he had a meeting with Rashid 'Ali, the Foreign Minister, al-Sabbagh and the commander of the Royal Iraqi Air Force.

Meanwhile, the first German reconnaissance team, composed of three aircraft under Major Axel von Blomberg who had been designated to lead the German air operations in Iraq, arrived in Baghdad on 11 May, with the exception of Blomberg's own aircraft, which was shot down in battle with British aircraft over Baghdad.⁸⁶ Colonel Werner Junck was appointed Flieger-führer Iraq to lead Luftwaffe operations in Iraq. One fighter-bomber

⁸³ Talib Mushtaq, *Awraq Ayyami* (My Recollection Papers) (Beirut, 1968) pp. 402-3 and Grobba, *op. cit.* pp. 397-8. Mushtaq in his memoirs had not mentioned the other demands which he put to the German Minister in Tehran which Grobba did mention in his memoirs and *DGFP Series D, Vol. XII*, No. 457 pp. 716-7. These omitted requests were: the resumption of Iraqi-German relations, the dispatch to Baghdad of military experts, and the need for 3 million dinars.

⁸⁴ Grobba, *op. cit.* p. 402. Owing to the closure of most of the foreign banks in Iraq, and in an attempt to solve the financial crisis which was threatening the Iraqi economy, Rashid 'Ali proceeded with the project of establishing an Iraqi national bank financed with a German loan of which the first instalment brought from Germany arrived on 11 May.

⁸⁵ Grobba, *op. cit.* pp. 401-3.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 403-4 and *DGFP op. cit.* No. 493 p. 775 and footnote (2) and Guedalla, *op. cit.* p. 146.

squadron with Messerschmitt-110s and one bomber-squadron with Heinkel-111s (composed of 12 aircraft) each were put under Junck's command. These two squadrons arrived in Mosul on 15 May. They were followed by one squadron of Italian fighters (12 aircraft) equipped with Fiat C.R.42 biplanes, which was based at Kirkuk on 28 May. This Italian squadron failed to lend any substantial assistance to the Iraqis, a fact which could well be attributed to their shattered morale after severe attrition in East Africa at the hands of the British and South African Air Forces. Count Ciano, then Italian Foreign Minister, confirmed in his diaries the inactivity of these aircraft.⁸⁷ Still, the surprising thing is that such short-range and obsolescent machines went to Iraq in the first place.

The Iraqi Government had not publicly admitted the presence of Axis aircraft in Iraq despite Rashid 'Ali's attendance at Blomberg's funeral.⁸⁸ A reconnaissance operation had been carried out by the R.A.F. on 12 May over Mosul, Tel Kotcheck (on the Syrian border), Tel Sirwal, Ain Zala, (North of Mosul), al-Badi and Qaiyara (south of Mosul) to check whether any preparations were being made by the Iraqis to receive Axis aircraft on any of these ideal landing-grounds. No confirmation was obtained but on that same day an aircraft believed to have been a Heinkel III was observed landing in the morning at Rashid airfield, Baghdad.

As a precautionary step to block the passage of any war material by road from Syria or via the Aleppo-Mosul railway to Iraq (to which the British believed the Vichy authorities might also have had agreed), it was decided to destroy the railway between Tel Kotcheck and Mosul; and such a mission was carried out successfully by the R.A.F. on 13, 14 and 15 May. Reconnaissance flights by the R.A.F. continued to observe the bases and landing-grounds used by these German planes.⁸⁹ On 15-16 May, six German aircraft were discovered at Arbil by the R.A.F. as were 16 at Mosul. Two of them were destroyed at Arbil and another eight at Mosul.⁹⁰ Another confrontation between the R.A.F. and German aircraft took place on 17 May over Rashid airfield in which the latter came off worse. The speedy neutralization of the Luftwaffe was being made a top priority.

Apart from Axis air aid, a large consignment of arms had been received between 13-28 May (as already mentioned) via the Syria

⁸⁷ Grobba, *op. cit.* pp. 407-8, DGFP, *op. cit.*, No. 528, p. 834 and *Air 41/30. V. The Advance on Baghdad* p. 67, VI, General Summary of the Operations of the R.A.F. During the Iraqi Rebellion p. 72 and Ciano's diary, 1939-1943, (London, 1947) p. 350.

⁸⁸ Freya Stark, *Dust in the Lion's Paw, an Autobiography* (London, 1961) p. 106

⁸⁹ *Air 41.30 IV The Capture of Falluja.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

railroad in exchange for food supplies to the Levant, and a treaty to this effect was signed. The arms consignment included 15,500 rifles, four artillery guns of 75mm calibre and eight of 155mm calibre model, 17,200 machine-guns, 354 machine pistols; ammunition: about five million rifle and machine-gun cartridges, 657 belts with 24 bullets each, 9,999 rounds of 75mm, 600 rounds of 155mm, 30,000 of grenades, 6,000 caseshot, 8,850 magazines for machine pistols and many different types of fuses; carriers; four ammunition carts; 32 lorries; five telephones; 30 kilometres of cable and 30 reserve storage batteries.⁹¹ It is a remarkably diverse mix. Even so no tanks or armoured fighting vehicles could be included. Nor is there any mention of the logistic support those Axis air squadrons must desperately have needed.

Turkish Offer of Mediation

Since the early days of the fighting between Britain and Iraq, the Turkish Government had indicated a preparedness to use her good offices to solve the conflict. The motives behind this initiative were quite clear. Her alliance with Britain and Iraq motivated her to play this mediating role in order to bring to an end the conflict and secure her supplies via the Gulf. To maintain peace and stability on her southern flank with Iraq and Syria and to avoid encirclement by the Axis forces was another motive. Furthermore her relations with the U.S.S.R. and Italy were far from amicable. Turkey's relations with Iraq had been quite close since King Faisal's visit in July, 1931, not to mention her membership of the Sa'ad Abad Pact of 1937, a pact to which Afghanistan, Persia and Iraq were also parties. On 4 May Turkey had offered orally and in writing to mediate. As far as Britain's reaction to this offer was concerned, the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, in a speech to the House of Commons on 6 May, gave the Government's view, albeit in a manner which conflicted with Churchill's refusal to negotiate when he was asked to do so by General Wavell. Eden said:—

We are very grateful for the offer of good offices by the Turkish and Egyptian Governments. Our position is as follows: the first requisite is the withdrawal of troops from Habbaniya and the cessation of hostilities against His Majesty's Forces in Iraq. When this has been done and fighting between the Allied nations has in consequence ceased, His Majesty's Government are prepared to discuss the ful-

⁹¹ Hirszowicz *op. cit.* pp. 163-4. On 6 May Iraq had already asked Germany through the Japanese Legation in Baghdad and Tehran to provide her with 250 tanks and 500 planes and 3 million dinars in cash as a condition of further continuation of hostilities, FO37127087

filment of their treaty rights which His Majesty's Government must make plain they are in all circumstances determined to maintain.⁹²

On 8 May the Iraqi Government decided to send the Defence Minister, Naji Shawkat, to Turkey to ascertain their intentions and discuss the terms of this mediation, and to send the Finance Minister, Naji al-Suwaidi, to Saudi Arabia to explain the reasons and factors which had led to the present situation and to justify Rashid 'Ali's quarrel with Britain. Al-Suwaidi was to ask King Ibn Sa'ud's help to repel British aggression, Saudi Arabia being obliged by the Friendship Treaty signed in April, 1931, to support Iraq, in accordance with paragraph one Article 4.⁹³ In his interview with the King, al-Suwaidi pressed Ibn Sa'ud to mediate with Great Britain with a view to calling off the fighting 'whether on British or Iraqi terms not stated'. He also requested the King to send his forces to threaten Transjordan and thus prevent her forces being used against the Iraqi Army.

He further asked the King to send a representative to Iraq to participate in a conference which Rashid 'Ali proposed to convene to discuss making a pact between Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Japan, Russia, Germany and Italy, and to consider the present situation and the future of the Arab world. Al-Suwaidi's mission to King Sa'ud failed, the King advising Iraq to negotiate a settlement and to achieve an understanding with Britain.⁹⁴ In a reply addressed not to Rashid 'Ali but to the people of Iraqi Ibn Sa'ud said:—

If you wish us to mediate between you and His Majesty's Government, we are willing to do what we can, but do not for a moment imagine that we shall take any step which could cause a breach between us and the British. Our firm and fixed belief remains that interest of all Arabs lies in friendly co-operation with the British.

It could be argued that Ibn Sa'ud's negative attitude to Rashid 'Ali's régime might have been the outcome of the pressure the British exerted upon him.

The Turkish initiative which aimed at finding a settlement for the dispute had little hope of success since the British attitude to

⁹² FO 371/27068/1956/1/93, from Foreign Office to Angora. No. 1029, 6 May, 1941, Immediate.

⁹³ Naji Shawkat, *op. cit.* p. 464.

⁹⁴ FO 371/27069/E2235 From Saudi Arabia from Jedda to Foreign Office, No. 156. 14 May 1941, Immediate and F.O. 371/27077/E3648, British Embassy, Baghdad, 15 June 1941 to Foreign Office

Extract from a letter from Adviser to the Ministry of Interior dated 11/6/1941 ff 107-8

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

the proposal was not encouraging, a circumstance that can reasonably be attributed to the position of strength afforded by the victory at Habbaniya. In fact, the Turkish terms of reconciliation were rejected by the British Government, two of the proposals being particularly unacceptable to them, as being a considerable restriction of their treaty rights. The terms proposed were:—

- (1) The evacuation of all Iraqi troops at Habbaniya.
- (2) As soon as present arrangement has been accepted, hostilities will be stopped on both sides.
- (3) The British Ambassador in Baghdad will present his credentials.
- (4) Passage of British troops from Basra to their destination outside Iraq will begin without delay.
- (5) Seeing that Anglo-Iraqi treaty will continue to constitute judicial bond between the two countries renders valid for the British the right of passage through Iraqi territory. Any concentration of forces must have as its object the putting into force of that right and must not constitute an end in itself.
- (6) Iraqi Government accepts a reasonable augmentation of British forces stationed at bases provided for in the treaty. Technicians of the two parties will decide in common agreement the extent and modalities of this increase.⁹⁶

Eden stated in a telegram to his Ambassador in Turkey that the only solution which would secure the region from the German menace and safeguard lines of communication for the benefit of both Turkey and Britain through Iraq, was the resignation of Rashid 'Ali and the setting up of a friendly government. The Ambassador was to urge the Turkish Government not to say or do anything which might encourage Rashid 'Ali to continue his struggle, and press them to make the Iraqis lose all hope of involving the British in prolonged and complicated discussions by which they might seek to gain time until the arrival of German aerial aid in Iraq.⁹⁷

Eden's insistence on Rashid 'Ali's resignation was communicated to the Iraqi envoy to Turkey, Naji Shawkat, through the Turkish Foreign Minister. Naji Shawkat replied that if a successor were chosen by the Iraqis themselves, then a more fanatical person might come to power. Yet if the British Government tried to

⁹⁶ Naji Shawkat, *op. cit.* pp. 469-473, FO 371/27069/E21141/193, from Foreign Office to Angora, No. 1075, 11 May, 1941, Most Immediate and FO 371/27068/E2085, from Angora, to Foreign Office No. 1135, 9 May, 1941, Most Immediate.

⁹⁷ FO 371/27069/E21141/193, from Foreign Office to Angora, No. 1075 11/5/1951. Most Immediate.

choose a successor he would be rejected outright.⁹⁸ The Turkish Foreign Minister urged the British Ambassador in Ankara to press his government to reconsider her virtual refusal of his good offices, pointing out that he was prepared to consider alternatives or amendments to his original suggestions and that once the Arabs felt that Germany was solidly supporting them, they would be encouraged to harbour hostile attitudes towards the British.⁹⁹

In order to ascertain Germany's intentions, Naji Shawkat had conferred with von Papen immediately after the latter's return to Ankara from Berlin on 14 May. Naji argued that the only advantages of Turkish mediation would be the gaining of time for mobilizing the Axis aid, and its bad effect on Anglo-Turkish relations, as he believed that the British were determined to topple Rashid 'Ali and to control Iraq militarily.¹⁰⁰ Germany had no objection to the Turkish offer of mediation.

According to his memoirs, Naji Shawkat regretted his government's refusal of the Turkish initiative, which in his eyes had provided a good chance for settling the dispute, since the Germans showed no serious concern to help Iraq once Iraqi troops were in retreat. On the other hand the acceptance of the offer by Iraq might have made Churchill consider the Turkish proposals thoroughly before he rejected them. It was against Britain's interest to anger Turkey by rejecting her offer of mediation, owing to the value of Turkey's friendship for Britain in her struggle against the Axis, in spite of Turkey's official neutrality and her weak offensive power and other military deficiencies.¹⁰¹

The Iraqi Minister had emphasized again Iraq's need for aerial aid. Papen assured Naji Shawkat, *inter alia*, that German military aid would be available within a fortnight. He said that Hitler had taken all necessary steps to support Iraq and that at least 30 aircraft would reach Iraq within two days. He further said that Germany had agreed with Vichy France to supply Iraq with military aid through Syria.¹⁰²

When Naji Shawkat eventually put the Turkish peace initiative to his government, great controversy arose over the factual reasons for a refusal, though the Iraqi official reply was that the

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *DGFP, Series D, Vol. XII, No 514, p. 812.*

¹⁰¹ Naji Shawkat, *op. cit.* pp. 476-77 and Churchill, *The Second World War, Abridged Edition*, 7th ed. (London, 1967) pp. 394-95. In A.J.P. Taylor's, *The War Lords* p. 84, he says that Churchill believed that Turkey was, as he put it, 'crying to go to war against Germany' which is contrary to what Churchill said in *The Second World War, Abridged Edition* pp. 394-5

¹⁰² Naji Shawkat, *op. cit.* p. 472.

proposals were under consideration by the Ministry of Defence. One story expressed the view that initially Rashid 'Ali was prepared to accept them, which would have provided him in return with the recognition of his government by Britain. The other version was that during his discussions with al-Sabbagh on this matter, a bitter exchange took place in the presence of the Mufti which led to al-Sabbagh's threatening to shoot Rashid 'Ali for temporizing with the British. This interpretation was refuted by Rashid 'Ali himself, who attributed the episode to his intention to dismiss al-Sab'awi, the Minister of Economics, from his Cabinet due to his abuse of his position and his misconduct of the financial affairs of his Ministry.¹⁰³ Then Rashid 'Ali submitted his resignation. He changed his mind only when the army leaders persuaded him that he was needed in those critical times, and when al-Sabbagh had apoloised.

In his memoirs, Naji Shawkat mainly blames the four Colonels for the failure of his mission, believing them to have been the key influence behind the rejection of the Turkish proposals. He suggested that their lack of experience in international politics and of a feeling for diplomacy made them unable to understand the difficulties they faced, let alone overcome them. He maintained that they were under the influence of some people (he meant the Mufti and other Palestinian Arab exiles and Syrians in Iraq) whose approach in politics was quite different from that of experienced Iraqi politicians.¹⁰⁴ Here Naji Shawkat seems to be saying that those Arab exiles, including the Mufti, were ignoring Iraq's interests in their approach to day-to-day political issues, an attitude in conflict with the attitude of the Iraqi politicians, who put Iraq's national interests before anything else. Naji Shawkat therefore also attributed the failure of his mission to those people who were influencing Iraqi politics from behind the scene. As he explained:—

The four Colonels argued that the British government was behind the Turkish initiative in order to gain time. And if that was so, then why did they (the four Colonels) not launch a decisive military action between 25 April and 4 May, 1941, to occupy the British air base at Habbaniya and to put things right? In order to vindicate the rejection of the Turkish mediation they said that they

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, and al-Hasani *Al-Asrar al-Kaffia fi Harakat al-Sana 1941 al-Taharruria*, pp. 169-170 footnote (1).

¹⁰⁴ *Naji Shawkat op. cit.* 476.

were awaiting the arrival of German aid; but why did they refuse to accept the Turkish offer which was already approved by Germany, in order to give the Germans time to assist Iraq? When conditions were suitable for us to use force, Cornwallis cheated us with his diplomacy and manoeuvres and so we ruled out this course of action. When time was propitious for us to use diplomatic means, we preferred to wait for German assistance although we did not know its time of arrival and its quantity. We were in a mess, and were waiting for a miracle to happen.¹⁰⁵

Because of his peace efforts Naji Shawkat was eventually accused by the four Colonels of being a traitor. When he returned to Iraq on 19 May he tendered his resignation and left for Turkey where he was to stay until the end of the crisis.

On the question of the Turkish offer of mediation, *The Times* commented:—

...the Turkish offer of good offices to assist in settling the conflict between Iraq and Great Britain was made on the request of the Iraqi Minister in Angora, who is a brother of Rashid 'Ali. The condition laid down by the British for acceptance was communicated to the Iraqi Government, but so far as is known the latter has not yet replied.¹⁰⁶

The Battle of Falluja

By the end of the first phase of the conflict in the Battle of Habbaniya, virtually one whole division (the 4th and the 11th Infantry Brigades and two mechanized battalions) had been rendered ineffective and the Royal Iraqi Air Force had been destroyed. So Colonel al-Sabbagh, as Commander-in-Chief of the Western Command, immediately ordered that Colonel Fahmi Sa'id, the Officer Commanding the 3rd Division should be relieved. He was then placed in command of the 5th Division, then located below war establishment at Baghdad. Al-Sabbagh then asked one of his old opponents, Brigadier Ismail Haqqi al-Agha, to assume the leadership of the 3rd Division. Al-Agha was a retired officer who had been the Iraqi Chargé d'Affaires at Aleppo during the crisis and was a close friend of a General Bakr Sidqi. No withstanding his seniority in rank, he agreed to work

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 476

¹⁰⁶ *The Times* 8 May, 1941.

¹⁰⁷ *Al-Durrah*, op. cit. p. 305.

under al-Sabbagh's leadership. As al-Durrah observed, this submission might be fairly attributed to his deep feelings of patriotism at that critical time.¹⁰⁸ Meanwhile, al-Sabbagh brought in two other young staff officers as replacements at divisional headquarters, Staff-Major Abbas Ali Ghalib and Staff-Captain Hasan Mustapha. Both had been serving as instructors at the Military Staff College at Baghdad.

Al-Sabbagh was sure the next British objective would be the town of Falluja, together with its still intact bridge which was the key to Baghdad. He had accordingly ordered that the banks of the Euphrates be breached to render movement impossible between Habbaniya and Falluja. So by opening the regulator of the Saqlawiya Canal (see the enclosed map of Habbaniya at Appendix 'P') Lake Aqarguf could be filled and the territories immediately south of it flooded, thereby impeding any advance towards Baghdad. The defence system around Falluja was inspected by a German and an Italian officer on 18 May, and they reported on it favourably.¹⁰⁹

Though Falluja was on the most direct route to Baghdad, there was an alternative way through Musayyib, but this would necessitate crossing some 60 miles of desert which presented many difficulties, notably a lack of the requisite motor transport and the impossibility of concealing movements. The bridge at Falluja was a steel girder structure and the prevention of its destruction by Iraq was an overriding aim of the British commander.

The main defence of Falluja lay in the inundations. At a point some four miles to the west of Falluja, these extended for two miles blocking the Habbaniya-Baghdad road. However, the new Majora-Falluja causeway, known as 'Hammond's bund', was available as a diversion, although one section was not yet complete. Moreover, despite the considerable floods which extended to the north side of the Euphrates, there was still a good chance of overrunning Falluja by using air-landed and ferried troops to flank the town from the west and north and then launch a surprise attack. A new ferry was built at Sin al-Dhibban by two Air Ministry Works Directorate Officers with a party of Sappers who arrived on 11 May from Basra.¹¹⁰

On 15 May Colonel O. L. Roberts, who had commanded all ground forces at Habbaniya since 1 May, conferred with his

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*, footnote (1)

¹⁰⁹ Grobba, *op. cit.*, p. 418.

¹¹⁰ Air 41/30 IV *The Capture of Falluja*

commanding officers about plans for the capture of Falluja with its bridge intact. The plan which was decided upon implied the following:—

- (a) A combined air and ground attack preceded, the day before, by a bombing attack on located targets at Ramadi, simultaneously with a feint attack by ground forces.
- (b) The capture of Falluja was to be carried out by the air striking force in conjunction with the advance of five columns called G, A, S, V and L columns.
- (c) 'G' Column was to block any Iraqi interference with the Falluja bridge and to cover the repairs to Hammond's bund.
- (d) 'A' Column was to capture the Police Post and Regulator Bridge one mile west of Saqlawiya and then advance towards Falluja and occupy a position on the high ground north of Falluja, blocking any exit from the outskirts of the town.
- (e) 'S' Column was to cross the ferry immediately after 'A' Column and support that Column during its advance on Falluja. It was to protect 'A' Column from the direction of Saqlawiya and establish a secure base to cover a withdrawal of 'A' Column which it was to support and reinforce if necessary.
- (f) 'V' Column, airlifted, was to occupy a position 2 kilometres from the surroundings of Falluja, covering the Falluja-Baghdad road by fire, and preventing the exit of Iraqi troops from Falluja.
- (g) 'L' Column was to cross the Euphrates by ferry behind 'S' Column and move up to Burma Bund to establish a ferry across Notch Fall Regulator and secure a line of withdrawal or a line of evacuation for prisoners and supporting the 'V' Column in the meantime.¹¹¹ (See Appendix 'N')

Meanwhile, a small detachment of Royal Engineers and a troop of artillery from 'Kingcol' were to support the Sappers and Miners in maintaining the ferry north of Sin al-Dhibban, reconstructing Hammond's Bund and providing ferry facilities at Saqlawiya Regulator and Notch Fall Regulator. The air striking force, in co-operation with the land forces, was to bomb specified targets in Falluja, drop leaflets calling on the garrison to surrender, and then resume bombing routinely until requested to cease fire by Brigade H.Q. or by a smoke signal from 'G' Column. Fighter patrols were to be maintained over the area, particularly to report

¹¹¹ WO 169/224, Phase 3, *The Capture of Falluja and Arrival of Kingcol. 15/5/41.*

if 'V' Column was coming under pressure.¹¹²

In the meantime the forces at Habbaniya were increasing as forty-five soldiers of the Essex Regiment, including three officers, arrived on 17 May by air from H.4 and a hundred Gurkhas were airlifted from Basra.¹¹³ On the same day Major-General Clark arrived at Habbaniya and took charge of all ground forces in that area. It was decided to go ahead with the plan, except that the feint attack on Ramadi was not carried out so as to avoid attracting the attention of the Luftwaffe. Troops were assigned to each column as follows:—

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| 'G' Column | Commander: Captain A. Graham
Troops: One Company Iraq Levies
One Platoon Iraq Levies
In support, one Troop 25-pdr. guns
(6 guns) from Kingcol Detachment
of Sappers and Miners |
| 'A' Column | Commander: Captain Anderson
Troops: One Company Iraq Levies
Detachment of Sappers and Miners |
| 'S' Column | Commander: Major Strickland, 2/4 G.R.
Troops: Detachment 2/4 G.R.
Under Command One Troop
Habbaniya Artillery (4, 3.7 how.) |
| 'V' Column | Commander: Lieutenant D.G. Reese
Troops: King's Own.
One Company King's Own
One Section M.M.G.s
Two A/TK Rifles |
| 'L' Column | Commander: First Lieut. Hillard, R.A.F.
Troops: One Armoured Car Company.
One Section of Armoured Car
One Company R.A.F.
One Platoon King's Own
Detachment of Sappers and Miners
with lorry-borne raft. ¹¹⁴ |

The Attack upon Falluja

At first light, 0500 hours, on 19 May, fifty-seven aircraft of the R.A.F. began a concentrated attack on the Iraqi positions in and

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 17/5/41.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

around Falluja, while four fighters made a patrol flight over the town. An hour later leaflets calling on the Iraqi garrison to surrender were dropped, and as these brought no response, the air offensive was sustained throughout the morning. It was then decided to launch an assault to capture the bridge, this to be carried out by 'G' Column which was facing the Iraqi positions and the bridge from the west. So at 1445 hours an intensive air attack was directed against the Iraqi positions at the western end of the bridge. This air raid lasted for about ten minutes and was followed by thirty-five minutes of shelling by the 25-pounder guns. Then the assault column rushed the Falluja bridge, facing no resistance from the Iraqi positions which had been silenced by the intense 'dive and pattern' bombing. This enabled the Iraq Levies (Assyrians in this case) to continue their advance towards the bridge and capture it intact. By 1700 hours the town was occupied by the British troops and a defensive perimeter arranged.¹¹⁵ As regards the three northern columns, A, S and L, which had crossed the Euphrates on 18 May, they took no part in the Battle of Falluja owing to various delays and difficulties in crossing canals, which meant they did not reach their positions until long after the aerial attack had begun at 0500 hours on 19 May. The airborne column was lifted by two Valentia aircraft and landed without difficulty before first light at its positions off the road leading north-east from Falluja. It was thus the aerial bombardment, combined with the advance of the southern Column, which ensured the success of this phase of the conflict, in which 300 Iraqi prisoners were taken, including 27 officers. There were no casualties on the British side.¹¹⁶ The airlifted company of the King's Own then assumed the responsibility for the defence of Falluja.

It was only at this juncture, after the defeat of the Iraqi Army, that the Luftwaffe began to intervene. On 20 May Habbaniya was attacked and many hangars containing many of the S.F.T.S. aircraft were destroyed. At the same time an army officer and one civilian were killed, and two Army other ranks wounded. On the following day another air attack was launched against Habbaniya, this time by two German aircraft, which succeeded in damaging two R.A.F. aircraft on the ground, with two officers wounded.¹¹⁷ Now the overriding priority of the R.A.F. became the elimination of the German air threat.

¹¹⁵ *Air 41130, op. cit.* p. 57.

¹¹⁶ *Cab 411122, 13-27 May, Advancing Kingcol, capture of Falluja and repulse of counterattack, 19 May.*

¹¹⁷ *Air 41130, op. cit.* p. 60.

It was believed by the R.A.F. Command that, due to its proximity to Syria, Mosul was the main operating base, though other airfields, especially Rashid, might be in use as advanced landing grounds. In view of a shortage of long-range fighters, a request for two Hurricanes was made on 19 May to R.A.F. Headquarters, Middle East. The response came immediately, the two Hurricanes reaching Habbaniya on 21 May.¹¹⁸ On the 24th, the Light AA Battery arrived at H.4 to join 'Habforce', which then proceeded to Habbaniya, leaving a detachment behind at H.4.

Rashid aerodrome was bombarded and all its large hangars damaged in order to deny the Germans their use. As close a watch (both visual and photographic) as possible was maintained on every likely landing-ground, these being mainly in the Mosul and Baquba areas. All in all, between 16 and 20 May the two Luftwaffe squadrons operating in Iraq lost five bombers and eleven fighters out of a total strength of 24 planes. Yet it was not until 23 May, because of the Crete campaign and the forthcoming invasion of the U.S.S.R., that Hitler overtly committed Germany to the assistance of Iraq.¹¹⁹ In his Military Directive of 23 May No. 30 on the Middle East, Hitler stated that the Arab liberation movement was his natural ally against Britain. Yet still his personal preoccupation was with the impending Barbarossa campaign against the U.S.S.R.

The Iraqi Counter-Attack on Falluja (22 May)

Owing to the destruction of telegraph and telephone communication on the road between Falluja and Baghdad, the Headquarters of the 3rd Division were not aware of the loss of the Battle of Falluja and the withdrawal of the 3rd Infantry Brigade until the evening of 19 May, when some civilian people who had escaped from the battle zone reported the attack. It was then decided to lodge a counter-attack to recapture Falluja and its bridge. Grobba describes in his memoirs how he became angry with the Iraqi Chief-of-Staff, General Amin Zaki, and snapped at him for not blowing up the bridge as had been planned. Grobba goes on to say that, after a heated argument, General Amin indicated his preparedness to recapture Falluja.¹²⁰ Accordingly, a conference was held at Divisional Command Headquarters on 20 May, attended by all the officers in command of troops which were to participate in the counter-attack, including Colonel al-Sabbagh, C.-in-C. of

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹¹⁹ Grobba, *op. cit.* pp. 420-23 and DGFP, Series D, Vol. XII, No. 543 pp. 862-64.

¹²⁰ Najdat Fathi Safwat, *Al-Iraq fi Mudhakarat al-Diplomasieen al-Ajanib (Iraq in the Memoirs of Foreign Diplomats)* (Beirut, 1969) p. 173.

the Western Command, and Colonel Nur al-Din Mahmud, Director of Military Operations at the Ministry of Defence. Fresh troops were brought up to replace the 3rd Infantry Brigade, and the plan of the counter-attack was as follows:-

- (a) The 6th Infantry Brigade to lead the counter-attack at midnight of 20/21 May.
- (b) Two tanks and two Mechanized Machine-Gun Companies to assist, cover the attack, capture the bridge and block the withdrawal of the British troops.
- (c) The engineering detachment to blow up the Falluja bridge.¹²¹

In view of the failure of the preparations for the attack, the lack of necessary fuel which was to be brought from Baghdad and the delay in settling the direction of the attack and in preparing night navigation signals on the ground, it was decided to postpone the attack to 21/22 May, to secure time for a pre-dawn attack. As a result of the failure to reach its rendezvous the 2nd Battalion lost its way to the target. So after a delay of more than one and a half hours it was decided to attack with one battalion.¹²² The Iraqi assault was able to achieve some success by driving back British outposts and penetrating into the town. However, it was forced back by an effective aerial attack in the morning and by shelling across the flood water from two troops of 237 Battery which were located west of the gap in Hammond's Bund.

