

ANNEX 1

IRAQ – 1583 TO 1960

This text, on early British involvement in Iraq, was prepared by Professor Sir Martin Gilbert before he was taken seriously ill in 2012. Sir Martin died on 3 February 2015.

The text that follows is a tribute to Sir Martin's valuable contribution to the work of the Inquiry.

The Ottoman years

1. The sources for this survey of British involvement with Iraq from 1583 to 1960 are principally the Admiralty, Cabinet Office, Colonial Office, Foreign Office, India Office, Treasury, War Office, Ministry of Defence and Air Ministry archives at the National Archives. Other sources include the private papers of H.H. Asquith, Winston Churchill and David Lloyd George. Published sources include *Special Report: Progress of Iraq, During the period 1920-1931*. Colonial Office Paper 58 (His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1931); A.J. Barker, *The Neglected War: Mesopotamia, 1914-1918* (Faber and Faber, 1967); Lieutenant-General Sir Aylmer Haldane, *The Insurrection in Mesopotamia, 1920* (William Blackwood, 1922); Philip Willard Ireland, *Iraq: A Study in Political Development* (Jonathan Cape, 1937); and Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *Iraq, 1900 to 1950* (Oxford University Press, 1953); Robert Lyman, *Iraq 1941: The Battles for Basra, Habbaniya, Fallujah and Baghdad* (Osprey Publishing, 2006); Brigadier-General F.J. Moberly, *The Campaign in Mesopotamia, 1914-1918* (4 volumes, Historical Section, Committee of Imperial Defence, 1925); Daniel Silberfarb, *The Twilight of British Ascendancy in the Middle East: A Case Study of Iraq, 1941-1950* (St Martin's Press, 1994); and Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq: Contriving King and Country* (I.B. Tauris, 2007). Certain sources are given in the footnotes.

2. Britain's interest in what is today Iraq goes back more than four hundred years, to 1583 when an English merchant, John Eldred, left London on a five-year journey that took him to Baghdad.¹ The first British military involvement came in 1775, when the Ottoman Turks faced a sustained Persian attack on the Shatt al-Arab waterway. The Turkish Sultan asked Britain to defend the waterway; the British Prime Minister Lord North agreed, and the Royal Navy drove the Persians out of the Sultan's domains.

3. Under the Ottomans, what is now northern Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan was within the province of Mosul. What is now central Iraq was the province of Baghdad, and southern Iraq the province of Basra. All three provinces were to become the British Mandate of Mesopotamia (the Land of Two Rivers – the Tigris and Euphrates), later known as Iraq.

¹ John Eldred, *Journal of His Voyage* (in Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations*, first published in 1599).

There was a fourth Ottoman province, running along the Arabian shore of the Persian Gulf, with its small port of Kuwait.

4. In 1805 the East India Company appointed its first Resident in Baghdad: Claudius James Rich, who was fluent in Arabic. A visiting Briton later wrote: “Mr Rich was universally considered to be the most powerful man in Baghdad; and some even questioned whether the Pasha himself would not shape his conduct according to Mr Rich’s suggestions and advice rather than as his own council might wish.” Mesopotamian tribesmen frequently appealed to the British Resident for support against the Ottoman authorities.²

Britain, Basra and al-Faw

5. In 1861, with the support of the British Government, a British merchant shipping company established the Euphrates and Tigris Steam Navigation Company. Most of the river steamers on the Tigris were built in British yards. With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, Basra, and al-Faw at the mouth of the Gulf, became an important staging post for British naval and mercantile traffic with India. The fort at al-Faw had been built by local Ottoman officials, suspicious of British territorial ambitions in the Shatt al-Arab.³ By 1890, nine-tenths of the steamer tonnage using Basra for Indian Ocean trade was British.

Anglo-German rivalry

6. In 1899, to counter a planned German railway terminus and naval base in Basra, the ruler of Kuwait promised Britain that he would cede none of Kuwait’s territory without Britain’s agreement. When in 1902, Turkish forces advanced from Basra into Kuwait, they were driven off by a British gunboat. In 1904 a British Resident arrived in Kuwait to uphold Britain’s authority there.

