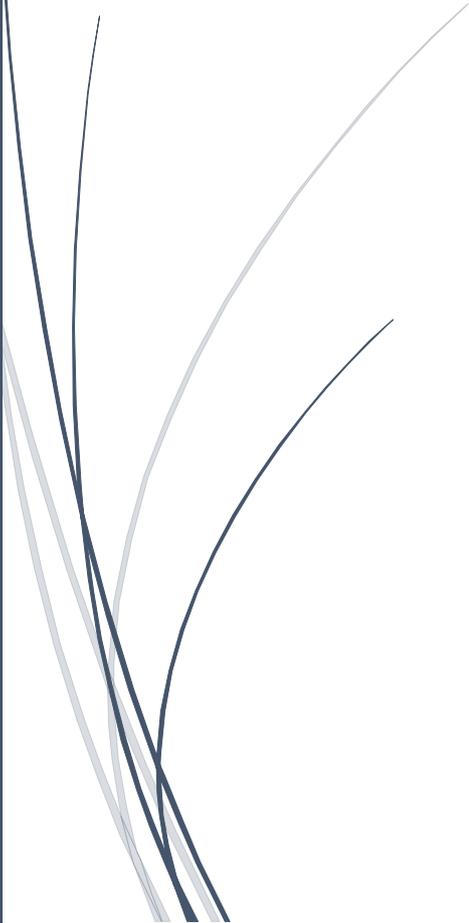




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The Role of the British Mandate (1920-1932) in the Developments of Political Instability in Today's Iraq



Bachelor's dissertation

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Executive Summary

Iraq is currently one of the most unstable countries in the world. Its political instability can be attributed to different factors, such as internal (armed) conflicts, wars with neighbouring countries, and invasions. Political scientists such as Toby Dodge argue that the state that the British created in 1920 contained the seeds of unrest and conflicts.

The aim of this paper is to outline the correlation between the British Mandate (1920-1932) and the political instability of current-day Iraq. It evaluates the British role in the evolution of Iraqi borders. This is of particular importance for understanding why the Iraqi borders have been such a prominent source of unrest and conflict. It also addresses the British political approaches to Iraq and their consequences. Furthermore, it examines the roles of different groups in Iraqi society in the independence movement. The most important findings of this paper are as follows.

The evaluation of the border demarcation process finds that, prior to the British Mandate, most Iraqis were unfamiliar with hard border lines. In order to create an Iraqi state, the British attempted to impose hard borderlines and centralise power in Baghdad. This was opposed to by groups such as the Kurds and Assyrians, which had ambitions for more autonomous rule.

Investigating the British political approaches shows that the British insisted in interfering with Iraqi politics despite promises of self-governance to the locals. The British applied different methods to maintain their presence in Iraq. For instance, important administrative positions in Iraqi ministries were held by British advisors. The British also collaborated with local landowners to undermine anti-British activities in the countryside. Furthermore, they established a highly Baghdad-centric bureaucratic system that was vulnerable to corruption and excluded people of farther-away regions. In addition, they mostly relied on the Sunni Arab elite to indirectly rule the country, excluding the Shi'a and other minorities from important administrative decisions.

Study of the independence movement finds that every ethnic, religious, and sectarian group in Iraqi society responded differently to the British Mandate. In a way, their responses defined their positions in the independence of Iraq. While Sunni and Shi'a Arabs anticipated the withdrawal of the British, other groups such as Kurds and Assyrians grew concerned about their positions in the future of Iraq. This research argues that no direct link can be established between the Mandate and the current instability in Iraq. However, it can be stated that the local despotic leaders inherited the legacies of the British Mandate to maintain their power in the country. This eventually led to increasing political instability.

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Important names

Abdallah bin Huseyn	The king and founder of the Hashemite monarchy in Jordan and the brother of King Faisal I of Iraq.
Arnold Talbot Wilson	A British Indian army officer who temporarily replaced Sir Percy Cox as the Civil High Commissioner in Baghdad (1918-1920).
Edward Noel	A British Indian political and army officer of the British Mandate in Iraq.
Faisal bin Huseyn the Hashemite	The son of Huseyn the Sharif of Mecca, the first king of the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq (1921-1933).
Francoise George Picot	A French diplomat and representative of France in the Sykes-Picot Agreement's negotiations in 1915-1916.
Gertrude Bell	A British writer, a scholar of Arab culture and society, and the Oriental Secretary of the British Mandate in Iraq.
Gilbert Ernest Hubbard	A British diplomat who travelled through Mesopotamia and Kurdistan in the early 20 th century.
Henry Dobbs	A British Indian army officer, High Commissioner of the British Mandate in Iraq (1923-1929), and the successor of Sir Percy Cox.
Ja'far al-'Askari	Fraction leader of al-'Ahd society and later the Prime Minister of Iraq during the Mandate (1923-1924) and (1926-127).
Mar Shamon	The patriarch of the Christian Assyrian community.
Mark Sykes	A British diplomat and representative of Great Britain in the Sykes-Picot Agreement' negotiations in 1915-1916.
Muhammad al-Sadr	An Iraqi cleric, a politician, the founder of the Guards of Independence society, and the Prime Minister of Iraq in 1948.
Mustafa Kemal Pasha	The leader of the Turkish National Movement and the founder and first president of the Republic of Turkey (1923-1938).
Nuri al-Sa'id	A fraction leader of al-'Ahd society and later the Prime Minister of Iraq under the British Mandate in 1930.

Reza Pahlavi	The Prime Minister of Iran (1921-1925) and the King of the Pahlavi Monarchy (1925-1941).
Sheikh Mahmud	The Kurdish nationalist and spiritual leader of Southern Kurdistan during the British Mandate. He aimed to establish an independent Kurdish state.
Thomas Edward Lawrence	A British officer and diplomat in the Middle East who played an important role in the Arab revolt against the Ottomans.
Percy Cox	A British Indian army officer, the first Civil High Commissioner in Baghdad (1914-1918), and later the High Commissioner of the British Mandate in Iraq (1920-1923).
Winston Churchill	A British politician and army officer, the colonial secretary during the British Mandate in Iraq, and later the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.
Woodrow Wilson	The president of U.S.A. (1913-1921).
Yasin al-Hashimi	The leader of al-'Ahd Society.

Treaties

Anglo-Iraqi Treaty 1930	Signed between Great Britain and Iraq to define the relationship between the countries after the planned independence of Iraq in 1932.
Anglo-French Proclamation	A joint proclamation of Great Britain and France regarding the right of self-determination. Released in November 1918.
Sykes-Picot Agreement	In 1916, France and Great Britain agreed to divide the former Ottoman territories in the Middle East between the two countries. Great Britain's share was Southern Mesopotamia and Basra. France's share was Cilicia, Mosul, Lebanon, and Syria.
Treaty of Ankara	Signed in 1926 between Great Britain, Turkey, and Iraq to settle the border dispute between Turkey and Iraq. Following this treaty, Mosul became an official part of the Iraqi territories.
Treaty of Lausanne	Signed on 24 July 1923 between Turkey, Great Britain, and other countries to settle the issues of the former Ottoman Empire.

Treaty of Sevres

Signed on 20 August 1920 by the defeated Central Powers following the First World War. It is considered the beginning of the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire.

Organisations

Al-'ahd society

A society established by Sunni Arab officers to serve king Faisal I of Iraq. It played a role in the Arab uprising against the Ottomans and the British Mandate.

**Muslim National League
(Arabic name: al-Jimy'ya a;-
Wataniay al-Islamiya)**

A Shi'a-dominated Islamic nationalist society established in 1918 to combat the British Mandate.

**The Council of the League of
Nations**

The executive body of the League of Nations

**The Guards of Independence
(Arabic name: Haras al-
Istiqlal)**

An Iraqi nationalist society established in 1918 to combat the British Mandate.

The League of Nations

An intergovernmental organisation that was founded following the First World War to prevent future wars.

**The League of the Islamic
Awakening (Arabic name:
(Jim'yat al-Nahda al-
Islamiya)**

A Shi'a-dominated Islamic nationalist society established in 1918 to combat the British Mandate.

Introduction

Iraq, as it is known today, did not exist prior to the British Mandate (1920-1932). In fact, it was divided into three provinces during the 400 years of Ottoman rule: Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul. In the beginning of the 20th century, the Ottoman rule in Iraq was weakening. Maintaining control over the country was becoming an increasingly difficult task. When the First World War started, the Ottomans lost Basra province to the British. Subsequently, they lost the remaining provinces of Baghdad and Mosul. Upon the fall of Ottoman rule in 1918, the British became the main administrative power in Iraq. The League of Nations¹ declared Iraq a mandated territory of Great Britain. As a result, the British were assigned the task of creating an Iraqi state in 1920. The British Mandate lasted until 1932, when Iraq officially became an independent state.

After its independence, Iraq went through several wars, internal (armed) conflicts, and uprisings, which swept different regions in the country. Following the American-led invasion in 2003, Iraq became an arena for the activities of militias and terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida and ISIS. The co-existence between different groups also seemed to be fading away due rising ethnic, religious, and sectarian tension in Iraqi society. The purpose of this research is to outline the correlation between these outcomes and more than a decade of British Mandate in Iraq. The central question of this research, therefore, is *'what has been the role of the British Mandate in the developments of political instability in today's Iraq?'* Three focus areas have been identified for answering this question: borders, political approaches, and the independence movement.

The first chapter discusses the role of the British in shaping the borders of Iraq. It focuses on the political factors that influenced the process of border demarcation. It discusses how these factors influenced British decision-making in incorporating regions such as Mosul and Southern Kurdistan² while excluding other regions such as Muhammareh³. The second chapter outlines the political approaches of Great Britain to Iraq. It explains why these approaches were applied in the Iraqi case and what consequences resulted from them. The third chapter presents the responses of different ethnic, religious and sectarian groups to the British Mandate. It discusses how these responses showcased the contradictory goals and ambitions of these groups.

The analysis discusses the most important issues that have been identified in the three chapters. It highlights the implications of the border demarcation process and its consequences. Furthermore, it

¹ An intergovernmental organisation that was founded following the First World War in order to prevent future global wars.

² Southern Kurdistan refers to the Kurdish region in northern Iraq. It is called Southern Kurdistan since the Kurdish territories are divided between Iran (east), Syria (west), Turkey (north), and Iraq (South).

³ Muhammareh is an Arab-dominated region in the southern part of today's Iran. Its official name is Khuzestan. However, writers and researchers refer to this region by several names, such as Muhammareh, Arabistan, Ahwaz, Khuzestan, and the Ka'b chiefdom. I will use the name 'Muhammareh' in this report, since it was used to refer to this area at the beginning of the 20th century.

discusses the rationale behind the British decision-making process. It sheds light on the legacies of great empires that ruled Iraq and how they shaped the responses of different groups in Iraqi society to the British Mandate. Finally, a conclusion is drawn from the findings of these chapters. This section explains the role of the British and whether they are to blame for the political instability in current-day Iraq.

It is important to note that the political instability in current-day Iraq was further deepened due to internal and external armed conflicts, uprisings in different regions and the rise and fall of different despotic leaders. Due to the limits of this paper, these issues could not be properly addressed.

Literature Review

This literature review discusses existing research findings regarding the British Mandate and its role and legacies in Iraq. It deals with findings about the political events that occurred during the British Mandate. Research findings that specifically focus on the British Mandate are very limited. Most writers deal with the British Mandate as the starting point of the modern history of Iraq in the 20th century. Others discuss one particular legacy of the British or one major event that occurred during the Mandate. Few to no research findings have established a clear link between the British Mandate and current political instability in Iraq.

Phebe Marr, a historian of modern Iraq, and Charles Tripp, an academic and professor of politics at the University of London, are considered to be two of the most important historians who have written about political, economic, and social systems in Iraq during the Ottoman rule, the British mandate, and its aftermath.

Phebe Marr's book *The Modern History of Iraq (2011)* sheds light on major phases of Iraq's history in the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century. Marr provides important background information about the empires and dynasties that ruled the country and how they influenced the evolution of the modern Iraqi identity. Marr also offers a helpful overview of the religious and ethnic groups in Iraq and how and why they started demanding more autonomy in the country. Marr also discusses the rise of nationalism in Iraq during Ottoman rule and how the Turkish-trained officers started transforming governmental institutions and educational systems from Turkish to Arabic. Most importantly, she explains the process of the British occupation of Iraq and the rise of anti-British sentiment that later turned into a movement. Marr also provides a sufficient explanation of why the anti-British movement failed to include ethnic and religious groups such as Kurds in Iraqi society.

Similarly, Charles Tripp discusses major events and treaties that shaped modern-day Iraq in his book *A History of Iraq (2002)*. Tripp names numerous challenging events that planted the seeds of religious and ethnic instability in the country during Ottoman rule, but also during the British Mandate. This book comprehensively explains the major phases of Iraq's modern history, such as the British Mandate, the establishment of the Hashemite monarchy, the republic that overthrew the monarchy, and the rule of Saddam Hussein. Besides this book, Tripp also wrote several other academic articles about Iraq, such as *The United States and State-Building in Iraq (2004)* and *Iraq in World War I: from Ottoman Rule to British Conquest by Mohammad Gholi Majd (2009)*.

While writers such as Phebe Marr and Tripp succeed in comprehensively explaining the complicated events that shaped Iraq over the last century, their books lack critical analysis of British political

approaches to Iraq. On the other hand, political scientist Toby Dodge evaluates the British policy in Iraq from a critical point of view. Dodge is also a professor and director of the Middle East Centre at the London School of Economics and Political Sciences. He has written a number of books and theses about state building in Iraq, such as *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied* (2003) and *Iraq – From War to a New Authoritarianism* (2013). Furthermore, Dodge has written academic articles such as *Intervention and Dreams of Exogenous State Building: The Application of Liberal State Building in Iraq and Afghanistan* (2013). In his book *Inventing Iraq* (2003), Toby Dodge considers the lack of accurate studies of the culture and people of Iraq as one of the prominent reasons for the failure of British policy in Iraq. Dodge argues that violence and corruption were rooted in the state that the British attempted to build. He also argues that the colonial officers who were deployed from India to rule Iraq lacked knowledge about Iraqi society. According to him, this further contributed to the failure of state building in Iraq.