A lorry loaded with gun cotton intended for the demolition of the bridge was destroyed by a direct hit by a British aircraft.¹²³ While the battle at Falluja was in progress, two German aircraft attacked Habbaniya. They might have done better to intervene more directly in the battle, either by lending close support themselves or by interfering with R.A.F. sorties.¹²⁴

At this juncture Brigadier Kingstone was ordered to proceed to Falluja to take charge of the situation. Another counter-attack was carried out by the 1st Battalion which had hurriedly joined the battle shortly after dawn. But this, too, failed owing to considerable casualties again being inflicted by the R.A.F. Iraqi reinforcements were attacked on Falluja plain and about 20 lorries were damaged, two officers and 90 other ranks surrendering.¹²⁵

The 6th Infantry Brigade suffered overall considerable casualties in this battle, totalling 11 officers and approximately 273 other

¹²¹ Hasan Mustafa, *Dhikrayati 'an Marakatal-Falluja* (My Recollection of the Falluja Battle) *Afaq Arabiya* (Arab Horizons) Vol 1 (Baghdad, 1978) p. 12.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

¹²³ *Air 41/30, op. cit.*,

¹²⁴ *Air 23/5920*, From: A.H.Q. Iraq. to: H.Q., R.A.F., Middle East Secret, *Situation Report No. 69*, 22/4/1941.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, *Situation Report No. 70*, 22/5/1941.

ranks killed or wounded.¹²⁶ Total British casualties were approximately 50.¹²⁷ That same day an Iraqi petrol dump at Cassels Post, 12 miles north of Baghdad, was bombed by the R.A.F. and nearly one million gallons of petrol destroyed.¹²⁸ Falluja was reinforced by other British troops which had been brought from Habbaniya, including troops of the Household Cavalry and the two companies of the Essex Regiment. Some 1,300 civilians were expelled from the town as a precaution against sudden attack as some Iraqi snipers had changed their khaki uniforms for civilian clothes and hidden themselves in the town. A few of them were caught and shot.¹²⁹ Such reliance on urban cover was to some extent an antidote to the strike power of the R.A.F. Also on 22 May the Regent, Abd al'Ilah, and his party arrived at Habbaniya by air.

During the following days aerial attacks continued by the R.A.F. against various localities and thousands of leaflets were showered on some 19 provinces in Iraq. Mosul, Kirkuk and Baquba aerodromes were attacked, about ten Iraqi aircraft being destroyed.¹³⁰ Further bombing attacks were carried out against Ramadi, which was still held by the Iraqi 1st Infantry Brigade. Although no signs of wishing to surrender were shown by the Iraqi garrison, the British were able to divert their attention from the preparations for their advance on Baghdad by these intermittent air attacks which continued until 27 May. In his memoirs, al-Sabbagh bitterly criticises Colonel Sa'id Yahya, the Officer Commanding the 1st Infantry Brigade at Ramadi, for agreeing to the letter¹³¹ sent to him by Nuri al-Sa'id who had arrived at Habbaniya with the Regent on 22 May, urging him to take his side. He attributed Colonel Sa'id's performance during the crisis, especially during the approach of 'Habforce', to that letter.

Still more significant, on 23 May General Wavell arrived in Basra to confer with the Commander-in-Chief in India, General Sir Claude Auchinleck, about further reinforcements and military operations in Iraq. Wavell instructed General Quinan to send forward a force along the line of the railway from Sha'iba to Baghdad, now that the situation in Basra was under control. It was also decided at this meeting that C-in-C India would immediately supply reinforcements to complete the concentration of two equivalent divisions in Iraq.¹³²

¹²⁶ Al-Durrah, *op. cit.* p. 343.

¹²⁷ Air 23/5920, from A.H.Q. Iraq, to, R.A.F. Middle East, Situation Report No. 70 22/5/41.

¹²⁸ Air 41/30, IV The Capture of Falluja.

¹²⁹ Cab 44/22, *op. cit.* 22-27 May.

¹³⁰ Air 41/30 *op. cit.*

¹³¹ Al-Sabbagh, *op. cit.* p. 77.

¹³² Air 23/811, *Revolt in Iraq*, from General Sir A. Wavell C-in-C in the Middle East, to Secretary of State, War Office, from 15/2/1941 to 5/7/1941.

The Advance on Baghdad and the Armistice Agreement

With the fall of Falluja town, the road to Baghdad was open and Anglo-Iraqi hostilities entered their third and final phase. Colonel al-Sabbagh issued orders to establish an urgent defensive line around the capital, and requested the Chief-of-Staff to form a military council to arrange for and supervise the defence of Baghdad. A ditch sixteen kilometres long, five metres wide and two deep was dug round the capital, to hinder any tank advance upon it. This ditch was prepared by thousands of youth organizations (Al-Futtuwwa and Kata'ib al-Shabab) and workers. Accordingly, its construction can be seen as a manifestation of a quite high level of popular mobilization in the capital itself.

The actual defence system (see Appendix 'P') was organized in two sectors established behind the ditch:—

The Northern (al-Kadhimiya) sector

This was six kilometres across and extended from the right bank of the Tigris north of Kadhimiya to Aqargouf Marshes. It contained the following troops:—

- (a) Some armour remnants from the Mechanized Force which were used as a mobile screen between the defence lines and al-Taji (North Kadhimiya).
- (b) The 9th Infantry Battalion, commanded by Colonel Mustafa Raghīb.
- (c) The 1st Desert Artillery Brigade.
- (d) The 9th Desert Artillery Brigade.

The Western (al-Washash) Sector

This was ten kilometres across, and extended from the river turn near al-Dorah on the right bank of the Tigris to Aqargouf Marshes. It contained the following troops:—

- (a) The 4th Infantry Brigade commanded by Colonel Husain Jahid.
- (b) The 3rd Infantry Brigade which was re-organized after the Falluja Battle, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Bahjat Bapo.
- (c) The 5th Desert Artillery Brigade commanded by Colonel Shawkat Yamani.
- (d) One 6th Battery.

The following troops were in general reserve:—

- (a) A Cavalry Brigade composed of three Cavalry Regiments, two of which were deployed behind the Washash Canal

while the third regiment was deployed on the left bank of the Tigris to prevent any possible penetration towards Baghdad from this direction which was opposite to Kadhimiya.

- (b) The 6th Infantry Brigade (less one Battalion) commanded by Colonel Yasin Hasan.¹³³

As regards the British plan for the advance on Baghdad, it was decided by the British command that the advance on Baghdad was to begin on 28 May. The plan of operations was as follows:— (see Appendix 'O')

(a) The attacking force (Kingcol) was to be organized in two columns — North and South. *The North Column* under Lt.-Colonel A.H. Ferguson, Household Cavalry, was to cross Sin al-Dhibban Ferry during the night of 25/26 May. At first light it was to move along the bund into the desert and invade Baghdad from the North by a route to be decided upon and indicated by Major John Glubb, the commander of the Arab Legion Detachment. This Column was composed of:—

Household Cavalry Regiment less 'C' Squadron.

One Troop 237 Battery, R.A.

Three armoured cars No. 2. Armoured Car Company R.A.F.

Detachment of Arab Legion

Detachment of Field Ambulance

Detachment of 2 Field Squadron R.E.

No air support was assigned to it.

(b) *The South Column* under Brigadier J.J. Kingstone was to cross Hammond's Bund on the night 26/27 May and approach Baghdad along the main Falluja-Baghdad road. This Column was composed of:—

H.Q. 'Kingcol'

Signals

'C' Squadron, Household Cavalry Regiment

One Troop 237 Battery

Field Troop less detachments

Two Companies 1 Essex

Three armoured cars No. 2 Armoured Car Company (R.A.F.)

Detachment of Field Ambulance

Independent Anti-Tank Troop.

This Column was to be provided with:—

¹³³ Al-Durrah, *op. cit.* pp. 386-89.

- (a) Air reconnaissance.
- (b) Close support by bomber aircraft, on call by 'Kingcol'.
- (c) Fighter cover from the bomber aircraft.

As a precaution against accidental air attack, the ground troops were instructed to wear a white patch on their backs.¹³⁴

On 26 May, in preparation for the advance, the R.A.F. carried out a photographic reconnaissance of the road between Baghdad and Khan al-Nuqta, which was situated 17 miles east of Falluja. Meanwhile, the sappers had carried out a remarkable job on the breach in the Euphrates bund above Falluja; and, helped by Iraqi prisoners of war, had built a pontoon across the gap in Hammond's Bund.¹³⁵ On 28 May the South Column left Falluja at first light and by 0700 hours it had captured the Iraqi Police Post at Khan al-Nuqta, taking a number of prisoners. After the discovery that the telephone line from Iraqi Battalion Headquarters to Baghdad was still intact, an interpreter was instructed to spread alarm by transmitting in Arabic a message giving a gross exaggeration of the British strength, and suggesting that the British were attacking with tanks.

The extensive inundations near Khan al-Nuqta that had been caused by the opening of the Abu Ghraib Regulator by the Iraqi troops hindered the British advance, so did the destruction of the road bridges over the canals affected after the Iraqi retreat from Falluja.¹³⁶

During the next day, 29 May, the R.A.F. kept up close support sorties as well as standing air patrols. Many targets were hit in the Khan al-Nuqta area, while Iraqi positions south of Falluja and near the Abu Ghraib Regulator were bombed to 'soften up' some fierce resistance led by the Zoba' tribe and al-Futtuwwa regiments there. During a bombing attack on Khan al-Nuqta, two Italian fighters intercepted the R.A.F. aircraft. One was forced down, while one of the Italian aircraft was shot down. Other R.A.F. actions that day included a further raid on Baquba aerodrome, which left two Italian and one Iraqi aircraft seriously damaged.¹³⁷ The South Column was able to negotiate the floods and other obstacles in its way and continue advancing. This was partly because some local people, having seen what flooding had done to their crops, had made another break to let the water escape. By 0900 on 30 May this column had reached the experimental farm a

¹³⁴ WO 169/1224, Phase 5, Advance on Baghdad and Air 41/30, V The Advance on Baghdad.

¹³⁵ Cab 44/122, Advance of 'Kingcol' To Habbaniya: Capture of Falluja and Repulse of Counter-Attack, 13-27 May.

¹³⁶ Air 41/30, *op. cit.* and WO 169/1224, *op. cit.* 30/5.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

few miles west of Baghdad. By nightfall it had reached a point three miles west of the Iron Bridge over the Washash canal in the suburbs of the city. Air support was continually maintained during the advance. That evening heavy bombing attacks were carried out on the Iraqi barracks at Washash.

The North Column left its bivouac at 0730 hours, 28 May. The route it was to follow was left to Major Glubb, O.C. the Arab Legion. He decided that the Arab Legion would assist 'Kingcol' in crossing the desert, although it had been agreed that the role of the Arab Legion on arriving in Iraq would be independent of the army, its specific task in Iraq being to raise a revolt in the tribal areas against the Rashid 'Ali régime. Two tribal areas seemed especially favourable: the Middle and Lower Euphrates from Habbaniya to Basra and the Jazira area between Mosul and Baghdad. The latter lay between the Tigris and Euphrates but also included the Western Desert beyond Falluja.

The promotion of guerilla operations in the Jazira area was envisaged as an important complement to the main operations. Messengers were sent to the leading tribal personalities in the area. They came both from the Regent and his entourage and from Major Glubb, who had become recognized as an expert on tribal affairs in Iraq between 1921 and his leaving that country for Transjordan in 1930.¹³⁸ To induce the tribes to co-operate with the British advancing force, it was important to carry out military action in the Jazira area to show that the British retained the initiative. Therefore the destruction of communications between Baghdad and Mosul up the Tigris was considered the first objective. The advantages were seen as being:-

- (a) (To) Prevent the passage of military reinforcements from Mosul to Baghdad or vice versa.
- (b) (To) Create confusion and consternation.
- (c) (To) Cripple the economic life of the country, especially between the central and northern region.
- (d) (To) Induce the tribes to rise against Rashid 'Ali, especially those who were pro-British.
- (e) (To) Frustrate Rashid 'Ali's plans of leading a resistance movement from Mosul in the event of Baghdad's fall, where the German Air Force were stationed.¹³⁹

On 23 May armoured cars of the Arab Legion crossed the

¹³⁸ A private letter from Sir John Glubb to the author dated 18/12/1980.

¹³⁹ FO 624/26/589, Secret, A report on the Role played by the Arab Legion in Connection with the Recent Operations in Iraq by al-Fariq, Officer Commanding, Arab Legion, Amman, 10 June, 1941 (i.e. Glubb).

Euphrates at Habbaniya and headed towards the Mosul-Baghdad railway. This unit was accompanied by a detachment of Royal Engineers and by two more armoured cars from No. 2 Armoured Car Company, R.A.F. The railway track was broken that night near Istablat, a post six miles south of Samarra which is 70 miles north of Baghdad. While returning from this raid those involved captured two cars containing an Iraqi Captain and six other ranks en route to Ramadi. Another sortie was made on 26 May when a party comprised of ten cars of the Arab Legion plus an R.E. detachment set out from Habbaniya to break the railway north of Samarra. During its advance the party was confronted by an Iraqi mechanized patrol in seven cars. In a short skirmish the Iraqis suffered three killed and an unknown number of wounded and lost one taken prisoner. British casualties were nil.¹⁴⁰ (See Appendix 'O', map of the operations of the North and South Columns and the Arab Legion).

On 28 May when the North Column advanced the Arab Legion acted as advance guard, leading it to the Jazira area from Habbaniya and then on to Mshahida railway station and along the Mosul railway towards Kadhimiya and Baghdad. Having destroyed the railway line two miles south of the Mshahida station, the column turned right down the railway line towards al-Taji Station. The railway and telephone lines on both sides of Mshahida were also cut. Mshahida Station was garrisoned by nearly 30 men of the Iraqi army and eight police. Therefore the North Column continued its advance towards Baghdad via al-Taji-Kadhimiya. This area was covered by Iraqi mechanized forces, deployed as a mobile screen between there and the anti-tank barrier. So the Arab Legion was also ordered to protect the rear from any Iraqi foray which might come from Mosul. This might not only cut the Column's communications, but could have penned it into the strip of land between the Aqargouf Marshes and the Tigris.¹⁴¹

Accordingly, the Arab Legion returned on 29 May and moved up towards Mshahida to cover the rear of the North Column. On the evening of 29 May the Governor of Baghdad, Jelal Khalid, who was on an official visit to Samarra, was wounded and captured by the Arab Legion. He confirmed that the advance of the North Column via Mshahida had come as a surprise to the Iraqis.

During its movements towards Mshahida, the Arab Legion encountered an Iraqi police patrol which had been dispatched from Smaicha town to reconnoitre the North Column from the

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

rear. Two Iraqi police were killed and five taken prisoner. British casualties were nil.¹⁴² During this engagement between the Arab Legion and the Iraqi police a train appeared, proceeding down the railway from Mshahida towards al-Taji. It was carrying Iraqi reinforcements intended to attack the North Column from the rear, as had been anticipated. But on seeing the Arab Legion, the train went into reverse and returned towards Mshahida.

At a meeting between the commander of the North Column and Major Glubb on the evening of 29 May, it was decided to storm and secure Mshahida Station on the morning of 30 May. Strategically, Mshahida was of great importance because it was connected by rail with Mosul and Baghdad and by an unmetalled motorway to Ramadi. Now, of course, it was on the line of communication between the North Column and Habbaniya via the Jazira area.¹⁴³

It could be argued that if the Iraqi army had been more adventurous and reinforced Mshahida from Mosul and Ramadi, the situation of the North Column, squeezed between the Tigris and the Aqargouf Marshes, would have had been quite difficult, particularly with one Iraqi Infantry Brigade in front of Kadhimiya and another behind Mshahida. As things were, however, Mshahida was occupied by the Arab Legion without resistance after a brief shelling by one 25-pounder gun. Subsequently the whole area of Ramadi, Samarra, Mshahida, Taji and Habbaniya was patrolled intensively by detachments of the Arab Legion, the operational aims being to clear Iraqi troops from this area and keep the railway line near Samarra cut. The maintenance of subversive activities within the Shammar tribe in Jazira was a collateral task with which the Arab Legion was also entrusted.

The situation on 30 May was that the column advancing from Falluja had reached a point three miles from Baghdad, while the one advancing from the north had reached al-Kadhimiya, a point five miles north of the Capital. Yet neither column felt able to enter the city as the Iraqi army was resolved to defend this sprawling urban area (normal population: 500,000) to the bitter end. Also the use of air power against the city seemed inappropriate, not only tactically but ethically. It is relevant to note that it was not until January, 1942, that the British War Cabinet decided to endorse area bombing against German cities, with the explicit purpose of breaking the morale of its population as well as obliterating its industry.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, loc., cit.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

On the evening of 30 May, within twelve minutes of an intense bombing attack on Washash barracks on the outskirts of Baghdad, the Iraqi army leaders sued for peace. The attack against this barracks undoubtedly had the effect of deterring the leaders in the capital from prolonging the conflict, as General Clark observed.¹⁴⁴ Rashid 'Ali and the military leaders, together with their other confederates, fled the country and took refuge in Persia. His plan to execute a withdrawal to the north in order to continue his resistance there failed. In a letter to the Iraqi historian, Abd al-Razzaq al-Hasani, Rashid 'Ali explained how it was decided to move with the army to Kirkuk. He wrote:—

On 28 May the Supreme Defence Council held a meeting at the Ministry of Defence attended by the Minister of the Interior, the Acting Minister of Defence, al-Sabbagh, Mahmud Salman, and Amin Zaki, to discuss the military situation. The Mufti also joined, when al-Sabbagh was explaining the worsening situation and the difficulties the army was facing as a result of the shortage of ammunition, the flow of British troops by air and by land and the participation of the Jordanian Army with the British against Iraq. Al-Sabbagh then suggested a withdrawal to Kirkuk to establish a front there, using the Diyalah river as a defence line. His proposal won the support of army commanders and the Council as well. It was decided to leave the Capital in order to avoid its destruction by the British forces. This decision was endorsed by the Regent, Sharif Sharaf. Later in the evening, the Prime Minister discussed with the Acting Finance Minister how to move the Treasury to Kirkuk.

The Treasury was duly transported in an armed police vehicle which was accompanied by the Acting Finance Minister and the Chief-of-Staff. The following morning (29 May) Colonel Mahmud Salman contacted Rashid 'Ali and told him that the army leaders had abandoned their command posts and left in their cars for Iran. Rashid 'Ali was surprised and resented their action and said, 'How can they do it when the Supreme Defence Council had decided to continue the resistance and establish a combat front at Kirkuk?' Subsequently, Mahmud Salman informed Rashid 'Ali that he was going to

¹⁴⁴ Air 23/811, Secret, Extract from Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac's Letter dated 12th September, 1945.

join his colleagues. Rashid 'Ali was thus left alone, surrounded by British troops. The Prime Minister informed Sharif Sharaf about the situation, and then advised the Palestinian and Syrian refugees to leave Baghdad for Iran because the British had blocked every avenue to other countries. Finally, before he took the train to Iran via Khanaqin, Rashid 'Ali instructed the Acting Finance Minister and the Chief of Staff (who were still in Baquba) to hand over the Treasury to the Diyalah Governor and proceed to Iran via Khanaqin.¹⁴⁵

On 30 May the Mayor of Baghdad, Arshad al-'Umari, and Colonel Nur al-Din Mahmud called at the British Embassy with the news that Rashid 'Ali, the four Colonels, the Mufti of Jerusalem plus certain Germans and Italians had fled to Iran. On their departure control of the administration had been assumed by a Committee of Internal Security under the Mayor of Baghdad.

Kingstone was informed about midnight on 30/31 May that envoys from Baghdad would come to the Iron Bridge at 0200 hours to negotiate armistice terms. The British Ambassador sent a telegram via the Palestine and Transjordan Command to Major-General Clark in which he explained the situation, suggesting that honourable terms were necessary, otherwise the Iraqi Army would continue to fight. He went on to observe:—

We do not want street fighting in Baghdad.¹⁴⁶

Major-General Clark, Air Vice Marshal d'Albiac and Major Glubb arrived at about 0600 hours and the party was then joined by Sir Kinahan Cornwallis. At 1600 hours both sides signed the armistice which included the following conditions:—

1. All hostilities between the two armies cease forthwith;
2. The Iraq Army will be permitted to retain all its arms, equipment and munitions, but all units of the army must proceed forthwith to their normal peacetime stations.
3. All British prisoners of war (military, R.A.F. and civilians) to be released forthwith.
4. All enemy (German and Italian) service personnel to be interned and their war material retained by the Iraqi Government pending further instructions.
5. The town and vicinity of Ramadi to be evacuated by the Iraq Army by 1200 hours, 1st June;

¹⁴⁵ Al-Hasani, *op. cit.* p. 240.

¹⁴⁶ *Cab 44/122*, *op. cit.* 31 May

6. All Iraqi prisoners of war now in British hands to be handed over to the Regent as soon as the terms in paragraph 3, 4 and 5 are complied with.¹⁴⁷

The Regent and his entourage, plus Jamil al-Madfa'i, left Habbaniya for Baghdad on 1 June and were met by the British Ambassador at the outskirts of the capital. To secure Mosul city and its airfield, the 2/4 Gurkha Rifles were flown in from Basra. These were followed on 5 June by No. 84 Bomber Squadron (Blenheims). All the Germans had left behind were eight wrecked Luftwaffe planes, together with quite a large quantity of aircraft stores and equipment. Dr Grobba and his entourage had left Mosul for Syria via Tel Kotcheck on 2 June.¹⁴⁸

Leaflets setting out the terms of the armistice were dropped on Nasiriya, Diwaniya, Amara and al-Qurna for the information of the Iraqi commanders. Ferguson's North Column returned to Habbaniya, while Kingstone's South Column remained on the Western side of the Washash Canal, as Sir Kinahan had argued in favour of keeping the British troops outside the city until the Regent had formed his government. A new administration was formed with Jamil al-Madfa'i as Prime Minister, because the Foreign Office was of the opinion that the new government should be broadly based so as not to give the impression that it merely represented a 'pro-British clique'. Jamil al-Madfa'i was therefore preferred to Nuri al-Sa'id.

In this thirty-day campaign Iraqi casualties were 33 officers and 464 other ranks killed, 36 officers and 659 other ranks wounded and 549 missing. British losses were¹⁴⁹ about one hundred and fifty in all, including 40 prisoners of war, among them three Royal Air Force and one army officer.¹⁵⁰ All prisoners were safely returned from each side.

The crux of the campaign had been the battle for Habbaniya. Had it fallen, Iraqi confidence would have soared. What is more, the British would then have had little choice but to advance north from Basra as they had done in World War One. But the prospect would have been even grimmer than it had been in that Mesopotamian campaign, a campaign that nearly two years after its commencement in December, 1914, could still involve a major

¹⁴⁷ WO 169/1224, Phase 6, Armistice.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ WO 208/1585, Secret, Report No. 35 on the Iraqi Army and Royal Air Force for the period Ending 31 July, 1941.

¹⁵⁰ Air 23/5920, From A.H.Q. Iraq to H.Q.R.A.F. Middle East A. 501,6.5.1941, Situation Report No. 38, No. 67 of 21 May and No. 70 of 22.5.1941 and FO 371/27074/E2777/1193 from Baghdad to F.O., No. 488, 2 June, 1941.

British surrender at Kut al-Amara. In 1941 an extended campaign would have had more dire consequences, if only because Pan-Arab nationalism had become more active. Iraqi oil was an important factor in the energy budget of Britain and the Empire. The sterling area was a relatively new but already significant trading bloc and Iraq was quite an important member of it. To these reasons for avoiding a long campaign can be added the risk that it would (a) aggravate the differences among British decision makers over the whole policy, b) expose the contradictions in the military command structure, and c) lower British credibility, not least in a very restive India.

The key to the control of Habbaniya was the plateau on which the Iraqi field force assembled. At first sight it would seem that an Iraqi army of four divisions ought to have been able to mass there in sufficient strength to dominate the British garrison, so as to enforce its surrender or withdrawal by artillery bombardment, if not by direct assault. In practice, however, the Iraqi army could not deploy in truly overwhelming strength. Inevitably, its dispositions always reflected to quite an extent its own internal politics, especially as related to local interests and to relations with the crown (See Appendix F). Moreover, there were, in a society so plural and largely tribal, heavy commitments *vis-a-vis* border control and internal security. In these considerations alone there is enough of an explanation as to why the deployment on the plateau was in comparatively modest strength, with the participants believing themselves to be engaged in a symbolic demonstration rather than a military operation.

However, there is another way of conducting this analysis. This Iraqi army of four divisions could muster only 28,000 men in peacetime and 34,000 on war establishment (see Appendix L). In other words, its 'divisional slice' was only 7,000 or 8,500 men, depending on which of those two totals you take. Even the highest of these two figures is only half what one would expect if the divisions in question were properly equipped with a due quota of heavy weapons (tanks and artillery guns) and if they had enough logistic backing for truly mobile deployment.

In other words, the evolution of the Iraqi army (under the tutelage of a British military mission) had been very much as a local security force, complementary to the British military presence in that theatre rather than in rivalry with it. As much is confirmed by the way in which the only purpose-built anti-armour and anti-aircraft weapons that could be dispatched to the plateau were four 20mm cannon.

Not that anybody would dispute that, viewed as an individual weapons system for close-in defence, the 20mm was of value in both capacities. It had long since been standard equipment on German fighter aircraft and was being introduced on British. During the spring of 1941, too, its installation on Royal Navy warships began, this in order to provide self-protection at short range against aircraft. They could be similarly effective against armoured cars.

However, the operative term is 'short-range'. The shells from such cannon suffer a sharp fall-off of energy and accuracy across a distance of just a few hundred metres. Therefore less than half-a-dozen of them could not provide anything like proper anti-aircraft cover for the Iraqi field force. Even planes as obsolescent or otherwise unsuitable as the Audaxes, Gordons and Oxfords (see Appendix H) could easily avoid them (and, of course, Iraqi fire) by flying high or other evasive tactics.

So it is hardly surprising that British air attacks fairly soon effected a collapse of Iraqi military morale on the plateau, notwithstanding quite a fervent commitment to the Rashid 'Ali régime across the population at large. With Habbaniya so close, the R.A.F. sortie rate could be high. The landscape on the plateau was virtually devoid of vegetation. Plateaux tend, almost by definition, to be composed largely of hard rock, into which it is hard to dig. The era in question was one in which air power was regularly proving to be decisively effective, especially against unseasoned troops.

The best hope of the Iraqi resistance might have been for either the Iraqi or the Axis air forces to win an air battle. As so often, however, this prospect hinged on airfield attack and defence and in its Wellingtons and Blenheims the R.A.F. had formidable planes for this purpose. What is more, their crews had already gained some combat experience in many cases. Take, for example, No. 70 Wellington squadron. This had played a major part in the campaign in Cyrenaica, notably the 'mail-run' bombing raids against Benghazi.

Besides which, the Axis squadrons arrived well after the plateau had been lost and when the general balance of the campaign was tilting heavily against the Iraqis. Moreover, the only fighters dispatched were the Messerschmitt-110s and the Fiat CR42s. The former were cumbersome twin-engined machines that had already been outpaced by Hurricanes as well as Spitfires in the Battle of Britain. The latter had been outfought in the Western Desert by the R.A.F.'s last biplane fighter, the Gladiator. (See Appendix H).

CHAPTER V

The Reassertion of British and Monarchical Control

Until the conclusion of the armistice of 31 May, British forces continued to flow into Iraq. On the night of 30/31 May the 25th Indian Brigade Group of the 10th Division landed at Basra. On 2 June the 20th Indian Brigade Group of the same division, which was already at Basra, was ordered to move north towards Baghdad via 'Ur, which was occupied without serious resistance. But deployment further up the Euphrates valley was as yet impossible due to the sabotage of the railway near 'Ur, flooded roads and a lack of river transport. Eventually, on 10 June, the 20th Indian Brigade Group left 'Ur for Baghdad by road and rail, in two columns.¹ It is to be remarked that the Arab tribes in this area did not attack these troops at all.

Still, General Wavell was concerned to preclude any possible threat from the Iraqi-Syrian frontier, across which Rashid 'Ali's confederate, Fawzi al-Qawuqchi, and his 500 men had withdrawn on 11 June. Accordingly, he instructed Lieutenant-General Quinan to move from Basra to Baghdad, to establish as soon as possible an advanced H.Q. in close touch with the British Embassy.

Then Quinan pressed New Delhi to expedite the dispatch of the GOC of 8th Indian Division, Major-General C.O. Harrey, so that they could consider together plans for the defence of the Sh'aiba-Basra area where the 8th Division was due to replace the 10th. Nevertheless, General Quinan opened his advanced H.Q. on 12 June. That same day the 20th Brigade Group arrived at al-Taji near Baghdad.²

Meanwhile, the 10th Indian Division made ready to assume the role previously assigned to 'Habforce': that is, to take over all its responsibilities at Baghdad, Kirkuk, and Mosul as well as guarding Rutbah and the Falluja bridge. On 9 June the 17th Indian Brigade Group of the 8th Division had arrived at Basra, to be followed by

¹ *Cab 44/122*, June, 1941, Iraq after the Armistice.

² *Ibid*

the 24th Indian Bridge Group of the same division on the 16th and the 2nd Armoured Brigade soon afterwards. The 21st Indian Brigade Group of the 10th Division also left Basra, arriving in Kut on 17 June and in Baghdad on the 19th. Apart from the 8th and 10th Divisions deployed in Iraq, Quinan requested the despatch of a third division because he felt that his troops were still thin on the ground.³ The most striking thing is the great strength of these deployments, bearing in mind (a) the war was over and (b) British commitments elsewhere.

Major-General Slim, O.C. 10th Division, was to station his forces and the 2nd Armoured Brigade in northern Iraq. His immediate tasks were to protect the survey and construction parties which were preparing three new landing grounds in the Mosul area; to make administrative arrangements for the maintenance of four R.A.F. squadrons there; and to protect technical staff at the oil pumping stations, T.I, H.I, H.3 and K.3 as well as along the Habbaniya-Rutbah line of communication.⁴ Then, on 29 June, command of the ground forces in Iraq reverted to India while the air force remained under Air Marshal Tedder in Egypt.

This bifurcation of the command structure was never to be put to operational test. Yet one does have to say that it was truly remarkable. The repeated military success of Nazi Germany since September, 1939, (Poland, Norway, the Low Countries and France, Greece and the Western Desert) had all demonstrated the immense importance of intimate co-operation between the air arm and the ground forces. Such intimacy could never have been achieved in a theatre where the headquarters of the former was Cairo and of the latter in New Delhi. Nor was such a pattern conducive to good political liaison.