7. In 1913 the British decided to separate Kuwait from the influence of the Ottoman authorities in Basra, of which Kuwait was then an integral administrative part. Under the Anglo-Ottoman Convention of July 1913, Kuwait became a separate administrative district.

8. As German pressure for influence in Baghdad grew, a British irrigation engineer, Sir William Willcocks, was appointed Consultant for Irrigation to the Ottoman Government. As a result of Willcocks’ vision, the Hindiya Barrage was built on the Euphrates, bringing 3,500,000 acres under year-round irrigation. Opened in November 1913, it is still one of the engineering marvels of Iraq.

²J.S. Buckingham, *Travels in Mesopotamia*, Volume 2, page 200, first published in 1928.

³From 1985 to 1988 (during the Iran-Iraq War) the Iraqi port of al-Faw was occupied by Iran.

Oil

9. In 1912, the Royal Navy changed from coal to oil. To secure this oil for Britain, in the spring of 1914 the First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, acquired for the British Government a 51 percent share in the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (in 1904 a British prospector had discovered oil in Persia, forty miles from the Mesopotamian border; in 1909 the oilfield was acquired by the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, whose principal shareholders were British). The British Government's 51 percent share in Anglo-Persian Oil made Basra, and al-Faw at the head of the Gulf, a vital British interest.

War and conquest in Mesopotamia

10. On 29 October 1914, in the early months of the First World War, two German warships, flying the Turkish flag, bombarded Russia's Black Sea ports. Britain, allied to Russia, ordered Turkey to end the bombardments. The British ultimatum expired on 31 October. On 7 November a British and Indian military force landed at al-Faw.⁴ Marching a hundred miles inland and crossing the Persian border, it occupied the British Government-owned Persian oilfields. It then marched back into Mesopotamia, to Basra, which it captured on 22 November.

11. That November, the Ottoman Government having declared that the Anglo-Ottoman Convention of 1913 was null and void, Britain, to protect its interests at the head of the Persian Gulf, declared Kuwait an independent sheikhdom under British protection.

12. In London, on 19 March 1915, the War Council – headed by the Prime Minister, H.H. Asquith – discussed various plans to partition the Ottoman Empire once it had been defeated. Only Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary, opposed partition and annexation, telling the War Council that he wanted Britain to make a good impression on the British Empire's Muslim subjects (of whom there were more than fifty million in India) by setting up an independent Muslim State in all the Arab regions of the Turkish Empire: Arabia, Syria and Mesopotamia.⁵

13. Fighting against the Turks continued. In August 1915, after the British occupied Nasiriyah, a civil administration was set up in Basra for the whole southern area.

14. A steady stream of reinforcements reached Basra during the second half of 1916. That October, Lieutenant William Slim (a future Field Marshal) who had been badly wounded at Gallipoli a year earlier, arrived. In the fighting that followed, he was wounded again, and awarded the Military Cross. Slim remembered Basra as "a very unpleasant place to be".⁶

⁴ British troops again landed at al-Faw on 20 March 2003, at 2200 hours (local time), when 40 Commando, Royal Marines and US Marines came ashore, followed within an hour by 42 Commando Royal Marines.

⁵ War Council, 19 March 1915: Cabinet Office papers, 22/1.

⁶ Quoted by Lt Gen Sir Graeme Lamb, Public hearing, 9 December 2009.

15. On 11 March 1917, as British forces approached Baghdad, and the Turkish Army fled, the city was given over to mass looting by local Arabs and Kurds. After the American Consul appealed to the British to intervene, British and Indian soldiers fired over the heads of the looters and dispersed them.

16. On March 12, a British proclamation announced: “O, people of Baghdad ... Our armies do not come into your cities and lands as conquerors or enemies, but as liberators”. The people of Baghdad were then invited “through your Nobles and Elders and Representatives, to participate in the management of your own civil affairs in collaboration with the political representatives of Great Britain who accompanied the British Army so that you might be united with your kinsmen in north, east, south and west in realizing the aspirations of your Race”.