The previously mentioned books and articles provide relevant information about British political approaches to Iraq and major obstacles that challenged the creation of an independent state of Iraq. For a better understanding of the evolution of Iraqi borders, it is helpful to study the treaties that resulted in the incorporation of regions such as Mosul and Southern Kurdistan into Iraq and the exclusion of other regions, such as Muhammareh. Books and articles that shed light on these topics include: *A line in the sand: Britain, France and the struggle that shaped the Middle East* (2011) by J. Barr, *Britain and the Arab Middle East: World War I and its Aftermath* (2016) by Lieshout, *Oil and the Creation of Iraq: Policy Failures and the 1914-1918 War in Mesopotamia* (2016) by McNabb, *The Rise and Fall of the Banu Ka'ab: A borderer State in Southern Khuzestan* (2006) by Willem Floor, and *The Creation of Iraq* (2004) by Reeva Spector Simon and Eleanor Teijirian. The last book is a volume that sheds light on how Iraq came into existence after the fall of the Ottomans following the First World War. Its fourth chapter, which is written by Lawrence G. Potter, explains the evolution of the Iran-Iraq and Turkey-Iraq borders.

The incorporation of Muhammareh with Iran rather than Iraq could be a relevant case study for understanding the evolution of Iran-Iraq borders. The previously mentioned journal article *The Rise and Fall of the Banu Ka'ab* (2006) sheds light on the last Arab tribes that ruled Muhammareh before it was incorporated with Iran. The writer of this article, Willem Floor, offers a sufficient explanation of the hierarchy and power within Arab tribes. Floor also explains how these tribes perceived central governments and great empires such as the Ottomans. Furthermore, Floor explains the tribal views on hard border lines and how the tribes dealt with this relatively new concept of boundaries.

Bailing Maxim and Meredith Day address the rise of 'local despotism' in their book *The Colonial and Post-Colonial Experience in the Middle East (2017)*. Although this book does not focus only on Iraq, it provides important interpretations of tribal culture and its possible link to the creation of authoritarian regimes in this Middle East.

There are also books and research findings that shed light on the independence movement during the British Mandate. These writings either shed light on one particular group or one political event during the mandate, and include: *The British Administration of Iraq and Its Influence on the 1920 Revolution (2015)* by Ortega Fabal, *The 1920 Revolt Reconsidered: The Role of Tribes in national Politics (1972)*, by Amal Vingradov, *Faisal I of Iraq (2014)* by Ali Allawi, *A Valiant Effort: Faisal's Failed Inculcation of National Identity in Iraq (2015)* by Tova Abosch, *Alliance patterns of a secessionist movement: The Kurdish nationalist movement in Iraq (1998)*, by Yousif Freiji, *The Assyrian Affaire 1933 (1974)* by K. Husry, and *The Tragedy of the Assyrian Minority in Iraq (2004)* by Stafford.

Although *The Tragedy of the Assyrian Minority in Iraq (2004)* provides sufficient information about the history of Assyrians in Iraq, it fails to offer an unbiased point of view on their situation. This might be due to the fact that this book was originally written by a British officer who served in Iraq during the Mandate.

As this paper has highlighted some of the findings about the modern history of Iraq, it is important to note that there are limited analytical findings about the British legacies in today's Iraqi state that might have contributed to the current political instability in the country. It should also be noted that this paper contains elements of Toby Dodge's book *Inventing Iraq (2003)*, which critically analyses British state-building in Iraq.

Furthermore, it draws inspiration from Charles Tripp's book *A History of Iraq (2002)* in addressing the positions of different ethnic, religious, and sectarian groups during the Mandate and their responses to it. The important element that differentiates this paper from the existing findings is its focus on border demarcation as a possible cause of political instability in Iraq. Furthermore, it attempts to establish a link between the Mandate and the current political instability through analysing the British legacy regarding the establishment of the Iraqi state and the British impacts on different groups in Iraqi society.

Methodology

Desk research

The first approach to conducting this research involved exploring the subsurface of the political history of Iraq in the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. The period marks the decline of Ottoman rule and the rise of the British presence in Iraq. Forming a picture of this era offers an understanding of the British Mandate and its motives. Identifying the motives is useful for understanding how they impacted the decision-making of the British in Iraq. Studying this era is also helpful for identifying the legacies of the Ottoman Empire and how they impacted different groups in Iraqi society. This is helpful for understanding the role of these legacies in shaping the goals and ambitions of each ethnic, religious, and sectarian group in Iraqi society during the mandate.

Qualitative methods

After gaining a better grasp of Iraqi political history in the 19th and 20th centuries, qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and case studies were used for conducting this research. Qualitative methods offer an effective way of evaluating the consequences of the British Mandate and its legacies. Identifying the legacies of the British Mandate is useful for understanding its possible links with the political instability in current-day Iraq.

First, an attempt was made to understand the rationale behind British decisions within the theoretical framework of borders, colonialism, and imperialism. The concept of borders allows a better understanding of the evolution of the Iraqi borders and the role of the British Mandate in defining them. It helps to provide an understanding of the territorial issues that resulted from the incorporation of regions such as Southern Kurdistan. It is also useful for understanding why the people's will was neglected and how this affected the stability of Iraq.

The concepts of colonialism and imperialism provide an understanding of the British political approaches towards Iraq, their consequences, and their legacies. These concepts are useful for understanding how the colonial backgrounds of the British officers influenced their approaches to different groups within Iraqi society and how this impacted the process of building the Iraqi state.

Second, a case study approach was used for conducting this research. The first advantage of the case study approach is that it allows an understanding of the positions of groups such as the Assyrians in the independence movement. This case study offers an opportunity to discuss how different groups

perceived each other and how it impacted the identity and unity of Iraq. This, in turn, is helpful for understanding the evolution of the ethnic, religious, and sectarian tensions in Iraq.

The second advantage of the case study method is that it explains how the process of border demarcation impacted locals. Three case studies were used for this purpose, looking at the regions of Mosul, Southern Kurdistan, and Muhammareh. These case studies offer an opportunity to understand how undermining the demands of the locals contributed to the instability of the country. Furthermore, case studies help to gain a better insight into the rationale of the British behind incorporating Mosul and Southern Kurdistan and excluding Muhammareh from the Iraqi map. In other words, the case studies help to explain why the British made these decisions, the consequences that resulted from them, and how they could be linked to the current instability in the country.

Third, a face-to-face and in-depth interview was conducted with Amir Taha, a history lecturer at Utrecht University. Taha has expertise in the modern history of Iraq with a special focus on the Baath regime and the resistance to it. He wrote his MA thesis about the 1991 uprising in Al-Shinafiyah village in southern Iraq against the Baathist regime of Saddam Hussein. Furthermore, he has written several articles about the current political instability in Iraq.

The conducted interview was semi-structured. Predetermined questions on the previously mentioned topics were sent to the interviewee prior to the interview. Additional questions were also asked during the interview. The role of the British in shaping Iraqi borders, the interests of the locals, the implementation of the self-governance approach in reality, the collective Iraqi identity, and how different groups in the society perceived each other were amongst the topics that were discussed during the interview. By choosing these topics, an attempt was made to understand the legacies of the British Mandate and how they possibly affected current circumstances in Iraq.

A transcript was made of the interview. The results of the interview were used as primary results for discussing the Iraqi identity and self-governance in the analysis. Through the interview, an attempt was made to present the opinions of an Iraqi expert regarding the British Mandate rather than only relying on the research of Western scholars such as Charles Tripp and Toby Dodge.

Data collection

Primary sources were consulted when conducting this research. Besides the previously mentioned interview, the book of British diplomat Gilbert Ernest Hubbard, *From the Gulf to Ararat (1916)*, was consulted regarding the role of the British in shaping the borders of Iraq. This book records the journey of this diplomat through Iraq and Kurdistan. The reason that this book was consulted is to understand why the evolution of Iran-Iraq borders was troubled during the Ottoman rule. It also explains why the boundaries between the two countries were transgressed continuously despite British and Russian efforts to stabilise the borders.

Another primary source is the report of Thomas Edward Lawrence on the 1920 revolt⁴. This source was primarily consulted for evaluating the uprising. This report offers an opportunity to evaluate the scale of the uprising, its roots, and its impact on British political approaches to Iraq. Consulting this report allowed insight into the circumstances that surrounded the revolt from the perspective of a British diplomat who was directly involved in the situation.

Furthermore, the speech of American president Woodrow Wilson on the right of self-determination was used. Consulting this speech was especially useful for understanding the new international order of self-determination and self-governance that the Americans brought following the First World War. This speech offered the opportunity to understand how this impacted British policy towards Iraq. The impact of the speech is especially reflected in the Anglo-French proclamation in 1918 that iterated the importance of allowing the people in the Middle East to govern themselves.

The practical impact of this speech is evaluated in the analysis. It is discussed whether efforts by the British to allow Iraqis to govern themselves were indeed the reality. An attempt is made to explain the shortcomings of the self-governance approach and how it impacted the Iraqi state after independence. Moreover, the treaty between the United Kingdom, Iraq, and Turkey regarding the incorporation of Mosul into Iraq in 1926 was consulted. This treaty was useful for gaining a better understanding of the agreement that was reached after years of failed negotiations between the three countries.

Secondary sources were also consulted for this paper. Books from the Dutch Royal Library were used for collecting further information about the Mandate. Also, different databases were consulted in collecting information for this paper. World Cat Discovery, J-Stor, and Pro-Quest were among the most-used databases for collecting online books, research reports, journal articles, and theses for

⁴ A large scale revolt against the British occupation broke out in the summer of 1920. The revolt swept most parts of Iraq, however, it had a strong footing the Shi'a areas. The Arab tribes played the major role in the uprising.

this research. The databases of The Hague University of Applied Sciences were also consulted for additional information. The previously mentioned databases offer research findings and academic articles that discuss the British Mandate from different perspectives. Consulting sources that offer different perspectives on the Mandate is useful for understanding the impact of the Mandate.

The primary search terms for finding sources about the subject of this paper included the British Mandate, the Ottoman Iraq, British state-building in Iraq, the modern history of Iraq, and the creation of Iraq. These search terms were used to collect general information about the Mandate and the history of Iraq in the beginning of the 20th century.

Percy Cox, Arnold Wilson, Gertrude Bell, the Assyrian Affaire 1933, Iraqi Kurdistan during the Mandate, the Mosul question, and Khuzestan⁵ were amongst the search terms used to collect data about specific regions or particular major events during the Mandate. Using the names of the Indian army officers who ruled Iraq was useful for collecting background information about them. Hereby, an attempt was made to understand the consequences that resulted from their actions and how their backgrounds influenced their decision-making.

⁵ Khuzestan is the official name of Muhammareh.

Chapter 1: The British role in shaping the borders of Iraq

Iraq shares borders with six countries: Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. In the past few decades, Iraq has had several internal and external armed conflicts. The Assyrian Affair (1933), the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988), the Iraq-Kuwait War (1990–1991), and the Kurdish separatist activities are some of the most prominent conflicts that Iraq experienced in the decades following its independence. Many factors led to these conflicts. However, one might ask why the Iraqi borders have been such a prominent source of unrest and violence. In order to answer this question, it is necessary to demonstrate the evolution of the Iraqi borders and the role of the British Mandate in defining them. Since the Iraqi borders were produced as a result of many wars and peace treaties, this chapter only outlines the Iran-Iraq and Turkey-Iraq borders. First, the difference between borders and boundaries is outlined. Second, the evolution of Iran-Iraq borders is explained. Muhammareh is used as a case study to further explain the demarcation of Iran-Iraq borders. Third, the case studies of Mosul and Southern Kurdistan are used to explain the evolution of Iraq-Turkey borders.

Definition of borders

Borders and boundaries have often been sources of confusion for many writers and researchers. These terms have often been used as synonyms for each other without much attention being paid to their differences. According to political geographer A. E. Moodie, a frontier is “real and natural”, while a boundary is more “linear and artificial” (Banerjee, 2010, p. XXV). On the other hand, borders are boundary lines that have political implications (Banerjee, 2010, p. XXV). Paula Banerjee, an expert on border issues in South Asia, believes that most frontiers were replaced by linear boundaries in the 20th century. Subsequently, many states turned these boundary lines into borders (Banerjee, 2010, p. XXV). Although borders are lines, they are subject to change. Banerjee states, ‘borders are not static but alive, and they take different forms in different political and historical circumstances’ (Banerjee, 2010, p. XXXV).

Banerjee also believes that borders as known and used in current politics are a Western European concept that was imposed on European colonies (Banerjee, 2010, p. XXIV). Writer J. Prescott believes that most borders in the Middle East were not negotiated by locals, but rather by and between the foreign powers that were ruling these countries (Prescott, 2014, p. 269). Prescott also argues that most of the frontiers and boundaries in the Middle East evolved into borders in the 20th century

(Prescott, 2014, p. 269). To a certain extent, this was also the case in Iraq, which was historically known as Mesopotamia.

[An introduction to the British role in defining Iraqi borders](#)

In the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the British role in demarcating the Iraqi borders could be described as intermediary, especially in the south. During this period, Great Britain did not yet represent itself as a colonial power in the Middle East. In fact, the British presence was limited to agencies that represented its economic interests in Ottoman Iraq and the Middle East in the 19th century (Taha, personal interview transcript , 2019, p. 60). After the end of the First World War and the beginning of the Mandate in the 1920s, the British took a more decisive role in shaping the Iraqi border. This is reflected in cases such as Mosul and Kurdistan in the north.

Although the British had a presence in the Gulf, they did not have great interest in Iraq until the beginning of the First World War. The British position towards Iraq changed when the Ottomans began mobilising their troops in the country to join the First World War on the German side. As a counter attack, the British decided to occupy Iraq, which at that time was composed of three Ottoman vilayets.⁶

British forces first occupied Basra in November 1914, then Baghdad in March 1917, and eventually the Kurdish Kirkuk in the summer of 1918 (Tripp, 2002, pp. 31 – 32). After the Kirkuk battle and the many other defeats the Ottoman Army faced during the war, the Ottomans had no other choice left but to seek peace with the British. This led to the Armistice of Modrus in 1918 (Tripp, 2002, p. 32). Following the armistice, the British troops moved towards Mosul (Tripp, 2002, p. 32). The governor of Mosul refused to surrender, arguing that Mosul was not a part of Mesopotamia (Tripp, 2002, p. 32). However, he was forced to comply, because the Ottoman troops withdrew in November 1918 (Tripp, 2002, p. 32).

The primary aim of occupying Basra was to protect and safeguard the gateway to Britain's most important colony: India (Marr, 2011, p. 47). The British also wanted to protect the oil fields in the northern part of the Gulf area (Marr, 2011, p. 47). It is important to note that these oil fields were not in Iraq. In fact, they were in the Arab-dominated region of Muhammareh in the neighbouring

⁶ According to the Oxford Dictionary, 'vilayet' means: "(in Turkey, and formerly in the Ottoman Empire) a major administrative district or province with its own governor" (Vilayet, n.d.).

country of Iran. Oil was thus not the primary reason for British involvement in Iraq since it had not yet been discovered there (McNabb, 2016, p. 153).