On the other hand, there was an administrative rationale. The R.A.F. was largely based in Habbaniya, which lies well on the western side of Iraq, whereas the natural axis of supply and reinforcement for the ground forces was up the Gulf and through Basra. The argument stands, however, that operational considerations should have been paramount. After all, the U.S.S.R. had been invaded on 22 June and the War Office in London was avowedly sceptical about its prospects of holding out for more than a few weeks. Needless to say, if the U.S.S.R. had collapsed German forces would soon have been pressing south through the Caucasus.

³ *Ibid*

⁴ *Ibid*

The Temporary breakdown of Order: 'The Farhud'

The previous history of the Jewish community in Iraq shows that they were an integral part of Iraqi society, most active in the crafts and commerce. Little harm was ever done to them⁵ until the rise of Zionism and its claim to much or all of Palestine (see pp. 24-5). Until 1935 the number of Jewish deputies in Parliament was four out of 88. It became six in 1946.⁶ According to Hayyim Cohen the campaign against Iraqi Jews and their persecution began in 1932 when Iraq became an independent national state.⁷ Yet he does not support this interpretation with substantial evidence. It is true that in 1934 some Jewish officials were dismissed from their posts at the Ministry of Communications but this was together with certain Muslims and Christians. So active discrimination was not necessarily manifest, but it was an administrative measure on ministerial level.⁸ However, the situation worsened during Yasin al-Hashimi's premiership, 1935-36, when many Iraqi Jews were attacked in Baghdad as a direct result of the deteriorating political situation in Palestine. In protest against this, a strike was sustained by Jewish businessmen for many days.

In the aftermath of the Regent's return to Baghdad on 1 June, 1941, the public mood in the city was febrile⁹ and much affected by the anti-Jewish propaganda disseminated by the German Ambassador, Fritz Grobba, and his wife¹⁰ (see pp. 65-71 on Nazi propaganda in Iraq). Moreover, the armed forces and even the police were bitterly resentful about their humiliation in the field. Crowds in the street angrily booed those returning from the Royal Palace after paying a visit to the Regent to applaud his safe return. Unfortunately, all this coincided with the Jewish Feast of Shevouth (Pentecost).

Jewish and Muslim youth then skirmished. Soon, Jews were attacked everywhere in Baghdad. These disturbances rapidly escalated, with shooting and looting in the streets continuing throughout the night. On 2 June the situation worsened and some important shopping streets in Baghdad were looted. Altogether, something like 120 Jews were killed and between six and seven hundred wounded. In fact, Iraqi sources acknowledge that the

⁵ Hayyim J. Cohen, 'The anti-Jewish Farhud in Baghdad, 1941', *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 3, October, 1966, p. 5.

⁶ Khadduri, *op. cit.* p. 21.

⁷ Cohen, *op. cit. loc. cit.*

⁸ Al-Hasani, *Tarikh al-wizarat al-Iraqiyya*, vol. 4 (Sidon 1978), pp. 7-8.

⁹ Al-Hasani *al-Asrar al-Khaffia fi Harakat al-Sana 1941 al Taharrurra* (Sidon, 1971) p. 256.

¹⁰ FO 371/23202. Confidential No. 251. British Consulate, Damascus, to FO London 14 April, 1939 and FO 624/24 *Nazi Propaganda in Iraq* (No date appears on the document).

number of casualties on both sides (Muslim and Jews) were: 110 killed and 240 wounded.¹¹ The Jewish Agency for Palestine protested bitterly, requesting that Sir Kinahan secure the punishment of those responsible and that Iraqi Jews be allowed to emigrate to Palestine. However, the mass exodus was not to begin until 1950 when the government allowed them to leave. According to Israeli official sources 121,512 Jews had emigrated to Israel by the end of 1951.¹² Undoubtedly the fear of another massacre had precipitated this emigration of Jews from Iraq. The number of Jews remaining in Iraq was between 12 and 15 thousand.

The Director of the Iraqi Police had been ordered by the Mayor of Baghdad, acting as the head of the Committee of Internal Security in the capital (see below), to open fire on the rioters. He refused to obey in the absence of direct orders from the Regent himself. So orders were then issued by the Regent to the military to take control, opening fire if need be. In a dispatch to London the British Ambassador blamed certain army and police officers for this massacre, accusing them of instigating trouble in the streets. Moreover, this was to be substantiated by the Investigation Committee set up by the new government to enquire into this episode. However, it seems that the Regent was not prepared to invite the British troops to intervene to stop the massacre in case that provoked a clash with the Iraqi troops. Indeed, when the head of the Committee of Internal Security suggested such intervention to him he rejected it out of hand.¹³

An Investigation Committee was to place the responsibility for the tragedy on the Director-General of the Police, the Governor of Baghdad, the Officer Commanding the Military Police, the Officer Commanding the 1st Division stationed at Baghdad (who had allowed his soldiers to join the riots) and the Committee of Internal Security¹⁴ (which had been formed by Rashid 'Ali on 28 May to supervise the popular defence of Baghdad in the event of an army withdrawal). Leaflets abusing the Regent were circulated, as was a message said to come from Rashid 'Ali in which he vowed to return soon to resume resistance. All these political tensions, coming on top of what happened at Basra, ensured that a large proportion of the Baghdad populace were not at all happy with the Regent's return. So Sir Kinahan Cornwallis urged Abd

¹¹ FO 371/27081, from High Commissioner for Palestine to the Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies, 21 August, 1941, and al-Hasani, *op. cit.* p. 263.

¹² Khadduri, *op. cit.* p. 277. British sources confirm that by March 1951, 105,400 Jews had applied to emigrate, but only 40,000 of these had left the country, see FO371/111039, 14 February, 1954.

¹³ FO 371/27078, British Embassy, Baghdad. No. 185, 11 July, 1941 to FO and al-Hasani, *al-Asrar al-Khaffia fi Harakat al-Sana 1941 al-Taharrur*, 3rd ed. (Sidon, 1971) p. 257.

al-'Ilah to form a government immediately, in order to forestall any further disturbances.¹⁵

The Purge of the Army

After the armistice, relations between the British and Iraqi military authorities were somewhat strained at first as the new government and the Chief of the General Staff were most anxious to avoid anything which might be used against them as propaganda to show that they were agreeing to a virtual occupation of the country or giving away any of Iraq's vital interests. As time went on, relations eased considerably.

In the aftermath of the revolt, the most urgent problem confronting the Regent Adb al-'Ilah and the British authorities in Iraq was the Iraqi army, a considerable proportion of which was still considered a potential source of danger. It was decided that all steps should be taken to forestall any attempts from within the army to support another pro-German *coup d'état* or otherwise take up arms against the British in Iraq. To secure these aims a drastic reorganization of the army with the purge of all officers of 'pro-Nazi' sympathies was recommended by the Combined Intelligence Centre in Iraq.¹⁶ In this regard the Foreign Office stressed:—

1. One of the most urgent problems before the Regent and ourselves will be to decide how best to deal with the Iraqi army.
2. All possible steps must clearly be taken to insure against the danger that it may at any moment decide to support another pro-German *coup d'état* or again take up arms against us, and reliable officers must be put in all the high commands. No such favourable opportunity is likely to recur, and the Regent must not let it slip.
3. Perhaps, however, the purge should be carried still further and the army substantially reduced in size, with the disbandment of the most unreliable elements.
4. I should be glad to have as soon as possible your views and recommendations on the whole problem. In particular, I should like to know whether you think there are any steps which could be taken to convert the army into a power

¹⁵ FO 371/27078, British Embassy, No. 185, 11 July, 1941 to FO.

¹⁶ Wo 201/1257, Secret, Combined Intelligence Centre, Iraq, Intelligence Situation in Iraq, 2 June, 1941.

capable of performing some function useful to our cause in the futures.¹⁷

One complication here was that a considerable proportion of the Iraqi army had not taken part in the hostilities. Accordingly, it retained considerable military potential but was of uncertain political loyalty. At all events, the liquidation and elimination of all anti-British officers was the first urgent step to be taken in order to safeguard the British war effort and the Regent's continuation in power. To achieve this, a drastic reorganization and reshaping of the Iraqi army as a whole was sought. It was rumoured that, as the price for the return of the Regent to power, a covert deal had been concluded between him and the British to give the latter a free hand to dissolve the Iraqi army.¹⁸

It seemed that the Regent was in favour of reconstituting the Iraqi army under British advisers in the same way as they had worked during the mandate. The Combined Intelligence Centre in Iraq advised that, in order to obtain officers of the same calibre as those who had served in the mandate period, it was advisable to employ instructors with experience of the Arab world.¹⁹ However, it seems that the British Military Mission had been an additional cause of tension during the recent crisis. Indeed, the head of the Mission was recommending the assimilation of his officers to the British and Indian field establishments in view of their bitter feelings about having been ill-treated and having had their homes and property looted. As the British Ambassador told the Foreign Office, all these officers were desperate to leave Iraq because they believed that the mission could no longer be considered integral to the Iraqi army. Nevertheless Sir Kinahan himself was against the removal of the mission. He recommended the replacement of these officers by others who would continue the liaison role between the British and Iraqi authorities as laid down in the joint Anglo-Iraqi Plan of Defence drawn up in 1940.²⁰ But the mission had not been in contact with the Iraqi army since the outbreak of the crisis. The matters it had dealt with since that time had been purely of a routine administrative nature.

The drastic purge envisaged was soon begun. All divisional and most brigade commanders were removed, while a large number of

¹⁷ FO 371/27074, from FO to Baghdad, No. 392. 1 June, 1941.

¹⁸ Al-Durrah, *op. cit.* p. 419.

¹⁹ WO 201/1257, secret Combined Intelligence Centre, Iraq, c/o Air HQ, Habbaniya, *Intelligence Appreciation of the Situation in Iraq*, 2 June, 1941.

²⁰ WO 208/1585, Secret report No. 35 on the Iraqi Army and the Royal Iraqi Air Force for the period ending 31 July, 1941.

replacements took place in the lower ranks as well. All pro-Rashid 'Ali officers were pensioned off and some were put on trial by a special military court. The number of those pensioned or dismissed reached 411. The number of officers who took refuge in Iran were 90, in Syria 43 and in Turkey one.²¹

Undoubtedly this drastic purge was aimed at curbing the Iraqi army by stages in order to ensure its loyalty to the restored régime. British objectives were: (a) to weaken the army's command structure; (b) to weaken its fighting spirit and (c) to hamper any attempt to rearm and supply the army with necessary arms and equipment. Moreover, the army was being reduced in size in order to bring it more within the financial capacity of the country.²² In reality, the aim was to reduce its immense influence which it had used, and would undoubtedly use again, if permitted, to overthrow the civil administration. Establishments were reduced by abolishing one platoon in each infantry company and one troop in each squadron.²³ The detailed changes had brought the average battalion strength down to 250-300 men which did have the incidental advantage of adjusting to the losses of equipment during the conflict. Also one division was being abolished, leaving the army with only three weak divisions.²⁴

Subsequently, the total strength of the army went from just over 40,000 strong in early 1941 to about 25,000 in June that year.²⁵ It was suggested that a military infantry detachment would be stationed at Baghdad west (Washash) in order to provide the Regent with the moral support he needed until such time as the Iraqi army was purged of all doubtful elements and reorganized under the British.

The Ways in which a Machinery of British Control was established

The fall of Rashid 'Ali's Government on 31 May, 1941, ushered in a new era in Iraqi politics. The Regent Abd al-'Ilah, supported by an occupation army and an energetic and determined Ambassador, was able to defeat the opposition and humiliate the army.

After the revolt, British objectives in Iraq were, as Sir Kinahan spelled out, to attain the following:—

²¹ *Ibid.*, and al-Kattab, *op. cit.*, pp 269-273.

²² *WO 208/1585*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Al-Durrah, *op. cit.*, p. 421.

²⁵ *WO 208.1585* and al-Durrah *op. cit.* p. 243 and p. 420. The Foreign Office even suggested that it would be very desirable, for political reasons, that Nuri al-Sa'id should abolish conscription in Iraq altogether. See *F0371/27120*, FO to WO, 20 Nov, 1941.

- (a) To secure full facilities for our war requirements and unimpeded opportunities for training and defensive measures by our Navy, Army and Royal Air Force.
- (b) To root out pro-Nazis and bring about a change in public feeling, both to facilitate (a) and, looking further ahead, to consolidate our future position by making people realize the advantage of alliance with us.
- (c) Unofficially and in the hope of helping to create greater stability, to influence the administration as far as possible, but not to the extent of causing a crisis and so jeopardizing (a) and (b). Owing to my personal knowledge of the working machine and my old friendship with Ministers, shaikhs and others, I happened to be favourably placed for this.²⁶

All the same, it was no easy task for the British to achieve these aims and win the Iraqis positively to their side. It can fairly be said, in fact, that they succeeded in a narrow sense but failed in a wider. For they faced a considerable amount of dislike and resentment over the fact of a virtual reoccupation of the country. Following more liberal policies and forming a more responsive and less corrupt government was the only way to secure a stable Iraq. In this regard Sir Kinahan wrote:

The Rashid 'Ali uprising in May, 1941, during the course of which not only the Iraqi army but the majority of the population of Iraq demonstrated dislike for the British, came as a great shock to Britishers in Iraq and stimulated the British Government into modernizing its control apparatus in this area.²⁷

Thus, Abd al-'Ilah, acting in league with the British, was planning to let things settle quickly and to choose an acceptable Prime Minister who was willing to co-operate with the British and achieve their war aims in Iraq which had been for so long frustrated by Rashid 'Ali. On the recommendation of the British Government, Nuri al-Sa'id was ruled out as not suitable and Jamil al-Madfa'i became the new Prime Minister. General Nadhif al-Shawi, an ex-army officer who had been placed on pension after the coup of 1938, became the Minister of Defence and

²⁶ FO 371/45302 Sir Kinahan Cornwallis to FO, 30 March, 1945, (Review of Events 1941-1945) No.

²⁷ ¹³⁴
Ibid.

General Amin al-'Umari was appointed as the Chief of the General Staff. The new government was soon to reach a new understanding with the British, one superceding the Treaty of 1930. From now on the British were allowed to station their land and air forces, for the duration of the war and for its purpose alone, at such places as might be deemed necessary by Britain for the defence of Iraq and always provided that the Iraqi Government was notified a sufficient time in advance. So, using the rationale of defending Iraq, Britain occupied virtually the whole country again. Relations with Italy were formally broken off on 8 June. On the readiness of al-Madfa'i's Government to co-operate with Britain without reservations, the British Ambassador wrote:—

The new administration fell in readily enough with the desiderata of his Majesty's Government, agreeing to the stationing of British troops anywhere in Iraq for the duration of the war, to the establishment of a censorship, to British participation in the control of Basra and the expulsion of the Italian Legation.²⁸

My own belief is that other Iraqi politicians would not have dared to agree to turning Iraq into a base for Britain's war effort. In order to subjugate Iraq further to British will and designs there were two means by which they could achieve this. First, they had to influence the Iraqi people by means of propaganda, gestures of friendship, bribes and favours, while at the same time striking against anti-British and pro-German elements. Second, they had to control any Iraqi Government, the Regent and the politicians. Therefore Sir Kinahan proceeded with the establishment of a Public Relations Department and a political advisory staff whose duties were to act as a liaison between the British army and Iraqi officials, especially in the provinces, to fight German propaganda and to restore British influence. Special agencies were also established such as *Ikhwan al-Hurriyah* (Brotherhood of Freedom), the task of which was to establish touch with the people and to maintain a certain level of observation within the country with the purpose of promoting feelings of friendliness between the Iraqis and the occupying British forces. Moreover, there were political advisers in every politically important and sizeable town to monitor the political activities there and keep the Embassy informed from day to day. Needless to say, funds were also used to

²⁸ FO 371/31371, Sir Kinahan Cornwallis to FO, 8 March, 1942.

bribe the religious and political leaders and Shaikhs to win their support.²⁹

Needless to say, too, a British Adviser or employee was to be found again in every key position in the political, economic and cultural spheres of the Iraqi government. Moreover, British officials were in senior posts in the Iraqi army, the courts, the educational system, financial institutions, agricultural departments, etc. They also controlled Iraqi ports and transport systems, including water, rail, road and air. British experts were also supervising the collection of taxes and the sale of land. They even influenced import and export policies. On the whole, there were more British officials in the government than for many years past.³⁰ In fact, this phase became a much more intensive form of 'indirect rule' than obtained in most other protected territories on the fringes of the British Empire.

The Kurds

One of the problems which the restored government and the British had to deal with was that of the Kurds, whose most important leader, Shaikh Mahmud, had tried to use the conflict for his own purposes. When hostilities had broken out at Habbaniya on 2 May the Kurds had seen an opportunity to upset the government and make their voice heard again. They thought the time was propitious to extort concessions. Practically speaking, the Kurdish nationalist movement could be divided into two schools of thought, their only common denominator being the assumption of a permanent British presence:—

- (a) There were those who argued, like Shaikh Mahmud and other tribal leaders, that Britain would sooner or later do something to redress legitimate Kurdish grievances. In this category came the tribes and persons of tribal mentality whose nationalist feeling was mixed with impatience at the administrative constraints imposed upon them by the central government.
- (b) Then there were those who were adamant that they must fight for their future as a nation since they believed that the Kurds obviously did not fit into the British Imperial scheme and that there was no hope that British policy would upset the Arabs for the sake of the Kurds. To this

²⁹ Henderson to State Department, 13 March, 1944, US NA, 890 GOO/695 in Amin's *op. cit.* p. 208-209.

³⁰ FO 371/45302, from Sir Kinahan Cornwallis to FO, 30 March, 1945, No. 134.

group belonged the majority of intellectuals and army officers, though a large proportion of this group who had had dealings with the British were in favour of dealing with the British rather than with the Germans or the Russians.³¹

The first attitude is reminiscent of the expectations of the British entertained by other ethnic minorities on the fringes of empire e.g Nagas in India, Aborigines in Borneo.

A plan for staging a revolt in Kurdistan was formulated in Sulaimaniya by the notables of that town, acting in close association with the local tribal leaders. Between 15 and 20 May, two key strategies emerged: the one called for immediate action against Rashid 'Ali's Government, and the other, represented especially by some Kurdish Aghas, advocated delay because they were alarmed and feared the arrival of Axis air force units in Mosul and Kirkuk and in Syria.³²

It so happened that Shaikh Mahmud, the outstanding Kurdish tribal and religious leader, escaped from forced detention in Baghdad, passed through Kifri, near Kirkuk on 16 May and presumably arrived in Sulaimaniya about 19 or 20 May.

From 1919 until his capitulation in 1931 Shaikh Mahmud had fought constantly against all established authority, British or Iraqi, to try to make such authority accede to his demands for the independence of the Kurdish people. He returned to Sulaimaniya after 16 years in exile more resolved than ever to fight a new round with Baghdad. He began to gather his fighting men around him in preparation to attack Sulaimaniya while Rashid 'Ali's régime was crumbling. Shaikh Mahmud held off his attack when the British forces brought Iraq under tight control, preferring then to negotiate since the British authorities might intercede in a manner beneficial to the Kurds. Edmonds, in particular, was exerting his influence on the Iraqi Government to talk with the Shaikh.³³

While negotiations were going on between Shaikh Mahmud and al-Madfa'i's government, military forces were concentrated in Sulaimaniya, Martial Law being declared in the province on 14 July as a deterrent. The Shaikh's demands were for the Kurdish control of law and order in their localities, the administration of Kurdish provinces by a locally appointed committee of Kurds and

³¹ C.J. Edmonds *Private Papers, file 4 Box 11*. (Oxford University St. Antony's College, Middle East Centre), Secret, *The Kurds in Iraq May 1941*, 27 July, 1941.

³² *Ibid*, and al-Hasani, *Tarikh al-Wizarat al-Iraqiyya* 5th ed. vol. VI (Beirut, 1978) p. 33 footnote (1).

³³ FO 371/27078, Baghdad, No. 185, 11 July, 1941 to FO and No. 825, 4 July, 1941.

the establishment of a voluntarily enlisted force for garrison duties in the Kurdish areas. Jamil al-Madfa'i rejected these demands which were seen as a step towards Kurdish autonomy. The firm stand of the Prime Minister, backed by the British forces, could well be considered a factor in Shaikh Mahmud's decision not to fight. In a dispatch to the Foreign Office, Sir Kinahan outlined the attitude of the Iraqi Prime Minister and some Iraqi politicians towards the Kurdish problem. He wrote:—

... the Prime Minister is bigotedly anti-Kurd and not likely to handle the problem with friendliness and foresight. The Adviser to the Ministry of the Interior (C.J. Edmonds), an expert in Kurdish affairs, tells me that in discussion with Iraqi politicians he frequently senses in some of them a vindictive feeling that they would prefer to lose Kurdistan rather than secure them as loyal Iraqis by acknowledging their existence qua Kurds; they are ready to contemplate evacuation of the Kurdistan areas but never a really liberal policy.³⁴

Shaikh Mahmud sent a confidential messenger to the British Ambassador with a solemn affirmation of his loyal friendship towards the British Government. In his reply, Sir Kinahan confirmed that, with the large British forces in Iraq, Britain had the capacity to deal with any trouble which might hinder the British war effort. Duly, the Iraqi Government allowed the Shaikh to settle in his village and live there quietly.³⁵

In his private papers, C.J. Edmonds reveals how the Kurdish officers who were gathered with their troops around Baghdad during the crisis expressed their resentment at being dragged into a 'quarrel which was not theirs'. Edmonds pointed out that when it was rumoured that Rashid 'Ali was contemplating a withdrawal to the North and that Kurdistan was going to be the last ditch where he would fight, these Kurdish officers decided to frustrate his plan. They considered withdrawing their troops to Kirkuk where they, especially the 4th and 6th Brigades of the 2nd Division (which were predominantly Kurd), would make dispositions which would be reinforced by other troops from Mansuriya. An alternative was that Kurdish officers and their men should make their way on to Kirkuk and Sulaimaniya by deserting the army and assembling there. Once they were in Kurdistan, efforts would be

³⁴ *Ibid*

³⁵ *Ibid*

made to prevent the remnants of Rashid 'Ali's régime and army from establishing a stronghold there.³⁶ In effect they were facilitating British occupation of Iraq by their endeavour to save Kurdistan from the atrocities of war. But the flight of Rashid 'Ali to Iran persuaded the Kurdish officers not to implement their scheme.

Edmonds concluded his report by urging al-Madfa'i's government to redress legitimate Kurdish grievances in order to remove the danger created by this new feeling of solidarity among these Kurdish officers, whose weight within the army was considerable. Thus the 2nd Division, stationed in Kirkuk, was very predominantly Kurdish so far as its rank and file were concerned. This Mountain Division was responsible for defending north and north-east of Iraq. (See Appendix F). Nevertheless, Edmonds' speculations are open to challenge on what Kurdish officers might have done in the event of Rashid 'Ali's withdrawal to the North. Most of the key posts in the Iraqi army's command structure were still held by men of Kurdish origin, who had themselves taken part in the army revolt and even accompanied Rashid 'Ali into exile when he fled the country. They included the Chief-of-Staff, Amin Zaki, the Officer Commanding the 7th Infantry Brigade at Basra, who resisted British occupation of Basra and Ashar, Colonel Jawdat Rashid and Colonel Nur al-Din Mahamud, the Director of Military Operations who had participated in drawing up the withdrawal plan to Kirkuk. This was confirmed to the author in a recent interview with General Mahmud in Baghdad.³⁷ It seems that there was, among those Kurdish officers, no sense of a loyalty crisis.

The Mood of the Iraqi People after the suppression of the Revolt

Despite the collapse of Rashid 'Ali's régime and the tragic end of its leaders, who were arrested, put on trial and executed, the episode demonstrated the great feeling of hatred and resentment the Iraqi people harboured against the British and their agents in Iraq. This was to continue as long as British occupation lasted. The revolt betokened a challenge to Britain's continued infringement of the letter and spirit of the Treaty of 1930, especially in the later stage of the crisis when Basra began to gain great importance as a forward base for U.S. supplies.

The great majority of the Iraqi people stood behind Rashid 'Ali.³⁸ A large body of young nationalist opinion was anti-British,

³⁶ *Edmonds private papers.*

³⁷ An interview with General Nur al-Din Mahmud in Baghdad on 9th January, 1981.

³⁸ *Al-Zaman*, 7 May, 1941, Baghdad daily in Arabic, al-Hasani, *op. cit.*, p. 284 and al-Qazzaz, *op. cit.* p. 593.

chiefly because they believed that the older generation was pro-British and kept all the influence and power in its own hands.³⁹ Its strongholds were the Army, Pan-Arabism and the Press. It was only the Regent and his entourage and some of the tribal shaikhs and a portion of the urban middle class who stood against Rashid 'Ali and his pan-Arab policy.⁴⁰ *Jihad* was declared by the 'Ulama in Najaf and Baghdad and women volunteered to fight with the army against the British.⁴¹ Shaikh Sa'id Ali Beg, the tribal Chief of the Yazidi' sect in Iraq, called upon his people to join the armed forces (this sect was already excluded from military service for religious reasons) in the fight against the British.⁴² The same was true of the Jewish community. Their president, Sasun Khadduri, visited Rashid 'Ali and offered his allegiance to the Prime Minister.⁴³ Likewise, the Chaldean Bishop in Baghdad called upon his community to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their country.⁴⁴

Within a few days all deserters from the army repented and joined the fight.⁴⁵ A great number of tribal volunteers (Arabs, Kurds and Turcomans) put themselves at the army's service. Many tribal chiefs participated in offering funds and supplies for the voluntary movement in Iraq.⁴⁶ All volunteers were taken to the outskirts of Baghdad to defend the capital, notably *Kata'ib al-Shabab* and *al-Futuwwah* (the Youth Regiments). These two organizations played a major role in the crisis and in taking part in preparing the defence system round Baghdad. But despite all that enthusiasm the government did not make full use of the masses and no mobilization was declared.

Fighting spirit and morale remained high, despite the setbacks of the early stage of the fight at Habbaniya. Al-Hasani and al-Durrah observe that virtually no crime or violence or robbery was committed during the whole month of the conflict. All the people were preoccupied with supporting and assisting their government to win the battle against the British, offering whatever they had in their possession and collecting donations to support the war effort.⁴⁷

As regards the attitude of other Arab peoples towards the revolt in Iraq many Arab volunteers joined the battle, notably Fawzi

³⁹ Freya Stark, *op. cit.* p. 81.

⁴⁰ An interview with al-Hasani in Baghdad, *Alf ba'* magazine, Baghdad vol. 814, 2 May, 1984.

⁴¹ Al-Hasani, *op. cit.* pp. 234, 270, 271, and al-Durrah, *op. cit.* p. 414.

⁴² Al-Durrah, *op. cit.* p. 414.

⁴³ *Al-Istiqlal*, 15 April, 1941 (A Baghdad daily).

⁴⁴ Al-Durrah, *op. cit.* p. 414.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 414-415 and al-Hasani, *op. cit.* p. 196.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 415.

⁴⁷ An interview with Abd al-Razzaq al-Hasani in Baghdad in May 1984, *Alf ba'* magazine, No. 814, 2 May, 1984.

al-Qawuqchi, a Syrian nationalist, Abd al-Qadr al-Husaini, a Palestinian leader who played a major role in the Palestinian armed revolt of 1936-39, and their followers. The Syrian Druze leader, Sultan Pasha al-Atrash, declared his support for Iraq and so did the Lebanese *Najadah* party.⁴⁸ Only Saudi Arabia recognised Rashid 'Ali's régime. The Egyptian and Turkish Governments instructed their representatives to act in harmony with Sir Kinahan. But why was it that the Rashid 'Ali régime collapsed so quickly despite its popularity? A multitude of reasons, political, tactical and strategic, were behind that: (1) At all events the Iraqi army did not have any contingency plans to confront the British and take over the two airfields in Habbaniya and Sh'aiba. (2) The Iraqi troops deployed around Habbaniya were told that they were on an exercise manoeuvre so they remained confused until they were bombed by the R.A.F. (3) Rashid 'Ali and his Chief of Staff Amin Zaki were not willing to confront the British and preferred a diplomatic to a military solution, while the army leaders, notably the four colonels, were inclined to use force but reluctantly. (4) The army leaders lacked initiative, experience, strategic vision and awareness of the international political situation. They underestimated the strength of British air power with nearby reinforcements in Palestine, India and Egypt.

But, despite the defeat, the Rashid 'Ali uprising of May, 1941, showed the British that there was a great deal of dislike and resentment, not only on the part of the Iraqi army, but also the majority of the population of Iraq⁴⁹, over their presence and policies in Iraq, Palestine and other Arab countries. This came as a great shock to them. It stimulated London to adjust its control apparatus in the area.

⁴⁸ Al-Durrah, *op. cit.* p. 416.

⁴⁹ FO 37145302/E 2431, from Sir Kinahan Cornwallis to FO. 30 March, 1945, (Review of Events 1941-1945). No. 134.

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CHAPTER VI

Conclusions

Throughout the reign of King Ghazi (1933-39) Iraq was engulfed in internal political strife waged by rival politicians who were motivated by greed for power to fill the vacuum at the centre of politics. Their illicit manipulation of the tribes in order to achieve their own ends compromised the neutrality of the army and precipitated its interference in political affairs. Hence, from 1936 the officer corps emerged as a leading force behind every change of government because of their resentment at the way they were endlessly being used as a punitive instrument to subdue tribal uprisings.

Another factor was the absence of a strong and uncorrupt politician who could lead the country. Most of the people remained apathetic through illiteracy and because, although the Iraqi political system was a constitutional parliamentary régime, the real power was in the hands of a restrictive and venal élite. Their chief preoccupation was to outpoint their opponents and to undermine hostile combinations in parliament.

It was during the early nineteen-thirties that various army officers (who since 1927 had had a quasi-political organization — the *Nationalist Bloc*) began to contemplate active interference in politics. Hence the emergence in 1933 of the *Bakr Bloc*. This was led by General Bakr Sidqi and followed his decisive contribution to the Assyrian affair of that year. Between them, these two army-based organizations laid the foundations for the political and military evolution of 1936 to 1941.

With the assassination of General Bakr Sidqi in 1937, and the consequent liquidation of his bloc, the *Nationalist Bloc*, under Colonel Salah al-Din al-Sabbagh and his colleagues, emerged as the dominant political influence in the army and, indeed, the country. Needless to say, this outcome was also due to the continuing failure of the political parties to inspire the masses.