17. In August 1917 the Mesopotamia Commission – the first Iraq Inquiry – set up by the British Government a year earlier, published its report of the first two years’ fighting. Among the Report’s criticisms were equipment that was “not up to the standards of modern warfare”, a “lamentable breakdown of the care of the sick and wounded”, the “isolation and ignorance” of those responsible for the care of the wounded, a standard of administration based on “the routine method of normal times rather than to the impressment of new ideas”, army organisation that was “backward in every particular”, and what it called (with regard to some of the witnesses) “misuse of reticence”. Neither in the organisation of industrial resources for the purposes of war, nor in general finances, the Report asserted, “was sufficient alacrity shown during the first year and a half of war.” The overarching failure: “a lack of plans and a lack of preparations”.⁷

18. On 30 October 1918, Turkey accepted an armistice. When it came into force the following day, the three Ottoman provinces of Mosul, Baghdad and Basra came under British military rule. The human cost of the four-year campaign had been high: more than 31,000 British and Indian dead and at least 25,000 Turkish dead.

19. With the defeat of Turkey, the British confirmed the status of Kuwait as an independent sheikdom under British protectorate. A month later, under the Anglo-French Settlement of 1-4 December 1918, Mesopotamia and Kurdistan – known collectively as Iraq – became a British-ruled entity.

Insurgency and the British Mandate for Iraq

20. Iraqis were divided on whether Britain should lead them towards independence or whether they should seek immediate independence by force. In Baghdad, the Sunni-dominated al-Ahd Society was a centre of anti-British (and anti-Kurdish) activity. Al-Ahd also opposed the political aspirations of the Shia in the south. Another Sunni grouping, led by Nuri Said, an officer in the Ottoman Army who had been active in the Arab Revolt of 1916-18 against the Turks (a revolt that originated in the Ottoman Red

⁷ Command Paper 8610 of 1917.

Sea province of Hedjaz, now part of Saudi Arabia) looked to British rule to secure the unification of Iraq. Nuri Said, a supporter of British influence, was to serve seven times as Prime Minister of Iraq during the following thirty-five years.

21. Seeking immediate independence, first the Baghdad Sunni, then the southern Shia, and finally the Kurds in the north, attacked British garrisons throughout Iraq. In the spring of 1920, a Revolutionary Council was established, dedicated to the removal of British rule. Its President, Mohammad Hassan al-Maliki, was a poet who, after being imprisoned by the British, was to become Minister of Education two years later, in the first Iraqi National Government. (His grandson, Nouri al-Maliki, became Prime Minister of Iraq in 2006).

22. On 26 May 1920, an anti-British rebellion broke out near Mosul, and rapidly spread south, threatening Baghdad. Two days after the start of the rebellion, Britain received, at the San Remo Conference, the League of Nations Mandate for Iraq. The Mandate pledged Britain to create in Iraq “an independent nation subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a mandatory until such time as she is able to stand alone”.

23. The Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, hoped to end the rebellion in Iraq by immediately setting up an Arab administration. The Cabinet insisted the rebellion be crushed first. British military and air power was used to do this; in the battle for Fallujah, more than ten thousand Iraqi and a thousand British and Indian soldiers were killed.

24. Starting at the end of September 1920, and lasting for three and a half months, punitive expeditions set out to all the centres of revolt, and whole villages were burned to the ground. Throughout the winter of 1920-1, the last of the insurgents were hunted down in punitive expeditions.