David McNabb states in his book *Oil and the Creation of Iraq (2016)* that 'at this stage in the negotiations over the break-up of the Ottoman Empire after victory in the war, oil was not a consideration' (McNabb, 2016, p. 141). British author Christopher Catherwood states that 'no oil was being produced in any quantity anywhere in Mesopotamia until the late 1920s. Oil for Britain's Navy before and during the war came from proven wells in the United States' (McNabb, 2016, p. 141). Regardless of their primary motives, the British first engaged in defining Iraqi borders in the late 19th century as an intermediary actor between the Ottoman and the Persian (Safavid) Empires.

Iran-Iraq borders

Currently, Iraq shares 1,599 km of borders with Iran (Middle East: Iraq, 2019). The evolution of these borders began during the Ottoman conquest of Iraq, which dates back to 1514 (Marr, 2011, p. 23). The religious competition between the Sunni Turkish Sultan and the Shi'i⁷ Shah of the Safavids in Iran may have contributed to the demarcation of the Iran-Iraq borders (Marr, 2011, p. 23). It is perhaps safer to use the term 'boundaries' instead of 'borders' since no definitive lines were drawn between the two countries during Ottoman rule. The lack of hard borderlines was due to several wars that broke out between the two powers. In fact, boundaries were defined and redefined depending on the rise and fall of each power in both countries. (Potter, 2004, p. 65)

With the end of almost every war, a peace treaty was signed to define hard borderlines. However, most of these treaties failed to make an end of this issue. The Treaty of Zohab, which was signed between the Ottomans and the Safavids in 1639, is one of the oldest treaties that laid the foundation for the current borders (Potter, 2004, p. 65). This treaty was followed by several others, such as the Kurdan treaty in 1746 and the first and second treaties of Erzurum in 1823 and 1847 (Potter, 2004, p. 66).

The first Erzurum treaty reaffirmed the boundaries that had been agreed upon in earlier treaties (Potter, 2004, p. 66). This implied that there were still no hard lines drawn between the two countries. Therefore, it was not surprising that tribes that resided in that area failed to respect the boundaries (Potter, 2004, p. 63). In fact, the tribes on both sides of the boundaries had more

⁷ Shi'i: singular; Shi'a: plural

connections and interactions with each other than with the rest of their countries. This eventually led to an Ottoman attack on Muhammareh in 1837 (Potter, 2004, p. 65).

Muhammareh

Since boundaries were never fully demarcated, incidents continued to occur. With the evolution of nation states, undefined boundaries gradually became unacceptable. Therefore, the Russian Empire and Great Britain took on the responsibility of mediating between the two powers by setting up a boundary commission in 1843 (Potter, 2004, p. 66). The negotiations eventually led to the second Erzurum treaty in 1847, in which the Ottomans recognised Muhammareh as part of the Persian Empire (Potter, 2004, p. 66). On the other hand, the Persians recognised the Ottoman rule of the city of Sulaymaniya in Iraq (Potter, 2004, p. 66).

There were a number of problems with this treaty. First, it failed to specifically address the sovereignty of the Shatt Al-Arab River (between Muhammareh and Iraq) (Potter, 2004, p. 66). Second, the treaty had little impact on the Arab tribes in Muhammareh. These tribes continued to challenge the newly created borders between Iraq and Iran. In order to put an end to this, both countries set up a commission to demarcate the borders under the Tehran Protocol in 1911, which in turn led to the 1913 Protocol of Constantinople that '*described*' the boundaries rather than defining them (Potter, 2004, p. 67).

Although the Commission finished its mission in October 1914, the borders were never fully respected by either side (Potter, 2004, p. 67). This also caused difficulties for Russian and British diplomats who were involved in the negotiations. Gilbert Ernest Hubbard, a British diplomat who travelled through Mesopotamia and Kurdistan, described the process of the negotiations as 'a phenomenon of procrastination unparalleled even in the chronicles of Oriental diplomacy' (Hubbard, 1916, p. 2).

The southern Iran-Iraq borders gradually became more stable after the end of Arab rule in Muhammareh. In 1924, Iran's Prime Minister Reza Pahlavi (later the king of Iran) annexed Muhammareh by force in an attempt to create a central government (Potter, 2004, p. 63). The British, who were present in Muhammareh to protect the oil field, also played a role in the incorporation of this region into Iran rather than Iraq. Lawrence G. Potter, a writer and adjunct professor at Columbia School of International and Public Affairs, argues that the British probably

preferred a powerful central government in Iran rather than the leadership of local sheikhs (Potter, 2004, p. 63).

Willem Floor, an expert and historian who has written numerous books about the socio-economic history of Iran, states in his article *The Rise and Fall of Banu Ka'b (2006)* that 'these tribal borderers had no allegiance to anyone with the exception of their immediate clan leader. Even within the tribal confederacy, the supreme Sheikh's authority was not always recognised and had to be sustained by both positive and negative inducements' (Floor, 2006, p. 277). Floor further explains that 'these borderers did not therefore acknowledge any central state, and their individual members had not even an understanding of such a phenomenon. The only things that they acknowledged were force and clan loyalty' (Floor, 2006, p. 277). One could agree with Potter that against this background it was safer for the British to deal with stable central governments rather than traditional tribes with shifting loyalties.

Iraq-Turkey borders

Mosul

In contrast with their role in the south, the British had a more decisive role in defining the northern borders of Iraq. Towards the end of the Ottoman rule, France and Great Britain had secret negotiations about dividing the Ottoman Empire's territories outside Anatolia. Sir Mark Sykes, a British diplomat, was assigned to discuss the division of the territories with his French ally and fellow diplomat Sir Françoise George Picot. The negotiations between the two diplomats resulted in an agreement that would carry their names: the infamous Sykes-Picot Agreement, which was signed in 1916 (Unintended Consequences, 2016). Accordingly, Basra and Southern Mesopotamia were given to Great Britain (Unintended Consequences, 2016). France's share of territory included Syria, Lebanon, Cilicia, and Mosul (Unintended Consequences, 2016).

However, the British reconsidered the negotiations about Mosul because oil gradually became an increasingly important factor in their foreign policies after the start of the First World War (McNabb, 2016, p. 153). David McNabb argues that 'if it [Iraq] had been annexed by Britain after the war, as many imperialists desired in 1914, without oil it would have been a much smaller political entity than it became after oil was thought to exist in commercial quantities in at least one of the provinces, Mosul' (McNabb, 2016, p. 153).

Great Britain quickly moved to regain Mosul by convincing France to abdicate its claim to the former Ottoman province. This was not very difficult, because the British approved the French mandate of Syria and Lebanon (McNabb, 2016, p. 148). On the other hand, the British faced rather strong resistance from the Turkish side regarding Mosul. The fall of the Ottomans did not end the Turkish claim to Mosul. Mustafa Kemal Pasha, the nationalist leader who led the Turkish War of Independence (1919–1923), asserted that Mosul was part of Turkey. However, this protest was not very fruitful after Turkey refused to ratify the Treaty of Sevres, which was signed on 20 August 1920 (McNabb, 2016, p. 148).

Disputes over Mosul occurred again during the negotiations for the Treaty of Lausanne (1923). During these negotiations, the Turkish side insisted several times that Mosul was part of their state. However, their claim was answered with a firm refusal from their British counterparts. The difficulties in the negotiations forced both sides to sign the Treaty of Lausanne on 24 July 1923 without solving the issue of Mosul (Coşar, N. & Demirci, S., 2006). The failure of the Treaty of Sevres in 1920 and the difficult negotiations for the Treaty of Lausanne eventually forced the British to try other options in order to end this issue to their advantage. The British requested the involvement of the Council of the League of Nations⁸ (McNabb, 2016, p. 148). On 6 August 1924, the Council created a technical commission to investigate the facts of the situation in order to draw the borders (McNabb, 2016, p. 148).

In addition, the British tried a 'win-win' approach to convince Turkey to withdraw its claim to Mosul. Great Britain expressed its willingness to support Turkey in becoming a member of the League of the Nations if Turkey agreed to waive its claim to Mosul (McNabb, 2016, pp. 147-148). The British approach was successful, since Turkey the Turkish agreed to lose Mosul in return for membership in the League of Nations.

The final decision of the Council of the League of Nations was also in favour of the British. Turkish professors Nevin Cosar and Sevtap Demirci argue, 'considering the fact that Britain was the strongest member of the League and a permanent member of the Council, and that Turkey was not even a member, it is not surprising that the commission unanimously reported that Iraq should retain Mosul and the Brussels line be made the permanent border' (Coşar, N. & Demirci, S., 2006, p. 127). Great Britain and Turkey finalised the process of incorporating Mosul with Iraq through the Treaty of Ankara in 1926 (Treaty Between the United Kingdom and Iraq and Turkey Regarding the Settlement of the Frontier Between Turkey and Iraq, 1927).

⁸ The Council is the executive body of the League of Nations, an intergovernmental organisation that was founded following the First World War in order to prevent future global wars.

Southern Kurdistan

In addition to the Mosul issue, the British faced a significant challenge in convincing the Kurds to join Iraq. After the British occupied Iraq, they established an administration in the Kurdish territories (Eskander, 2001, p. 164). The Kurdish nationalist and spiritual leader, Shaikh Mahmud, headed the administration that lasted from October 1918 until June 1919 (Eskander, 2001, p. 164). This administration did not last long due to disagreement between the British and Shaikh Mahmud about the extent of Kurdish autonomy. This eventually turned into an armed conflict between the two parties (Eskander, 2001, p. 164). The British defeated the Kurds and send their leader, Shaikh Mahmud, into exile (Eskander, 2001, p. 164).

Contrary to British expectations, sending Mahmud into exile did not stabilise the Kurdish areas. In fact, the British faced continuous rebellions in 1919 and most of 1920. This opposition was not only inspired by Kurdish nationalists but also by the Turks, who encouraged anti-British and anti-Arab propaganda in the region (Sluglett, 1976). Turkey, which was also home to a large number of Kurds, considered the creation of an independent state in Southern Kurdistan a threat. Therefore, it began aiding the Kurdish rebellions in Southern Kurdistan not only by contributing arms but also by organising anti-British societies (Eskander, 2001, p. 164).

By 1922, the circumstances did not appear to be in favour of the British. At that time, no peace had yet been achieved with Turkey regarding Mosul, and unrest was on the rise in Kurdistan. Therefore, Shaikh Mahmud was brought back to Southern Kurdistan despite fierce disagreement between British officials (Eskander, 2001, p. 167). Winston Churchill, who was a colonial secretary at that time, demanded Mahmud's return (Eskander, 2001, p. 167). This, however, was not easily accepted by Sir Percy Cox, the high commissioner of the British Mandate in Baghdad. Cox was determined to incorporate Southern Kurdistan into Iraq despite fierce opposition from Kurdistan's people. Major Edward Noel, a British political officer, reported that 'these difficulties were compounded in the North by the lack of enthusiasm of a large proportion of the population for the whole idea of the Iraq State' (Sluglett, 1976).

Several factors contributed to the ultimate incorporation of Southern Kurdistan into Iraq despite the opposition of Kurdistan's people. Cox and his successor, High Commissioner Henry Dobbs, firmly opposed any steps towards establishing an independent state in Southern Kurdistan (Eskander, 2001, p. 151). In addition, when Southern Kurdistan was incorporated into Iraq, Winston Churchill was no longer a colonial secretary (Eskander, 2001, p. 151). This was due to the collapse of the coalition of liberals and conservatives in Great Britain in 1922 (The end of the 1922 coalition, 2012). Churchill's

absence from the decision-making about the fate of Southern Kurdistan had a significant impact. He had initially favoured the idea of making Southern Kurdistan a buffer zone against the Turkish threat. Bonar Law's new British government prioritised achieving peace with Turkey over the desires of Kurdish people (Eskander, 2001, p. 151). This government was able to convince the Turks that an Iraqi Kurdistan would not be a threat to Turkey.

It can be concluded that although the roots of Iraqi border issues lay in Ottoman rule to a certain extent, the British certainly played an important role in defining the final borders of Iraq. Since Iraq did not have clear borderlines prior to the British Mandate, it could be argued that the British tried to impose their definition of borders on the Iraqis. It can be argued that hard lines were important for stabilising the borders. Stable borderlines may have been important for British economic and political activities (Taha, personal interview transcript , 2019, p. 60).

Given their limited presence in the 19th century, the British role was that of an intermediary in cases such as Muhammareh, but was decisive in other cases, such as those of Mosul and Southern Kurdistan. Although oil was not Great Britain's primary motivation in occupying Iraq, it was certainly an important consideration after the beginning of the First World War.

One could also argue that the British did not take the preferences of the local people in Mosul, Southern Kurdistan, and Muhammareh into account when drawing the lines between Iraq and its neighbouring countries. The intense focus of the British on their own interests rather than those of the locals prevented Great Britain from noting the future challenges Iraq was destined to face. One could certainly argue that there was no country at that time that was not pursuing its own interests at the cost of the interests of others. This, however, cannot justify the significant ethnic unrest that Iraq suffered due to Great Britain neglecting the ambitions of ethnic groups such as the Kurds to create independent states.

Chapter 2: British political approaches and their consequences

Having addressed the British role in defining the borders of Iraq in the previous chapter, this chapter discusses British political approaches to Iraq. First, definitions of colonialism and imperialism are briefly outlined. This is of particular importance for understanding the colonial and imperialist backgrounds of British approaches to Iraq. Second, the London approach is highlighted. This section explains concerns that shaped the approach of the London Office to Iraq. Third, the direct rule and its consequences are addressed. This section highlights the opinions of British political and military officers in Baghdad regarding the London approach and why they opposed it. The final section discusses the indirect rule. This section explains why it was adopted and what consequences it had.

Colonialism and imperialism

The classical and perhaps most common definition of colonialism is the 'domination of people from another culture' (Sommer, 2011, p. 189). However, this definition is too broad, because it includes many forms of domination. Arnold J. Horvath, who conducted several studies about colonialism, defines it as 'that form of intergroup domination in which settlers in significant numbers migrate permanently to the colony from the colonizing power' (Horvath, 1972). The emphasis is thus on the number of settlers and their role in the new colonies. This definition is more specific, but it lacks the political implications of colonialism. According to German historian Jurgen Osterhammel, the definition of colonialism is 'the rule of the one collectively over another, with the life of the ruled being determined, for the sake of external interests, by a minority of colonial masters, which is culturally "foreign" and unwilling to assimilate; this rule is underpinned by missionary doctrines on the colonial masters' conviction of their being culturally superior' (Sommer, 2011, p. 190).

On the other hand, according to Horvath, imperialism implies 'a form of intergroup domination in which few, if any, permanent settlers from the imperial homeland migrate to the colony' (Horvath, 1972). Again, Horvath's definition excludes the political implications of imperialism. Writers such as John Baylis, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens provide a clearer definition. They describe imperialism as 'the practice of foreign conquest and rule in the context of global relations of hierarchy and subordination. It can lead to the establishment of an empire' (Baylis, Smith, & Owens, 2014, p. 536).