Furthermore, governments riven by tribal and urban dissent, which could be forced out of office by the direct intervention of

the King or the British, were no longer viable. Parliament was a non-representative facade because most of the elections were rigged and most of the deputies could almost be described as government nominees. A change of government by intervention from the King himself was, in any case, precluded because King Ghazi was still young and inexperienced. There was no politician outside the government strong enough to mobilize public opinion and cause the collapse of the government; military intervention therefore became the mode by which every change of government was effected. Under a 'Gentlemen's Agreement' forged between the four Colonels plus General Taha al-Hashimi and Nuri al-Sa'id, the formation or dismissal of governments and the nomination of prime ministers became subject to the guidance of the army leaders. The removal of Prime Minister Jamil al-Madfa'i in December, 1938, was an example of this. Nuri al-Sa'id took over in the conviction that he was the only candidate able to fulfil the nationalist goals and to bargain with the British over Palestine as well as Iraq. Subsequent political developments in Iraq, in the Arab countries and in the world at large hampered the attainment of nationalist aspirations and so widened an instinctual rift between Nuri al-Sa'id on the one hand and Colonel al-Sabbagh and his supporters on the other.

When King Ghazi had his fatal car crash in April, 1939, the blame was laid on the British and on Nuri al-Sa'id and Abd al-'Ilah. King Ghazi had been obsessed with Kuwait and demanded its annexation. He had also supported the Palestine revolt of 1936-39. This had paralyzed any consideration of an arms supply to Iraq. So had his daily attacks on British imperialism from his radio station in the Royal Palace.

Secondly, the deteriorating political situation in Palestine and Syria had a direct and immediate bearing on Britain's position, influence and prospects in Iraq, for it further stirred up national consciousness and resulted in Iraq's rejection of the 1939 British White Paper, put forward as a solution to the Palestinian problem. Thirdly, the outbreak of the Second World War deeply divided Iraqi politicians. There was the pro-British school of politicians, led by Nuri al-Sa'id, who anticipated Britain's victory in the war. They wanted to attach Iraq fully to Britain and to serve her war aims without disturbing her with any demands until after the war. On the other hand, there were those radical nationalists who advocated neutrality as a tactic to extort from Britain as many concessions as possible before committing themselves to accepting Britain's claims under the 1930 Treaty. When the radical national-

ists became convinced that Britain was determined to keep Iraq under her control as a wartime measure, without offering her anything in return, they first protested and then rebelled.

All these developments were taking place at a time when Germany's propaganda was gaining momentum in Iraq through the efforts of its capable ambassador, Dr Fritz Grobba, and his wife. Through the Press, the Muslim clergy and clubs and societies in Iraq German propaganda concentrated on the twin themes of Arab grievances in Palestine and Syria, and on support for pan-Arabism since (as in their initial overtures to the Croats in Yugoslavia, Ukrainians in the U.S.S.R. and Walloons in Belgium) the Nazis depicted themselves as being a radical nationalist movement as well.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, Iraq's Prime Minister, Nuri al-Sa'id, took the lead in severing his country's relations with Germany, though without declaring war on her, a compromise forced on him by some of his Cabinet ministers who were against dragging Iraq along the path of war. With the coming of the Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husaini, to Baghdad in October, 1939, a new chapter in the development of the Pan-Arab movement opened there. The Mufti subsequently became an influential element, a close adviser to the military leaders and hence a power to reckon with. With his exiled supporters, the Mufti was able to use Iraq to exercise leverage against Britain.

The formation of the secret Arab nationalist committee in February, 1941, headed by the Mufti and including Rashid 'Ali plus three of the 'Golden Square' colonels, al-Sabbagh, Mahmud Salman and Fahmi Sa'id, was aimed at liberating each and every Arab country from imperialism and corruption. It was another sign of a determination to challenge the British at a time when Axis influence was extending towards Iraq. Deterred by the assassination of one of his Cabinet members, Rustam Haydar, and although conscious of his own diminishing ability to rally other politicians (or, indeed, his own Cabinet) behind his strategy of bringing Iraq fully into the war on Britain's side, Nuri al-Sa'id decided to avoid direct confrontation with the 'Golden Square' to whom, after all, he owed his return from exile in Egypt in 1937 and then his return to power. So he tendered his resignation, recommending Rashid 'Ali, the Chamberlain of the Royal Office, as his successor.

It could be argued that Nuri al-Sa'id brought Rashid 'Ali to power in order to facilitate his own plans and retain important

decision-making by retaining the portfolio of Foreign Affairs. Needless to say, the British Embassy endorsed this move in order to ensure that the attitude of the Iraqi government towards Britain should remain unchanged. Obviously, through his inclusion in Rashid 'Ali's government, Nuri al-Sa'id was always aware of the former's political moves on the international level. Rashid 'Ali's position was seriously compromised when, in mid-1940, he was negotiating with both combatant blocs for the benefit, he believed, of the Arab cause.

When every avenue for negotiating an understanding with Britain over Iraqi and Arab issues and, above all, the Palestine question, was closed by Britain's refusal to respond, Rashid 'Ali turned in desperation to the Axis Powers to ascertain their intentions as to Arab independence in the event of their victory, in a war in which they had been gaining the upper hand. Naturally, the Germans said to anybody who asked them that they were in favour of Iraq's independence. Ostensibly, Nazi Germany had encouraged the independence of Iraq. Had it come to the crunch, however, Iraq would have been at best a second Croatia, at worst a second Ukraine. Contacts with the Axis Powers were through two personal and unofficial channels: the Arab Higher Committee, via the private secretary of the Mufti, and the Iraqi Minister of Justice, Naji Shawkat.

These contacts led to the vague Italo-German Declaration of 23 October, 1940, and the defiant Rashid 'Ali, together with the four colonels, was determined to challenge the British who were suffering defeats and appeared to be losing the war at that time. Rashid 'Ali perceived that he would succeed in playing the end against the middle by refusing to break off diplomatic relations with Italy when she entered the war in June, 1940, and when the capitulation of France was imminent. He wanted to avoid committing the mistake Nuri al-Sa'id had made during his premiership. The Anglo-Iraqi crisis over Iraqi-Italian relations and Iraq's overtures to Germany came to a head because of the tough-minded and uncompromising attitude of the British Ambassador, Sir Basil Newton, a plot having been prepared by the Regent, Nuri al-Sa'id and Sir Basil to remove Rashid 'Ali. Their aim was to pressurise Rashid 'Ali into resigning. Sir Basil conveyed his government's loss of confidence in Rashid 'Ali, and requested his resignation. However, this British attitude hardened Rashid 'Ali's attitude and made him determined to stay in office in defiance of Britain's attempt to interfere in Iraq's internal affairs.

In the face of this revolt, the British Government began to consider a tougher line. Along with economic sanctions, intervention by military force, ostensibly to secure the line of communication from Haifa to Baghdad and Basra, was one of the means envisaged to deal with Rashid 'Ali. In a well-planned move to gain time until the arrival of British forces in Iraq, when he could switch the Anglo-Iraqi crisis to the domestic political arena in order to embarrass Rashid 'Ali and bring about his resignation, Nuri al-Sa'id resigned his office in agreement with the Regent and with the blessing of the British Ambassador. What seems clear, however, is that the Regent had been forcefully advised by the British Ambassador not to endorse Nuri's resignation unless Naji Shawkat, the Minister of Justice, also submitted his. This he did shortly afterwards.

As a countermove, Rashid 'Ali moved against the pro-Nuri parliament. He tried to coerce the Regent to dissolve parliament, which was demanding his resignation. But his move was frustrated by the flight of the Regent from the capital to the southern tribal Liwa (province) of Diwaniya.

For now Rashid 'Ali was not prepared to resist further. So in January, 1941, he tendered his resignation in order, he claimed, to avoid a civil war. He had thus lost the first round to the Regent-Nuri axis, supported and encouraged by the British Embassy. Needless to say, this enforced climb-down did more to encourage the militancy of Rashid 'Ali, the four colonels, and the radical nationalists in Iraq than any other development. For it came as a severe blow to their personal and patriotic pride.

As things turned out though, the makeshift government of General Taha al-Hashimi, who succeeded Rashid 'Ali as the only acceptable alternative as prime minister, failed to bridge the gap between the Regent and the four colonels. Both sides were watchful and suspicious, and a state of tension and anxiety prevailed.

Eventually, al-Hashimi responded to the pressures put upon him by parliament, the Regent, the British Ambassador, and his Foreign Minister, Tawfiq al-Suwaidi. Following Tawfiq al-Suwaidi's meeting with the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, in Cairo in March, 1941, al-Hashimi decided to shatter the unity of the 'Golden Square' by ordering the transfer of two of them out of the capital. Then he would be able to sever Iraq's diplomatic relations with Italy, seeing this move as the only way he could serve the interests of Iraq and secure the continuation of British financial and military aid.

Al-Hashimi's Government collapsed in the face of the military coup which came as a complete surprise to the Germans no less than the British. Obviously, the coup was precipitated by al-Hashimi's challenge to the four colonels who, despite Italy's poor performance in the war, saw the severance of Iraq's diplomatic relations with her as a flagrant breach of their country's independence and a sign of submission to British imperial designs. Subsequently, the Regent and Nuri al-Sa'id fled the capital, while Rashid 'Ali was called upon to assume political leadership, first as the head of the Government of National Defence and then as Prime Minister. The Regent was deposed by a unanimous vote in Parliament following his escape to Habbaniya air base and thence to Basra after the failure of Rashid 'Ali and Cornwallis to come to an understanding. A new Sharifian Regent was appointed to legitimize the régime.

Strategically, the Near and Middle East was an important factor in the overall British Imperial defence system. In the Near and Middle East lay Britain's main interests. Iraq was easily Britain's most important source of oil from within the sterling area. The region was an important *place d'armes* for sea and air communications and as a route to India and the East via the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal. The Middle East was also considered as a forward zone for the defence of India and the protection of vital oilfields. In British strategy, India ranked next after the Royal Navy. (See Chapter II).

For all these reasons it would have been unwise to have ignored the dangers in Iraq. But this did not mean that use of force was the only solution to keep Iraq and the whole region a British preserve. Already obsessed with a possible pincer movement against Egypt from Cyrenaica and through Turkey, making use of the political events in Syria, Palestine and Iraq, Churchill was determined to use force in order to eliminate German influence in Iraq, Syria and Iran before the Germans would have the chance to reach these countries.

Here, the question is whether Churchill has not to be criticized for seriously overestimating the strategic mobility of German and Italian forces, much as in the summer of 1940 he had seemed to overstate the airborne and seaborne threat to Britain itself. The fact of the matter was that the standard Ju-52 transport was barely capable of reaching Syria from Rhodes.¹ Nor were German airborne troops equipped with a balanced distribution of heavy

¹ J.R. Smith and Anthony Kay *op. cit.* p.370.

weapons. Nor did the Axis enjoyed naval supremacy in the eastern Mediterranean. Nor was the merchant shipping available to them anything like adequate as witness a very considerable strain that had been imposed that year even by moving one or two divisions of German troops across Libya. Nor could Luftwaffe fighters readily deploy to Iraq. The few that did were Messerschmitt 110s, the cumbersome twin-engine design that had conspicuously failed during the Battle of Britain. Its powerful armament and very adequate speed could not offset its lack of manoeuvrability. (See appendix H).

On the other hand, the Axis Powers might have taken things in stages within the context of a developing situation in the eastern Mediterranean and the eastern front. Even as things materialized the British were also to lose naval supremacy in the eastern basin towards the end of 1941, this as a result of sinkings and damage inflicted in Greece and Crete, later aggravated by some enterprising maritime raids by the Italians.

Nevertheless, it could be argued that, if the British had been aware of Hitler's firm intentions towards Russia, Iraq would have been left unmolested until the situation on the Russian front had become clear. So then the whole course of events in the Fertile Crescent would have been decided in the light of the outcome of Russian resistance. But Churchill was an impatient and aggressive man. To him Iraq was an important outpost for the defence of British India (which was then in turmoil) and if Iraq went, Iran would go and that would cost him the loss of the rich oilfields of both countries which the British Navy needed.

Undoubtedly, the German campaigns in the Balkan states had weighed upon decision-making in Whitehall. The British failed to realize that the German campaign against Greece was precipitated by the Greek counter-offensive after the failure of the Italian invasion. Churchill failed to grasp that the German occupation of Greece was a move to secure the Roumanian oil and protect her southern flank in her projected attack against Russia. The Chiefs-of-Staff realized that the Germans might intend, after the occupation of Bulgaria and Greece, to attack Turkey through Thrace and establish bridgeheads on the further side of the Straits; and from there advance into Syria and perhaps into Iraq. This move would threaten the Suez Canal and would ultimately force the army of the Nile to fight on two fronts. Then again, the British authorities were not aware of Hitler's real aims and intentions in the Near and Middle East. Hitler already had rejected in November, 1940, any proposals to attack Turkey and

beyond. He believed this would be a diversion from the preparations for attacking the U.S.S.R.

Moreover, there was a split in opinion between the Foreign Office and the Chiefs-of-Staff on the question of bringing Turkey into the war. The Foreign Office had always been against the line taken by the Chiefs-of-Staff that pressure should be exerted on Turkey to declare war on Germany. But I believe that a Turkish declaration of war against Germany might have worked out very badly for Britain. If Turkey could remain neutral, she could serve as a land buffer for Syria, Iraq and Iran and the Gulf.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Sir John Dill, was against Churchill's strategy of putting Egypt and the Middle East on a top strategic priority after Britain. Churchill even differed with the Americans who put the Middle East, as a whole, in the fourth place after the defence of Britain, Singapore and the ocean trade routes. To an extent this could be regarded as typical. Roosevelt and his advisers never wanted to see the British preserve their presence in the Mediterranean and Middle East after the war as witness U.S. opposition to British intervention in Greece in 1944.

The fact remains, however, that Rooseveltian strategic thinking was in a muddle. As a former Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Roosevelt should have remembered that classical American naval doctrine (as propounded by Alfred Thayer Mahan) was that you could not control a major ocean unless you held or dominated all the shores around it, a truism which was bound to have even more force in the age of the submarine and aircraft. Nor was it consistent with the burgeoning American interest in Middle East oil. Besides all of which, the Jewish national home in Palestine (to which the U.S. had been considerably committed ever since World War One) could not have survived an Axis occupation of that theatre. Such contradictions are indicative of the inadequate staff work that was to plague American strategy until 1943.

After the fall of Greece the Chiefs-of-Staff considered that the dangerous situation in Iraq (after Rashid 'Ali's assumption of power in April, 1941) required the firmest handling, bearing in mind the implications of any German thrust through the Balkans, Cyprus, Syria and beyond. They even entertained the idea of bombing the Kirkuk oilfields and the pipelines in Iraq, Syria and Palestine. And as British forces were not immediately available, diplomatic and economic pressures were to be exerted to remove Rashid 'Ali from power.

The British then decided to change their tactics and use force to

topple Rashid 'Ali. They became obsessed with the idea that the Germans were aiming to taking Iraq and its oil and that Rashid 'Ali was working with them to the attainment of this end.

They almost certainly regarded that the Axis campaign in Yugoslavia and Greece was closely coordinated with the coup in Iraq. After all, the former began on 6 April, while the latter had taken place on 2 April. Moreover, the Balkan campaign remained for the British Government part of a strategy which sought, with the help of Italy (and, if possible, Spain and Vichy France) to overthrow British positions in the Mediterranean and Middle East and to divert British resources from the defence of the United Kingdom. Still, the British had been slow to agree among themselves that Hitler was determined to attack Russia. Moreover, Churchill feared that the Germans would land their airborne troops in Syria and penetrate both Iraq and Iran and threaten Palestine. Undoubtedly British assessment of what Rashid 'Ali intended to do was wrong. Rashid 'Ali appears to have been willing to abide by the terms of the Treaty of Alliance of 1930. He simply felt that a policy of reinsurance with the Axis powers would be common prudence as a means of extorting concessions from Britain to serve the Arab cause. He was always against any confrontation with the British. Rashid 'Ali averred that his government felt obliged to take counter-measures, not with the intention of fighting Britain, but to allay public opinion when British troops were moving on a massive scale into Iraq.

Already obsessed with the possibility of losing Iraq and its oil to the Axis, Churchill refrained from following a policy of peaceful settlement and conciliation. In retrospect, it may be said that the British campaign against Iraq was unnecessary. The objective reality is that Germany did not have any appetite for Iraq and there was no German plan whatsoever in this respect. Churchill's fears of a gigantic German pincer movement against Egypt from the west and north via Turkey, making use of the unrest in Palestine, Syria and Iraq, turned out to be unfounded, though events might have developed differently if the Germans had succeeded in defeating Russia.

Besides, there was bound to be at least a potential interest in Gulf oil. The Mosul and Kirkuk oilfields in Iraq yielded about 2.5 million tons in 1940. The south Iranian fields were giving 8.6 million tons of output in that same year in comparison with Roumanian oil output of about seven million.² Therefore control

² Warner, *op. cit.* p. 23 and Butler, *op. cit.* p. 74. In 1940 Roumania exported 1,930,000 tons to Germany and 2,067,00 tons in 1941. For more details see Hinsley *op. cit.* 241-42.

of Middle Eastern oil resources would have been a valuable asset for Germany and would eventually have eased the problem of oil shortage which was one of the limiting factors in Germany's and Italy's capacity to prosecute the war.

The question of whether German intervention in the Mediterranean and Middle East could have won the war for Hitler if the U.S.S.R. had not been invaded is still one of the most controversial issues in the Second World War. Granted, Hitler's intervention in this theatre might well have changed the whole course of the war. Yet the German position was weakened by their own divisions of opinion between those who wanted to destroy Russia and those who preferred to eliminate Britain first. As things turned out, Germany did not intervene in the Mediterranean until 1941 and did so then without a long-range strategic plan and only to sustain her failing ally. The preoccupation of the German army and much of the air force with the eastern front and the navy with the Atlantic both effectively prevented the necessary air support being sent to the Mediterranean. It was not until 1942 that Hitler decided to intervene with a major offensive to capture Suez. But by then it was too late and he was now facing not only Britain but the burgeoning might of the U.S. as well as the U.S.S.R.

However, whether Hitler should have launched a pincer movement from the Balkans through Turkey and from the direction of Cyrenaica, then Egypt, as opposed to treating the whole Mediterranean and Middle East region as a secondary theatre, which is what he did, largely depends whether the former objectives were within the reach of the Axis forces. Van Creveld in his *Supplying War* (see Chapter III) argues that Hitler's dilemma of supplying an Axis force for an advance into the Nile valley was insoluble and due to many complicated factors — namely, the dearth of fully-mechanized German units, the incapacity of the Libyan ports and the long and vulnerable line of communication of Rommel in Africa. But this argument may not fully justify the neglect by Hitler of the central and eastern Mediterranean and of the possibility of landing on the Levant coast. Iraq, Syria and Palestine were, at that time, ripe for strategic exploitation as they were looking for some one to support them against their pre-existing imperial overlords and, not least, to rescue Palestine from the Zionist threat.

However, Axis activity in Syria and Lebanon depended not so much on Germany's attitude and sympathy towards the Arabs as on Franco-German relations. The emergence of the Free French

movement was another factor for treating Vichy France with some leniency in order to avoid encouraging resistance or driving the French colonies into the Gaullist camp. Hitler already had promised Pétain and Laval the preservation of France's colonies.

Moreover, the Italian fleet was very much weakened and its qualitative inadequacies exposed by the battles of Taranto in November, 1940, and Matapan in March, 1941. These misfortunes must weaken any contention that it could give adequate protection to any seaborne movements towards the Levant coast. In addition to that, one of the difficulties about using Cyprus as a springboard to Syria and Iraq would have been the inadequacy of its port facilities for a logistic build-up after its putative capture by airborne assault. The only decent port is Famagusta and that was on the wrong side of the island from the Axis standpoint.

Granted, Hitler did not have an interest in invading the ancient civilization of the Near East. He also found this theatre very confusing in terms of his racial stereotypes. Certainly the Zionist factor was sufficient reason which turned the Arabs towards Germany and made the latter treat the Arabs more considerably than other non-Aryans. Moreover, Hitler recognized that the Mediterranean and the Adriatic had from old times belonged to the historic sphere of influence of Italy. (See Chapter II). Therefore Italy was given the absolute precedence in organizing the affairs of the Arab countries. The Reich Government made it clear that only 'in certain circumstances' and only in agreement with Italy, would they be prepared to help Iraq militarily with captured arms and money. But they did not spell out what these circumstances might be.

More substantial evidence of German *desintéressément* in Iraq and other Arab countries is afforded in a note by the political division of the German Foreign Ministry which averred the rightfulness of Germany's negative attitude to the Arabs. The note concluded that Germany should not sympathize with the Arabs, whom it described as being anti-European and torn by religious, family and tribal differences.

Even British Intelligence sources which broke the Italian cypher revealed the actual character of Rashid 'Ali's coup of April, 1941. The Italian Minister stressed that he could give Rome no firm assurance that the Rashid 'Ali coup had an anti-British pitch.³ Moreover, there was no conclusive evidence of any military understanding between Rashid 'Ali and the Axis powers. And as a

³ Hinsley, *op. cit.* p. 410.

token of their willingness to involve themselves in Iraq before the invasion of the U.S.S.R. had been concluded the Nazi Government repeatedly advised Iraq not to enter into open hostility against Britain until the overall military and political situation made such an eventuality desirable and feasible. This would be possible only when German troops were on the Arabian land bridge or if the moment of Britain's collapse was imminent. But this was a remote possibility as long as Germany's military and political conduct of the war was dominated and characterized by a continental strategy. Its main resources were directed to European priorities.

It was only after the defeat of the Luftwaffe over Britain that Hitler began to look towards the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Germany was also obliged to intervene in the Middle East in an attempt to salvage her alliance with Italy which suffered defeats in North as well as East Africa and also in Greece during the winter of 1940-41. Nevertheless, Hitler's top priority consistently remained the projected invasion of Russia. There is no firm evidence of a German readiness to involve themselves in any military campaign against Iraq before the invasion of the U.S.S.R. had been concluded. Therefore the Italo-German declaration of 23 October, 1940, together with the military aid to Iraq the following spring, must be seen as part of a peripheral strategy.

The mood of revolt in Iraq itself was not stimulated just by one particular event or factor. It was the cumulative outcome of causes originating over many years. The rise of Pan-Arabism within the officer corps, the row over weapons supply, the death of King Ghazi, disagreement and resentment among the Iraqi officers towards the British Military Mission in Iraq, and the Palestinian and Syrian problems were all factors contributing to the build-up of the crisis. Rashid 'Ali on many occasions affirmed his fidelity to the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of Alliance of 1930. Likewise, in April, 1941, he showed a great deal of willingness to compromise with the new British Ambassador. Sir Kinahan Cornwallis, in order to defuse the crisis to mutual advantage. Nevertheless, Cornwallis remained suspicious and aloof. Though his demeanour was affable, he was resolved to bring Rashid 'Ali to his knees. He flattered Rashid 'Ali with promises of recognition in order to gain time. Thus the British Ambassador pursued a course of quiet diplomacy, bluffing Rashid 'Ali till British military forces were able to move into Iraq and consolidate their position. Next he put Rashid 'Ali's basic attitude to the test when these forces were ordered to land at Basra to cover a line of communication from a

base established in and around the port area.

The stationing of these troops, for an undefined period, was seen by Rashid 'Ali and the four colonels as a blatant breach of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930. Hence Rashid 'Ali's protest against the seemingly permanent stay of these forces in Iraq was seen as the pretext on which the British could liquidate his régime, eliminate all radical nationalist elements and restore the Regent to power before Axis support could reach Iraq via the Aegean sea and Syria. The British believed that Rashid 'Ali was deceiving them and was intriguing with the Germans to eliminate British influence in Iraq and place the country under their control.

Apprehending a creeping occupation of Iraq, and pressurized by the Mufti and the four colonels, Rashid 'Ali felt obliged to confront the British. But he did not anticipate that his conflict with the British would drag him into full-scale war. His error of judgement left Iraq dependent on unprepared and miscalculated help from Britain's enemies. Of course, Rashid 'Ali's diplomatic relations with Italy could well be read as intriguing with the Axis Powers — an interpretation London would be only too anxious to exploit.

Granted, the 1941 crisis came close to being the undoing of the Regent and Nuri al-Sa'id. But with the British expedition, the scales were tipped in favour of the Regent and his friends. It is hard to believe that Rashid 'Ali really wanted to substitute the Germans for the British. His aim was Pan-Arab independence. He and the Germans had no agreed strategy or a 'grand design' which would link and commit each to the other.

Indeed, Germany lacked a master plan everywhere, except in respect of the 'New Order' in Europe. She regarded Iraq simply as a diversion for Britain, especially useful in view of her own forthcoming invasion of the U.S.S.R. Still, doubts were entertained within the German Government and High Command about the extent to which they should become involved in the Arab world in general and Iraq in particular.

Meanwhile Rashid 'Ali and the four colonels wanted to end interference by Britain in Iraqi internal affairs, especially its direct control over the army as exercised through the Military Mission. But this they did not see as necessarily achieved by force. He himself was driven by the course of events and by the uncompromising attitude of the British Government and Embassy to utilize the nationalist officers to whom he owed his return to power as instruments to challenge British designs in Iraq. This was done in the conviction that Britain's military position and capability were

declining everywhere, especially after her defeats in North Africa, Greece and Crete, and that she would eventually yield peacefully.

This time he was not prepared to submit to British pressure as he had done during the crisis which had ended with his resignation in January, 1941. In his eyes the Regent was no longer fit for his post in view of his escape to the protection of the British.

Nevertheless, it is fair to say that Rashid 'Ali had not imagined at all that he would one day wage war on Britain; and this was confirmed by Rashid 'Ali himself who stressed that he was against any head-on confrontation with Britain. This was evident by his rejection of the approach made by Colonel Fahmi Sa'id to the Supreme Defence Council when he asked the council to order the takeover of the British base at Habbaniya during the early stages of the crisis. According to his memoirs, Rashid 'Ali's main concerns were the liberation of his country from British imperialism and its agents (though he did not explain how), the pursuance of a pan-Arab policy and the preservation of Iraq's neutrality between the two warring sides. To these he added another goal, a quick return to constitutional life, in order, as he put it, 'to avoid any criticism by the enemies of the country of my being a dictator'.⁴

On the question of Rashid 'Ali's alignment with the Axis side, a British Member of Parliament, Morgan Phillips, made this statement in the House of Commons:-

I am not of those who think that Rashid 'Ali and his friends were pro-German for the sake of being pro-German. I believe they have merely used Germany as Germany used them. They are nationalists first and foremost, and they feel very strongly about the Palestine question.⁵

Specifically, the surrounding of the British base at Habbaniya was a move precipitated by the continuing British landings at Basra, coupled with the evacuation of all American, British and Allied nationals from Iraq. Besides, it was a move launched by the four colonels, the initiative actually being taken by al-Sabbagh, who believed that the step would deter the British from attacking Baghdad. It came as a complete surprise to Rashid 'Ali and everyone else in authority in Iraq, not least those at high military level.

⁴ Mudhakarāt Rashid 'Ali (Rashid 'Ali's Memoirs) *Akher Sa'a* Magazine No. 1168 (Cairo, 13 March, 1957).

⁵ *Hansard* (H.C.) 9/9/1941, 5th ser. vol. 374, col. 106 debates. Phillips was later to be the General Secretary of the Labour Party.

Manifestly, Rashid 'Ali wanted a diplomatic rather than a military solution to his dispute with Great Britain. Indeed, it could well be argued that this military move constituted a breach of what the Prime Minister, the Supreme Defence Council and the Cabinet had decided on as a way of defusing the crisis when they reconvened on 28 April, 1941. The subsequent telephone warnings to the A.O.C. at Habbaniya made armed conflict inevitable by provoking a pre-emptive air strike against the Iraqi forces investing the air base.

The British were successful in overcoming resistance on account of superb military planning and, above all, the distinguished role of the R.A.F. But despite its lack of a doctrinal or revolutionary programme, the 1941 movement was, in relation to the circumstances in which it emerged, every bit as momentous as the popular revolt of 1920. For the former involved the national army in repelling a foreign incursion whereas the latter had involved an irregular war of liberation mainly based on the activities of the peasants of the tribal areas and urban rioters. But the failure of the expected Axis aid, especially aerial support, to materialize proved critical.

Finally, it is fair to say that Iraq's political and military leadership went too far in their challenge, thanks to a lack of tactical and geopolitical perspective. After all, the Iraqi army and air force were still learning their jobs. They were still too inferior in terms of general military strength and experience to defy the power (and particularly the air power) of imperial Britain. Indeed, the Iraqis always seemed destined to lose once they had abandoned the port of Basra, which began to receive a ceaseless flow of British forces from 18 April onwards. Moreover the procrastination at Habbaniya, and above all the failure to move from investment to attack, betokened a lack of confidence which was bound eventually to lead to defeat.

Yet in retrospect that humiliation taught the army and the radical nationalists in Iraq how not to bow to force. The crisis certainly did not break their will. Though the British achieved a victory and the Regent and Nuri al-Sa'id returned to power to act once more as buffers against the emergent nationalist resentment, they had to face continual challenge and protest against every move which took Iraq further into the British orbit. The troubles which erupted in Baghdad in 1948 in protest against the conclusion of the bilateral Treaty of Portsmouth were to be the next overt threat to the Regent-Nuri régime.