25. The defeat of the rebellion had a long legacy. In August 1920, Lieutenant Colonel Gerard Leachman had been killed south of Fallujah in a confrontation with the local tribal leader, Sheikh al-Dari. Eighty-five years later, a British administrator in this same area, Rory Stewart wrote: “They still glorify the killing of Colonel Leachman as a great moment in the anti-colonial struggle ... His death was celebrated in Iraqi soap operas, and the grandson of the man who killed him, Harith al-Dari, was a leading figure in the Sunni opposition to occupation. Outside my office in Nasiriyah stood a bronze statue of Leachman being shot in the back.”⁸

Britain and the Iraqi monarchy

26. In January 1921, Lloyd George appointed Winston Churchill as Secretary of State for the Colonies, charged with “setting up a local government congenial to the wishes of the masses of the people” in Iraq. That April, Churchill told the House of Commons it was Britain’s intention “to install an Arab ruler in Iraq ... and to create an Arab army

⁸ Stewart, R. *The Prince of the Marshes*. Pan Macmillan, 2006.

for the national defence". Britain's aim was "to build up around the ancient capital of Baghdad, in a form friendly to Britain and to her Allies, an Arab State which can revive and embody the old culture and glories of the Arab race ..."

27. Churchill told the Commons how the decision to give "satisfaction to Arab nationality" had led him to invite Emir Feisal, one of the leaders of the wartime Arab Revolt in the Hedjaz, to "present himself to the people" of Iraq, which would be transformed into an Arab kingdom with its own monarchy, guarded principally by an Arab Army, and linked to Britain by treaty.

28. Feisal was the third son of Sherif Hussein, King of the Hedjaz (and head of the Sunni Hashemite dynasty). In 1919, Feisal had come to an agreement brokered by the British whereby he would become the ruler of an Arab kingdom in Syria, in return for recognising Britain's 1917 promise of a Jewish National Home in Palestine. At first all went according to plan. In October 1918, Feisal set up an Arab government in Syria, under British protection. Then all went awry: on 7 March 1920, Feisal was proclaimed King of the Arab Kingdom of Syria, by the Syrian National Congress, but within two months the San Remo Conference gave France the Mandate for Syria, and French forces defeated Feisal and drove him out; he went to live in Britain. The British, anxious to preserve their agreement with him, decided to place him on the throne of Iraq (and to give his brother Emir Abdullah the throne of Transjordan – the western part of Britain's Palestine Mandate, stretching from the river Jordan to the Iraqi border).

29. With British support, Feisal arrived in Iraq in June 1921. The Shia leaders wanted him to push for immediate independence. He refused to do so, fearing to lose British support for his imminent throne. During the first two weeks of August 1921 a referendum was held throughout Iraq on Feisal's kingship, and on 15 August, the British High Commissioner in Baghdad, Sir Percy Cox, announced that Feisal had been chosen as King, by "an overwhelming vote".

30. Two weeks later, as the insurgency continued, Cox informed London that Feisal had agreed that "there is no objection to the use of Gas bombs in Iraq provided that they are not lethal or permanently injurious to health".⁹

The first Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, 1922

31. Feisal agreed to negotiate an Anglo-Iraqi Treaty. He was told that Britain must retain responsibility, as the Mandatory power, both for the suppression of internal disorder and for the maintenance of external defence until such time when an "independent Islamic state of Iraq can stand alone".

32. As negotiations for the treaty continued, Churchill told Lloyd George that there was "scarcely a single newspaper in Britain – Tory, Liberal or Labour", which was not "consistently hostile" to Britain's remaining in Iraq. Lloyd George replied that Britain

⁹ Cox to Churchill, 2 December 1921, Air Ministry papers, 5/490.

could not abandon Iraq: “Having beaten the Turk ... we could not at the Armistice have repudiated all our undertakings towards the Arabs. We were responsible for liberating them from Turkish sovereignty, and we were absolutely bound to assist them in setting up Arab governments, if we were not prepared to govern them ourselves.” Lloyd George added: “If we leave, we may find a year or two after we have departed that we have handed over to the French and Americans some of the richest oilfields in the world.”

33. Treaty negotiations with Feisal were concluded; under the treaty, Britain would have “executive authority” for twenty years over Iraq’s foreign and security policy, in a “co-equal” Kingdom of Iraq. The Iraqi Cabinet ratified the treaty on 10 October 1922. Two weeks later, Lloyd George’s coalition government disintegrated, and a General Election was called. During the election campaign, several candidates urged Britain to leave Iraq immediately.