In this respect, it is difficult to consider Iraq a British colony, first because no large numbers of British settlers were sent to Iraq for colonial purposes, and second because the League of Nations declared Iraq a Mandate territory of Great Britain, implying that the British would rule the country until its people were ready to govern themselves. In this context, it can be argued that the British presence in Iraq had a more imperialist nature. This is further amplified by the fact that Great Britain was primarily concerned with protecting its economic, military, and political interests in the country in order to maintain its image as a great empire.

On the other hand, the fact that colonial officers ruled Iraq should not be overlooked. Political scientist Toby Dodge refers to civil, political, and military decision-makers in Iraq as 'colonial officers' in his book *Inventing Iraq* (2003). Most of these officers, such as Sir Percy Cox, were deployed from India to Iraq. Dodge believes that these officers brought their colonial experience in India to Iraq (Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 2003, p. 63). This was logical since they had not obtained prior knowledge about the Iraqi people (Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 2003, p. 63). Rafael Fabal, who conducted research about the British administration, argues that the British political and military officers based their understandings of the Iraqi people on their previous knowledge of the Ottoman Empire (Fabal, 2015). With the exception of their stereotypes about the Ottoman officers being 'corrupt' and 'insufficient', the British did not know how the Ottomans had ruled the country for over four centuries (Fabal, 2015).

Since most Ottoman officers took their register documents with them after the fall of the empire, no registered history was left for the British to base their administration upon (Fabal, 2015). The lack of both knowledge and register documents formed the greatest obstacles for the British when they arrived in Iraq. This resulted in contradicting views and opinions among British decision-makers regarding the approaches that should be adopted in Iraq. In general, three main approaches were applied over the course of the Mandate or the British presence in Iraq from 1914 until 1932. These approaches can be divided into three categories: the London approach, the direct rule approach, and the indirect rule approach.

[The London approach \(1918–1932\)](#)

The London approach was mainly concerned with two important issues: the changing international order and reducing the costs of the Mandate. A new international order regarding colonialism emerged following the First World War (Fabal, 2015, p. 34). In January 1918, American president Woodrow Wilson delivered an important speech consisting of 14 points in a session that included the

two houses of American congress: the Senate and the House of Representatives (Wilson's speech delivered at a joint session of the two houses of Congress, January 8, 1918). In his speech, Wilson addressed the issue of people or nations that aimed to establish their own independent states. This remarkable speech had important political consequences that forced Great Britain and France to change their policies towards their occupied territories, since colonisation was gradually becoming unacceptable.

The London Office, whose prominent figure was Winston Churchill, was concerned with adjusting its colonial policy according to the new order that the Americans were establishing. In the case of Iraq, the London Office faced a dilemma regarding making Iraq a colony or a semi-independent state (Fabal, 2015, p. 35). Nevertheless, it was not long before Great Britain and France announced the Anglo-French proclamation in November of 1918. The joint proclamation insisted on the importance of self-governance for the “people of the East” after their liberation from Turkish oppression (Fabal, 2015, p. 35).

On the other hand, the London Office was concerned with the expenditures of the mandated territories in Iraq and the rest of the Middle East (Eskander, 2001, p. 153). The rising costs were becoming a burden to Great Britain due to local uprisings or other political commitments. Even after the First World War, rebellions in different parts of Iraq did not seem to be ending. The British administration in Iraq was having a difficulty containing these rebellions. The British saw a solution in a self-governance approach that would comply with the international order and reduce the high costs of their administration in Iraq. (Fabal, 2015, p. 35) Furthermore, the Office believed that the solution of self-governance would release Great Britain from its international commitments to the occupied territories (Tripp, 2002, p. 39).

[The direct rule approach \(1914–1920\)](#)

The London approach faced firm opposition from Colonel Arnold Talbot Wilson, a British colonial administrator and politician. Wilson was sent from India to Baghdad as civil high commissioner in 1918 (Tripp, 2002, p. 37). Wilson replaced Sir Percy Cox, who was the first civil commissioner in Iraq and was active until May 1918 (Tripp, 2002, p. 37). Wilson favoured a direct rule approach to Iraq. He strongly believed that the Iraqi people were not ready to govern their new state (Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 2003, p. 11). According to Wilson, tribal divisions and religious contrasts would destabilise the Iraqi state (Buchan, 2003). He argued that ‘Iraq had no competent authority to which to hand over power’ (Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 2003, p. 11). He protested against the concept of self-determination,

stating that it 'would be to sow the seeds of decay and dissolution' (Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 2003, p. 11). Toby Dodge states that 'Wilson, who came to personify the Indian View, who joined the Indian Political Service as soon as he graduated from Sandhurst, refused to acknowledge that the British would change their policy' (Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 2003, p. 8). One could argue that Wilson aimed to create another 'Indian Model' in Iraq without taking the rising anti-British sentiment into consideration.

Wilson's direct rule approach does not appear very successful. It eventually led to a major uprising against British occupation in July 1920. The revolt took place in most parts of Iraq, especially the Shi'a areas. The revolt was costly in terms of both casualties and money. Thomas Edward Lawrence, a British officer and diplomat in the former Ottoman territories in the Middle East, summarised the dramatic events prior to and during the uprising in a report to the *Sunday Times* on 22 August 1920. Since his report had a significant impact on the policy of British decision-makers in London following the uprising, it is discussed in detail below.

In his report, Lawrence described the British involvement in Mesopotamia as a 'trap', stating, 'the people of England have been led in Mesopotamia into a trap from which it will be hard to escape with dignity and honour' (Lawrence, 1920). The trap he referred to was not set up by Iraqis, but rather by British officials who were taking advantage of the long geographic distance to withhold information from the London Office. Their aim was to push the London Office to agree on a direct rule policy in Iraq. Lawrence directly addressed this, saying, 'they [the English people] have been tricked into it [the trap] by a steady withholding of information. The Baghdad communiques are belated, insincere, incomplete. Things have been far worse than we have been told, our administration more bloody and inefficient than the public knows' (Lawrence, 1920).

Lawrence also criticised the London Office for giving the India Office the freedom to design their own policy towards Iraq, stating, 'the sins of commission are those of the British civil authorities in Mesopotamia (especially of three "colonels") who were given a free hand by London' (Lawrence, 1920). Lawrence also elaborated on how colonial officers aborted any efforts to reach the self-determination goals. He states, 'they contest every suggestion of real self-government sent them from home' (Lawrence, 1920).

In addition, Lawrence touched upon the costs of the administration in general and especially in 1920 when the uprising broke out, explaining, 'we spent nearly a million men and nearly a thousand millions of money to these ends [freeing Iraq from the Ottomans]. This year we are spending ninety-two thousand men and fifty millions of money on the same objects' (Lawrence, 1920). According to

Lawrence, British efforts to establish and maintain peace in Iraq were not sincere: 'they kept fourteen thousand local conscripts embodied, and killed a yearly average of two hundred Arabs in maintaining peace. We keep ninety thousand men, with aeroplanes, armoured cars, gunboats, and armoured trains. We have killed about ten thousand Arabs in this rising this summer' (Lawrence, 1920).

Indeed, it was a costly uprising for all parties involved: the Iraqi people, the London Office, and the British officials in Baghdad. Regaining control over the revolting territories proved to be difficult even with extra financial and military aid (Dodge, *The British Mandate in Iraq, 1914-1932*, 2006, p. 3). The large-scale uprising also forced major changes in the British policy in Iraq. According to Amir Taha, a lecturer of history in Utrecht University and an expert on the modern history of Iraq, following the costly uprising, the British realised that their presence in the country was not favourable for Iraqis (Taha, personal interview transcript, 2019, p. 62). Therefore, self-governance became a more serious consideration (Taha, personal interview transcript, 2019, p. 62). Arnold Wilson, who was in favour of direct rule, had to leave the country following the revolt. Percy Cox, who was serving in London when the revolt broke out, had to return to Baghdad.

[The indirect rule approach \(1920-1932\)](#)

Following the uprising, Sir Percy Cox returned to Baghdad in October 1920, this time as a high commissioner of the British Mandate (Lawrence, 1920). A difficult mission awaited Cox following the uprising. He had to design British policy in a way that complied with the new international norms of self-determination. In addition, he had to make the Mandate as inexpensive as possible for the London Office. Dodge explains these challenges by stating, 'his task was to tailor Britain's role in the country to conform to new international norms and the government's pressing need to reduce expenditures in line with its weakened strategic and economic position' (Dodge, *The British Mandate in Iraq, 1914-1932*, 2006, p. 3). Cox also had to take into consideration the Iraqi people's desire for self-government. This was a rather difficult mission, especially since there was a heated debate over who the Iraqi people were: Sunni Arabs, Shi'a Arabs, Kurds, Christians, or Jews? Who should Cox rely on to build the state of Iraq?

Despite the complexity of the mission, Cox did not seem very confused or hesitant. Within 18 days of his arrival in November 1920, Cox formed a cabinet (Tripp, 2002, p. 45). This was accomplished with the support of Gertrude Bell, the British Oriental secretary and a scholar of Arab culture and society. The Council of Ministers of the newly formed government included Sunni and Shi'a Arabs, Christians,

and Jewish members (Tripp, 2002, p. 45). Although the cabinet seemed diverse, it mostly relied on Sunni Arabs. Intentionally or not, the British followed the Ottoman method in excluding the Shi'a community from important senior administrative positions (Tripp, 2002, p. 45).

Gertrude Bell always advocated for Iraqi self-governance. However, for her, 'Iraqi' meant 'Sunni Arab'. She was suspicious of the influence of Shi'a clerics on their followers (Tripp, 2002, p. 39). These suspicions were confirmed after the 1920 revolt, which was very strong in the Shi'a areas. Therefore, Bell encouraged the British administration to rely on Sunni elite to build the institutions of the new state (Tripp, 2002, p. 39). This perhaps marked Britain's first official step in favouring the Sunni Arabs over other ethnic, religious, or sectarian groups. One could argue that it was very logical for the British to build a modern state by appointing to important administrative positions the most educated and experienced elite, who 'happened' to be from the Sunni sect. However, other groups in Iraqi society, especially the Shi'a, did not welcome this policy.

The continuous British reliance on Sunnis sparked tension between Sunni and Shi'a Arabs. Two important incidents in 1927 showcase this tension. That year, a Sunni public servant published a book in which he openly criticised Shi'ism (Tripp, 2002, p. 62). This book led to significant Shi'i demonstrations (Tripp, 2002, p. 62). Another important and this time bloody incident occurred when a Sunni army officer fired shots at a Shi'i religious event in July 1927 (Tripp, 2002, p. 62). The way this incident was handled showcased the government's lack of ability to contain the situation, or perhaps it revealed the power abuses of the Sunni-dominated government. Instead of sentencing the officer, the army promoted him (Tripp, 2002, p. 62). Unsurprisingly, this caused more protests and unrest among the Shi'a, who felt that their voices were not heard by the government.

In addition to their reliance on Sunni Arabs, the British seemed to be insincere in their intent to build a fully independent state. First, Cox claimed to have 'supreme authority' over executive decisions (Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 2003, p. 18). There is still debate over the extent of this authority and whether or not it was legally binding. Dodge argues that the high commissioner's power had an *advisory* nature (Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 2003, p. 18). According to Dodge, Cox relied on sending letters of recommendation to the council to discuss certain issues (Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 2003, p. 18). This implied that as the building of state institutions progressed, the high commissioner's power gradually decreased. Regardless of the significance of Cox's authority, this indicated that the British still wanted to have a say in the decision-making in Iraqi politics.

Second, despite the declining number of British personnel in Iraq, the mandate policy ensured the positioning of a British advisor in every Iraqi ministry (Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 2003, p. 19). According

to Dodge, 'legally the ministers were requested by the High Commissioner to take the views of their advisors into careful consideration' (Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 2003, p. 19). This was another indicator that the British were unwilling to constrain their influence on Iraqi politics.

Third, the British aimed to rule the country indirectly by creating the so-called Arab Façade, with King Faisal I of Iraq as an instrument (Dodge, *The British Mandate in Iraq, 1914-1932*, 2006, p. 3). Despite his title, King Faisal I of Iraq was from Hijaz, in today's Saudi Arabia (Faisal I, n.d.). His father, Huseyn ibn Ali, was a prominent notable from Mecca who claimed to be a descendent of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam (Faisal I, n.d.). Before coming to Iraq, Faisal went to Syria in an attempt to gain a strong footing for his family there. However, the French expelled him along with other Arab nationalists who fought the Ottomans despite training in their universities (Faisal I, n.d.). Cox and Bell, however, welcomed Faisal as a king of Iraq by establishing the Hashemite monarchy in 1921 (Faisal I, n.d.). The British hoped to indirectly rule the country through Faisal I. However, this was not easily accepted by the rising Iraqi nationalists, who perceived the monarchy as the long arm of the British.

Fourth, the British commenced building institutions such as schools and universities that would promote their imperialist ideologies among young Iraqis. Amir Taha argues that the British intended 'to create a new elite that would rule Iraq for the interests of the British' (Taha, personal interview transcript , 2019, p. 64). In other words, the British aimed to maintain their presence in Iraq by inserting a system that would serve their long-term interests after the planned independence in 1932.

Fifth, following the 1920 revolt, the British realised the importance of the tribes in Iraqi society. Therefore, they aimed to maintain control over the countryside by collaborating with landowners and sheikhs. The British approached the sheikhs to 'guarantee' the consent of their tribesmen (Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 2003, p. 84). The British developed a scheme for dealing with the sheikhs. Accordingly, the sheikhs were divided into two categories: 'nominal' and 'potential' (Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 2003, p. 83). Both were given special degrees of authority in their territories (Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 2003, p. 83). However, the recognised sheikhs were those who complied with the British administration to a great extent (Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 2003, p. 84). If a sheikh failed to undermine his anti-British tribesmen, the British would transfer the lands that they had given him to another sheikh (Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 2003, p. 85).

Finally, as part of the process of centralising power in Iraq, the British established a new bureaucratic system. This bureaucratic system was designed to maintain the power in Baghdad, which was in the

process of becoming the central point of power in Iraq. For instance, all civil inquiries such as birth or marriage registers of the locals in the countryside had to go through provincial and then Baghdad authorities (Taha, personal interview transcript , 2019, p. 73). Taha argues that even though this system empowered the local elite, they still required final approval from those who were in power in Baghdad (Taha, personal interview transcript , 2019, p. 73). He also believes that this complicated bureaucratic system was vulnerable to corruption and exclusiveness (Taha, personal interview transcript , 2019, p. 73). The exclusiveness of this system descended from the fact that all procedures were tied to Baghdad's approval. This implies that decision-making was mostly centralised in Baghdad and less power was delegated to the provinces.