In St. John Philby's view, this year would have been a propitious

one in which to grant Rashid 'Ali a pardon and allow him to return to Iraq. For his appearance as a nationalist leader would have placated the people and rallied all moderate politicians behind his banner against the extreme left. Yet it does seem that Philby was putting too much faith in Rashid 'Ali, whom he considered the sole saviour of the situation and an 'implacable enemy of communism and all that Russia stands for'. The communist challenge was then growing at an alarming rate in Iraq. But its leaders were to be arrested, condemned to death and executed in 1949. Still, Philby's overture had been supported by the British Ambassador in Jeddah, who asked his counterpart in Baghdad to persuade H.M.G. to put pressure on Baghdad to permit the return of Rashid 'Ali.⁶ Philby says in his report that, during the Regent's visit to London, he had urged him to pardon Rashid 'Ali but his suggestion had fallen on deaf ears.⁷ Philby suggested that only Rashid 'Ali could lead the *Istiqlal* Party (a prominent nationalist party which played a major role in the events of 1948 and to which Philby thought Rashid 'Ali belonged). He further argued that it was in the interest of both Britain and Iraq that this party should emerge as the governing element in the forthcoming election under Rashid 'Ali's leadership. Though he might lose adherents to the left, Rashid 'Ali was *the* man, so Philby believed, who could make Iraq's alliance with Britain palatable to Iraqi public opinion, only provided that nationalist susceptibilities be respected. Philby urged his government to talk with Rashid 'Ali in Jeddah or in London.⁸ It goes without saying that all the subsequent developments, (including the military government of 1952 headed by General Nur al-Din Mahmud, the Baghdad riots during the Suez crisis in 1956 and the 1958 Revolution) could be considered an extension of the Anglo-Iraqi conflict of 1941.

In the immediate aftermath of the suppression of the revolt, the temporary breakdown of law and order in Baghdad and Basra showed that a large proportion of the Iraqi people were not at all happy with Abd al'Ilah's return to Iraq. Therefore the most urgent problem facing the Regent and the British authorities was reconstituting the Iraqi army. All steps were taken to reorganize and reduce its size in an attempt to preclude its taking up arms against the British again. All senior officers of the army who sympathized with Rashid 'Ali were purged and all anti-British

⁶ FO371/68457, British Embassy, Jeddah, 19 February, 1948, to the Chancery, Baghdad.

⁷ H. St. J. B. Philby, *Private Papers, Rashid 'Ali Gailani*, 24/3/1948, file Box VI, (Oxford University, Middle East Centre).

⁸ *Ibid.*

officers were released on pension and put on trial. Undoubtedly there was a tacit deal between the British and the Regent that, in return for Abd al 'Ilah's return to power, the British would have a free hand to liquidate the army. Thus one division was abolished, leaving the army with only three weak divisions. The total strength of the army was reduced to nearly half its size, from 40,000 to 25,000 men.

One outcome of the suppression of the revolt, the rehabilitation of the Regent and the reassertion of British control over Iraq was that the majority of the population, including the army, demonstrated their dislike for the British. Through her agencies and by means of propaganda Britain was trying to make Iraq more malleable. The country was overwhelmed by British advisers and agents, both at governmental and non-governmental level.

The revolt betokened a challenge to Britain's continued breach of the letter and spirit of the treaty of 1930 especially in the later stage of the crisis when Basra began to gain great importance as a forward base for US Lend-Lease supplies. Most of the Iraqi people identified with the revolt. Moreover, a large section of youthful opinion was militantly anti-British (see Chapter V) as they grew fed up with the monopoly by the older pro-British generation of all influence and power. Most tribal and communal chiefs endorsed and supported Rashid 'Ali's régime and volunteers from other Arab countries joined the recruit centres offering themselves to fight against the British. For after two decades of rule and experience with the Iraqis in particular and the Arabs in general, through military occupation, the mandate systems and the enforced series of treaties of alliance, the British still lacked the experience and courage to show any concern for the nationalist and political aspirations of the Arabs. They were incapable of handling the crisis with tact and wisdom.

Eventually they came to see only Nuri al-Sa'id as able to secure their war aims in Iraq. On becoming Prime Minister he promised Britain that he would eliminate all anti-British elements and make Rashid 'Ali's key supporters stand trial.⁹ The whole episode ended with the arrest and extradition of the four Colonels from Iran and Turkey. They were put on trial and in 1942 Colonels Said and Salman and Yunis al-Sab'awi were condemned to death and executed. In 1944 Colonel Kamil Shabib was executed, while in 1945 Colonel al-Sabbagh was arrested in Turkey following his

⁹ Mudhaffar Abdullah Amin, *Al-Saitarah al-Baritaniyah ala Awda' al-Iraq Ba'da Fashl Harakat Maiys* (British control over Iraq after the failure of the Movement of May) *Afaq Abarrayya* magazine vol 12. Baghdad, August, 1979. p. 20.

escape from Iran. He was extradited to Iraq where he, too, was executed. Only Rashid 'Ali and the Mufti were able to escape to Turkey and then Germany, where they remained until the collapse of Berlin. Rashid 'Ali then managed to make his way to Saudi Arabia and was received by King Ibn Saud as an honoured guest.

It was this wave of death sentences and executions, arrests, trials and dismissals which left its deepest scars in the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people. The atmosphere of fear and tension helped to breed a considerable amount of hatred and resentment among Iraqis over the Regent's and Nuri's policies and against Britain's resumption of a *de facto* occupation of the country. The long-term consequences of this episode were bitter. It further exacerbated the rift between the people and their rulers, who were seen as traitors fighting openly on the side of their enemy.¹⁰ In 1958 the Iraqi army again moved into action against the monarchy and turned Iraq into a republican régime. Thus the British lost one of their valuable outposts in the Middle East. As Philby wrote:—

The trouble with Britain was that she was always incapable of co-operating with people of different colouring or culture than her own, except on the basis of her own dominance over them . . . blind to the approaching storm in spite of the gusts which swept some of her friends into oblivion: Faisal and Ali, Ja'far and Ghazi, to start with. Her (Britain's) tail feathers were ruffled by the storm of the Golden Square (the four Colonels) but she only muzzled her head deeper in the sands.¹¹

¹⁰ Khaldoun al-Husri, "The Iraqi Revolution of 14th July, 1958" Irene L. Gendzier, *A. Middle East Reader* (New York, 1969) p. 194.

¹¹ H. St. J. B. Philby, *Private Papers, The Hashemite Obsession*, Box IV, file 2, 8/4/1960 (Oxford University, Middle East Centre).

APPENDIX 'A'

ANGLO-IRAQI TREATY OF ALLIANCE
30 JUNE, 1930
AND NOTES EXCHANGED EMBODYING
A SEPARATE FINANCIAL AGREEMENT
19 AUGUST, 1930.

TREATY OF ALLIANCE
BETWEEN HIS MAJESTY IN RESPECT OF
THE UNITED KINGDOM
AND HIS MAJESTY THE KING OF IRAQ

Baghdad, 30 June, 1930
(Ratifications exchanged at Baghdad, 26 January, 1931)

His Majesty The King of Great Britain, Ireland and the British
Dominions beyond the Seas, Emperor of India.

And his Majesty the King of Iraq.

Whereas they desire to consolidate the friendship and to
maintain and perpetuate the relations of good understanding
between their respective countries; and

Whereas His Britannic Majesty undertook in the Treaty of Alliance signed at Baghdad on the thirteenth day of January, One thousand nine hundred and twenty-six of the Christian Era, corresponding to the twenty-eighth day of Jamadi-al-Ukhra, One thousand three hundred and forty-four, Hijrah, that he would take into active consideration at successive intervals of four years the question whether it was possible for him to press for the admission of Iraq into the League of Nations; and

Whereas His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland informed the Iraq Government without qualification or proviso on the fourteenth day of September, One thousand nine hundred and twenty-nine that they were prepared to support the candidature of Iraq for admission to the League of Nations in the year One thousand nine hundred and thirty-two and announced to the Council of the League on the fourth day of November, One thousand nine hundred and twenty-nine, that this was their intention; and

Whereas the mandatory responsibilities accepted by His Britannic Majesty in respect of Iraq will automatically terminate upon the admission of Iraq to the League of Nations; and

Whereas His Britannic Majesty and His Majesty the King of Iraq consider that the relations which will subsist between them as independent Sovereigns should be defined by the conclusion of a Treaty of Alliance and Amity:

Have agreed to conclude a new treaty for this purpose on terms of complete freedom, equality and independence which will become operative upon the entry of Iraq into the League of Nations, and have appointed as their plenipotentiaries.—

His Majesty the King of Great Britain, Ireland and the British Dominions beyond the Seas, Emperor of India,
For Great Britain and Northern Ireland:

Lieutenant Colonel Sir Francis Henry Humphrys, Knight Grand Cross of the Royal Victorian Order, Knight Commander of the Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George, Knight Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, Companion of the Most Eminent Order of the Indian Empire, High Commissioner of His Britannic Majesty in Iraq :
and

His Majesty the King of Iraq:

General Nuri Pasha al Sa'id, Order of the Nahda, Second Class, Order of the Istiqlal, Second Class, Companion of the Most Distinguished Service Order of Saint Michael and Saint George, Companion of the Most Distinguished Service Order, Prime

Minister of the Iraq Government and Minister for Foreign Affairs; who, having communicated their full powers, found in due form, have agreed as follows:-

Article 1

There shall be perpetual peace and friendship between His Britannic Majesty and His Majesty the King of Iraq.

There shall be established between the high contracting parties a close alliance in consecration of their friendship, their cordial understanding and their good relations, and there shall be full and frank consultations between them in all matters of foreign policy which may affect their common interests.

Each of the high contracting parties undertakes not to adopt in foreign countries an attitude which is inconsistent with the alliance or might create difficulties for the other party thereto.

Article 2

Each High Contracting Party will be represented at the Court of the other High Contracting Party by a diplomatic representative duly accredited.

Article 3

Should any dispute between Iraq and a third State produce a situation which involves the risk of a rupture with the State, the High Contracting Parties will concert together with a view to the settlement of the said dispute by peaceful means in accordance with the provisions of the Covenant of the League of Nations and of any other international obligation which may be applicable to the case.

Article 4

Should, notwithstanding the provisions of Article 3 above, either of the High Contracting Parties become engaged in war, the other High Contracting Party will, subject always to the provisions of Article 9 below, immediately come to his aid in the capacity of an ally. In the event of an imminent menace of war the High Contracting Parties will immediately concert together the necessary measures of defence. The aid of His Majesty the King of Iraq in the event of war or the imminent menace of war will consist in furnishing to His Britannic Majesty on Iraq territory all facilities and assistance in his power including the use of railways, rivers, ports, aerodromes and means of communication.

Article 5

It is understood between the High Contracting Parties that responsibility for the maintenance of internal order in Iraq and, subject to the provisions of Article 4 above, for the defence of Iraq from external aggression rests with His Majesty the King of Iraq. Nevertheless, His Majesty the King of Iraq recognises that the permanent maintenance and protection in all circumstances of the essential communications of His Britannic Majesty is in the common interest of the High Contracting Parties. For this purpose and in order to facilitate the discharge of the obligations of His Britannic Majesty under Article 4 above His Majesty the King of Iraq undertakes to grant to His Britannic Majesty for the duration of the Alliance sites for air bases to be selected by his Britannic Majesty at or in the vicinity of Basra and for an air base to be selected by His Britannic Majesty to the west of the Euphrates. His Majesty the King of Iraq further authorises His Britannic Majesty to maintain forces upon Iraq territory at the above localities in accordance with the provisions of the Annexure of this Treaty on the understanding that the presence of those forces shall not constitute in any manner an occupation and will in no way prejudice the sovereign rights of Iraq.

Article 6

The Annexure hereto shall be regarded as an integral part of the present Treaty.

Article 7

This Treaty shall replace the Treaties of Alliance (*) signed at Baghdad on the tenth day of October, One thousand nine hundred and twenty-two of the Christian Era, corresponding to the nineteenth day of Safar, One thousand three hundred and forty-one Hijra and on the thirteenth day of January, one thousand nine hundred and twenty-six, of the Christian Era, corresponding to the twenty-eighth day of Jamadi-al-Ukhra, One thousand three hundred and forty-four, Hijrah, and the subsidiary agreements thereto, which shall cease to have effect upon the entry into force of this Treaty. It shall be executed in duplicate, in the English and Arabic languages, of which the former shall be regarded as the authoritative version.

* Treaty Series No. 17 (1925), Cmd. 2370, and No 10 (1926), Cmd. 2662

Article 8

The High Contracting Parties recognise that, upon the entry into force of this Treaty, all responsibilities devolving under the Treaties and Agreements referred to in Article 7 hereof under His Britannic Majesty in respect of Iraq will, in so far as His Britannic Majesty is concerned, then automatically and completely come into an end, and that such responsibilities, in so far as they continue at all, will devolve upon His Majesty the King of Iraq alone.

It is also recognised that all responsibilities devolving upon His Britannic Majesty in respect of Iraq under any other international instrument, in so far as they continue at all, shall similarly devolve upon His Majesty the King of Iraq alone, and the High Contracting Parties shall immediately take such steps as may be necessary to secure the transference to his Majesty the King of Iraq of these responsibilities.

Article 9

Nothing in the present Treaty is intended to or shall in any way prejudice the rights and obligations which devolve, or may devolve, upon either of the High Contracting Parties under the Covenant of the League of Nations or the Treaty for the Renunciation of War signed at Paris on the Twenty-seventh day of August, One thousand nine hundred and twenty-eight.(*)

Article 10

Should any difference arise relative to the application or the interpretation of this Treaty and should the High Contracting Parties fail to settle such difference by direct negotiation, then it shall be dealt with in accordance with the provisions of the Covenant of the League of Nations.

Article 11

This Treaty shall be ratified and ratification shall be exchanged as soon as possible. Thereafter it shall come into force as soon as Iraq has been admitted to membership of the League of Nations.

The present Treaty shall remain in force for a period of twenty-five years from the date of its coming into force. At any time after twenty years from the date of the coming into force of this Treaty, the High Contracting Parties will, at the request of either of them, conclude a new Treaty which shall provide for the

* Treaty Series No. 29 (1929), Cmd 3410

continued maintenance and protection in all circumstances of the essential communications of His Britannic Majesty. In case of disagreement in this matter the difference will be submitted to the Council of the League of Nations.

In faith whereof the respective plenipotentiaries have signed the present treaty and have affixed thereto their seals.

Done at Baghdad in duplicate this thirtieth day of June, One thousand nine hundred and thirty, of the Christian Era, corresponding to the fourth day of Safar, One thousand three hundred and forty-nine, Hijrah.

F.H. Humphrys
Noury Said

ANNEXURE TO TREATY OF ALLIANCE

- 1 -

The strength of the forces maintained in Iraq by His Britannic Majesty in accordance with the terms of Article 5 of this Treaty shall be determined by His Britannic Majesty from time to time after consultation with His Majesty the King of Iraq.

His Britannic Majesty shall maintain force at Hinaidi for a period of five years after the entry into force of this Treaty in order to enable His Majesty the King of Iraq to organise the necessary forces to replace them. By the expiration of that period the said forces of His Britannic Majesty shall have been withdrawn from Hinaidi. It shall be also open to His Britannic Majesty to station his forces at Mosul for a maximum period of five years from the entry into force of this Treaty. Thereafter it shall be open to His Britannic Majesty to station his forces in the localities mentioned in Article 5 of this Treaty, and His Majesty the King of Iraq will grant to His Britannic Majesty for the duration of the Alliance leases of the necessary sites for the accommodation of the forces of His Britannic Majesty in those localities.

- 2 -

Subject to any modifications which the two High Contracting Parties may agree to introduce in the future, the immunities and privileges in the jurisdictional and fiscal matters, including freedom from taxation, enjoyed by the British forces in Iraq will continue to extend to the forces referred to in Clause 1 above and

to such of His Britannic Majesty's forces of all arms as may be in Iraq in pursuance of the present Treaty and its annexure or otherwise by agreement between the High Contracting Parties, and the existing provisions of any local legislation affecting the armed forces of His Britannic Majesty in Iraq shall also continue. The Iraq Government will take the necessary steps to ensure that the altered conditions will not render the position of the British forces as regards immunities and privileges in any way less favourable than that enjoyed by them at the date of the entry into force of this Treaty.

-3-

His Majesty the King of Iraq agrees to provide all possible facilities for the movement, training and maintenance of the forces referred to in Clause 1 above and to accord to those forces the same facilities for the use of wireless telegraphy as those enjoyed by them at the date of the entry into force of the present Treaty.

-4-

His Majesty the King of Iraq undertakes to provide at the request and at the expense of His Britannic Majesty and upon such conditions as may be agreed between the High Contracting Parties special guards from his own forces for the protection of such air bases as may, in accordance with the provisions of this Treaty, be occupied by the forces of His Britannic Majesty, and to secure the enactment of such legislation as may be necessary for the fulfilment of the conditions referred to above.

-5-

His Britannic Majesty undertakes to grant whenever they may be required by His Majesty the King of Iraq all possible facilities in the following matters, the cost of which will be met by His Majesty the King of Iraq.

1. Naval, military and aeronautical instruction of Iraqi officers in the United Kingdom.
2. The provision of arms, ammunition, equipment, ships and aeroplanes of the latest available pattern for the forces of His Majesty the King of Iraq.
3. The provision of British naval, military and air force officers

to serve in an advisory capacity with the forces of His Majesty the King of Iraq.

-6-

In view of the desirability of identity in training and methods between the Iraq and British armies, His Majesty the King of Iraq undertakes that, should he deem it necessary to have recourse to foreign military instructors, these shall be chosen from amongst British subjects.

He further undertakes that any personnel of his forces that may be sent abroad for military training will be sent to military schools, colleges, and training centres in the territories of His Britannic Majesty, provided that this shall not prevent him from sending to any other country such personnel as cannot be received in the said institutions and training centres.

He further undertakes that the armament and essential equipment of his forces shall not differ in type from those of the force of His Britannic Majesty.

-7-

His Majesty the King of Iraq agrees to afford, when requested to do so by His Britannic Majesty, all possible facilities for the movement of the forces of His Britannic Majesty of all arms in transit across Iraq and for the transport and storage of all supplies and equipment that may be required by these forces during their passage across Iraq. These facilities shall cover the use of the roads, railways, waterways, ports and aerodromes of Iraq, and His Britannic Majesty's ships shall have general permission to visit the Shatt al-Arab on the understanding that His Majesty the King of Iraq is given prior notification of visits to Iraq ports.

(Initialled)

F.H.H.

N.S.

Notes Exchanged with the Iraq Prime Minister embodying the separate agreement on financial questions referred to in the second exchange of notes appendix to the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 30th June, 1930.*

(No. 1) - The British High Commissioner at Baghdad to the Iraqi Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs.

*Treaty Series. No. 15 (1931) (Comd. 3797)

London,
19 August, 1930

Sir,

With reference to our conversations in London, I have the honour to propose that the following provisions shall be considered as embodying the separate agreement on all financial questions referred to in the second exchange of Notes between Your Excellency and myself at the time of the signature of the Treaty of Alliance on the 30 June, 1930.

It is understood that the agreement constituted by this note and by Your Excellency's reply thereto shall be included in the instruments of ratification of the Treaty of Alliance and shall become operative on the exchange of ratifications.

1. The Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland shall transfer to the Iraq Government, within the period stipulated in Clause 1 of the Annexure to the Treaty of Alliance signed on the 30th June, 1930, the aerodromes and encampments at Hinaidi and Mosul at present occupied by the Forces of His Britannic Majesty, and the Iraq Government shall accept the transfer thereof (less two "A" type steel hangars and the ice plants at Hinaidi, and Mosul to be removed by the Government of the United Kingdom) at one-third of the cost price certified as correct by the Air Ministry of the Government of the United Kingdom, of the permanent buildings, plant and structures thereon, no account being taken of the mud buildings which shall be transferred to the Iraq Government free of cost. The Iraq Government shall pay this sum to the Government of the United Kingdom not later than the date upon which the aforesaid transfer is completed.

During the maximum period stipulated in Clause 1 of the Annexure to the Treaty of Alliance, the Forces of His Britannic Majesty shall remain in undisturbed occupation of their present stations of Hinaidi and Mosul and at Shaiba and in the use of their existing emergency landing grounds, and the Government of the United Kingdom shall not be called upon to pay higher rental charges in respect thereof than those at present paid.

2. If upon the withdrawal of the Forces of His Britannic Majesty from Hinaidi and Mosul in accordance with Clause 1 of the Annexure to the Treaty of Alliance, the Government of the United Kingdom should decide to establish a British air base

in the neighbourhood of Habbaniya, then the Iraq Government shall take all possible steps, at no cost to either Government, to arrange for the construction of a railway to connect such air base with the railway system of Iraq.

3. The leases of the sites for air bases to be granted to His Britannic Majesty, in accordance with the provision of Article 5 of the Treaty of Alliance, shall, in so far as such sites are on waste Government land, be free of all rental charges, and, in so far as they are on non-government land, every facility shall be given for their acquisition on reasonable terms, such acquisition being affected by the Iraq Government at the request and at the cost of the Government of the United Kingdom. The leased lands shall be free of all taxes and rates and the leases shall continue so long as the bases remain in the occupation of the Forces of His Britannic Majesty in accordance with the provisions of the aforesaid Treaty of Alliance or of any extension thereof. On the final termination of the leases of the said sites, or of any one of them, the Iraq Government shall either themselves take over the buildings and permanent structures thereon at a fair valuation having regard to the use to which they have been put, or shall afford facilities as may reasonably be necessary to enable the Government of the United Kingdom to dispose thereof to the best advantage.

After the expiry of the maximum period stipulated in Clause 1 of the Annexure to the Treaty of Alliance and so long as the said Treaty of Alliance remain in force the Government of the United Kingdom shall not be called upon to pay any charges in respect of the use of any of the existing emergency landing grounds in Iraq.

4. The following arrangements for the disposal and administration of the Iraq railway system shall be carried into effect as soon as possible and in any case within a maximum period of one year from the entry into force of the Treaty of Alliance:
 - a) Legal ownership of the railway system shall be transferred by the Government of the United Kingdom to the Iraq Government and registered in the name of the Iraq Government, and simultaneously with such transfer full beneficial ownership shall be vested, by lease or otherwise and at a nominal rent and on terms satisfactory to the Government of the United Kingdom, in a special body or Corporation having legal personality, to be constituted by a special statute of the Iraq Legislature, the terms of which shall have been agreed by both Governments.

- b) The above mentioned Corporation shall be wholly responsible for the administration and management of the Iraq railway system, and, subject to such limitations as may be imposed in the Statute referred to above, shall have sole and exclusive authority to raise new capital by public issue or private loan and to dispose of the revenues of that system.
- c) The capital of the said Corporation shall comprise:
- (1) Rs. 275 Lakhs of Preferred Stock, bearing interest at 6 percent, such interest being non-cumulative for a period of twenty years from the date of the transfer of the ownership of the system and thereafter cumulative, to be allotted to the Government of the United Kingdom, of which Rs. 25 Lakhs represents the capitalised value of the debt of the railways to the Government of the United Kingdom on liquidation account;
 - (2) Rs. 45.85 Lakhs of similar Preferred Stock, to be allotted to the Iraq Government, being an amount equal to the loans which the Iraq Government have made to the railways on which interest charges have been waived; and
 - (3) Rs. 250 Lakhs of Deferred Stock also to be allotted to the Iraq Government. The Iraq Government shall have the option to buy at any time at par the Stock allotted to the Government of the United Kingdom.
- d) The Board of the Corporation shall consist of five Directors of whom two shall be appointed by the Government of the United Kingdom and two by the Iraq Government, and the fifth, who shall be the Chairman, shall be appointed by both Governments in agreement. The first Chairman shall be the present Director of the Iraq Railways.
- e) The Corporation shall be responsible for raising loan capital required for the reconditioning and development of the Iraq railway system, and neither Government shall be under any obligation to guarantee such loan capital either in respect of interest or of capital.
- f) Any loan capital raised by the Corporation for the reconditioning or development of the Iraqi railway system shall rank before the Stock allotted to the two Governments, in accordance with Clause (c) above.
- g) The Iraq Government, as owners of the equity of the system, shall accept ultimate responsibility for any liabilities relating thereto, not devolving upon the Corporation, that may subsequently come to light and in consideration thereof the

Government of the United Kingdom shall transfer to the Iraq Government an amount of Preferred Stock of a nominal value equal to the amount of any irrecoverable disbursements that the Iraq Government may have to make in the discharge of any of the aforesaid liabilities, the validity of which may have been established to the satisfaction of the Government of the United Kingdom.

- h) In anticipation of the transfer of the railway system and the establishment of the Corporation, the Iraq Government shall forthwith grant three-year contracts, on "Treaty" conditions, to such British railway officials as may be recommended therefore by the Director of the Iraq railways, and shall not terminate any such contracts when granted except with the agreement of the Government of the United Kingdom. The question of granting these officials contracts of longer duration shall be left for the decision of the Corporation when constituted.
5. The property in the port of Basra at present held by the Government of the United Kingdom shall be transferred to the Iraq Government and the port shall be administered by a Port Trust. For this purpose legislation in terms agreed with the Government of the United Kingdom shall be enacted in Iraq for the establishment of a Port Trust having legal personality and such legislation shall not be amended, except by agreement with the Government of the United Kingdom, so long as any part of the debt owing to the Government of the United Kingdom in respect of the port is still outstanding.

Upon the enactment of the above legislation and the establishment of the Port Trust, the property in the port shall be transferred to the Iraqi Government in whose name it will then be registered, and, simultaneously with such transfer, full beneficial ownership shall be conferred, by lease, concession or other appropriate instrument, the terms of which shall be subject to the approval of the Government of the United Kingdom, upon the Port Trust for the period during which any part of the debt owing to the Government of the United Kingdom in respect of the port remains outstanding.

I have, etc.,

(signed)

F.H. Humphrys

His Excellency, Nuri Pasha Al-Sa'id, C.M.G., D.S.O. Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Iraq.

Unpublished Note on the Special Iraqi Guards for the Protection of the British Air Bases in Iraq*

Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
Baghdad, dated the
30th June, 1930

Sir,

I have the honour to inform you, with reference to Clause 4 of the Annexure to the Treaty which we have signed to to-day, that, when the time comes to bring that Clause into effect the Iraq Government will be prepared to agree to the following arrangements for the special guards referred to therein. I do not anticipate that any legislation will be necessary in order to ensure the smooth working of this arrangement, but if there is any point upon which it is found in practice that the existing law is insufficient for this purpose, the necessary legislation will be passed without delay:-

- a) The force will consist of not more than 1250 men, exclusive of British personnel.
- b) Service in the force will be voluntary, and such service will exempt any member of the force from the provisions of any law for compulsory service.
- c) The force will be under the command of a British Commanding Officer and the requisite number of subordinate British and Iraqi officers, all of whom will hold the commission of His Majesty the King of Iraq. It will also include such British warrant and non-commissioned officers as may be necessary, who shall have the powers normally pertaining to their ranks. The Commanding Officer will have the power to make rules regarding recruitment, administration, nature of arms, equipment and clothing, method of training, rates of pay and conditions of service.
- d) With regard to discipline, the force, with the exception of the British personnel, will be subject to Iraq Military Law. The Commanding Officer and the subordinate British officers will be granted the necessary summary powers, and the Commanding Officer will have full discretion as to the convening and composition of courts-martial. The sentences of courts-martial of which the Commanding Officer is not a member,

* CO 730/151/78025, Part 2, New Treaty with Iraq, *Future Relations with Iraq*

will be confirmed by him. In cases in which the commanding officer is himself a member of the court or in which the sentence imposed by the court exceeds one year's imprisonment, confirmation of the sentence will be made by the Minister of Defence.

- e) The primary duty of the force will be the protection of such air bases in Iraq as may, with the consent of the Iraq Government, be occupied by the forces of His Britannic Majesty, and this duty will include the task of safe-guarding the material and stores of His Britannic Majesty's forces in Iraq wherever they may be. For the purpose of carrying out these duties, the sole executive responsibility for which will rest with the Commanding Officer, the force will be placed at the entire disposal of the Air Officer Commanding.
- f) It is understood that from time to time it may be necessary, in order that the above duties may be properly performed, that members of the force should receive orders from officers of His Britannic Majesty's forces. Such orders will normally be conveyed to the force through its own officers, but the Iraq Government raise no objection in cases of necessity to such orders being given direct, and will take steps to ensure that in this case all members of the force shall be under an obligation to obey such orders, and that they shall enjoy the same immunities as if the orders had been given by an officer of the force of His Majesty the King of Iraq. It is understood that any power of command over Iraqi forces which may be given to officers of His Britannic Majesty's forces will only be exercised in relation to the special force.
- g) The entire cost of the force will be met by His Majesty's Government in Great Britain.

I have, & C.

Noury Said

APPENDIX 'B'

The Leading Personalities in Iraq 1939 - 1941*

The Royal Family

1. King Ghazi
2. King Faisal II
3. Prince Abd al-'Ilah
4. Prince Zaid

Other Personalities

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| 5. Ali Jawdat al-Ayyubi | 20. Naji Shawkat |
| 6. Ali Mahmud al-Shaikh | 21. Nuri al-Sa'id |
| 7. Ali Mumtaz | 22. Rashid 'Ali al-Gailani |
| 8. Amin al-'Umari | 23. Rauf al-Bahrani |
| 9. Amin Zaki Sulaiman | 24. Rustam Haydar |
| 10. Amin al-Husaini, the Grand Mufti of Palestine | 25. Sabih Najib |
| 11. Bakr Sidqi | 26. Sadiq al-Basaam |
| 12. Fahmi Sa'id | 27. Salah al-Din al-Sabbagh |
| 13. Hikmat Sulaiman | 28. Salih Jabr |
| 14. Husain Fawzi | 29. Taha al-Hashimi |
| 15. Jamil al-Madfa'i | 30. Talib Mushtaq |
| 16. Kamil Shabib | 31. Tawfiq al-Suwaidi |
| 17. Mahmud Salman | 32. 'Umar Nadhmi |
| 18. Naji al-Asil | 33. Yunis al-Sab'awi |
| 19. Naji al-Suwaidi | 34. Yunis Bahri |

* FO 371/24562/E2239/E22329/93, Iraq 1.10.1940 from British Embassy to F.O. E/435/93/4/938, al-Sabbagh, op. cit., pp. 22-25 and al-Hasani, *Tarikh al-Wizarat al-Iraqiyya* (History of Iraqi Cabinets) Vol. III 5 ed. (Beirut, 1978).

THE ROYAL FAMILY

1. **King Ghazi**

The only son of King Faisal I. Born in the Hijaz at Mecca in 1911. Came to Baghdad in 1923 with his mother and sisters. Was educated first by his English governess, and later at Harrow, where he made little progress, owing to the inadequate preparation which he had received before entering the school. On his return to Iraq he went through the normal course of training at the Iraqi Military College. He learnt to be a good horseman, but was a poor student of military science. Left the college early in 1933 and became aide-de-camp to his father, King Faisal. Acted as Regent during King Faisal's absence from Iraq in summer of 1933. Soon after his accession he was married to Aliyeh, the eldest daughter of his uncle, ex-King Ali of the Hijaz. A son was born in May, 1935, and named Faisal, after his grandfather.