34. So strong was antagonism in Britain to remaining in Iraq that, when the Conservative leader, Andrew Bonar Law, became Prime Minister in October 1922, he set up a Cabinet Committee to reconsider whether Britain should continue with the Anglo-Iraq Treaty. The Committee decided that the twenty-year duration of the treaty should be reduced to four years.

35. In Iraq, Sir Percy Cox threatened to dissolve the Constituent Assembly if it did not ratify the treaty, and issued orders for British troops to occupy the Assembly building. The treaty was ratified, whereupon the British encouraged the creation of an Iraqi civilian administration under Feisal’s rule. One obstacle was a *fatwa* issued in 1922 by the Iraqi Shia religious leaders in Najaf, forbidding observant Shia from supporting Feisal, or any members of the Sunni royal house of the Hedjaz. Feisal was, in the language of the *fatwa*, “an alien usurper to the throne of Iraq, imposed by the colonial power”. A few leading Shia families defied the *fatwa* (which remained in force until 1937) and supported the new dynasty and government.

British bombing policy

36. For non-Kurdish Iraqis, the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty offered a means of curbing Kurdish separatism. In 1923 and 1924, British fighting against Kurdish separatists involved punitive military operations and RAF bombing raids. The RAF also took part in bombing raids to persuade recalcitrant tribes throughout Iraq to pay their taxes. One method by which Britain sought to maintain law and order in Iraq was by the setting up of “Arab Levies” – troops recruited from minority Iraqi communities: Kurds, Marsh Arabs and the Assyrian Christians.

37. In 1924, Air Commodore Lionel Charlton, the Chief Staff Officer of RAF Iraq Command, visited the hospital in Diwaniya where he saw horribly injured civilians, including women and children, who were among the Shia victims of a British air raid. In protest at Britain’s bombing policy, he resigned.

38. Among Iraqis, the legacy of these punitive bombing raids was long-lasting.

The Mandate years

39. During the ten years from 1922 to the end of the Mandate in 1932, when Iraq obtained full independence, as government ministries were steadily handed over to Iraqi control, British officials led the rebuilding of the Iraqi civilian and administrative infrastructure: in health, education, communications, irrigation, the economy, the judiciary, the army and the police. There were almost three thousand British officials in Iraq in 1922, as administrators in all departments. They were headed and supervised by a, five-man, Iraq Secretariat of British officials. Of those, the Judicial Secretary was put in charge of drafting a constitution for Iraq.

40. In accordance with the gradual but immediate Iraqiisation of the administration, while British officials worked as advisers in the Ministry of Finance, the first Minister of Finance was an Iraqi, Sasson Eskell, a Baghdadi Jew and a distinguished financier and parliamentarian since Ottoman times. He is regarded in Iraq to this day as the Father of Parliament. In the long and complex negotiations for the Iraq Treaty, he had worked closely with Gertrude Bell and T.E. Lawrence, and was at the centre of the creation of the new Iraqi Government's laws and financial structure. He was knighted in 1923.

41. Typical of these British civil servants was the Inspector General of Health Services, Henry Sinderson, who introduced modern medicine to Iraq and became Dean of Iraq's Royal College of Medicine. Knighted in 1946 after twenty-five years service to medicine in Iraq, the hospitals and clinics he established throughout the country made Iraq a model for the whole region.

42. In 1930, at the request of the Iraqi Government, a distinguished British politician, writer and soldier, Sir Edward Hilton Young, went to Iraq to advise on economic and loan policy, to scrutinise the budget, and to help establish a new currency, replacing the Indian rupee with the Iraqi dinar. His efforts ensured a stable Iraq currency.

43. By 1930 the number of British officials in the Iraqi administration had been reduced to just over two hundred; some were to remain in Iraq for another decade and more. The legacy of their service and of British-built infrastructure lasted into the era of Saddam Hussein and was spoken of with appreciation by several of the Iraq Inquiry's Iraqi interlocutors.

Defending Iraq

44. During the Mandate years, Britain also defended Iraq from attacks from across the Arabian border. In December 1923, raiders from Nejd, under the control of Ibn Saud, launched an attack on the tribes living in southern Iraq. The RAF drove off the attackers in a series of bombing raids.