The three British approaches might not have been very successful, but one could argue that they were practical to a certain extent. Considering Britain's lack of knowledge about the Iraqi people and history, British decision-makers relied on their past colonial experiences in India to establish a direct-rule approach to Iraq. However, the failure of this approach was proven by the costly 1920 revolt. In a practical or perhaps opportunistic shift, the British quickly moved towards indirect rule. The British hoped that a mandate system would be more acceptable to both Iraqis and the international community. However, like the previous one, this approach was not flawless.

It seems that the British lacked a coherent vision for Iraqis as a society. They approached Iraqis as separate ethnic and religious or sectarian groups. They categorised them according to the relevance of each group to British interests. Therefore, it was not surprising to see Cox and Bell rely on one group more than others in building the state of Iraq. This approach was clearly reflected in several incidents that further deepened the divisions in Iraqi society. The exclusion of certain groups such as the Shi'a eventually became a 'tradition' for despotic rulers in Iraq after the withdrawal of the British Mandate in 1932.

Chapter 3: The independence movement

The previous chapter highlighted three important political approaches that the British applied to Iraq. This chapter explains how the independence movement revealed the contradictory interests and goals of different ethnic and religious groups in Iraqi society. First, the Sunni Arab reaction to the British official debut on the political scene of Iraq is outlined. Second, the Shi'a Arab reaction is discussed. Third, the tribal reaction to the British Mandate is highlighted. Fourth, the Kurdish reaction is explained. Finally, the reaction of the Christians is highlighted. The so-called Assyrian Affair is used as a case study for explaining the position of Christians in the independence movement.

Sunni Arabs

Although the Sunnis Arabs did not form the majority of the population, they were the backbone of the Ottomans who ruled Iraq for 400 years (1514 -1920). The Ottomans mostly relied on Sunni Arabs to secure their rule in the country. On the other hand, the Ottomans did not have a particular interest in the Shi'a except for their territories. (Allawi, 2014, p. 343). The roots of this indifference lay in the historical wars of the Ottomans with their Persian rivals. Since Shi'a Arabs shared the same faith as the Persians, the Ottomans constantly suspected them of collaborating with the Persians. This eventually led to the systematic exclusion of Shi'i Arabs. Sunni Arabs had more opportunities to build careers within the Ottoman system.

Unlike the Shi'a, Sunnis were relatively satisfied with the Ottoman system since they had more opportunities to build professional careers (Allawi, 2014, p. 343). Hence, upon the fall of the Ottomans, most Sunni Arabs remained loyal to them (Allawi, 2014, p. 343). This loyalty eventually caused a rift between Sunnis. They were divided between remaining loyal to the Ottomans or form an alliance with the British, the new powerful actor in the region. Some Sunni Arabs saw new opportunities arising with the British entrance, but most of them were suspicious of the British intentions (Allawi, 2014, p. 343).

The confusion was reflected in al-'Ahd secret society, which was established by Sunni Arab officers in 1918 (Tripp, 2002, p. 36). On one hand, the leader of al-'Ahd society, Yasin al-Hashimi, suspected the intentions of the British (Tripp, 2002, p. 36). On the other hand, two prominent faction leaders of this society, Nuri al-Sa'id and Ja'far al-'Askari, believed in the importance of the British role in building the future state of Iraq (Tripp, 2002, p. 36). In its first years, al-'Ahd intensified its opposition to the British. In March 1920, the society declared the independence of Iraq (Tripp, 2002, p. 40).

The declaration took place in a congress held in Damascus (Tripp, 2002, p. 40). In the same congress, al-'Ahd recognised prince Abdallah as the king of Iraq (Tripp, 2002, p. 40). Prince Abdallah was, in fact, the brother of Prince Faisal, who would become the first king of Iraq appointed by the British in 1921. Although this congress did not earn strong recognition, it illustrated the vision of al-'Ahd and its future plans for Iraq (Tripp, 2002, p. 40). Shortly after the congress, al-'Ahd forces and their tribal allies marched towards Iraq aiming to conquer Mosul in May 1920 (Tripp, 2002, p. 40). However, the British foiled the plan to conquer Mosul. This event marked the end of al-'Ahd activities as an organisation, but the group's individual members remained active. (Tripp, 2002, p. 40).

Although the activities of al-'Ahd ended, the accelerating political events soon led to its revival in one way or another. The previously mentioned fraction leaders – Ja'far al-'Askari and Nuri al-Sa'id – both became Prime Ministers under the British Mandate. This is, perhaps, a representation of the confused Sunni position towards the British. While the majority opposed the British Mandate, others were willing to collaborate with the British to build the Iraqi state. This is especially reflected in the early Iraqi cabinets during the Mandate which were composed of mostly Sunni Arabs who initially were Ottoman officers. The legacy of this partial 'collaboration' with either the Ottomans or the British was perceived negatively by their Shi'i rivals.

Shi'a Arabs

The response of the Shi'a to the British occupation descended mostly from clerics (also known as Mujtahids), journalists, and tribes. Shi'a notables and clerics formed several religious societies and newspapers that served to promote their anti-British visions. Starting in 1918, societies such as the League of Islamic Awakening (Jim'yat al-Nahda al-Islamiya) and the Muslim National League (al-Jimy'ya al-Wataniya al-Islamiya) were established (Vinogradov, 1972, p. 133 & 134). These two societies consisted predominantly of Shi'i clerics, but also a few young Iraqi writers and journalists (Vinogradov, 1972, p. 133).

Another prominent Shi'a dominated society was the Guards of Independence (Haras al-Istiqlal) (Tripp, 2002, p. 40). This Society was established by a notable Shi'i cleric named Muhammad al-Sadr (Tripp, 2002, p. 40). It was founded in response to British authorities who prevented an Iraqi delegation from attending the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919 (Tripp, 2002, p. 40). The delegation aimed to prevent an agreement imposing a British Mandate on Iraq (Tripp, 2002, p. 40).

The Guards of Independence played an important role in organising mass protests that broke out prior to the 1920 revolt. Its members had regular meetings with Shi'a clerics (Tripp, 2002, p. 41). The meetings followed a Shi'i *fatwa*⁹ which declared that the collaboration of Muslims with the British was unlawful (Tripp, 2002, p. 41). The result was a series of mass protests that swept Baghdad in May 1920 (Tripp, 2002, p. 41). Although these demonstrations were peaceful, the option of armed resistance was left open (Tripp, 2002, p. 41). Due to its diverse composition, the Guards of Independence formed a link between the Sunni and Shi'i communities (Tripp, 2002, p. 41). This was illustrated by visiting the mosques of the opposite sect as a sign of brotherhood and unity against the occupation (Tripp, 2002, p. 41). Despite the overall religious spirits of these societies, they had distinctive nationalist characteristics.

Reflecting on the Shi'i and Sunni responses to the British, one could argue that their visions for the future of Iraq did not differ significantly. In fact, both sects almost fully agreed on Arab Muslim leadership of the country (Vinogradov, 1972, p. 131). However, both sides did not join actions against the British occupation. Their collaboration during the Baghdad May protests was limited and almost only symbolic.

Arab tribes

Although they were not represented prominently in the Iraqi political scene during the Mandate, the tribes could not be underestimated since they formed the largest group in Iraqi society (Vinogradov, 1972, p. 124). Their significant role was further highlighted in the 1920 revolt that forced the British to adjust their policy towards Iraq. Besides its political consequences, the revolt revealed weaknesses in the tribal system.

First, the shifting loyalty of the tribes came into prominence following the revolt. Although the tribes showed heroic actions in their battles with the British, they still had a negative side in the way that they dealt with certain situations. The tribes that rose against the British were expecting a harsh punishment (Allawi, 2014, p. 340). Meanwhile, some sheikhs were expecting rewards in exchange for their collaboration with and loyalty to the British (Allawi, 2014, p. 340). Fahad Beg ibn Hadhdhal and Jaid ibn Mijland of the Dahamshah are two examples of sheikhs who received a monthly subsidy in return for their collaboration (Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 2003, p. 84).

⁹ Islamic legal pronouncement

Most importantly, there were tribes that were not loyal to a particular party in the conflict. Their loyalty depended on the reward that they would receive for their cooperation. Ali Allawi, the writer of King Faisal of Iraq I states, "the tribes were above all concerned with their material welfare and power, and their Sheikhs carefully weighted the rewards that might emanate from the Ottomans or the British as a price for their support" (Allawi, 2014, p. 242). This implies that the tribes' loyalty shifted according to that circumstances and the significance of the rewards.

Second, there was tension among tribes of the same faith as well. This could be seen in the Shi'i and Sunni areas in Iraq. The writer Amal Vinogradov stated in her research about the role of Iraqi tribes in 1920 revolt, "the three powerful confederations [Dulaim, Shammar and 'Aanaza], all Sunni, were often at war with each other" (Vinogradov, 1972, p. 126). In this context, it could be stated that religion was not the only factor that played a role in the tension between tribes. Arab tribes are traditionally always in competition with each other for greater wealth, recognition, and dominance in the region. One could argue that this continuous competition not only made it difficult for future Iraqi government to control the tribes, but also formed an obstacle to further integration between the three former Ottoman provinces.

Third, the Shi'i background of the revolting tribes raised questions about the goals of the uprising. Writers such as Elie Kadouri are convinced that the 1920 revolt was a southern separatist movement inspired by the Shi'i interpretation of Islam (Vinogradov, 1972, p. 124). Kadouri believes that Shi'i clerics and tribes aimed to create a state in the south that was separate from Iraq (Vinogradov, 1972, p. 124). His claim is perhaps inspired by the fact that the shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala formed the backbone of the 1920 revolt. This is further amplified by the significant influence that Shi'i clerics had on the tribes (Allawi, 2014, p. 342). However, despite the fierce Shi'i inspiration of the revolt, there is no evidence that the clerics or tribes called for an independent state in the south (Vinogradov, 1972, p. 124). Regardless of the primary intention of the tribes, one could argue that the legacy of the Shi'i role left a sense of superiority in the collective memory of the Shi'i population since they bore the significant burden of confronting the occupiers.

Kurds

The Kurdish response to the British was partially highlighted in the first chapter. Southern Kurds were carefully observing the British occupation of Basra and Baghdad. Their position towards the British was not negative. On the contrary, they were relatively welcoming to the British who conquered Kirkuk in May 1918 (Tripp, 2002, p. 34). Perhaps the Kurds hoped that the British would help them to

create their own independent state. The British did not oppose this idea in the beginning of their presence in Southern Kurdistan. In fact, the British helped the Kurds to establish an autonomous administration with Sheikh Mahmud as governor (Eskander, 2001, p. 164).

The rule of Sheikh Mahmud did not last long (October 1918 - June 1919) (Eskander, 2001, p. 164). The British withdrew their support for Mahmud for two reasons. First, they realised that Mahmud was not accepted in all parts of Southern Kurdistan (Tripp, 2002, p. 34). Second, they noticed that his ambition for creating an independent state included all regions of Kurdistan in Turkey, Iran, and Syria (Eskander, 2001, p. 164). The British soon ended his rule and sent him into exile. This not only sparked rebellions in the region, but also marked an important shift in the Kurdish attitude towards the British. The Kurdish rebellions were strong and costly. Furthermore, they provided room for the Turkish campaigns against both the British and the Arabs. The British tried to contain the Kurdish opposition by bringing Sheikh Mahmud back from exile in 1922 (Eskander, 2001, p. 167).

The British were divided among themselves about the fate of Kurdistan. The Colonial Secretary at the time – Winston Churchill – preferred an independent Kurdish state as buffer zone against Turkey. Meanwhile, Cox argued that no Kurdish leader, including Sheikh Mahmud, was capable of bringing the Kurdish tribes together (Eskander, 2001, pp. 168-169). Despite Sheikh Mahmud, Cox insisted that Southern Kurdistan should be a part of Iraq. The tension arose again once Sheikh Mahmud heard that Southern Kurdistan would be included in the Iraqi Assembly election (Eskander, 2001, p. 174). The elections implied the incorporation of Southern Kurdistan into Iraq. As a result, Sheikh Mahmud declared himself the king of Kurdistan, establishing a new independent Kurdish State (Eskander, 2001, p. 174). This led to continuous armed conflicts from 1922 until 1925 (Eskander, 2001, p. 176), which finally ended with the defeat of the Kurds.

However, the Kurdish opposition to an independent Iraqi state did not end. In the summer of 1929, the Kurds demanded that the Baghdad government increase expenditures for their region (Tripp, 2002, p. 64). This was a sign of hope that the Kurds were finally willing to engage in Iraqi politics. However, it also implied that Kurds would not be ignored by Baghdad elite – ‘should this be the case, the Kurdish party would request that the Mandate stay in force for full twenty-five years stipulated by the League of Nations’ (Tripp, 2002, p. 64).

It can be concluded that the Kurdish revolts against the British stemmed from the Kurdish opposition to the incorporation of Southern Kurdistan into Iraq. Unlike the Arabs, the Kurds did not oppose the British presence in their region. On the contrary, they welcomed a joint Kurdish-British administration. However, when they realised that the British would impose Arab rule on Southern

Kurdistan, no option was left for them but to revolt in the hope of gaining independence. This shows that the Kurdish anti-British movement was intended to create an independent Kurdistan rather than an independent Iraq. This also implied that the Kurds' goals and ambitions contradicted those of the Arab Iraqis.

Christians

Christian (and Jewish) people were generally welcoming to the British (Allawi, 2014, p. 340). To a certain extent, they considered the British to be protectors of their futures and prosperity in Iraq (Allawi, 2014, p. 340). Before elaborating on this topic any further, it is important to note that Iraqi Christians are divided into several subgroups. The case study that is highlighted in this section is one related to Assyrian Christians, who were massacred in 1933. The Assyrians were brought to Iraq by the British following the First World War. They originally descended from today's Turkish Kurdistan, where they revolted against the Ottomans during the First World War (Karol, 2010, p. 268). After their rebellion, they fled to Urmia in current day Iran. Following the First World War, the republic of Turkey refused to take them back. Therefore, the British brought them from Urmia to Iraq (Vinogradov, 1972, p. 137).

With the approaching independence of Iraq, the Assyrians grew more concerned about their position in a future Iraq. The British withdrawal from Iraq implied that they were losing their main source of protection. This was especially worrisome because of rising tensions with their neighbours (Karol, 2010, p. 268). The reputation of 'British collaborators' could put them in a dangerous position in a fully independent Iraq. This reputation descended from their military cooperation with the British (Karol, 2010, p. 269).