In May, 1936, his sister, the Princess Azzah, while visiting Athens, made a runaway marriage with a Greek hotel servant, a native of Rhodes. This created a great scandal in Iraq and for a time seemed to have destroyed King Ghazi's personal prestige. By the end of the year, however, the incident had been largely forgotten. Nevertheless, there was little doubt that this misalliance would be counted against him if he ever found himself in difficulties in his relations with his people. He showed no aptitude or taste for public affairs.

In 1937 his second sister married a young officer in the Iraqi Air Force. Though it brought no prestige to the Royal Family the marriage was apparently a happy one. Ghazi himself was killed in a car accident in April 1939.

2. **King Faisal II**

Born in Baghdad on 2nd May, 1935. Succeeded to the throne on the death of his father, Ghazi I, on the 3rd April, 1939. His mother was a sister of the Amir Abd al-'Ilah. He had had an English nurse and also an English governess, Miss Salmon. Was a bright intelligent child. He was enthroned in 1953 as King of Iraq. In 1958 he was killed in the revolution of 14 July.

3. **Prince Abd al-'Ilah**

Only son of Ali-bin-Husain, ex-King of the Hijaz who died in 1935. Born in the Hijaz 1912. Came to Baghdad as a child with father in 1926, after the latter's expulsion from the Hijaz. Educated partly at home and partly at Victoria College, Alexandria.

He spoke good English.

In November, 1936, he married in Baghdad the daughter of Salah-al-Din Fawzi and grand-daughter of Amin Yahiyah Pasha of Cairo. Was keenly interested in Arab horse racing and maintained a large stable. Became Regent on the death of King Ghazi on 3rd April, 1939.

Was pro-British. He was killed in 1958 following the revolution of 14 July.

4. **Prince Zaid**

Born in Constantinople in 1900. Youngest son of the late Husain of the Hijaz. Half-brother of King Ali, King Faisal and the Amir Abdullah (of Transjordan). His mother was a Turk. Educated in Constantinople. Fought with the Arab Nationalist forces during the Great War, and won the good opinion of the British officers with the Sharifian army.

Came to live in Iraq in 1922 and was commissioned in the Iraqi Cavalry. Acted as Regent for a short time in 1924 during King Faisal's absence.

In 1925 he went to England and studied agriculture at Oxford for nearly three years. During this period he took an active part in the social life of the university and rowed in the torpids for Balliol. In 1928 he joined his father in Cyprus and remained there until King Husain's death in 1931. Appointed Iraq's Minister at Angora in January, 1932.

In 1933 it became known that one of his sisters had contracted a clandestine marriage with Atta Beg Amin, sometime first secretary at the Iraqi Legation at Angora (and later at the Legation in London). The Royal Family were indignant, and Zaid was transferred to Cairo in January, 1934; he was the first Iraqi Minister at King Faud's Court. He did not, however, proceed to this post, which he ultimately refused to accept. At the end of 1934 he was busy in Athens engaged in litigation concerning extensive properties which he claimed to have inherited in Greece. Appointed Iraqi Minister at Berlin in September, 1935. In the spring of 1937 it was suspected that he had been using his position as Iraqi Minister to give false certificates to German soldiers destined for Spain. He was recalled to Iraq for enquiries, but apparently established his innocence and returned to Berlin. Was a pleasant, well-mannered man, and spoke excellent English and Turkish.

In 1933 he married a Turkish lady who had been divorced by her husband. This misalliance mattered little so long as he was not living in Iraq, but when he was withdrawn from Berlin in the

spring of 1938 and came to live in Baghdad it was counted against him locally. But for his wife he would probably have been made Regent after the death of King Ghazi in April, 1939. After the summer of 1939 he settled in Istanbul, until the outbreak of the Second World War and died later.

Other Personalities

5. **Ali Jawdat al-Ayyubi**

Of humble Mosul origin. Born 1886. Officer in the Turkish army, fought at Sha'iba; subsequently surrendered to the British and spent most of 1915 at Basra. He was a member of the 'Ahd-al-Iraqi. After the war he was Military Governor of Aleppo after the resignation of Ja'far Pasha early in 1920, and was subsequently in Dair. Returned to Baghdad with the Amir Faisal in 1921, and in October, 1921, was given the post of Mutasarrif (Governor) of Hillah, which he held till September, 1922. He took a very active part in the anti-mandate agitation and was finally dismissed (on the advice of the High Commissioner) for defrauding the Treasury by under-estimating revenue demands on supporters of his political views. In January, 1923, he was appointed Mutasarrif of Karbala in the hope that he might be able to reconcile the Mujtahids (Religious men). He was unsuccessful, and in May was transferred to Muntafiq, where he did very well. Minister of Interior in the Askari Cabinet, November, 1923 - July, 1924, and voted for the treaty. Appointed Mutasarrif of Diyala, and later of Basra. In early 1930 was made Director of the Ministry of the Interior. Minister for Finance under Nuri Pasha, March, 1930; resigned from Nuri's Cabinet in September as a protest against the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of that year, and his seat in the Chamber in 1931, followed by Rashid 'Ali-al-Gailani and Yasin al-Hashimi in March, 1932. Re-elected for Mosul 1933. Appointed principal private secretary to the King, March, 1933. Became Prime Minister and Acting Minister of the Interior in August, 1934. Was forced to resign in February, 1935 on account of the agitation worked up against him throughout the country by Yasin al-Hashimi, and Rashid al-Gailani. He was made President of the Chamber in March and appointed Iraqi Minister in London in August, 1935. Transferred to Paris in December, 1936.

He came to Baghdad on leave in October, 1937, and decided not to return to his post at Paris. Appointed Minister for Foreign Affairs in Nuri al-Sa'id's Cabinet in April, 1939. Resigned with whole Cabinet in February, 1940. Became Prime Minister in

December, 1949 and in June, 1957. Died in Beirut in 1969.

6. **Ali Mahmud al-Shaikh Ali**

Born 1902. He was connected with the Ubaid tribe. Graduated at the Baghdad Law School in 1923 and practised as a lawyer for about thirteen years. He also learnt to speak English and French. He became well known as an extreme Nationalist and contributed many articles to the newspaper *Istiqlal* attacking British policy in Iraq. He was arrested in 1924 on account of his agitation against the first Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, but was acquitted on trial. He was brought before the courts again in 1930 for a similarly violent agitation against the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of Alliance signed in that year and sentenced to a short term of imprisonment. He had twice been elected to the Chamber of Deputies. He was one of the members of the delegation of Iraqi notables which visited Palestine and Egypt in 1936, and a short time after his return he was appointed (through the personal influence of Yasin al-Hashimi, the Prime Minister) to a judgeship in the Court of Appeal. In this post he showed more talent and good sense than was to be expected from his past career. Appointed Minister of Justice in Hikmat Sulaiman's reorganized Cabinet in June, 1937. Resigned August, 1937, and returned to the Bar.

Banished from Baghdad by Jamil al-Madfa'i's Cabinet in November, 1938, but was permitted to return when Nuri al-Sa'id formed a Cabinet in 1938. In February, 1939, he was appointed Mutasarrif of Basra, where he soon began to make trouble for the Shaikh of Kuwait. After holding this appointment for about a year he was transferred to Baghdad to be Director-General of Customs and Excise. As a Mutasarrif he allowed his political prejudices to colour too deeply his administrative activities. In April, 1941, became Minister of Justice in Rashid 'Ali's Cabinet.

7. **Ali Mumtaz**

Born 1901. Belonged to the Daftari family of Baghdad. Graduated at Baghdad Law College and entered Government service in 1920. Married a daughter of Yasin al-Hashimi in 1933. Appointed Director-General of Revenues in 1935, but was obliged to leave Iraq for a time when Bakr Sidqi overthrew Yasin al-Hashimi's Government in 1936. In January, 1939, he was reappointed Director-General of Revenues by Nuri al-Sa'id's Cabinet. In October, 1941, and December, 1943, he became Minister of Finance in Nuri al-Sa'id's Cabinet.

8. **Amin al-'Umari**

Born in Mosul 1889 of the notable family of the 'Umaris. Passed out of Military College in Baghdad in 1906 and then entered the Artillery School in Constantinople, where he remained for three years. Gazetted second lieutenant in 1909 and posted to Adana. Later he served in 1910 in operations against the Shammar tribe and in 1911 and 1912 against the tribes in Samawa, Abu Sukhair and Rumaitha. Entered the Turkish Staff College in 1912. Fought in the Balkan war and was mentioned in despatches for good work on the Chitaljah lines. After the First World War he took part (with Jamil al-Madfa'i) in the Arab insurrections in Deir-ez-Zor and Tell Afar. He returned to Mosul after the general amnesty in 1920 and joined the Iraqi army at the time of its formation. He was promoted Assistant Chief of the General Staff in 1935 and General Officer Commanding the Northern Area in 1937. In August, 1937, he refused to carry out the orders given to him by the Government to arrest a number of officers charged with co-operation in Bakr Sidqi's murder, and this successful defiance brought about the fall of Hikmat Sulaiman's Cabinet. Soon after, when Jamil al-Madfa'i came into office, Amin al-'Umari was transferred to command of the Baghdad District.

Went to Europe on leave in the winter 1938 to undergo medical treatment. As a soldier he was out of date and obstinately refused to modernize tactical ideas. Was relieved of his command and placed on pension in February, 1940, because of the influence which he endeavoured to exercise in political matters outside his proper sphere. Became Chief of Staff in al-Madfa'i's Government in the immediate aftermath of the suppression of the army revolt of May, 1941.

9. **Amin Zaki Sulaiman**

Of Kurdish origin. Born 1887 in Baghdad. Received his military training in Istanbul and appointed second Lieutenant in the Turkish army in 1905. He joined the Iraq army in 1921 as a captain, and was promoted Major in 1926 and Lieutenant-Colonel in 1930, when he was placed in command of the 4th Iraqi Infantry Battalion.

He was promoted Colonel in 1934 and appointed to the command of the Northern Division with headquarters at Mosul. In 1940 he became the Acting Chief of Staff following the retirement of General Husain Fawzi and Amin al-'Umari. He played a major role in the military coup of April, 1941. Following the overthrow of Rashid 'Ali's Government he fled with the

“Golden Square” and Rashid 'Ali to Persia.

10. **Amin al-Husaini**

Palestine Grand Mufti and President of Supreme Arab Council for Palestine. Born in 1897 in Jerusalem; Educated at al-Azhar University, Cairo. Career: Officer in the Ottoman Army during World War I (1914-18). Elected President for life of the Supreme Muslim Council for Palestine (1922). Elected President of the World Islamic Congress at the Jerusalem Conference (1931) and President of the Higher Arab Committee for Palestine (1936), left Palestine after the country was overwhelmed by the Jews in 1937, settled in Lebanon between 1937 and 1939, then in Iraq (1934-41), Iran and Europe (1941-45), France (1945-46). Re-elected President of the Higher Arab Committee for Palestine, in Egypt as guest of the late King Farouq (1946). Elected President of the General Assembly and the Supreme Council of the Government of Palestine (1948), President of the World Islamic Conference at Karachi (1951) at Baghdad (1952), of the Conference of Ulama of Islam and of the Executive Committee of the Islamic World at Karachi (1952), President of the Palestine Arab Delegation in the Afro-Asiatic Conference of Bandung (1955).

11. **Bakr Sidqi***

Born 1890 and of Kurdish origin. First commissioned in 1908. Had studied at Turkish, German, and British staff schools. Had published at least two small text books (Patrolling and Mountain Warfare) in Arabic. Was rigid in his tactical methods, and in training troops insisted on strict adherence to form: there is only one right way to do things. At the same time he himself was not unresponsive of new ideas. Was rather jealous, and very suspicious of any instruction or doctrine which did not emanate from himself.

A great advocate of an advance on a wide front, he had been seen in training to advance a brigade in two columns on roads more or less divergent two miles or more apart. When making a plan almost the first thing he did was to study map and ground for “parallel line of advance”.

For years signs had not been lacking that he had some deep game in mind, and the *coup d'etat* of 1936 might perhaps have been predicted.

Though supremely ambitious, there is no case for dismissing

* FO 371/20015/E7627, British Embassy, Baghdad, 26th November, 1936. To FO.

him as just entirely self-seeking: his sincere patriotism is unarguable, though he saw his country's interests as being intimately linked with his own; perhaps he was himself an Ataturk, a Riza Shah, or a Mussolini. It was hardly likely that he would organize a *coup d'état* only to obtain for himself the position of C.G.S., to which he would have succeeded in the normal course of events within a reasonable time. This was only a first step; probably he himself could not then foresee the next, but he had put himself in a position to profit by any opportunity which may present itself.

He professed a respect, probably sincere, for Great Britain, and also for Germany; he had, however, expressed himself bitterly about what he regarded as injustice in the rejection of proposals for his visits to England in 1934 and again in 1936, on which he had set his heart. This might have soured his feelings towards Great Britain, and perhaps inclined him towards Germany.

He had said (August, 1934) that he felt neither liking nor respect for either Italy or France. He was assassinated in 1937 by Salah al-Din's followers in Mosul.

12. **Fahmi Sa'id**

Born in Sulaimania in 1898. He served as an officer in the Ottoman and Syrian Army. He joined the Iraqi army in 1921 and in 1940 became Officer Commanding the Mechanized Force. He was the Officer Commanding, 3rd Division during the Anglo-Iraqi crisis of 1941. He studied at the Iraqi Staff College. Fahmi was one of the opponents of General Bakr Sidqi. Following the defeat of Rashid 'Ali in his conflict with Britain in 1941, he fled to Persia and later he was extradited to Iraq and executed in 1942.

13. **Hikmat Sulaiman**

Born 1886. Director of Education in Baghdad under the Turks. Also Assistant Governor. Member of C.U.P. Was in Constantinople at the time of the occupation. Returned in January, 1921, and was a candidate for the Ministry of Education. Made Director of Posts in April, 1922, and Director-General of Posts and Telegraphs in April, 1923. Minister of Interior in the second Sadun Cabinet. Lost his seat in the Chamber in the general election of 1930, but became Minister of Interior in March, 1933. Resigned from Cabinet with Rashid 'Ali in October, 1933, and from Chamber in November, 1933. He played an active part in organizing intensive opposition in Ali Jawdat's Cabinet in the early months of 1935, but refused office in the Cabinet formed by Yasin Pasha after Ali Jawdat's fall. Paid a long visit to Turkey in the summer of 1935

and returned full of praise for modern Turkish Methods. In the autumn of 1935 he was offered the portfolio of the Ministry of Justice, but did not accept it. Was very influential in political circles, where his intelligence was much respected.

In October, 1936, he joined with Bakr Sidqi in the plot which resulted in the successful military coup against Yasin al-Hashimi's Government, and upon Yasin's resignation he became Prime Minister. He remained in office until August, 1937, when, after the murder of Bakr Sidqi, he and his Cabinet resigned. As a Prime Minister he was disappointing. His intentions were excellent, but his impatience with detail and administrative routine, coupled with the malign influence exercised by Bakr Sidqi over the Cabinet, prevented him from achieving anything of importance. A well-mannered man of wide Liberal views.

In 1938, though he took no active part in politics, he was on the alert to keep Nuri al-Sa'id from returning to power. When Nuri al-Sa'id formed a Government in December, 1938, he sent messages of goodwill to Hikmat and later calls were exchanged between Hikmat and Sagah, Nuri's son. In spite of their reconciliation, he was arrested early in 1939, tried by court-martial for treason and sentenced to death. This was at the same time commuted to five years' imprisonment. In the summer of 1939 he was removed to Sulaimaniya, where he was interned in a comfortable house. He was released by Rashid 'Ali on his becoming Prime Minister in March, 1940. He died in 1964.

14. **Husain Fawzi**

Of Kurdish origin. Born in Baghdad in 1889. Entered the Military College in Istanbul and received a commission in the Turkish army in 1909. He passed the senior officers' course at Belgaum, India and had twice been attached to units in England for training. Promoted Lieutenant-Colonel in 1929 and Colonel in 1933. In 1934 he was appointed Commandant of the Staff School, Baghdad, and in February, 1935, he was given the command of the Northern District. In August, 1935, he became a Brigadier, and in November, 1936, he was made G.O.C., 1st Infantry Division. A pleasant man with good manners. He spoke good English. He had nothing to do with the military revolt of October, 1936. After the murder of Bakr Sidqi in August, 1937, he was appointed Chief of the General Staff. Relieved of appointment and placed on pension in February, 1940, for interference in politics.

15. **Jamil al-Madfa'i**

Of Mosul, born 1890. Led the party which in June, 1920, came from Dair and called upon the tribes to rise against the British in the name of the Sharif. Entered Tell Afar after the murder of Captain Stuart. He had been seven times Prime Minister of Iraq as well as Minister of Interior, Minister of Defence, etc. He succeeded Rashid 'Ali as Prime Minister following his overthrow in May, 1941. Died in 1958.

16. **Kamil Shabib**

Born in Baghdad in 1895. He graduated and was commissioned as Lieutenant in the Ottoman and Syrian armies. Later he joined the Iraqi army when the Iraqi State was established in 1921. He graduated as Staff Officer from the Iraqi Staff College. In 1940 he became Officer Commanding 1st Division. He was one of the four Colonels who staged their coup in 1941. Following the overthrow of the Gailani régime he fled with his colleagues to Persia. He was tried and executed in 1944 following his extradition from Persia.

17. **Mahmud Salman**

Born in 1889 in Baghdad. He served as an officer in the Ottoman and Syrian army. He joined the Iraqi army in 1925 and became aide de camp to King Faisal and King Ghazi. Became Officer Commanding a Cavalry Regiment, then Officer Commanding the Royal Iraqi Air Force in 1940. He was one of the al-Sabbagh's adherents. He fled to Persia after the overthrow of Rashid 'Ali in 1941 and was executed with his colleagues in 1942.

18. **Naji al-Asil**

Born 1895 in Baghdad. First became prominent in 1922 as semi-official Hashemite representative in London. Continued to represent Hashemite interest in London until final conquest of the Hijaz by Ibn Saud. Dr. Naji then became destitute in England, and was deported to Iraq in October, 1925. In Iraq he was soon employed under the Ministry of Defence in the Iraqi Military Medical Service. Appointed Iraqi Consul-General and Chargé d'Affaires in Jeddah in August, 1931. Returned to Baghdad in June, 1932, to be present during the visit of the Amir Faisal, son of King Abdul Aziz-al-Saud. Appointed consul, Mohammerah, October, 1932. Acting Director-General in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, April, 1933. Appointed counsellor in the Legation at Tehran, April 1935.

In June, 1936, while on leave in Baghdad, he was appointed

Master of Ceremonies at the palace, and accepted the portfolio of Foreign Affairs when Hikmat Sulaiman formed his Cabinet in October, 1936. Resigned with Sulaiman in August, 1937, and was not included in the Cabinet formed by Jamil al-Madfa'i.

19. **Naji al-Suwaidi**

Born in Baghdad 1883. Educated in Baghdad and in the school of law at Constantinople. Spoke French and English. Public Prosecutor in the Yemen 1905; president of the Commercial Tribunal, Basra, 1908; member of the Baghdad Court of Appeal 1910, Kaimakam of Kadhimain 1910-1911; of Najaf 1911; and of Hundiyyah 1912; Civil Inspector for Diarbekr, Urfa and Mardin, 1913; Inspector for the Eastern Region (Adana to Mosul) 1915; Civil Inspector of the Adana Wilayet 1916, when he was transferred to Konia; Civil Inspector in the Ministry of the Interior, Constantinople, 1917. Returned to Syria after the armistice and was appointed Deputy Military Governor of Baghdad, but resigned the appointment after a few days and returned to his former post in Aleppo. Returned to Baghdad in March, 1921, and was active in the preparations for the reception of the Amir Faisal. Was appointed Minister of Justice in September, 1921, and held the post till November, 1923, having served for a short time also as Minister of Interior. Deputy for Baghdad in the Constituent Assembly, March, 1924. He opposed the treaty and voted against it. Became Prime Minister in November, 1929. His Cabinet resigned in March, 1930. Re-elected for Baghdad in the general election of 1930, but resigned his seat in March, 1931, as a protest against the alleged unconstitutional conduct of the Government. Accompanied King Faisal to Tehran in April, 1932. Appointed Senator January, 1933. Joined Jamil al-Madfa'i's Cabinet in February, 1934, as Minister for Finance, and resigned with his colleagues in August, 1934. He presided over the Arab Congress held at Bludan (Syria) in August, 1937, to protest against the policy of the British Government in Palestine, and on returning to Iraq reorganized and strengthened the Palestine Defence League.

Became Minister of Finance in the Cabinet formed by Rashid 'Ali al-Gailani in March, 1940, and also Finance Minister in the Cabinet formed by Rashid 'Ali al-Gailani in April, 1941. He died in South Africa in 1942 during his deportation to Baghdad.

20. **Naji Shawkat**

Born in 1891 in Baghdad. Studied in Constantinople and became a reserve officer. Joined the Sharif and was at Aquabah

with Colonel Lawrence, for whom he had a great admiration. Returned to Baghdad in 1919. Early in 1921 he was given an appointment under the Mutasarrif of Baghdad, and subsequently became Mutasarrif. He showed considerable administrative ability, and maintained cordial relations with his British advisers. He was appointed Mutasarrif of Kut in October, 1922, of Hillah in 1923, and of Baghdad in 1924. Minister for Justice, September, 1929, and reverted to Interior in the changes which followed Abd al-Muhsin's suicide. Appointed Iraqi Minister at Angora in September, 1930. Recalled to Baghdad in October, 1931, to take up portfolio of Interior. Became Prime Minister in November, 1932. Received the Order of Grand Officer of the Crown of Italy in January, 1933. Resigned premiership March, 1933. Minister for the Interior in November, 1933, resigned February, 1934. Again appointed Minister at Angora April, 1934. He accompanied Tawfiq Rusta Aras, the Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs, on his official visit to Baghdad in the summer of 1937, and was then offered a Cabinet post in Hikmat Sulaiman's Government. He declined because of his objections to Bakr Sidqi's influence.

Became Minister of the Interior in the Cabinet formed by Nuri al-Sa'id in December, 1938, but resigned in April, 1939. Deputy for Baghdad in the elections of June, 1939.

Became Minister for Justice in Rashid 'Ali's Cabinet in March, 1940, and Minister of Defence in Rashid 'Ali's Cabinet in April, 1941. Died in 1979.

21. **Nuri al-Sa'id**

Born 1888 in Baghdad son of an accountant of Mosul descent. Educated in Constantinople, spoke Turkish, German, French and English. Served in Balkan War. He was one of the founders of the Ahd in 1913, and came from Constantinople to Iraq in order to start branches there. He was in Basra at the time of the occupation as a patient in the American hospital; joined the Arab army in Hijaz in June, 1916, and commanded the troops till the arrival of the Ja'far Pasha (his brother-in-law); served as C.G.S. till the fall of Damascus. A good strategist very receptive of ideas, clever, hard-working, rash and hot-headed under fire. A modernist with an exceptionally alert intelligence. Was awarded the D.S.O. 1917 and the C.M.G. 1919; and accompanied Faisal to London, Paris and Syria in 1919 and 1920.

He always wished for a reasonable rapprochement between France and the Arabs. Thus he dissuaded King Faisal from offering resistance to the French on the grounds that he could not

hope for support from the British. When the break came in July, 1920, he went with Faisal to England. Returned to Baghdad in February, 1921, and took charge of the Ministry of Defence during the absence of Ja'far Pasha at the Cairo Conference. On his return he became G.C.S. and Director-General of Police, and held these appointments till October, 1922. Acting Minister of Defence from November, 1922, to November, 1923. Held the same portfolio in Ja'far Pasha's Cabinet. Minister of Defence again in November, 1926, he retained that portfolio with only short intervals out of office until he became Prime Minister in March, 1930. Negotiated and signed the Anglo-Iraqi treaty of 1930. Visited Jeddah in 1931 to negotiate a "Bon-Voisinage" Treaty with Najd and the Hijaz. Resigned with the whole Cabinet on the 19th October, 1931, but reaccepted office on the same day in a reformed Cabinet. Visited Angora with King Faisal July, 1931, and again in December-January, 1931-32. During latter visit he signed with the Turkish Government an Extradition Treaty, a Treaty of Commerce and a Residence Convention. Resigned premiership in October, 1932. Appointed Minister at Rome, 1933, but did not proceed. Became Minister for Foreign Affairs in Cabinet of Rashid 'Ali al-Gailani in March, 1933. Resigned with Rashid 'Ali in October, 1933, and accepted portfolio of Foreign Affairs and Defence under Jamil al-Madfa'i in November, 1933. Resigned in February, 1934, but returned to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in August, 1934 under Ali Jawdat's premiership. Resigned with Ali Jawdat in February, 1935, but retained the portfolio of Foreign Affairs in the succeeding Cabinet formed by Jamil al-Madfa'i, and returned again to the Ministry in the Cabinet formed by Yasin Pasha in March, 1935.

In October, after Bakr Sidqi's successful military revolt, Nuri al-Sa'id, fearing for his life, fled to Egypt with his family, where he carried on a restless agitation from Cairo to secure his return to Iraq. He came back in October, 1937, after the murder of Bakr Sidqi and the fall of Hikmat Sulaiman's Government. He was offered the post of Iraqi Minister in London, but did not accept it. In early December he went to Syria with the intention of working privately for a solution of the problem of the future of the Jews and Arabs in Palestine.

But for two short visits to Baghdad, Nuri al-Sa'id spent the whole of the year 1938 outside Iraq, occupied principally in desultory conversations about Palestine with politicians in Syria, Egypt and London. On each of his short visits to Baghdad his presence gave rise to rumours concerning his political intentions,

but these died away as soon as he left.

In December, 1938, he came back to stay. A few days later a military demonstration in his favour organized by Taha al-Hashimi, Husain Fawzi and the Golden Square, overthrew Jamil al-Madfa'i's Cabinet and brought Nuri al-Sa'id into office as Prime Minister. He represented Iraq at the opening of the London conversations about Palestine in January, 1939.

Due to his falling popularity and his pro-British policies he resigned the premiership in February, 1940, but at the Regent's request reformed his Cabinet and continued in office until the end of March, when, with his own collaboration, a new Cabinet was formed by Rashid 'Ali. He was killed during the outbreak of the revolution in 1958 at Baghdad following his unsuccessful attempt to escape.

22. **Rashid 'Ali al-Gailani**

Born 1892 in Baghdad. A distant relation of the Naqib. In Turkish times was a clerk in the Waqf Department. Fled to Mosul with the Turks on the capture of Baghdad, and after the fall of Mosul practised as a lawyer. In May, 1921, he was appointed a judge in the Court of Appeal. His work as a judge won him the good opinion of his advisers. Was appointed Minister of Justice in Yasin Pasha's Cabinet in 1924. Resigned over the signing of the Turkish Petroleum Company's Concession in March, 1925, which, at Yasin Pasha's instigation, he strongly opposed. Became Minister of the Interior in the second Saduniyah Cabinet in June, 1925, but resigned almost immediately on being elected President of the Chamber of Deputies. From November, 1926, to January, 1928, was Minister of the Interior. Re-elected to the Chamber of Deputies in the general election of 1930, but resigned his seat in March, 1931, in company with Yasin al-Hashimi, Naji al-Suwaidi and Ali Jawdat, as a protest against the conduct of Nuri Pasha's Government. Became a prominent leader of the Hizb al-Ikha al-Watani (the Party of National Brotherhood). He encouraged the general strike in July, 1931, hoping thereby to embarrass Nuri Pasha's Cabinet. Appointed chief private secretary to the King in July, 1932. Became Prime Minister in March, 1933. Resigned October, 1933. Appointed Senator in summer of 1934. Helped to organize the disturbances on the Euphrates which forced Ali Jawdat to resign in March, 1935, and, as Minister for the Interior, joined the Cabinet then formed by Yasin al-Hashimi.

After Bakr Sidqi's military revolt against the Hashimi Cabinet in October, 1936, Rashid 'Ali fled to Constantinople. He came

back in October, 1937. During 1938 he made several speeches in the Senate attacking the policy of Jamil al-Madfa'i's Cabinet.

Deported to Anah December, 1938, during al-Madfa'i's premiership. Returned a few days later when Nuri al-Sa'id succeeded Jamil al-Madfa'i as Prime Minister. Appointed chief private secretary to the Palace in January, 1939, and remained in this post after King Ghazi's death in April, 1939. Became Prime Minister in March, 1940. He resigned in January, 1941. Made Prime Minister again in April, 1941, following the military coup led by the "Golden Square". Following the confrontation of May, 1941, with Britain, he fled the country to Persia and then to Germany and Saudi Arabia. He returned to Iraq in 1958 after the revolution. Sentenced to death in 1959 by General Qasim for treason and plotting against his regime and his sentence was commuted to life sentence. He was freed later and died in Beirut in 1965.

23. **Rauf al-Bahrani**

Born about 1887 in Baghdad. Graduated at the Baghdad Law School and was appointed to a clerical post in the Ministry of Finance, where he rose to be Accountant-General (not altogether by merit). Appointed Minister for Finance in Yasin Pasha's Cabinet in March, 1935. Resigned October, 1936.

Appointed Director-General of Customs and Excise, January, 1938. Became Minister of Finance in February and of Social Affairs in March.

24. **Rustam Haydar**

Born 1889 in Syria where his family owned considerable estates. He came to Iraq with the Amir Faisal in June, 1921, and after the coronation was appointed Chamberlain of the Royal Office. Appointed Minister of Finance in November, 1930, in Nuri al-Sa'id's Cabinet. Acted as Prime Minister twice during Nuri's absence from Iraq. Assassinated in his office in January, 1940. Known for his pro-British tendencies.

25. **Sabih Najib**

Born 1892. Gazetted to the Turkish army in 1912. Joined Iraq Army 1921, and reached the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel 1929. Passed a staff course in England, and for some time was Commandant of the Iraqi Staff College in Baghdad. Spoke English and French and some German. Appointed Director-General of Police in March, 1931. Represented Iraq on the Syria-Iraq Frontier

Delimitation Commission in 1933. Appointed counsellor, Berlin, June, 1935. Transferred to Geneva as Iraqi delegate to the League of Nations in November, 1935.