45. In November 1927, the northeastern tribes of the Nejd carried out an armed attack seventy-five miles inside the Iraqi border. Despite an RAF bombing raid on the attackers,

they penetrated even deeper into Iraq, killing Shia Marsh Arab shepherds and their children in December.

46. The RAF continued its bombing raids. The Arabian tribes continued their attacks. In February 1928 their target was both Iraqi and Kuwaiti villages south and south-west of Basra. In January 1929 another Nejd tribe crossed the border into Kuwait, killing twenty Iraqis. Then a third Arabian tribe crossed into Kuwait, killing more than seventy Iraqis and Kuwaitis.

47. Only continued bombing raids from RAF Shaibah near Basra drove the attackers out of south-western Iraq. In January 1930, Ibn Saud agreed to financial compensation to the Kuwaitis and Iraqis, and, with British encouragement, in April 1931, a “Treaty of Bon Voisinage, Friendship and Extradition” was signed in Mecca – the Iraqi Prime Minister, Nuri Said signing for Iraq.¹⁰

The second Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, 1930

48. In 1930, two years before the end of the Mandate, an all-Iraqi Government was formed, with the Sunni politician, Nuri Said – who made determined efforts to assuage Sunni-Shia and Kurdish tensions – as Prime Minister. Nuri Said also negotiated a new Anglo-Iraqi Treaty establishing “perpetual peace and friendship between His Britannic Majesty and His Majesty the King of Iraq” as well as “full and frank consultation between them in all matters of foreign policy which may affect their common interests”. Article Five of the Treaty authorised British forces to remain in Iraq after it became independent in 1932. By the late 1930s these forces were restricted to two RAF stations, RAF Shaibah near Basra, and RAF Habbaniya west of Baghdad.

49. In November 1930, Nuri Said called a General Election to ratify the Treaty. He was successful, but the Kurds objected that the Treaty did not meet the undertakings they believed the British had given a decade earlier to protect their national status, and once more raised the flag of revolt. For almost two years, RAF Habbaniya was a staging post for bombing attacks on Kurdish rebels until they were defeated in April 1932.

Iraqi independence, 1932

50. With the ending of the British Mandate in 1932, Iraq entered the League of Nations as a sovereign State. Britain had fulfilled its pledges and promises – first made when the British Army entered Baghdad in March 1917 – to give the Iraqis control of their country.

51. Oil had been discovered in Iraq in 1927. One of the first official acts of the Iraqi Government after independence was to grant a seventy-five-year concession – valid until 2007 – to the British Oil Development Company, jointly owned by British and Italian investors.

¹⁰ In 1932 Ibn Saud renamed his three provinces – Najd, al-Ahsa and the Hijaz – as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

52. King Feisal died in 1933. He was succeeded by his son, twenty-one-year-old King Ghazi. Three years later General Bakr Sidqi – a Kurd, a former officer (like Nuri Said) in the Arab Revolt, and a graduate of a British Staff College, seized power in Baghdad. In the course of the coup, Nuri Said's brother-in-law, the Minister of Defence, was killed. Nuri fled for safety to the British Embassy in Baghdad, and eventually reached Britain.

53. Nationalists in the army resented General Sidqi because of his Kurdish background, and because he encouraged Kurds to join the army. The Shia could not forgive his brutal suppression of a Shia revolt in 1936. In 1937 General Sidqi was murdered by a group of army officers.

54. In 1937, King Ghazi began publicly advocating that Iraq annex Kuwait, and denouncing British influence in the Middle East, under pressure from German diplomats and Nazi Party representatives in Baghdad. Even the return of Nuri Said at the end of 1938 from London – where he had served for a year as Iraq's Ambassador to Britain – could not curb anti-British propaganda, although, to counter it, at the recommendation of the British Ambassador to Iraq, Sir Archibald Clerk-Kerr, funds were made available to the British Council in Iraq to help cover the cost of Iraqi students taking examinations for British universities, and bursaries for their books.¹¹

55. In April 1939, King Ghazi was killed in a car accident. His four-year-old son, King Feisal II, came to the throne, with one of his uncles, Abdul Illah, as Regent. In Mosul, after claims that King Ghazi had been murdered by the British, a mob broke into the British Consulate, dragged out the consul and stoned him to death.