Assyrians became Great Britain's most trusted group in the so-called Iraqi Levies: the first British military force in Iraq (Karol, 2010, p. 269). Although the Levies were meant to include all Iraqis, they gradually became dominated by Assyrians. Some writers such as Amal Vinogradov believe that the Assyrians became a British instrument to fight the tribesmen (Vinogradov, 1972, p. 137). With the approach of independence and rising Arab nationalism, Assyrians sought more protection by requesting a special consideration for their cause from the League of Nations (Karol, 2010, p. 269). However, their request was declined by the League (Karol, 2010, p. 269). This forced Assyrians to take hasty and careless action in order to obtain autonomy in a future independent Iraq.

The Assyrians' respected patriarch, Mar Shamon, hindered the settling of his people by refusing to collaborate with the government (Karol, 2010, p. 269). In response, the Iraqi government jailed him in June 1933 (Karol, 2010, p. 269). Despite the British and King Faisal's intervention, Shamon could not be released. Assyrians had to find another place to settle. Syria seemed a good option, but the French refused to offer them a place (Karol, 2010, p. 269). However, they gave the Assyrians their weapons back (Karol, 2010, p. 269). The situation reached a new peak when armed Assyrians re-entered Iraq. A clash between these Assyrians and the army occurred. Even today, it is not clear who fired shots first (Karol, 2010, p. 269).

The conflict was interpreted as an attack on the Iraqi national army and a threat to the newly established unity of the country. Considering the combat skills of the Assyrians, the Iraqi government was afraid that the tension would cause further unrest in the north (Husry, 1974, p. 349). Many Iraqis believed that the British encouraged the attack. Perhaps the British were looking for an opportunity to interfere with the newly independent Iraq. However, Faisal believed the French were encouraging the Assyrians to revolt against the Iraqi government (Husry, 1974, p. 349). He eliminated the possibility of British involvement. One could question his real intention in this claim. Considering his dependence on the British even after independence, it can be argued that he wanted to protect himself by protecting the British reputation.

Shortly after the attack, neighbouring Kurdish and Arab tribesmen started looting Assyrian villages (Husry, 1974, p. 344). On 8 August 1933, Iraqi troops started disarming the inhabitants of Summayl village, where many Assyrians took refuge from the ongoing looting (Husry, 1974, p. 344). According to K. Husry, who conducted research on the Assyrian Affair, on the morning of August 8th, the army entered the village and started the massacre (Husry, 1974, p. 344). The numbers of victims were not confirmed, but the government claimed that 305 Assyrians and 25 tribesmen were killed (Husry, 1974, p. 345).

The Iraqi government denied any involvement and claimed that the Affair involved a clash between the tribesmen and the Assyrians. However, the government story was not convincing. According to Husry, the tribesmen were mostly interested in property rather than Assyrian lives (Husry, 1974, p. 345). Also, he believes that Assyrian fighters were more skilled than the tribesmen (Husry, 1974, p. 345). Following the massacre, the army was received in a huge celebration in Baghdad (Husry, 1974, p. 353). Despite the government denial, Arabs in Baghdad considered the massacre a heroic victory against 'British collaborators'.

Although no one was convicted, several conclusions can be drawn from the Summyl massacre. First, it revealed that not all Iraqis were anticipating independence. On the contrary, many Kurds and Assyrians were worried about their positions in the 'new' country. Second, it reflected the Kurdish and Assyrian preference for more autonomy rather than a centrality of power in Baghdad. Finally, the crowd's celebration of the army following the massacre showed how little sympathy Baghdadis had for Christians. It can be argued that the celebration of the army's victory was due to the belief of Baghdadis that Assyrians were merely foreign British collaborators rather than fellow 'compatriots'.

Against this background, it can be concluded that the independence movement was divided. Every sectarian or ethnic group sought to achieve its goals separately. Driving the British out was not a collective goal of all Iraqis, but was rather an Arab goal. Sunni and Shi'a Arabs wanted to establish a fully independent Iraq under Arab rule. However, even Sunni and Shi'a Arabs were not unified in their struggle against the British. Their unity was rather symbolic and limited to certain occasions such as the May protests in 1920. On the other hand, Kurds and Assyrians initially did not oppose the British. In fact, they were more concerned with gaining their own autonomy rather than building the state of Iraq. The contradictory goals and ambitions of each group within Iraqi society were revealed during the so-called independence movement perhaps more than any other period in modern Iraqi history.

Analysis

This chapter discusses the most important issues that came into prominence in the previous chapters. First, the process of border demarcation and its consequences is discussed. This section highlights the wills of different ethnic, religious, and sectarian groups in relation to the demarcation of borders and power centrality in Iraq. Second, the British political approaches in relation to self-governance are addressed. This section discusses the sincerity of British efforts to foster self-governance and build an independent state. Third, the legacies of different empires that ruled Iraq are addressed. This section also discusses how these legacies have affected different groups in Iraqi society.

1. Border demarcation and its consequences

1.1. Borders

As stated in the first chapter, the concept of hard borderlines with political implications did not exist in Iraq. Most people in Iraq were not familiar with the concept of hard borderlines. Tribal interactions on both sides of the boundaries were very common. However, with the rising engagement of Western powers in the Middle East in the 19th century, vague boundaries gradually ceased to be accepted. Western powers such as the Russian Empire and Great Britain offered to mediate between the Ottomans and the Persians to 'solve' the boundary issue (Potter, 2004, p. 66). It is, however, still debateable whether these powers actually wanted to solve this issue or whether they intended to impose their understandings of borders for their own interests rather than the interests of the locals.

1.2. Centralising power

As previously mentioned, Iraq consisted of three Ottoman provinces. This implies that, at least during the Ottoman period, there was no official central point of power. Therefore, the demarcation of borders could also be considered a stepping stone towards the centralisation of power in Iraq. Besides border demarcation, the British attempted to centralise power by creating a cabinet and establishing a monarchy in the early 1920s. Centralising power in Baghdad, however, clashed with the reality of the locals.

1.3. The people's will

Drawing hard borderlines and centralising power clashed with the reality of several groups. First, it clashed with the tribes that resided on both sides of the boundaries between Iraq and Iran. These tribes had more interaction with each other than with their respective central governments. This is further amplified by the fact that these tribes had limited understandings of central governments (Floor, 2006, p. 277). Since these tribes enjoyed considerable autonomy in their territories, they did not recognise any authority except that of their tribe or sheikh (Floor, 2006, p. 277).

According to Floor, even sheikhs had difficulty imposing their authority on the tribesmen (Floor, 2006, p. 277). Therefore, one could argue that the British attempt to bring them under the umbrella of Baghdad as a single point of power was challenging and perhaps not successful, at least at the beginning of the British Mandate. The power of the tribes was clearly reflected in the 1920 revolt.

Second, drawing hard borderlines and centralising power clashed with the interests of ethnic and religious groups such as the Kurds and Assyrians who wished to have more autonomy. Since vague boundaries were gradually transforming into hard borderlines and power in Iraq was increasingly centralised, these groups became more concerned about their positions after the independence.

The tension grew even greater as the independence of Iraq approached. These concerns eventually turned into armed conflicts with the British in the Kurdish case and with the Iraqi army in the Assyrian case. This was further amplified by the British reliance on the former Ottoman elite, which mostly consisted of Sunnis, to control the central point of power in Iraq.

One could argue that the interests of local people in different regions were not taken into serious consideration during the process of demarcating borders and centralising power in Baghdad. Neglect of the people's will was especially reflected in the regions of Muhammareh, Southern Kurdistan, and Mosul.

1.3.1. Muhammareh

It is still debateable why Muhammareh was incorporated into Iran rather than Iraq. Muhammareh has ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious, and even sectarian ties with

southern Iraq. Taking these factors into consideration, one could argue that Muhammareh would have 'fit' better into the Iraqi identity. However, these factors were not serious considerations for the British. Instead, the British favoured a stable and trusted ally such as Reza Pahlavi more than local tribes with unstable leadership and shifting loyalties. In this context, one could argue that the rationale behind Great Britain's decision was based on its own interests in the region rather than the interests of the local people.

On the other hand, there is little evidence that the people of Muhammareh favoured incorporation into Iraq. Given the considerable autonomy of the tribes in Muhammareh, one could argue that they may have wanted to establish their own independent Arab state. The dispute over Muhammareh, however, continued regardless of the people's will and ambitions. Following independence, Iraqi governments claimed that the region was an extension of their territories. In addition, the dispute over the Shatt Al-Arab River came into prominence. These disputed border issues eventually became important factors in the Iran-Iraq war from 1980 to 1988, which had significant consequences for the stability of Iraq.

The conclusion that can be drawn from this case study is that the British indeed bear a share of the responsibility for ending autonomous Arab rule in Muhammareh by approving the 1924 annexation of the region by Reza Pahlavi. However, it is difficult to blame the British for the Iran-Iraq border issues since their legacy lies in the two vague treaties of Erzurum (1823 and 1847) between the Ottoman and Persian Empires.

1.3.2. Mosul

Mosul is another case study that reflects the neglect of locals' interests. As demonstrated in the first chapter, the negotiations took place between the British Mandate and the Turkish counterpart. Rather than the people's will, oil became the main factor in deciding the fate of Mosul. Realising the importance of oil after the First World War, Great Britain fiercely opposed losing Mosul to the Turks. This insistence became especially fierce as speculations increased about discovering oil in Mosul. Additionally, considering the weakened British economy, Mosul's oil became a glimmer of hope for Great Britain. From a British perspective, it was logical to take oil into account more than the wishes of the locals.

1.3.3. Southern Kurdistan

The incorporation of Southern Kurdistan into Iraq is yet another example of the British neglecting the local people's will. Southern Kurds made their preference for an independent state very clear through negotiations and armed conflicts with the British. However, the British, and especially High Commissioner Percy Cox, saw little chance of the success for an independent Kurdish state. Cox's opinion descended from his belief that the Kurds were not able to unify under the rule of one leader. In the end, the British decided to incorporate Southern Kurdistan into Iraq in order to stop the rising Turkish threat, to prevent other Kurdish regions from demanding independence, and to reward the Arabs who revolted against the Ottomans.

Rather than justifying British actions, it is perhaps wiser to try to understand the rationale behind British decisions. Reflecting on the British approach to the three previously mentioned regions, one could argue that the British were trying to survive the 'anarchy' of that time. The British faced two major obstacles. First, they had just survived a devastating war that weakened Britain's economic position. Second, Turkey was imposing a rising threat on Iraq by claiming that Mosul and Southern Kurdistan were part of its territories. Given these circumstances, one could argue that the British 'had' to put their interests before the interests of the locals in order to maintain their reputation as a great imperial power.

On the other hand, it is also important to take into consideration the British policy towards sheikhs and landowners. As discussed in the second chapter, the British aimed to maintain stability in the countryside and tribal areas by collaborating with sheikhs and landowners. Taha argues that the interests of sheikhs and landowners were taken into account to a certain extent since they accommodated British interests (Taha, personal interview transcript , 2019, p. 60). Considering the difficulty that the sheikhs faced in maintaining control over their tribesmen, the success of this British approach is still debateable.

Reflecting on the British rationale behind the demarcation of borders and the centralising of power in Iraq, one could state that British decision-making descended from a realist perspective. Their decisions to incorporate Mosul and Kurdistan were primarily to stop the Turkish threat and secure a possible oil field. Also, their approval of ending the Arab rule in Muhammareh could be attributed to their good relations with Reza Pahlavi. The collaboration with landowners descended from the necessity of maintaining stability in the countryside for their own interests, even though it might have been at the cost of lower-class Iraqis and other ethnic and religious groups.

2. Self-governance

There is still a debate about how the modern state of Iraq was built and which factors played a role. It can be argued that the British were more concerned with making the mandate *seem* to comply with the new international order of self-determination rather than genuinely building an independent Iraqi state. A new international order was indeed emerging following the First World War. The right of self-determination forced colonial powers such as the British and the French to adapt their policies in the Middle East. The result was an Anglo-French proclamation in 1918 that insisted on the self-governance of the people of the 'East' (Fabal, 2015, p. 35).

However, in practice the right of self-determination had yet to become a reality. Author Len Scott states that 'from the perspective of former colonies, the principles of self-determination that underpinned the new global order were slow to be implemented, and required political, ideological, and in some cases military mobilisation' (Scott, 2014, p. 54).

It can be stated although the British adapted their approach to Iraq, they still wanted to remain involved in its politics. When the 1920 revolt proved the failure of the direct rule approach, the British quickly switched to an indirect rule approach. Self-governance was the stepping stone of the British indirect rule approach. However, it is still debateable whether the self-governance attempts were sincere. Taha argues that self-governance was 'an artificial compromise where the most important positions were held by British advisors' (Taha, personal interview transcript , 2019, p. 62).

Most likely, the practical or perhaps opportunist shift from direct to indirect rule was to ensure a British presence in Iraq, but under the label of the Mandate. While building state institutions, the British also made room for interference with Iraqi decision-making. This was accomplished through 'recommendations' by either the High Commissioner of the British Mandate or other British advisers in Iraqi ministries (Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 2003, p. 18). The state institutions were built to ensure dependence on the British. The dependence of these institutions and their limited integration with each other became problematic for the development of the Iraqi state following independence (Taha, personal interview transcript , 2019, p. 71).

Furthermore, a variety of British strategies for centralising power in Iraq reflected the British unwillingness to delegate power to different groups within Iraqi society. Their policy towards sheikhs and landowners, the bureaucratic system, and institutions that promoted the

benefits of the British administration of Iraq are indicators that the British were planning to indirectly hold different social, political, and economic aspects of Iraq under their control even after the end of the Mandate.

More importantly, Iraq was still ruled by officers such as Cox and Wilson who had colonial backgrounds and views of the Iraqi people as inferior. Even the Baghdadi elite who were supposed to rule the rest of Iraq were considered ignorant and backwards. Dodge summarises the British views of the Baghdadi elite as follows: 'Cox calls them "impecunious" and "backward", whereas Wingate, a political officer in Najaf, sought to isolate the rest of the country of the "half fledged intelligence of Baghdad". Tyler, a political officer in Hillah, also rails against the "low-born Baghdadi"' (Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 2003, p. 71). In this context, one could state that although Iraq was not officially considered a colony, it was ruled by political and army officers with colonial views. These colonial views, which perhaps descended from supremacist beliefs, prevented the British from taking steps towards genuine and inclusive self-governance.

3. Legacies of great empires

3.1. Different identities

One could argue that the British establishment of the modern state of Iraq in 1920 imposed a new identity on its inhabitants. Many great powers such as the Persians, Arabs, and Ottomans had ruled the country for hundreds of years. Every ethnic, religious, or sectarian group carried certain legacies of these empires, whether negative or positive. These legacies eventually resulted in different goals, ambitions, and visions for the futures of these groups. The futures that some of these groups foresaw did not lie in an independent Iraqi state.