He was appointed Director-General of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in December, 1937, with the rank of Minister Plenipotentiary. Made Minister for Defence in October, 1938. Resigned with the whole Jamil al-Madfa'i Cabinet on 25 December, 1938.

Tried by court-martial in February, 1940, for being an accessory to the murder of Rustam Haydar, Minister of Finance. Acquitted on this charge and sentenced to one year's imprisonment for having used insulting language when speaking of the Government at a semi-public gathering. Was pardoned by the Regent after serving only a few weeks of his sentence.

26. **Sadiq al-Bassam**

Born in 1895 in Baghdad. Graduated at the Baghdad Law School, and for several years practised as a lawyer. Deputy for Kut 1930-34. In the Chamber he gave steady support to Yasin Pasha, and was a member of the Ikha al-Watani party. In June, 1935, as a reward for his political services, he was appointed Director-General of Government Lands and Properties in the Ministry of Finance, and became Minister of Education in Yasin Pasha's Cabinet in September, 1935. Resigned in October, 1936.

Elected Deputy for Kut December, 1937, and for Baghdad in June, 1939. Became Minister of Economics in September, 1939. Joined the Cabinet formed by Rashid 'Ali in March, 1940, as Minister of Education. In February, 1941, he received the Education portfolio in Taha al-Hashimi's Cabinet.

27. **Salah al-Din al-Sabbagh**

Born 1889 in Mosul. Educated at Constantinople and graduated as an officer from the Turkish Military College in 1917. Taken prisoner in the war 1914-18 and released to join the Amir Faisal's army. Gazetted second-lieutenant in the Iraq army in 1921. Had done courses at Belgaum and Britain and also attached to British units. Instructor at Baghdad Military College 1924 and later at the Staff College. Appointed Director of Operations in the Ministry of Defence September, 1937, Assistant Chief of Staff, and became O.C. 3rd Division in March, 1940. Was an efficient officer, but had the reputation of being a careerist with ambition.

Belonged to the group of senior officers who were well-known for their nationalistic beliefs and activity in politics. Was a leading figure in all military coups staged in Iraq since 1937. Following the

overthrow of Rashid 'Ali in May, 1941, he fled to Persia, and then he was arrested in Turkey and extradited to Iraq and executed in 1945.

28. Salih Jabr

Lawyer of Najaf, Born about 1902. Employed for some time as a judge. Elected Deputy February, 1930, and resigned from the bench. Acquired notoriety in the Chamber as a persistent asker of questions and ready speaker. Appointed Minister for Education under Jamil al-Madfa'i November, 1933. Resigned February, 1934. Elected Deputy for Muntafiq December, 1934. Appointed Mutasarrif of Karbala in April, 1935, where he proved successful. In October, 1936, he accepted the portfolio of Justice in Hikmat Sulaiman's Cabinet. Resigned in June over the Euphrates disturbances and went away for several months. He returned when Jamil al-Madfa'i formed a Cabinet and was appointed Director-General of Customs and Excise.

Became Minister for Education in Cabinet formed by Nuri al-Sa'id in December, 1938. Elected for Diwaniyah June, 1939. Minister for Social Affairs in February, 1940. Resigned in March, 1940. Arrested in April, 1941, following the flight of the Regent to Basra as he was the Governor there who antagonised the military coup in 1941. Became Prime Minister in 1947-1948. Died in 1957.

29. Taha al-Hashimi

Brother of Yasin al-Hashimi. Born 1885. Served in Turkish army and was employed in Arabia and the Yemen during the war. Was given a post on the Turkish General Staff in Constantinople in 1920, but returned to Baghdad in 1922 to join the Iraqi army, and was at once appointed Officer Commanding Troops in Mosul. Appointed Chief of the General Staff in 1923. Was attached to Sir Percy Cox in May, 1924, for the boundary negotiations with the Turkish Government which followed the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne. The post of Chief of the General Staff was abolished shortly after his return in August, 1924. So for a while he acted as tutor to the (then) Crown Prince Ghazi. Appointed Chief of the Census Department in 1926 and Director of Education in 1928. In 1930 he returned as Chief of the General Staff to the Ministry of Defence, and was promoted Fariq (General). In 1931 he visited the Imam Yahya of the Yemen and concluded a treaty of friendship between the Yemen and Iraq.

He was popular with the British officers at the military mission. In September, 1935, he was appointed Acting Director-General of

Education in addition to his other duties.

He was in Angora in October, 1936, when Hikmat Sulaiman and Bakr Sidqi forced Yasin al-Hashimi to resign. He wisely did not return to Iraq. He came back in September, 1937, and was offered the post of Director-General of Works. He refused this offer on the grounds that it was beneath his dignity to accept any position lower than that of Chief of the General Staff.

Elected Deputy of Baghdad in December, 1937. Opposed Jamil al-Madfa'i's Cabinet in the Chamber. Worked actively on the committee of the Palestine Defence League in 1938. On the 25th December, 1938, in collaboration with General Husain Fawzi and the "Golden Square", he organized a military demonstration against Jamil al-Madfa'i's Government, and became Minister for Defence in the cabinet which Nuri al-Sa'id formed when Jamil al-Madfa'i resigned. Became a Deputy for Baghdad in the elections for June, 1939. Retained the portfolio of Defence in the Cabinet formed by Rashid 'Ali in March, 1940. Became Prime Minister in February, 1941, after Rashid 'Ali's resignation. He was forced to resign following the military coup of April, 1941. He died in London in 1961.

30. **Talib Mushtaq**

Born 1900 in Baghdad. Father was minor official. In the anti-mandate agitation of 1922 and in the spring of 1923 was one of those responsible for anti-British posters issued over the signature of the Supreme Committee of Iraq Secret Societies. Appointed Inspector of Schools in 1924 and held a variety of appointments under the Ministry of Education until November, 1931, when he was appointed first secretary to the Iraqi Legation at Angora. Appointed Director of the Consular Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in November, 1935. Appointed Consul-General at Beirut in August, 1937.

Withdrawn and dismissed from the service in February, 1938. He remained for a time in Syria, but returned to Baghdad when Nuri al-Sa'id formed a Cabinet in December, 1938. Appointed Accountant-General in January, 1939, and Director-General of Propaganda, Publicity and Broadcasting in May, 1939. Became Consul-General in Jerusalem May, 1940. He was dismissed from service in the aftermath of Rashid 'Ali's overthrow as he was considered one of Rashid 'Ali's confederates. During the republican regime and after the revolution of 1958 he became the Manager of the Arab Bank in Baghdad and then Ambassador in Turkey until 1965.

31. **Tawfiq al-Suwaidi**

Born 1892. Studied law in Baghdad and Constantinople and international law in Paris. In 1913 became first interpreter to the Ministry of Education, Constantinople. Represented Iraq at the Arab Conference held in Paris in July, 1913. After the armistice went to Syria and was appointed judge in Damascus. Returned to Baghdad in October, 1921, and in November was appointed Assistant Government Counsellor and Director of the Law School. Minister for Education January, 1928. Prime Minister, 1929. President of the Chamber 1929. Iraqi Minister at Tehran March, 1931. Joined Jamil al-Madfa'i's Cabinet in July 1934 as Minister for Foreign Affairs, but resigned with the whole Cabinet in August. Held Cabinet office for twelve days as Minister of Justice in Jamil al-Madfa'i's short-lived Cabinet in March, 1935, and in October was appointed Controller-General of Accounts. He became Minister for Foreign Affairs in Jamil al-Madfa'i's Cabinet in August, 1937, and headed the Iraqi delegation to the League of Nations in September. There he handled the Assyrian and Palestinian questions with tact and moderation.

Again represented Iraq at the League of Nations in the autumn of 1938, and afterwards visited London as the guest of His Majesty's Government. There he had conversations with the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and with the Secretary of State for the Colonies about Palestine.

Resigned with the whole of the Jamil al-Madfa'i's Cabinet on the 25th December, 1938, as the result of a military coup staged against them. Represented Iraq at the London conversations of Palestine in 1939 after Nuri al-Sa'id had returned to Iraq. He was appointed Minister for Foreign Affairs in al-Hashami's Cabinet in February, 1941. Became Prime Minister in 1946 and 1950. Died in Beirut in 1968.

32. **'Umar Nadhmi**

Born Kifri 1893. Graduated at the Baghdad Law College 1913. Appointed Judge, Khaniqin 1913; Baqubah 1914; on the outbreak of war joined the Reserve Officers' School and was named Public Prosecutor to the Military Court, Kirkuk 1924; Vice-President, Civil Courts, Mosul 1924; Hillah 1925; President, Civil Courts, DIALA; Mutasarrif of Kut and Basra Liwas; Administrative Inspector 1931; Mutasarrif of Mosul Liwa 1934.

Held other Government posts up to August, 1937, when he was made to be Director-General of Revenues. Became a Minister of Economics and Communications in December, 1938, in the

Cabinet of Nuri al-Sa'id.

Made a Senator April, 1939. Minister of Interior in September, 1939, and Acting Minister of Justice in February, 1940. Joined Rashid 'Ali's Cabinet in March, 1940, as Minister of Communication and Works. He became Minister of Interior in al-Hashimi's Government in February, 1941.

33. **Yunis al-Sab'awi***

Born at Mosul about 1909. Graduate of Law College, Baghdad. He was one of the extreme nationalists and close friend of the four Colonels. Formerly an active member of Yasin al-Hashimi's Ikha al-Watani party. One of the first secretaries of the Muthana Club and a member of the Palestine Defence Committee.

In December, 1938, he was one of those who with Rashid 'Ali worked up hostility to Jamil al-Madfa'i's Cabinet. In June, 1939, he became a Deputy for Mosul.

In August, 1940, he was reported by British Intelligence to be one of a pro-Nazi group, who met under the aegis of Dr Saib Shawkat at the Muthana Club. It was reported at the time by independent sources that this group was responsible for the distribution in Baghdad of anti-British leaflets. Appointed Minister of Economics when Rashid 'Ali reformed his new Cabinet in January, 1941, but remained in office only three days. In the aftermath of Rashid 'Ali's overthrow he fled to Persia. But was brought back to Iraq to be tried and executed in 1942.

34. **Yunis Bahri**

Born about 1904. From the Jubur tribe of Mosul. From 1923 to 1926 he held minor clerical posts in Government offices. In June 1926 he went on a journey round the world and was repatriated destitute from Paris after having served a term of imprisonment. Between 1929 and 1933 he travelled in Arab countries (including Tunis, Libya, and the Hadramaut) as well as Java, India, Afghanistan and Iran. On his return to Iraq he took up journalism and give his support to extreme nationalism. He also published a newspaper called *Al 'Uqab*. He was subsidised in 1935-1936 to publish articles favouring the Italian conquest of Abyssinia in 1936. In April, 1939, he went to Berlin and soon afterwards became an announcer for the Arabic service of Radio Berlin.

* F0371/27061, 30 January 1941

APPENDIX 'C'

*Iraqi Cabinets 1939 - 1941**

April 1939 - February 1940

Nuri al-Sa'id	Prime Minister and Acting Foreign Minister
Naji Shawkat	Interior Minister
Mahmud Subhi	Justice Minister
Rustam Haydar	Finance Minister
Taha al-Hashimi	Defence Minister
'Umar Nadhmi	Economics and Communications Minister
Salih Jabr	Education Minister

February 1940 - March 1940

Nuri al-Sa'id	Prime Minister and Acting Foreign Minister
'Umar Nadhmi	Interior Minister
Raouf al-Bahrani	Finance Minister
Taha al-Hashimi	Defence Minister
Sadiq al-Bassam	Economics Minister
Muhammad Amin Zaki	Communications and Works Minister
Sami Shawkat	Education Minister
Salih Jabr	Social Affairs Minister

March 1940 - January 1941

Rashid 'Ali al-Gailani	Prime Minister and Acting Interior Minister
Nuri al-Sa'id	Foreign Minister
Naji al-Suwaidi	Finance Minister
Taha al-Hashimi	Defence Minister
'Umar Nadhmi	Communications and Works Minister
Sadiq al-Bassam	Education Minister
Muhammad Amin Zaki	Economics Minister
Rauf al-Bahrani	Social Affairs Minister

* Abd al-Razzaq al-Hasani, *Tarikh al-Wizarat al-Iraqiyya* History of Iraqi Cabinets) Vol. V 5th ed. (Beirut, 1978)

February - April 1941

General Taha al-Hashimi	Prime Minister and acting Foreign and Defence Minister
'Umar Nadhmi	Interior Minister and Acting Justice Minister
Ali Mumtaz al-Daftari	Finance Minister and Acting Communications Works Minister
Abd al-Mahdi	Economics Minister
Hamdi al-Pachachi	Social Affairs Minister
Sadiq al-Bassam	Education Minister

April - May 1941

Rashid 'Ali al-Gailani	Prime Minister and Acting Interior Minister
Naji al-Suwaidi	Finance Minister
Naji Shawkat	Defence Minister
Musa al-Shahbandar	Foreign Minister
Ali Mahmud al-Shaikh Ali	Justice Minister
Muhammad Ali Mahmud	Communications and Works Minister
Yunis al-Sab'awi	Economics Minister
Rauf al-Bahrani	Social Affairs Minister
Muhammad Hasan Salman	Education Minister

APPENDIX 'D'

*British Cabinets 1939 - 1941**

The Cabinet - 1939

Neville Chamberlain	Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury
Ministers	
Sir John Simon	Chancellor of the Exchequer
Lord Maugham	Lord Chancellor
Sir Samuel Hoare	Secretary of State for Home Affairs
Viscount Halifax	Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs
Sir John Anderson	Lord Privy Seal
Sir Thomas Inskip	Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs
The Marquess of Zetland	Secretary of State for India and Secretary of State for Burma
Malcolm MacDonald	Secretary of State for Colonies
Admiral of the Fleet Lord Chatfield	Minister for Co-ordination of Defence
W.S. Morrison	Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
The Earl Stanhope	First Lord of Admiralty
L. Hore-Belisha	Secretary of State for War
John Colville	Secretary of State for Scotland
Oliver Stanley	President of the Board of Trade
The Earl De La Warr	President of the Board of Education
Walter E. Elliot	Minister of Health
Ernest Brown	Minister of Labour
Leslie Burgin	Minister of Transport
Sir Reginald Hugh Dorman-Smith	Minister of Agriculture

* The British Imperial Calendar and Civil List, 1939-1941 (London, HMS Office).

1940*

War Cabinet

Neville Chamberlain

Prime Minister and

First Lord of Treasury

Sir John Smith

Chancellor of the Exchequer

Viscount Halifax

Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

Sir Kingsley Wood

Lord Privy Seal

Winston Churchill

First Lord of the Admiralty

Oliver Stanley

Secretary of State for War

Sir Samuel Hoare

Secretary of State for Air

Lord Hankey

Minister without portfolio

1941**

War Cabinet

Winston Churchill

Prime Minister and

Minister of Defence

C.R. Attlee

Lord Privy Seal

Sir John Anderson

Lord President of the Council

Anthony Eden

Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

Arthur Greenwood

Minister without portfolio

Lord Beaverbrook

Minister of Aircraft Production

Sir Kingsley Wood

Chancellor of the Exchequer

Ernest Bevin

Minister of Labour and

National Service

* Ministers not in the War Cabinet are not mentioned.

** Ministers not in the War Cabinet are not mentioned.

APPENDIX 'E'

Secret Treaty signed in Baghdad on 25th April, 1941 between Rashid 'Ali al-Gailani in the name of the Regent of the Kingdom of Iraq and duly authorised by the latter and the Minister of His Majesty the King and Emperor of Italy and Abyssinia (sic) in Iraq, duly authorised by his government, and in the capacity of representative and referendum of the government of the Reich.*

Article 1

Italy and Germany recognise the government of Rashid 'Ali al-Gailani as the only national government of Iraq. The two above-mentioned countries undertake to give the above-mentioned government whole-hearted support in its efforts to annul the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of Alliance as being contrary to the principle of Iraq's national sovereignty if the royal Iraqi government should be forced to begin military hostilities against the British Empire in order to attain this object.

Article 2

Italy and Germany recognise the necessity of the union of Iraq and Syria into one single kingdom under the sovereignty of His Majesty the King of Iraq.

Article 3

Italy and Germany undertake to furnish to the royal government financial aid up to 10 milliard lire in the form of direct payments and also of long term credits for the supply of armaments, aircraft, tanks, and all kinds of military requirement necessary for the conduct of a war against the British Empire.

As a guarantee for the repayment of this sum, the royal Iraqi government undertakes to provide a mortgage on the oil wells which are on its territory and also to allow Italian and German financial advisers for the organisation and control of the Iraqi Ministry of Finance.

* This Treaty was translated from the French Language as it appears in FO 371/27099 records. Apart from this treaty, Germany and Italy had concluded another secret agreement by which each party was to secure 50% of the Iraq oil in the event of the success of the Iraqi revolt (For more details see Tillman, op. cit., p. 241).

Article 4

Of the sum mentioned the equivalent of one milliard lire is paid directly to His Excellency Rashid 'Ali al-Gailani on the signature of the present treaty.

Article 5

The Royal Iraqi Government undertakes to nationalise all exploitations of oil on its territory and to create a 'Special Exploitation Board' for these enterprises. Italy and Germany shall have a 75% participation in the management of this organization, on the basis of a convention which shall be signed as soon as nationalisation has taken place.

Article 6

The Royal Iraqi Government undertakes to furnish Italy and Germany concessions for the construction of pipelines to the Syrian coast ports which shall be leased to these two countries in accordance with article 7 of the present treaty.

All pipelines already in operation on Iraqi territory shall be placed under the "Special Board for Oil Exploitation".

Article 7

The Royal Iraqi Government undertakes to lease to Italy and Germany, after the realisation of the union of Iraq and Syria in one single kingdom, at least three ports on the Syrian coast for a period of 40 years with the adjacent zone of 25 kilometres radius. The payment of the lease shall be settled by a special agreement.

Article 8

Italy and Germany shall have the right to organise on the territories leased to them, military, naval and air bases and to construct all kinds of fortifications. Territory leased in this manner shall be excluded from the competence of Iraqi Customs organisations.

Article 9

The Royal Iraqi Government recognises Italy's special right to control and protect the Christian population throughout the territory of the future United Kingdom of Iraq and Syria. This right shall be exercised by a Commission specially appointed by the Italian Government which shall be directly accredited to H.M. the King of Iraq and Syria as the representative of the Christian population of the Iraq-Syrian Kingdom.

Article 10

If the Iraqi Government finds it necessary to ask Italy and Germany for direct military assistance for the prosecution of the war against the British Empire, this will take the form of an officially announced declaration. The Royal Iraqi Government undertakes in these circumstances to require the Powers, with which it is bound by Treaties of Alliance, to give to the Italian government complete collaboration in its intention of giving assistance to Iraq.

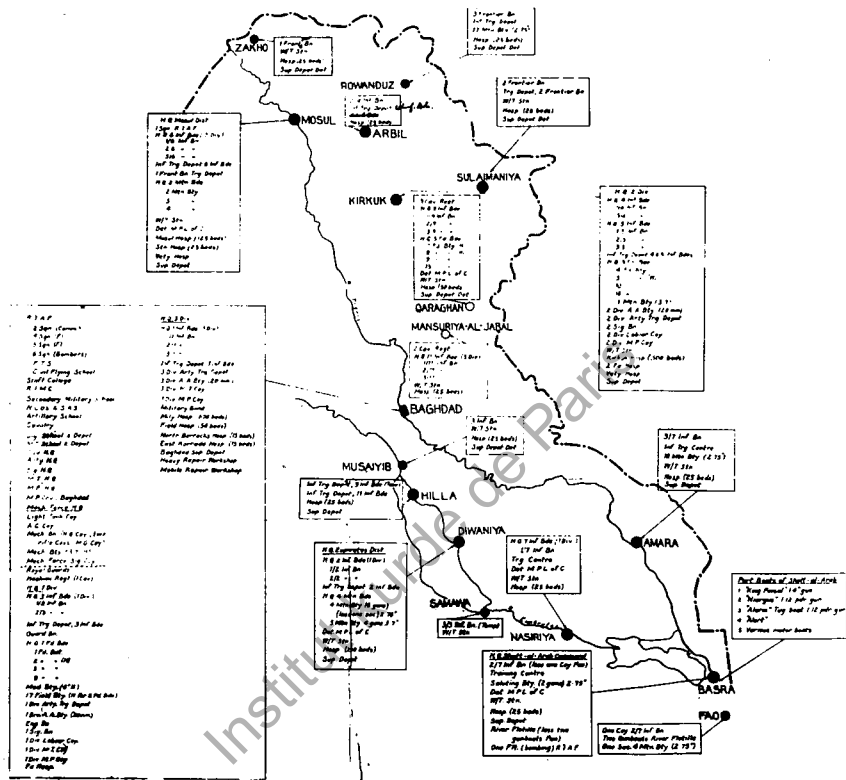
Article 11

The present treaty, with the exception of Article 4, shall only become valid after completion of the signature of a duly authorized representative of the Reich.

The present treaty is secret, but shall be replaced after the realisation of the union of Iraq and Syria, by a new treaty to be public and based on the present treaty.

Institut kurde de Paris

Location Map. Iraq Army. November 1939



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APPENDIX 'G' Air 41/30

SUMMARY OF STRENGTH AND SERVICABILITY - AIRCRAFT OF ROYAL AIR FORCE AS AT 15/2/41

Serial Unit	Function of Unit	Location of Unit	Type of Aircraft	Service- Reserve able	Unservice- able	Total	Remarks
1	No. 1 Squadron	Mosul	Pegasus Audax	10	—	10	A Crashes during period 15/11/40 to 15/12/41
2	No. 2 Squadron	Rashid	Vincent	4	1	5	Douglas 8A-4 No. 137 (repaired)
3	No. 3 Squadron	—	Rapide and Dragon	2	—	3	Breda No. 111 (repaired and now "S")
4	No. 4 Squadron	Kirkuk	Dragonfly	1	—	2	Gladiator No. 87
5	No. 5 Squadron	Rashid	Q.6	—	—	—	
6	No. 6 Squadron	Rashid	Gladiator	7*	Reduced to Cadre	8	Tiger Moths Nos. 45, 74 and 148
7	No. 7 Squadron	Rashid	Audax	3	—	3	B Aircraft put up for write off during period 15/11/40 to 15/12/41
8	Flying Training	Rashid	Breda 65	4	6†	14	
			Savoia 79	3	2†	5	
			Northrop 8A	6	2 u/s	15	
			D.H. Moth	9	3 ^s 4 under erection	31	Nil
			Magister	—	1†	1	C Aircraft written off during period 15/11/40 to 15/2/41
			Pegasus	3	—	6	
			Audax	—	3	—	

Serial Unit	Aircraft Depot	Function of Unit	Location of Unit	Type of Aircraft	Service- Reserve- able	Service- Reserve- able	Unservice- able	Total	Remarks
9	Aircraft Depot	Repair and Overhaul	Rashid	Audax	—	—	5	5	Nil
				Gladiator	—	—	3† 4	4	
				Percival	—	—	1†	1	
				Vincent	—	—	1†	1	
				Rapide	—	—	1†	1	
				Vega Gull	—	—	1†	1	
				Totals	53	13	50	116	Total aircraft
				Percentages	53	7	56	100%	
					48.27%	6.03%	45.7%		

N.B. * Since this date Gladiator 86 has crashed at Kirkuk.
 † Denotes aircraft cannot be made serviceable through lack of spares.

Note: The above is transcribed from Air H.Q. Iraq Appx. 8/8/41 to Form 540, Entry of 31 March, 1941

APPENDIX 'H'

The major Royal Air Force and Axis Aircraft which operated in Iraq during the Anglo-Iraqi War of May 1941 (information derived from Owen Thelford's *Aircraft of the R.A.F. Since 1918*, Fourth Edition (London, 1968) and Christopher Chant, *World War II Aircraft* (London, 1975)).

Serial	1
Type	Airspeed Oxford
Description	Three-seat advanced trainer
Performance & Armament	(MK.II): <i>Max speed</i> , 188 mph, <i>Climb</i> , 960 ft/min, <i>Service ceiling</i> , 19,500 ft. (MK. V): <i>Max speed</i> , 202 mph, <i>Climb</i> , 2,000 ft/min, <i>Service ceiling</i> , 21,000 ft.
Remarks	Entered service in 1937.

Serial	2
Type	Bristol Blenheim I
Description	Light bomber with a crew of 3
Performance & Armament	<i>Max speed</i> , 260 mph, <i>Cruising</i> , 200 mph, <i>Initial climb</i> 1,540 ft/min, <i>Range</i> , 1,125 miles, <i>Endurance</i> , 5.65 hrs, <i>Service Ceiling</i> , 27,800 ft., <i>Armament</i> . One fixed Browning machine gun forward and one Vickers 'K' in dorsal turret beneath nose. Bomb load 1,000 lb. internally and plus 320 lb externally.
Remarks	Entered service in 1937.

Serial	3
Type	Bristol Blenheim IV
Description	Light bomber with a crew of 3
Performance & Armament	<i>Max speed</i> , 266 mph at 11,800 ft, <i>Initial climb</i> 1,500 ft/min, <i>Range</i> , 1,460 miles, <i>Endurance</i> , 8.65 hrs, <i>Service ceiling</i> , 22,000 ft., <i>Armament</i> : one fixed 0.303" machine gun forward and twin 0.303" machine guns in dorsal turret beneath nose. Bomb load 1,000 lb. internally and plus 320 lb externally.
Remarks	It replaced the Blenheim I in 1939. In 1940 some Blenheim IVs were modified for use as fighters with Coastal Command. It was sent from Egypt to Iraq as a reinforcement.

Serial 4
Type Fairey Gordon
Description Two-seat day-bomber and general purpose aircraft.
Performance *Max speed*, 145 mph at 3,800 ft, *Cruising*, 110 mph,
& Armament *Initial climb* 1,000 ft/min, *Range*, 6,000 miles, *Service ceiling*, 22,000 ft., *Armament*: one Vickers machine gun forward and one Lewis gun after. Bomb load 460 lb.
Remarks Entered service in 1931.

Serial 5
Type Gloster Gladiator
Description Single-seat fighter.
Performance *Max speed*, 253 mph at 14,500 ft, *Cruising*, 210 mph,
& Armament *Initial climb* 2,300 ft/min, 9 1/2 mins to 20,000 ft., *Endurance*, 2 hours, *Service ceiling*, 33,000 ft., *Armament*: four 0.303" machine guns.
Remarks Entered service in 1931. They were first based in the Middle East in Feb. 1938. It was brought from No. 94 (Aden) to reinforce Habbaniya benefiting from her experience in desert warfare and in countering tribal disturbances.

Serial 6
Type Hawker Audax
Description Two-seat army co-operation biplane.
Performance *Max speed*, 170 mph at 2,380 ft, 157 mph at 13,120
& Armament ft. *Climb* 2 1/2 mins to 2,380 *Endurance*, 3 hrs. 35 mins, *Service ceiling*, 21,000 ft., *Armament*: one (0.303") Vickers gun forward and one Lewis gun (0.303") after. Four 20lb practice bombs or two two 112 lb supply containers. *Range* 470 miles.
Remarks Entered service in 1932.

Serial 7
Type Hawker Hurricane
Description Single-seat fighter and fighter bomber.
Performance (MK I) *Max speed*, 316 mph at 17,000 ft, *Climb* 6.3
& Armament min to 15,000 ft. *Service ceiling*, 35,600 ft., *Armament*:
(MK I) Eight 0.303" machine guns (MK IIC) four
20mm cannons and positions for two 250 lb or two
500 lb bombs beneath the wings.
Remarks (MK I) Entered service in 1931. (MK IIC) Was sent
from Squadron No. 94 in Aden with the Gladiators
to support Habbaniya.

Serial 8
Type Vickers Vincent
Description Three seat general purpose biplane with crew of 2.
Performance *Max speed*, 142 mph at 4,920 ft, *Initial climb* 765
& Armament ft/min. *Range*, (normal) 625 miles. (Max) 1,230
miles, *Service ceiling*, 17,000 ft., *Armament*: Two
0.303" machine guns. Bomb load 1,000 lb.
Remarks Entered service late in 1934. It was stationed in
Iraq, in Shaiba airbase with No. 244 Squadron.

Serial 9
Type Vickers Valentia
Description Troop-carrier biplane with a crew of 2 and accom-
modation of 22 troops.
Performance *Max speed*, 130 mph at 5,000 ft, *Cruising*, 117 mph,
& Armament *Initial climb* 700 ft/min, *Range* 800 miles, *Service*
ceiling, 16,250 ft., *Armament*: For bombing duties the
Valentia could be fitted with racks beneath the
wings to carry a load of 2,200 bombs.
Remarks Entered service with No. 70 Squadron at Hinaidi
(Rashid airfield at Baghdad) in 1934 moving to
Habbaniya in Nov. 1937. Valentias of No. 37
Squadron took part in the evacuation of British
subjects from Habbaniya during the Anglo-Iraqi
War of 1941.

Serial 10
 Type Vickers Wellington
 Description Long range night-bomber with a crew of 6.
 Performance (MK IC) *Max speed*, 235 mph at 15,000 *Initial Climb*
 & Armament 1,120 ft/min *Range*, 120 miles with 4,500 lb of
 bombs or 2,550 miles with 1,000 lb of bombs,
Service ceiling, 18,000 ft., (MK III) *Max speed*, 255
 mph at 12,500 ft., *Initial Climb* 930 ft/min *Range*,
 2,200 miles with 1,500 lb of bombs or 1,540 miles
 with 4,500 lb of bombs, *Service ceiling*, 19,000 ft.,
Armament: (MK IC) two 0.303" machine guns in
 each of nose and tail turrets plus two manually
 operated 0.303" machine guns in beam positions.
 Max bomb-load 4,500 lb. (MK III) Two 0.303"
 guns in nose turret, four 0.303" guns in tail turret
 and two manually operated 0.303" machine guns
 in beam positions. Max bomb-load, 4,500 lbs.