Rashid Ali's revolt, 1941

56. On the outbreak of war in September 1939, Nuri Said broke off relations with Germany. For the first eighteen months of the war, while refusing British requests to declare war on Germany and Italy, he ensured that Iraq was an essential overland and air link in Britain's chain of defence from Egypt to India. On 31 March 1941, however, Nuri Said was forced to resign by a Rashid Ali al-Gaylani. On April 1 the Regent fled from Baghdad, and two days later Rashid Ali became Prime Minister.

57. A Sunni whose family traced their ancestry back to Mohammed, and a lawyer by training, Rashid Ali had been Minister of Justice in 1924 in Iraq's first government. In 1930 he had rejected Nuri Said's Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, and called for an end to the British connection. He was Prime Minister of Iraq from March to November 1933 and again from March 1940 to January 1941, when he was dismissed by the Regent for refusing to allow British troops to transit Iraq, and for entering into negotiations with Germany.

58. On becoming Prime Minister for the third time, Rashid Ali seized control of all the main cities except Basra, restored the amicable relations between Iraq and

¹¹ Sir Archibald Clark-Kerr, Baghdad, 27 December 1937: Foreign Office papers, FO 395/587.

Nazi Germany that had been severed by Nuri Said in 1939, and promised the Germans vital fuel oil from the Mosul oilfields.

59. In London, the War Cabinet ordered a brigade of Indian infantry and extra aircraft to Iraq. “We are not at war with Iraq”, Churchill told the House of Commons on May 7. “We are dealing with a military dictator who attempted to subvert the constitutional Government, and we intend to assist the Iraqis to get rid of him and get rid of the military dictatorship at the earliest possible moment.”

60. During the second week of May 1941, the first of thirty German and Italian aircraft reached Mosul. Flying on to Kirkuk, they took part in air operations against the British besieging Fallujah, and carried out frequent bombing raids on RAF Habbaniya. On 20 May, the British captured Fallujah, and nine days later were in battle with Rashid Ali outside Baghdad. Unaware of the small size of the force against him, Rashid Ali fled under cover of darkness to Iran.

61. The Mayor of Baghdad, at the head of a Security Committee of leading Iraqis, approached British forces outside Baghdad. An armistice was signed, and the monarchy restored. On 9 October 1941, Nuri Said formed a government acceptable to the British. Iraqi Ministers who had served under Rashid Ali were removed from all influence, and in some cases deprived of citizenship and deported. At least seven hundred Rashid Ali supporters and those with Axis sympathies were interned for the duration of the war.

The third Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, 1948

62. The British military presence in Iraq both before and after Rashid Ali’s revolt was based on the terms of the 1930 Anglo-Iraqi Treaty. When the war ended in 1945, and as British forces prepared to leave Iraq, Britain’s Labour Government (whose Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, had been wounded in Mesopotamia in 1917) asked the Government of Iraq to sign a new military treaty, to give the British even greater powers than under the 1930 Treaty, and to increase joint Iraqi and British military planning and cooperation.

63. The new Anglo-Iraqi Treaty was approved by the Iraqi Government and by the Regent. The Prime Minister, Salih Jabr – Iraq’s first Shia Prime Minister – and his Foreign Minister, accompanied by Nuri Said, went to Britain for the signing ceremony, held at Portsmouth on 15 January 1948. The signatories were the Iraq delegates and the British Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin.

64. As soon as the Treaty was signed there were mass demonstrations in Baghdad against it, and against any continuing links with Britain. On 20 January 1948 the British Consulate at Kirkuk was attacked, and on the following day – six days after the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty had been signed – the Regent announced that the Treaty did not “realise the national aspirations of Iraq or consolidate the friendship between the two countries”. Salih Jabr was replaced as Prime Minister by a leading Shia and former President of the Iraqi Senate, Sayyid Muhammad al-Sadr, one of Britain’s adversaries of a quarter

of a century earlier. Such British influence as remained waned rapidly. In May 1948 the British Military Mission was withdrawn.