Groups such as the Kurds and Assyrians did not foresee their future in an independent Iraq with a central government and little room for autonomy. More autonomy to preserve their languages, cultures, and costumes was perhaps the most prominent demand of these groups at the beginning of the creation of the Iraqi state. Undermining these demands only contributed to their isolation, both politically and socially. Furthermore, it brought their ethnic and religious identities, rather than the collective Iraqi identity, into prominence.

A collective Iraqi identity might be a solution. However, Taha believes that a collective Iraqi identity may not be able to contain the differences between the diverse groups in Iraqi society, since they all have different interests and different understandings of who is an Iraqi (Taha, personal interview transcript , 2019, p. 67). Instead, Taha suggests that war and violence are the true commonality that these groups have with each other (Taha, personal interview transcript , 2019, p. 68). Although war and violence do not necessarily unify these groups, they remain a common experience that all of them endured during a specific period of time (Taha, personal interview transcript , 2019, p. 68).

3.2. A notion of collaboration

As previously mentioned, in addition to the British, different empires have ruled Iraq for long periods of time. Each group within Iraqi society rose into prominence during the rule of these powers. Upon the fall of these empires, the groups that supported them earned the title of 'collaborators'.

Sunnis were considered Ottoman collaborators since the latter relied on them to rule the country. In fact, Sunnis formed the majority of the Ottoman army in Iraq (Allawi, 2014, p. 343). It should be noted that the Turks to a certain extent favoured Sunni Arabs more than Sunni Kurds. The Arab Shi'a, who share the same faith as the Persians, were accused of supporting the Persian invasions of Iraq. At the beginning of their rule, the Ottomans were tolerant towards the Shi'a (Marr, 2011, p. 23). However, the continuous conflicts between the two empires negatively influenced the reputation of the Shi'a. As a result of these conflicts, the Shi'a were labelled Persian collaborators (Marr, 2011, p. 23).

The Assyrians were considered the backbone of the British military forces due to their large enlistment in the British-established levies during the Mandate. Writers such as Amal Vinogradov believe that they were used to combat the tribes (Vinogradov, 1972, p. 137). The Kurds, who firmly opposed incorporation into Iraq, were considered the enemies of Iraqi unity.

It can be stated that the notion of collaboration is a mere result of the foreign rule of Iraq. Taha believes that although this notion exists, it does not necessary reflect reality (Taha, personal interview transcript , 2019, p. 74). Nonetheless, he argues that this notion has a significant mobilisation power (Taha, personal interview transcript , 2019, p. 75). According

to Taha, it 'could easily be exploited to mobilise people who are sensitive to these kind of myths' (Taha, personal interview transcript , 2019, p. 75). Perhaps this explains why the notion of collaboration comes into prominence during political crises and armed conflicts in Iraq.

3.3. The independence movement

As previously discussed in Chapter 3, the British withdrawal and the independence of Iraq received different responses from various ethnic and religious groups within Iraqi society. While Sunni and Shi'a Arabs clearly struggled to achieve this dream of independence, other groups such as the Kurds and Assyrians were more concerned about their positions in the independent state of Iraq. In a sense, this contradicts the romanticised version of the independence movement in Iraq. Taha argues that suggesting that all Iraqis revolted against the British is a rather nationalistic myth that emerged as part of the nation-forming process (Taha, personal interview transcript , 2019, p. 66). According to Taha, this is not a phenomenon of Iraq only, but of many countries that also had to build their nation-states.

Dividing ethnic, religious, and sectarian groups between pro- and anti-independence is also difficult, since people joined the independence movement for a variety of reasons. While the independence of Iraq might be a true ideological conviction, other factors such as tribal ties and peer pressure might also have played roles in influencing people's decisions to join the movement (Taha, personal interview transcript , 2019, p. 67). Therefore, it is very difficult to assume that a certain group such as the Assyrians or Kurds collectively opposed independence, or vice versa.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the processes of border demarcation and power centralisation in Iraq were accompanied by mixed responses from different groups in Iraqi society such as the Kurds and the Assyrians. However, the rationale behind the British decision can be attributed to its realist perspective towards the anarchy of that era. In order to secure its economic, political, and imperial image, Great Britain had to prioritise its interests over the interests of the locals. This perhaps also explains the British insistence on maintaining a role in Iraqi politics and decision-making despite its self-governance promises.

Furthermore, the responses of different groups in Iraqi society to the British administration revealed their differences. Clearly contradictory goals, ambitions, and perhaps identities were reflected in

Iraq's struggle to gain independence. It is important to note that the ethnic, religious, and sectarian tension was further deepened as a result of the continuous political instability and armed conflicts that Iraq went through after the British Mandate. Due to the limits of this dissertation, the aftermath of the British Mandate could not be properly addressed. Therefore, it is difficult to attribute the causes of this tension solely to the British.

Conclusion

The legacies of British rule and the former great empires that ruled Iraq the country established a shaky foundation for building the modern state of Iraq. While it is difficult to establish a direct link between the British Mandate and the current instability in Iraq, it can be stated that the legacy paved the way for the political crises that Iraq experienced after its independence.

First, the borders that Iraq inherited from the British Mandate became a prominent source of violence and conflicts both with groups such as the Kurds and neighbouring countries such as Iran. Prior to the Mandate, the Iraqi people were not familiar with the concept of hard borderlines. Therefore, when the British attempted to impose their concept of borders, the locals did not welcome it. Demarcating the borders not only defined the Iraqi territories but also contributed to centralising power in the country. Centralising the power in Baghdad was another important legacy of the British. It resulted in the creation of a central government in Iraq, which implied little to no autonomy for groups such as the Kurds and the Assyrians.

Undermining the demands of these groups, especially those of the Kurds, laid the foundation for a continuous clash between groups and the central government of Iraq after independence. The British disregard of these demands can be attributed to the realist attitude of the British. The rising power of Turkey imposed a threat to British economic and political interests in Iraq. Turkey asserted that Mosul was part of its territories. Furthermore, it fuelled the anti-British and anti-Arab activities in Southern Kurdistan. Great Britain had to stop the Turkish rising threat in order to protect its interests and image as a great imperial power. As a result, despite the unwillingness of the locals, the British incorporated southern Kurdistan.

Furthermore, the British had to enforce stability on the southern Iran-Iraq border by approving the incorporation of Muhammareh with Iran rather than Iraq, or declaring it an independent state. It is, however, important to bear in mind that the roots of the issues on Iran-Iraq borders lie in the Ottoman-Persian wars. It is, therefore, difficult to hold the British responsible for the border issues that occurred between the two countries after the end of the Mandate.

Second, excluding groups such as the Shi'a, Kurds, and Assyrians from the decision-making in Baghdad is a legacy that Iraq inherited from the British to a certain extent. The exclusion of, especially, the Shi'a could be attributed to their fierce opposition to the British during the 1920 revolt. This, in turn, showcases the British's insincere efforts to build a fully independent state in Iraq. Despite the emerging international order of self-determination, the British insisted on staying involved in Iraqi politics. This was evident through the different measures that the British undertook

to preserve their presence in Iraq. The most important administrative positions were held by British advisors. Great Britain aimed to interfere with Iraqi politics and decision-making.

Furthermore, the British established relations with local sheikhs and landowners in order to undermine anti-British tribesmen. Following the significant 1920 revolt, the British aimed to control tribes through landowners. It is unclear whether this policy was successful, since sheikhs also had difficulty controlling their tribesmen. In addition, the British attempted to create an elite that would serve their interests after the end of the Mandate. They aimed to do so by establishing educational institutions that promoted the benefits of the British Mandate.

Considering the fierce role of the Shi'a in the 1920 revolt and the Kurds' rejection of incorporation with Iraq, the British had to rely on Sunni Arabs to rule the country. Empowering mostly Sunni Arabs sparked protests among other groups, especially the Shi'a. The incidents that occurred between the two groups highlighted the beginning of Sunni-Shi'a tensions.

Additionally, the British established a highly Baghdad-centric bureaucratic system. Even though the main objective of this system was to maintain control of remote regions, it contributed to the exclusion of various groups such as the Shi'a from decision-making. In addition, the system was vulnerable to corruption. Similar to other British measures, this bureaucratic system was also determined to serve the interests of the ruling elite of Baghdad.

Third, the British collaboration with some groups such as the Assyrians to undermine anti-British activities further deepened the idea of collaboration. This concept already existed in Iraq and was perhaps inherited from different great empires that ruled Iraq in the past. Even though this notion did not necessarily reflect reality, the reigning group in Baghdad used it to undermine the demands of other groups in Iraq after independence.

Additionally, independence was not a collective goal for all groups. It can be argued that different groups in Iraqi society struggled for their own interests rather than for the independence of Iraq. Even the Sunni and Shi'a Arabs, who both wanted Arab rule in the country, struggled separately against the British. Therefore, it can be argued that the independence movement revealed the contradictory goals and ambitions of different groups in Iraqi society.

On the other hand, it should be noted that it is difficult to draw a clear line between people who favoured independence and those who opposed it. Similarly, it is difficult to accuse an entire group of collaborating with foreign powers. This is due to other factors that influence the self-interests of each member of these groups.

Rather than directly linking current instability to the British Mandate, it can be stated that the Mandate played an *indirect* role in the development of political instability in the country. Incorporating regions against the will of the locals, establishing dependent institutions, and empowering one group and excluding others from decision-making are among the most important legacies of the British mandate. These measures, which the British undertook to preserve their own interests, were taken over by local despotic leaders to serve their agendas. The rise and fall of these leaders was accompanied by armed conflicts and continuous unrest, which eventually resulted in political instability in the country.

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European Studies

Represented by Chair Final Project Committee

Signature: 

Date: 21/05/2019

Discloser of Confidential Information:

Name Organisation: *HMS - European Studies*

Name Mentor: *Guido van Hengel*

Signature: 

Date: *15.05.2019*

Name Student: *Hawra Ahmad Nissi*

Signature: 

Date: *15 may 2019*

Student Ethics Form

European Studies Student Ethics Form

Your name: Hawra Ahmad Nissi

Supervisor: Guido van Hengel

Instructions/checklist

Before completing this form you should read the APA Ethics Code (<http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/index.aspx>). If you are planning research with human subjects you should also look at the sample consent form available in the Final Project and Dissertation Guide.

- a. Read section 3 that your supervisor will have to sign. Make sure that you cover all these issues in section 1.
- b. Complete sections 1 and, if you are using human subjects, section 2, of this form, and sign it.
- c. Ask your project supervisor to read these sections (and the draft consent form if you have one) and sign the form.
- d. Append this signed form as an appendix to your dissertation.

Section 1. Project Outline (to be completed by student)

(i) Title of Project:

The Role of The British Mandate In The Political Instability of Current Day Iraq

(ii) Aims of project:

This dissertation aims to investigate the role of the British mandate in the political instability in current day Iraq. The first chapter will outline the British role in shaping the Iraqi borders. Firstly, this chapter discusses the British decision to incorporate regions such as Southern Kurdistan and Mosul. Secondly, it discusses the British rationale behind consenting to the incorporation of the Arab dominated province of Khuzestan with Iran rather than Iraq. The second chapter highlights the British political approaches towards Iraq, the extent of their success or failure and their consequences. The third chapter explains how the independence movement in Iraq shaped ethnic, religious and sectarian contrasts in Iraq and whether full-independence was a collective goal of 'all' Iraqis.

- (iii) Will you involve other people in your project – e.g. via formal or informal interviews, group discussions, questionnaires, internet surveys etc. (Note: if you are using data that has already been collected by another researcher – e.g. recordings or transcripts of conversations given to you by your supervisor, you should answer 'NO' to this question.)

YES / NO

If no: you should now sign the statement below and return the form to your supervisor. You have completed this form.

This project is not designed to include research with human subjects. I understand that I do not have ethical clearance to interview people (formally or informally) about the topic of my research, to carry out internet research (e.g. on chat rooms or discussion boards) or in any other way to use people as subjects in my research.

Student's signature _____ date _____

If yes: you should complete the rest of this form.

Section 2 Complete this section only if you answered YES to question (iii) above.

(i) What will the participants have to do? (v. brief outline of procedure):

For collecting primary sources, it is needed to conduct interviews with experts in Iraqi politics.

(ii) What sort of people will the participants be and how will they be recruited?

I will conduct interviews with experts in the field of the modern history of Iraq and the political instability in the country.

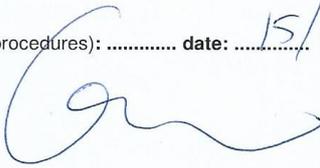
(iii) What sort stimuli or materials will your participants be exposed to, tick the appropriate boxes and then state what they are in the space below?

Questionnaires[] ; Pictures[] ; Sounds [] ; Words[] ; Other[] .

(iv) Consent: Informed consent must be obtained for all participants before they take part in your project. Either verbally or by means of an informed consent form you should state what participants will be doing, drawing attention to anything they could conceivably object to subsequently. You should also state how they can withdraw from the study at any time and the measures you are taking to ensure the confidentiality of data. A standard informed consent form is available in the Dissertation Manual.

(vi) What procedures will you follow in order to guarantee the confidentiality of participants' data? Personal data (name, addresses etc.) should not be stored in such a way that they can be associated with the participant's data.

Student's signature:  date: 15-05-2019

Supervisor's signature (if satisfied with the proposed procedures):  date: 15/05/19

Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

1) Research Project Title

The role of the British mandate in the political instability of Iraq

2) Project Description (1 paragraph)

This dissertation aims to investigate the role of the British mandate in the political instability in current day Iraq. The first chapter will outline the British role in shaping the Iraqi borders. Firstly, this chapter discusses the British decision to incorporate regions such as Southern Kurdistan and Mosul. Secondly, it discusses the British rationale behind consenting to the incorporation of the Arab dominated province of Khuzestan with Iran rather than Iraq. The second chapter highlights the British political approaches towards Iraq, the extent of their success or failure and their consequences. The third chapter explains how the independence movement in Iraq shaped ethnic, religious and sectarian contrasts in Iraq and whether full-independence was a collective goal of 'all' Iraqis.

If you agree to take part in this study please read the following statement and sign this form.

I am 16 years of age or older.

I can confirm that I have read and understood the description and aims of this research. The researcher has answered all the questions that I had to my satisfaction.

I agree to the audio recording of my interview with the researcher.

I understand that the researcher offers me the following guarantees:

All information will be treated in the strictest confidence. My name will not be used in the study unless I give permission for it.

Recordings will be accessible only by the researcher. Unless otherwise agreed, anonymity will be ensured at all times. Pseudonyms will be used in the transcriptions.

I can ask for the recording to be stopped at any time and anything to be deleted from it.

I consent to take part in the research on the basis of the guarantees outlined above.

Signed: _____

Date: 10-05-2019

Interview transcript

On 10 May 2019, a face-to-face interview was conducted with Amir Taha, a history lecturer at Utrecht University. A transcript of the full interview is enclosed below.