Remarks The first production Wellington I (24212) made its
 initial flight on 23 Dec. 1937. In Sept. 1940
 Wellingtons of Nos. 37, 38 and 70 Squadrons
 became the first long-range bombers in the Middle
 East, where they formed No. 202 Group.

Serial 11
 Type de Havilland Tiger Moth
 Description Two-seat elementary biplane trainer with a crew of
 2.
 Performance *Max speed*, 109 mph at 1,000 ft, *Cruising*, 93 mph.
 & Armament *Climb* 673 ft/min, 23 1/2 mins to 10,000 ft. *Range*
 302 miles, *Endurance*, 3 hours, *Service Ceiling*, 13,600
 ft.

Remarks One of the world's most famous training aircraft.
 First introduced in Feb. 1931.

Serial 12
 Type Miles Magister
 Description Two-seat elementary trainer.
 Performance *Max speed*, 132 mph at 1,000 ft, *Cruising*, 123 mph,
 & Armament *Initial climb* 850 ft/min, 9 1/4 mins to 10,000 ft.
Range, 380 miles, *Service ceiling*, 18,000 ft.,

Remarks Used by R.A.F. in Oct. 1937.

Serial 13
Type Percival Proctor
Description Four-seat radio trainer and communication aircraft.
Performance & Armament *Max speed*, 160 mph at sea level, *Cruising*, 140 mph, at 3,000 ft. *Initial climb* 700 ft/min, *Range* 500 miles, *Service ceiling*, 14,000 ft.
Remarks The first true military version Percival I was produced in Oct. 1939.

Serial 14
Type Northrop 8A
Description Fighter Bomber
Performance & Armament *Max speed*, 255 mph, *Range*, 910 miles with 1,800lb bomb-load, *Cruising speed*, 200 miles at 10,000 ft., *Armament*: 5 x 0.30 inch Browning machine guns.
Remarks American manufacture. Iraq purchased 15 Northrop from the U.S.A. during 1940.

Serial 15
Type Percival Vega Gull
Description Communication aircraft.
Performance & Armament *Max speed*, 174 mph *Range*, 660 miles, *Service ceiling*, 16,000 ft.
Remarks Developed from the earlier Gull. It first appeared in 1935.

Serial 16
Type Sopwith Dragon
Description One-seat biplane.
Performance & Armament *Max speed*, 150 mph, *Service Ceiling*, 25,000 ft., *Range* 500 miles.
Remarks Produced in U.K. in 1919 and designed for transport.

Serial 17
Type Dragonfly
Description One-seat biplane.
Performance & Armament *Max speed*, 147 miles at sea level, *Cruising Speed* 125 miles at 1,000 ft. *Range*, 600 miles.
Remarks Produced in U.K. for transport.

Serial 18
 Type Heinkel He III-20/R3
 Description Five-seat night bomber.
 Performance *Max speed*, 270 mph at 19,685 ft. 227 mph at sea
 & Armament level *Cruising speed*, unknown, *Climb* 23 mins 30 secs
 to 19,685 ft, *Service ceiling*, 27,887 ft. Range, 1,280
 miles at 239 mph at 16,404 ft. *Armament*, Defensive,
 three flexible twin 13.1mm. MG. 131 Machine
 guns, one in each nose, ventral and dorsal positions,
 and two flexible twin 7.92 mm. MG 81Z machine-
 guns, in two beam positions. Offensive: up to 4,409
 lbs of bombs.
 Remarks German aircraft, built first in 1935 for military
 purposes.

Serial 19
 Type Messerschmitt 110
 Description Two or three seat heavy fighter.
 Performance *Max speed*, 349 mph at 22,966 ft., 294 mph at sea
 & Armament level, *Cruising speed*, 301 mph at 22,966 ft. *Initial*
Climb, 2,165 fpm, *Climb*, 10 mins 12 secs to 19,685
 ft., *Service Ceiling*, 32,808 ft., *Range* 565 miles at 301
 mph at 22,966 ft. *Armament*: two fixed 20mm. MG
 FF cannon with 180 pounds per gun and four fixed
 7.92 mm MG17 machine guns with 1,000 rounds
 per gun in the nose, and one flexible 7.92 mm.
 MG15 machine guns with 950 rounds in the rear
 cockpit.
 Remarks German aircraft which first flew in May 1936.

Serial 20
 Type Savoia Marchetti SM 79.
 Description Four-seat medium and torpedo bomber.
 Performance & Armament *Max speed*, 267 mph at 13,123 ft, 224 mph at sea level, *Cruising speed* 230 mph at 19,685 ft, *Climb* 19 mins. and 45 secs. to 16,404 ft. *Service ceiling*, 22,966 ft. *Range* 1,234 miles. *Armament*: defensive, one fixed 12.7 mm. Breda SAFATA machine gun with 350 rounds in the forward fuselage, one flexible 12.7 mm. Breda SAFATA machine-gun with 500 rounds in the ventral position, and one 7.7 mm. Lewis machine-gun for beam defensive. *Offensive*: up to 2,756 lbs of bombs or two 17.17 in torpedos.

Remarks Italian aircraft. It was Italy's best medium bomber of the WW2 period. In 1937 it was first used as a launching aircraft.

Serial 21
 Type Breda 65
 Description Single engine monoplane with crew of 3.
 Performance & Armament *Max speed*, 225 mph at 16,400 ft., *Cruising speed*, 160 mph at 13,500, *Range* 470 miles with 880 lb. bomb-load. *Armament*: 2 x 12.7 mm machine-guns and 3 x 7.7 machine-guns.

Remarks Italian ground attack aircraft. There was one Iraqi Squadron of Breda 65 which was composed of 14 aircraft including 6 unservicable, stationed at Rashid aerodrome at Baghdad.

Serial 22
 Type Fiat CR42
 Description One-seat fighter biplane.
 Performance & Armament *Max speed*, 220 mph at 9,842 ft. *Cruising speed* 196 mph at 15,748 ft. *Range*, 485 miles. *Armament* 2 x 12.7 mm machine-guns.

Remarks Italian fighter. A refined version of the CR32. Entered service in 1940 and continued in production until 1942. Arrived in Iraq at Kirkuk aerodrome on 28 May during the conflict.

APPENDIX 'I'

AIR 41/30, Appendix 'E'

AIRCRAFT STRENGTH OF (the R.A.F.) UNITS IN IRAQ

		At start of Operations	At end of Operations
No. 4 Service Flying Training School	AUDAX	32	25
	GORDON	8	7
	OXFORD	29	25
	GLADIATOR	9	7
	BLENHEIM I	1	
Communication Flight	VALENTIA	3	3
	WELLINGTON	18	15
Nos. 37 (B) and 70 (B) Squadron Detachments			
No. 203 (F) Squadron Detachments	BLENHEIM IV (F)	4 (arr. 3rd May)	3
No. 94 (F) Squadron Detachment	GLADIATOR	6 (arr. 8th May)	4
	HURRICANE	4 (arr. 16th May)	6
		2 (arr. 21st May)	
		1 (arr. 28th May)	
No. 84 (B) Squadron	BLENHEIM IV (B)	4 (arr. 12th May)	11
		2 (arr. 13th May)	
		2 (arr. 16th May)	
		2 (arr. 23rd May)	
		3 (arr. 24th May)	
No. 244 (B) Squadron Shaiba	VINCENT	12	

Transcribed from Appendix 'A' to A-V-M d'Albiac's Report. "Ops, in Iraq - 2 to 31 May 1941" (A.H.B. 11/3/3).

APPENDIX 'J'

AIR 31/30, Appendix 'F'

Type	Shot Down	Destroyed on Ground	Other Causes
Audax	4	3	1
Gordon	-	1	-
Oxford	1	3	-
Gladiator	1	2	1
Hurricane	1	-	-
Wellington	1	1	12
BLENHEIM IV	1	1	1

NOTE:- In addition to the above operational aircraft lost, the following were also destroyed on the ground at Habbaniya by enemy action:-

- 1 Wellesley
- 1 Moth
- 2 Harts

APPENDIX 'K'

WO 201/125

SENIOR NAVAL
OFFICER
PERSIAN GULF
1st May 1941

SCHEME "GOLD"

REVIEW OF SITUATION

The existing Iraq Government, essentially under military direction appears to be preparing for hostile action against Habbaniya; we shall regard any such action as a declaration of war.

2. In which case it is intended to:

- (a) Occupy Basra area militarily.
- (b) Move only against Iraqi Military Forces and leave the existing administration in offices.
Operation (a) will be known as "GOLD"
Operation (b) will be known as "COPPER"

NAVAL TASKS

3. The Naval tasks are:—

- (i) To ensure the safety of the British Consulate at ASHAR and hulk opposite ABADAN (Appendix I).
- (ii) To capture FAO (Appendix II).
- (iii) To neutralise or destroy the Iraqi Gunboats (Appendix III).
- (iv) To take offensive action in co-operation with Fleet Air Arm if required (Appendix IV).
- (v) To provide water transport for certain military units (Appendix V).
- (vi) To prevent enemy reinforcements crossing the QARMAT ALI Bridge (Appendix VI).

4. The execution of all or any of these tasks may be ordered by the appropriate Code Words in the Appendices. In so far as the Navy is concerned the code word "GOLD", which will be made by general signal, is a *preparatory* order only.

OWN FORCES AND DISPOSITION

5. *Naval.* The forces available for the Naval Tasks are disposed as follows:

H.M.S. "EMERALD, OFF Ashar,

H.M.S. "YARRA and
one light Tug

H.M.S. "COCKCHAFFER".

At Outer Bar

H.M.I.S. "LAWRENCE"

At Outer Bar

H.M.S. "HERMES"

H.M.S. "ENTERPRISE"

R.F.A. "PEARLEAF"

(oiler)

} At Marine Dockyard
} buoy

} Force "T" - operating
} miles South of Rooka
} Float.

6. *Military.* A detachment of 100 Gurkhas for the capture of FAO.

ENEMY FORCES

7. The enemy forces likely to be met are:

4 Iraqi Gunboats. In Shatt-al-Arab, believed to be above BASRA, but continually moving.

About 300 Iraqi soldiers with two 18 pounder guns and some Bren guns at FAO.

About 2000 Iraqi troops and some mountain artillery in the vicinity of Qarmat Ali.

8. Enemy *air attack* must be expected and all ships are to have A.A. Armament in readiness by day.

COMMODORE

APPENDIX 'K'

WO 201/1254

APPENDIX 'A'

DISPOSITION OF NAVAL FORCES IN IRAQ

In the SHATT-AL-ARAB river off BASRA

H.M.S. Emerald	Cruiser	Six 6" guns. Four 4" guns.
H.M.A.S. Yarra	Sloop	Three 4" guns
H.M.S. Cockchafer	River gunboat	Two 6" guns, one 3" gun, A/A
H.M.S. Seabelle	Converted yacht	One 3" H.A. gun

Institut kurde de Paris

APPENDIX 'K'

WO 201/1254

APPENDIX "B"

DISPOSITION OF BRITISH MILITARY FORCES IN BASRA-SHAIBA AREA

I. BASRA

Force H.Q.

H.Q.R.A. 9 Ind, Div.

3 Fd. Regt. less one tp.

H.Q. 20 Ind. Inf. Bde.

3/11 Sikh Regt.

2/7 Gurkha Rifles.

26 Fd. Amb. less one coy.

1 F. Hyg. Sec.

20 Ind. Inf. Bde. Tpt. Coy.

35 G.R. Tpe. Coy.

22 Supp. Pers. Coy.

37 Ord. Mob. W/Shop.

48 F.P.O.

Dett. H.Q. Force "SYBIL"

Dett. H.Q. (Works) Base Sub-area.

Dett. L. of C. Telegraphs.

H.Q. 10 Div. Engineers.

One Fd. Coy.

One Artisan Work Coy.

One Dock Sec.

One F.A. Office.

Dett. Base Movement Control Gp.

Dett. H.Q. 2nd Echelon

I.C.G.H.

One Depot Med. Stores.

Three Mess Units (Officers).

Three Mess Units (W.O.s and Sgts).

6 Coy Iraq Levies

Half Sec. 4 sec. 1 Armd. } Stationed in R.A.F. Camp.

Car Coy

II. SHAIBA

Dett, K.O.R.R. (80 Officers and men)

One tp. 3 Fd. Regt. R.A.

One bty. 'K' A. Tk. Regt.

2/8 Gurkha Rifles.

One Coy 26 Fd. Ambulance

9 Div. Tps. Tpt. Coy.

Base Details, I.A.O.C.

28 Ord. Mob. W/Shop.

7 M.A. Sec.

One Fd. Park Coy.

One Sec. Rly. Survey Coy.

One Coy. 26 Fd. Amb.

5 Coy (Arab) Iraq Levies.

Half sec. 4 1 Armd. Car Coy.

Institut kurde de Paris

APPENDIX 'K'

WO 201/1254

APPENDIX "B"

DISPOSAL OF BRITISH MILITARY FORCES IN IRAQ

1. **BASRA**

H.Q. 10 Ind. Div. (Comdr, A/Q, GI. and Cipher Offr.)

H.Q.R.A/9 Ind. Div.

3rFd. Redt. R.A. less one tp.

H.Q. 20 Ind. Inf. Bde.

3/11 Sikh Regt.

2/7 Gurkha Rifles

2/8 Gurkha Rifles

26 Fd. Amulance

1 Fd./ Hyg. Sec

9 Div. Tps. Tpt. Coy.

20 Ind. Inf. Bde. Tpt. Coy

35 G.P. Tpt. Coy

Base details I.A.O.C.

22 Supp. Pers. Coy.

28 Ord. Mob. W/Shop.

37 Ord. Mob. W/Shop.

7 M.A. Sec.

48 F.P.O.

2. **SHAIBA**

One tp. Fd. Regt. R.A.

2. **HABBANIYA**

Dett. K.O.R.R.

APPENDIX 'K'

WO 201/1254

APPENDIX "C"

DISPOSITION OF R.A.F. IN BASRA-SHAIBA AREA

1. BASRA
No. 6 Coy. Iraq Levies.
2. **SHAIBA**
 - (a) *Aircraft*

12 Vincents (No. 244 Sqn. Stationed at SHAIBA	
3 Audax	at SHAIBA ex HABBANIYA
8 Gordons	Available from
3 Gladiators	HABBANIYA
 - (b) *R.A.F. Armoured Cars*
One section armd. Cars (six cars, two armd. six-wheelers
two W/T tenders).
 - (c) *Ground troops*
No 5 Coy. Iraq Levies

APPENDIX 'L'

WO 201/1257, Appendix 'C'

ORDER OF BATTLE OF IRAQ FORCES

As known on 31.5.40

<i>1st Division</i>	<i>Location</i>
H.Q. 1 Div.	BAGHDAD
1 Div. Cav. Sqdn.	
2 Inf. Bde. (temp, att. 4 Div)	MUSAYIB
3 Inf. Bde.	BAGHDAD
1 Fd. Arty Bde (3 Btys).	BAGHDAD
4 Mtn. Arty Bde (3 Btys). H.Q. and 2 Btys. temp att 4 Div. and one Bty temp att 3 Div)	DIWANIYAH
1 AA/AT Bty (20 mm)	BAGHDAD
1 Eng Bn (one FD Pk and 2 Fd Coys)	BAGHDAD
1 Div Mobile Repair Shop	BAGHDAD
1 Sign Bn	BAGHDAD
1 Div. H.Q.M.T.	BAGHDAD
1 Div. M.T. Coy	BAGHDAD
1 Div. M.T. Coy	BAGHDAD
1 Fd Amb	BAGHDAD
24 guns	BAGHDAD
Proposed expansion 1940/41 – one Fd Bde (4 Btys) plus 16 guns.	
 <i>2nd Division</i>	
H.Q. 2 Div.	KIRKUK
2 Div. Cav. Sqdn.	KIRKUK
4 Inf. Bde.	MOSUL
5 Inf. Bde.	KIRKUK
6 Inf. Bde.	
3 Fd. Arty Bde. (4 Btys)	
9 Fd. Arty Bde. (3 Btys)	
2 Mtn Arty Bde. (3 Btys)	MOSUL
2 AA/AT Bty. (20mm)	KIRKUK
Fd Coy Engineers	KIRKUK
2 Sgn Bn	KIRKUK
2 Div. H.Q.M.T.	KIRKUK
2 Div. M.T. Coy	KIRKUK
2 Mobile repair shops	KIRKUK
2 Labour Coy	KIRKUK
2 Div. M.P. Coy	KIRKUK
2 Fd. Amb.	KIRKUK

Attached

1 Frontier Bn
2 Frontier Bn
3 Frontier Bn

ZAKHO
SULAIMANIAYH
RUWANDIZ
(normal)

(moved to vicinity of RAYAT for training
SULAIMANIAYAH
DIANA near
RUWANDIZ

52 guns

Proposed expansion 1940/41 - A second Fd Coy Engineers to be raised

3rd Division

H.Q. 3 Div

3 Div Cav Sqdn

1 Inf Bde

9 Inf Bde

11 Inf Bde

5 Fd Arty Bde (4 Btys)

7 Fd Arty Bde (3 Btys)

1/6 Mtn Bty (3.7 Hows)

3 AA/AT Bty

2 Fd Coy Engineers

3 Sqn Bn

3 Div. H.Q.M.T.

3 Mobile repair workshops

3 Labour Coy

3 Div. M.P. Coy

32 guns.

BAGHDAD
QARAGHAN
MANSURIYAT
AL-JABAL
QARAGHAN
BAGHDAD

BAGHDAD
BAGHDAD
BAGHDAD
BAGHDAD
BAGHDAD
BAGHDAD
BAGHDAD

Proposed expansion 1940/41 - 6 Mtn Bde (less one Bty) to be raised plus 8 guns.

4th Division

H.Q. 4 Div

7 Inf. Bde.

1/14 Inf. Bde.

15 Inf. Bde.

DIWANIYAH
BASRA

Proposed expansion for 1940/41 - 14 Bde H.Q. and two Bns to be raised. 16 Inf Bde to be raised.

N.B. At present one Inf. Bde from this Div. is at BASRA

Attached to 4 Div.

18 Mtn Bty 2.75

4 guns

Mobile Force

H.Q. Cav Bde

Baghdad To be raised dates
uncertain

Cav Bde (3 regts)

Baghdad One motorised M.G. Bn

Motorised Inf. Bn.

Baghdad One Tank Coy (if tanks
can be provided from
U.K.)

Lt. Tank Coy

Armd Car Coy

Baghdad One Mech Arty Bde
(3.7 How)

1 Mech Bty 3.7 Hows

Baghdad

Mech Force M.T. Coy

Baghdad Plus 12 guns

Army Troops

Royal Body guard (1 sqn. Cav. and 1 Coy Inf.)

Guard Bn.

1 Med Bty. 6 in. Hows

4 guns

One Bty. 25 pdrs (if and when guns can be supplied from U.K.
plus 4 guns).

Strengths

Excluding recruits at Depots

Establishment 1,336 officers

34,951 O.R.s

Actual Strength 1,100 officers

28,448 O.R.s

Deficiency 226

6,503

% of deficiency on Establishment

Officers 16.9%

O.R.s 18.6%

Depots

Recruits 2,756 Officers

Reservists 930 Officers

3,686 Officers Total Strength O.R.s 32,134

% deficiency in Establishment 8.06

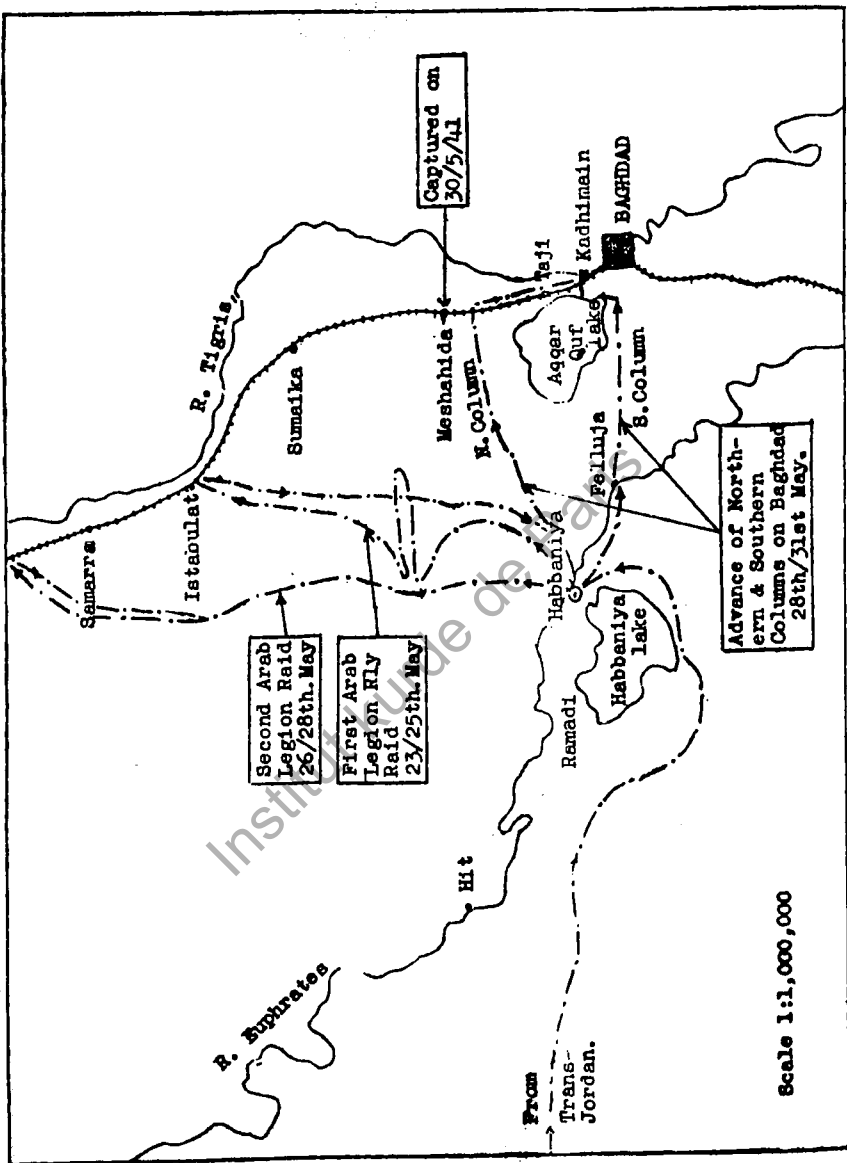
Totals

120 guns plus 40 guns to be added = 160 guns

36 Bns plus 5 Inf. Bns

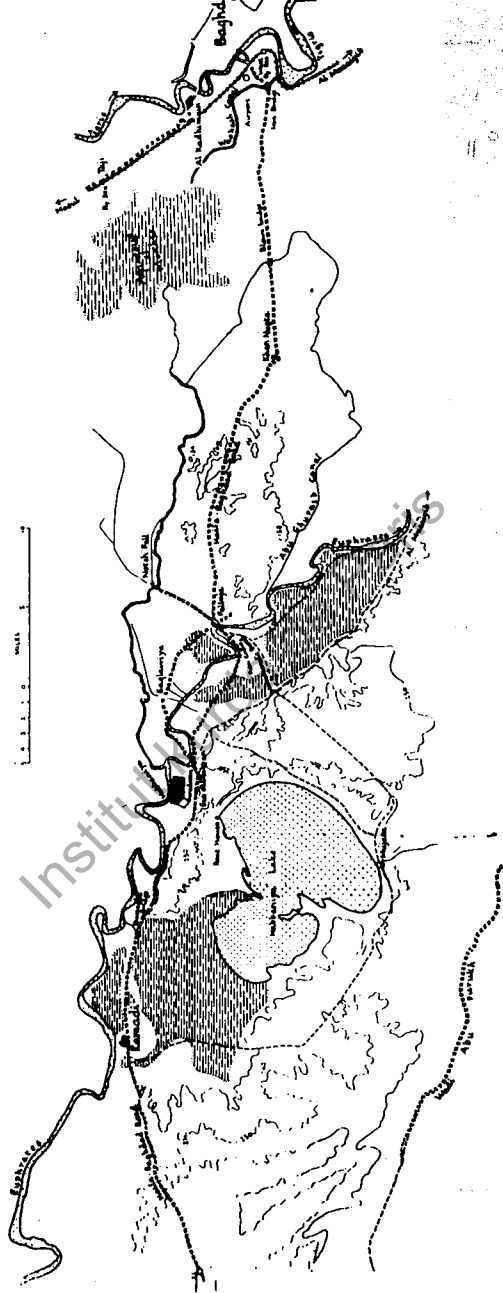
1 Motorised N.G. = 42 Bns

+ Excluded AA/AT Btys, which are Infantry Weapons



Ramadi - Baghdad

with ground surface in form of heights in feet



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APPENDIX 'R'

AI 41/30 Appendix 'C'

CYPHER MESSAGE

To: A.O.C.
From: CORNWALLIS
Date: 1 May 1941

Grateful if you can arrange print in Arabic several thousand leaflets to drop from aircraft over Baghdad tomorrow if and when fighting starts. City is being worked up by intense propoganda. Text follows.

"Citizens! Rashid Ali and his Golden Square of army officers betrayed you for German gold into fighting with your ally Great Britain. Keep calm. Believe none of their lies. Do not make crowds. The British are truthful and strong and will soon put all enemies of your country to flight. The British will then ensure that the noble 'Iraqi nation regains its accustomed peace with honour in alliance with its friend Great Britain and under its independent and constitutional 'Iraqi Government. I promise it. Long Live King Faisal.'

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Archival sources

(1) *Collections*

Public Record Office

Admiralty : Ships' Logs (ADM53)

These are navigational records concerned only incidentally with operations. They comprise the logs of battleships, aircraft carriers, cruisers and armed merchant cruisers for 1939 and early 1940 only. H.M. Ships do not keep war diaries.

Air Ministry : Chief of Air Staff Papers (Air 8)

1916-1963. This class consists of records formerly held in the office of the Chief of the Air Staff. They deal with Air Force policy and planning. Includes complete records of Cairo conference.

Air Ministry : Overseas Commands (Air 23)

1916-1966. This class is composed of reports and correspondence on operations of Iraq, India, Aden, Middle East and Far East Commands. Includes War Diaries of Air Headquarters, RAF Iraq, 1923-1930.

Air Ministry : Directorate of Intelligence and other Intelligence Papers (Air 40)

1926-1958. These are reports and photographs on air intelligence - military, political and civil - of all allied and enemy aircraft and oilfields and other details.

Air Ministry : Air Historical Branch : Narratives and Monographs (Air 41)

1942-1950. These are historical and narrative studies of aerial warfare in Iraq in May 1941, Volume III, file 3. Other Middle Eastern campaigns are extensively described in other seven volumes.

Cabinet Office : Historical Section : Official War Histories : Narratives (Military) (Cab 44)

This section includes narratives on the 1939-1945 war compiled from such records as formation war diaries, answers to questionnaires, and interviews with participants.

Cabinet Office : War Cabinet (Cab 65)

This class comprises the War Cabinet minutes, including the proceedings of the War Cabinet and Confidential Annexes.

Cabinet Office : War Cabinet, Chiefs of Staff Committee : Minutes of Meetings (Cab 79)

Unfortunately, files relating to the following periods are missing:

From:	1939 September 3rd
To:	1940 February 7th
From:	1940 May 2nd
To:	1941 April 19th

Cabinet Office : War Cabinet, Chiefs of Staff Committee : Memoranda (Cab 80)

This is composed of memoranda of the Chiefs of Staff Committee and of the various sub-committees including those of the Deputy Chiefs of Staff.

Colonial Office : Original Correspondence Iraq (CO 730)

1921-1932. Composed of correspondence between London and Baghdad and interdepartmental despatches on Iraq.

Foreign Office : Political (FO 371)

Correspondence between London and Baghdad and interdepartmental correspondence on Iraq. But this is not exclusive to Iraq. It contains correspondence of the Foreign Office relating to Turkey, Eastern (General) and Iraq between 1906 and 1950.

Foreign Office, Confidential Print (FO 406) 1920-35. These are papers relating to Arabia, Iraq, Palestine, Syria and the Levant.

Foreign Office : Embassy and Consular Archives, Iraq:

Correspondence (FO 624)

1933-1952. Mainly composed of correspondence of the post-mandate period.

Foreign Office : Private Collections, Ministers and Officials : Various (FO 800)

1824-1954. Private Papers of Secretary of State, Foreign Office Officials, and members of the Diplomatic Service 1900-1935.

Foreign Office : Ministry of Economics (FO 837)

1931-1951. These are files of the Ministry of Economic Warfare and its successor departments in the Foreign Office mostly for the period 1939 to 1945.

Foreign office : Avon Papers (FO 954)

These are photographic copies of the private papers of Anthony Eden, later Earl of Avon, as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs from 1936 to 1938 and 1940 to 1945. The original papers have been deposited in the Library of Birmingham University, where Lord Avon's personal and private papers are also deposited (see below).

War Office : War of 1939-1945 : War Diaries : Middle East Force (WO 169)

These diaries contain the daily record of events, reports on operations, intelligence summaries etc. of the headquarters organisation and unit commanders of British forces serving in the Middle East, including Aden, East Africa, Sudan, Malta, Persia and Iraq.

War Office : War of 1939-1945 : Military Headquarters Papers : Middle East Forces (WO 201)

This class consists of files of General Headquarters Middle East Forces and covers operations of the British Dominion and Allied Forces in the Middle East theatres, including the Balkans. A small collection of files which originated in the Political Intelligence Centre, Middle East is included also.

War Office : War of 1939-1945 : Combined Intelligence Summaries (WO 208)

This class is composed of weekly Intelligence Summaries and Reviews of the military situation.

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In this book, the author examines the political and military aspects of the Anglo-Iraqi conflict of 1941, set against the wider background of the Second World War. The work contains an in-depth study of the British military campaign in Iraq, and the mood of the people in the aftermath of the suppression of the revolt.

Drawing primarily on British and German archival material, along with published accounts and personal interviews from Iraqi sources, the author interprets British reaction to the radical nationalist movement between 1939 and 1941. Within this study he examines the key question: "whether Germany and Italy planned to drive the British out of that country and so out of the whole Fertile Crescent, this in collaboration with Rashid 'Ali and the coup leaders of 1941."

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