The continuing British contribution

65. In April 1954, Lord Salter, a senior British civil servant – and former head of the economic and financial section of the League of Nations Secretariat – was asked by the Iraq Development Board to advise on the economic advancement of Iraq. His report, focusing on forward planning, covered water use, agriculture, communications (road, rail, river and air), industry, housing, health, education and administration.

66. Lord Salter’s report was published in 1955 by the Iraq Development Board, and detailed what Salter described as Iraq’s “exceptional opportunity of achieving a development which within a few years would substantially increase her economic resources and raise her general standard of living”.¹²

67. This was to be the last British contribution to the economy of Iraq for many years. But 1955 was to see another British-Iraqi joint venture, as fear of the spread of Communism in the Middle East brought Britain and Iraq together again, with the establishment of the Middle East Treaty Organisation (METO), consisting of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and Britain, later known as the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO).

68. In 1955, with Iraq a member of CENTO and in close relations with Britain’s armed forces, RAF Shaibah and RAF Habbaniya were handed over to the Iraqi Air Force. As part of this air base agreement, the RAF continued to administer the RAF hospital at Habbaniya, and agreed to provide medical and surgical in-patient treatment for up to twenty officers of the Iraqi forces stationed there. In exchange, Iraq also granted free storage to British personnel using the port at Basra.¹³

69. In 1956, with Egypt threatening to nationalise the Suez Canal, Nuri Said was invited to London by the Prime Minister, Anthony Eden, and asked what Iraq wanted for its friendship. He told Eden that Iraq wanted at least one fighter squadron equipped with the latest type of aircraft. Eden agreed. Nuri Said added that Iraq wanted all thirty-six Centurion tanks promised by Britain and a further forty promised by the United States. Eden said “he felt sure that the tanks could be found from one source or another”. Nuri Said then said Iraq was interested in the application of atomic energy to peaceful purposes. Eden offered him a nuclear reactor.¹⁴

¹² Lord Salter, *The Development of Iraq: A Plan of Action*. Iraq Development Board, 1955.

¹³ Middle East Defence Secretariat, ‘Implementation of the Anglo-Iraqi Agreement’, 15 June 1956: Foreign Office papers, FO 371/121671.

¹⁴ ‘Top Secret’, 25 July 1956: Foreign Office papers, FO 371/121662. The pool-type nuclear reactor, also called a ‘swimming pool reactor’, had a core immersed in an open pool of water. It was never delivered.

The fall of the monarchy, 1958

70. On 14 July 1958, an army officer, Brigadier Abdel Karim Kassem, seized power in Baghdad. That day, King Feisal II and many of his family were killed. The British Embassy in Baghdad was ransacked and set on fire. The Ambassador, Sir Michael Wright and his wife were held captive at the Embassy until late in the afternoon, when they were released.¹⁵ On the following day Nuri Said was murdered in the street.

71. The monarchy, established by Britain thirty-seven years earlier, was abolished. Kassem, who was half Sunni, half Kurdish Shia, became Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Commander-in-Chief. In 1961, in a blow to British commercial activity and investment in Iraq, Kassem nationalised the Iraq Petroleum Company.

Kuwaiti independence

72. In 1961, Kuwait gained independence from Britain; Iraq immediately claimed sovereignty. General Kassem mobilised Iraq troops along the Kuwait border. Britain, which had only recently ended its military presence in Kuwait, sent an expeditionary force to Kuwait, and persuaded the Arab League to recognise Kuwait as an independent country. British troops were then replaced by troops of the United Arab Republic (Egypt and Syria). Britain had honoured its historic commitment to Kuwait.

¹⁵D.M.H. Riches, 'Events in Iraq', 14 July 1958: Foreign Office papers, FO 371/132502.