Hawra: Hi, as we discussed I am writing my dissertation about the British mandate from 1920 to 1932. And I am trying to investigate the British role in the current political instability in Iraq. And also there is a special focus on the religious ethnic and sectarian tensions in Iraq. My dissertation consists of 3 chapters; the first chapter is about the borders, and what was the British role in shaping the Iraqi borders. And the second chapter is about the political approaches... Like the London approach, The Direct-rule approach and the Indirect-rule approach. And the third one is about the Independence movement or the so-called independence movement, and how it shaped the religious and ethnic tensions in Iraq. So, yeah... maybe it's an idea to introduce yourself as well?

Amir Taha: Yes, my name is Amir Taha, and I worked on the modern history of Iraq. And currently I teach history at the University of Utrecht. My speciality is the Baath regime under Saddam Hussein and the resistance. But I have a wider expertise in the modern history of Iraq after the Industrial Revolution.

Hawra: Ok, great, thank you... Well, then let's start with the modern history of Iraq. So, as we know Iraq was created by the British in 1920. Maybe it's an idea to look at the British presence before 1920? Like, from late 19th century to 1920. At the beginning of their presence, the British had and more mediatory role in shaping the Iraqi borders. So, for example, they offered to mediate Between the Ottoman Empire and the Persian Empire. And their role actually came into prominence during the Erzurum treaties in 1823 and 1847. But after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the British took a more decisive role, especially when it concerned the northern borders like Southern Kurdistan and Mosul. So do you think that the British acted to protect their own interest, without taking the interest of the locals into serious consideration?

Amir Taha: Well... as far as I know the British had economic interests both in the Persian Empire and in the Ottoman Iraq as well, especially because agriculture in Iraq was, with time in the 19th century more closely tied with the international markets... More agricultural products/produce in the Ottoman Arabs was produced for the international market, which Britain was an important participant of, and an important... how to say... important support of this capitalisation of the Iraqi market, wherefore certain British interest started to grow, especially because Iraqi agriculture

became part of British import policies, wherefore, the ties between economics and politics more intertwined. I am not fully sure about the Persian Empire, but I think there were already British incursions in the Persian Empire to conduct trade treaties for trade and so on. So, what can I say... a stable border was important for stable economic activity for the British? I am not saying that the British were already colonised these areas, but they had agents present in these regions representing the British interests in the Middle East. And your larger question is... could you repeat the question?

Hawra: whether the British took the interests of the local into consideration like the interests of the Kurds, for example, who were not very enthusiastic about joining Iraq. But, let me rephrase it. It was a consideration, but it wasn't a serious consideration. Why was it like that?

Amir Taha: well... I think... as far as I know, the Kurdish independence movements became more prevalent in the beginning of the 20th century. In the 19th century it was still Ottoman Iraq, not specifically the nation-state of Iraq which includes a certain ethnicity is certainly dominant culture that by definition would exclude the Kurds. It became more of a problem later on. In the time we are talking about, I think the British collaborated with, most likely, elite in Ottoman Iraq... And most likely elites in the Persian Empire who had an interest to conduct these trading treaties. Let me tell you in this way... For example in the 19th century Ottoman Iraq, you had large landowners who had significant agricultural produce and on those large lands also lived peasants. And what was in the interest of the elite you sell there agricultural produce for a high price to the British. So, in a sense you could say they took the interest of Iraqi landowners into account, possibly, because they could accommodate the British interest far more than, let's say, the mass of the British Empire, or the masses of the Persian Empire or the Iraqi masses of Ottoman Iraq.

Hawra: I actually read something about the land ownership at that time, but I didn't really focus on that. So, it is good that we are discussing that now. Would you agree that the British were acting from a Realist perspective? Like there was an anarchy, they just survived a war and there was a rising Turkish threat, and they were also allies with the Iranians. So, that's why they tried to incorporate southern Kurdistan [with Iraq] to stop the Turkish threat? They let the Arab dominated province [Khuzestan] in the southern part of Iran, to be a part of Iran rather than Iraq, just because they had good relations with Iran. So, do you think they acted from a realist perspective?

Amir Taha: could you specify the time we are talking about?

Hawra: from 1918 until 1925

Amir Taha: So, you are asking me whether the British acted... so this is the parts of the realist theory which, if I am correct, is out of self-interest for security reasons.

Hawra: Yes. Actually the British got involved in Iraq because the Ottomans joined the Germans in the War.

Amir Taha: yes, that is true. It was part of WWI for the British to support the Arab independence movement, but also to invade southern Iraq to guarantee they're presence, I think for post WWI. I am not sure what the British view was regarding Kurdistan, but I think originally the British aimed to colonise Iraq for a large part, because they also saw a potential threat to India from the Arab or Persian Gulf depending on what your political preferences are. It could possibly route to India as well. And they thought by securing the gateway this could be in the interest of the British presence in India. And I don't think, at that time at least, regional concerns in the Middle East played such a large role or so. The British presence in India was a more important matter for them, for why they invaded Iraq. If I am correct. There are even circulated theories around that time which says that Iraq was a large country and a small population; they could take a segments of the population in India and place them in Iraq so governing India would be easier. Absolutely ridiculous, but it was a serious consideration at that time.

Hawra: so, from what I am understanding, you are saying that it wasn't per se a realist thing, but more a colonial ideology or rationale behind it?

Amir Taha: Well, I think that it is still a realistic perspective because India was an important economic territory, there were also important conflicts with larger superpowers and India was also under attack from the North to Russia to Afghanistan. France was also... From South East Asia... So, somehow protecting India is considered an important British interest, not out of a colonial ideology, but out of a certain powerful prestige, but also out of the economic interests, and that for a large or defined their policy in the Middle East, especially since oil was not yet...

Hawra: a consideration at that time...

Amir Taha: at that time Iraq was not seen as a large economic ...

Hawra: Yeah, it was not very beneficial financially for them.

Amir Taha: At the same time the German threat to the Middle East was as much taken into account. They really wanted to counter Germany by countering the Ottoman Empire. But, once again, it was seen that if the Germans and the Ottomans would have won, it could be a serious threat to India as well.

Hawra: Okay... interesting.

Amir Taha: because the Ottoman Empire was very close to India.

Hawra: I see... I think we discussed the first question quite well. So, let's move on to the next one... Following the First World War the Americans brought a new international order with them. They brought the so-called right of self-determination with them. The British and the French as well had to adapt their policies towards their colonies and mandated territories. Actually that is why they labelled their presence in Iraq as a mandate rather than a colony. But it was too ruled by colonial officers such as Cox and Wilson. So, do you think that even though the British tried to build an Iraqi state, it was not really sincere and it was more of a show to tell the world that 'we are complying with this international order'.

Amir Taha: I think that you named important factors that could explain why Iraq became a mandate rather than a colony. But, this is only one side of the story. The other side was, the other reason why Iraq became a mandate and not a colony, was because of the 1920 Revolution which mobilized the Urban Iraqis to political activism. But more importantly the tribes in the south which led military insurrection against the British. But, also Kurds in the North joined this Revolution and I what you might call the Sunnis in Western Iraq. So, it was like a collective act against the British attempts to colonize Iraq.

I think... Eventually the British were able to very violently suppress this uprising. The amount of deaths that this oppression costs is unimaginable, still very significant massacre that is part of the British Empire. But, what I am trying to say is that... after the large... Because it took a large time to oppress this revolution, it cost a lot of money and resources to repress this, the British concluded that they were highly unpopular in Iraq and that it might not be so smart to colonise Iraq, but rather give some kind of... some form of self-rule, which was actually more or less an artificial compromise where still the most important positions be held for British advisors, this is one part of it.. The other

part of it was, they wanted also to appease to this new world order that the American president talked about after World War I, but the second point is an important reason as well.

Hawra: So, we kind of agree on this point. How do you think the colonial background of Iraq British rulers, impacted their state building process?

Amir Taha: well, I think to a significant extent, because when the British basically carved out what would be Iraq, they decided also that this country needs to be centralised. They started building institutions emphasised the centralisation. They built a large bureaucracy that could administrate the older provinces. They built schools that emphasized that Iraq was a unified country with one state.

But this wasn't only British... this 1920 Revolution was also a bottom up process; at least from the Iraqi intellectuals and the Urban Iraqi students, [they] imagined Iraq and some kind of community that collectively rose up against the British, that has some kind of collective identity, that has some kind of collective past. All these kind of nation-forming processes were something that many Iraqi intellectuals indulged in by writing poetry, by writing history books, by writing memoirs, by spreading the idea and that there was some kind of unified country. That was the urban centres. Regarding the countryside, what the British did there, was they heavily relied on the large landowners to collaborate with the British in exchange that they would repress the peasants and maintain stability for the British. Somehow they were able to involve all large Iraqi landowners, I'd call it Shoyoukh [Sheikhs / heads of tribes]... They were able to tie them to one British entity. This kind of also centralised the country. So, yes it was from a Colonial way of doing, but this entailed a variety of strategies to maintain control over Iraq in the way that it stays within the British interest.

Hawra: So, let me just say what I understood from your answer. So, the officers indeed had a colonial background and views for Iraq. But they implemented this through different strategies; in the urban areas they established schools which promoted the idea of a unified Iraq.

Amir Taha: yes!

Hawra: and in the countryside they tried to rely on the heads of tribes to maintain stability. So, that these Sheiks could undermine their tribesmen and prevent another uprising.

Amir Taha: exactly, yes. But I also have to add another point; these institutions that the British built in Iraq intended to educate, in their view, an Iraqi that would work for the British interests in Iraq.

They hoped to create a new elite that would rule Iraq for the interests of the British. That meant that in these kind of institutions, in these kind of schools, in these kind of universities, they would be taught a certain worldview that would be beneficial for the British interests. So, Iraq has customs, certain understandings, certain religious traditions, certain perspectives about itself, and these were, from the British perspective, dangerous, because they would imply certain aversions to the British dominance. By creating institutions where to emphasize certain colonial ideology where Europe has a certain civilizational image, a certain idea that they were more progressed than the rest of countries. They wanted to create a certain hierarchy where the rest of the world has to learn from it. So, this kind of idea was reproducing these institutions. So eventually when an Iraqi goes to these institutions; high school, university, vocational school, he eventually comes out with the ideal that for Iraq to develop it needs to collaborate with the British, because the British are more progressed than Iraq.

Hawra: like to create that kind of dependency... indirect dependency on the British. Could you maybe name a couple of institutions?

Amir Taha: well, I cannot name specific institutions, but basically all attempts of the British to create schools like, elementary schools, high schools, vocational schools, universities, secular universities, secular forms of education, that were founded by the British were all parts of this scheme. If, I can give one specific example; in my thesis I wrote about Shinafiyah [a village in southern Iraq], there is a small elementary school called 'Ibn- Sinaa' [Avicenna]. From what I understood this school was built by the British in Iraq in the 1930s. Of course, this was the original strategy of the British: these kind of institutions, after the independence, were taken over by Iraqis and then used for their own Projects. They recreated the original intentions of these institutions.

Hawra: how long did these institutions survive in Iraq?

Amir Taha: well, I think it was not the institutions themselves, but in the British had a significant impact on the Iraqi educational system. You have to double check this, but I think if you look at a large part of ministers of education of Iraq, where they studied, how they came so far, often, you could see they stay in London or they studied abroad and then came back to Iraq and then they started [*unintelligible*] to the educational system Of Iraq. This persisted for a quiet a long time I think.

Hawra: you just mentioned Shinafiyah, I did not read the entire thesis, but I read certain parts of it and something stood out to me: you this described the 1920 Revolution as follows: "the 1920

Revolution was the Iraqi people's first unified expression of contestation because it involved the participation of all Iraqis diverse ethnicities, religious groups and classes." (Taha, The Intifada in Shinafiyeh) Well, that it's true that different groups participated in this revolt, but I think it's almost undeniable that it was the strongest in the Shia areas... the tribal Shia areas. Even some writers say that Karbala and Najaf, especially Najaf, was the backbone of this Revolution. Do you think this left a sense of superiority in the Shi'a collective memory: that they actually had heaviest burden in the Iraqi struggle against the British? Because the Kurds were kind of focusing on their own interests, and the Sunnis were partially collaborating with the British for the establishment of the Iraqi state. And the Shi'a kind of felt the burden of the struggle....

Amir Taha: I get where this narrative comes from. I am not very familiar with how different variety of Iraqis look back on this event. But, what I do know is that the uprising took for a large part in the South of Iraq and Southern tribes of the tribesmen to fight the British, that is true, but, I do think there was an authentic collaboration between the different groups in Iraq.

Hawra: So, you say that you do think or you do not think...

Amir Taha: I do think so. As far as I know, the 1920 Revolution is still seen as a collective act by the most of Iraqis. I am not fully familiar by the narrative that says this was mainly the Shi'a who fought because they were Shi'a.

Hawra: No, I am not looking at it from the perspective that *because* they were Shi'a they revolted... No! I say it was the strongest in the Shia areas. After all the armed conflict which followed the independence and the division that deepened... do you think that the Shi'a started to gain a sense of superiority that 'we fought the British the most'.

Amir Taha: I am finally understanding your question. One important point was that, different from the other constituencies, the Shi'a also had the Marja'iyah [source to follow in Shi'a Islam], which played an important role in the revolt, because they had important ties to the tribes of southern Iraq. I am not sure which Marja' [cleric who becomes a religious reference for his followers] was the most important, but if I am right, even before the 1920 uprising, they were often involved in the anti-British [movement]...

Hawra: They also created certain communities like Hara Al-Istqlal [The Guards of Independence], which also had Sunni members, but it was mostly Shi'a, and it was founded by cleric. Not sure, Al-

Sadr or maybe also al-Shirazi. They [the Shi'a] were more organised, fierce, at least that is my understanding...

Amir Taha: I think you have a point where in the south there was more of an organised structure for these kind of revolts, that could give it more form and not to forget that the British invaded from the south and not from the north or the west, and that is why the south was also much more involved in this. But nonetheless, but I think your question was about the aftermath of the revolution... how this revolution impacted political ties... If I am correct the Marja'iyah, persisted in their anti-Britishness... I am not fully sure, but there was some kind of Fatwa...

Hawra: A Fatwa that declared that it was unlawful to work for the British. And that was the Fatwa of Al-Shirazi [cleric], I guess...

Amir Taha: Yes, but this was during the uprising. I think after the uprising something similar was given about not participating in British institutions and not joining the Iraqi army. There was some kind of conscription rule. It was either about not joining the political process of the British. That I think for a large part explains why the British were more eager to collaborate the ex-Ottoman elite. Also, at the same time, the Marja' was kind of anti-collaboration. But I also have to say that even in the south, they welcomed collaboration with the British. Once again, the large landowners were given a lot of power and economic benefits to collaborate with the British. So, it is difficult to pinpoint that one group did or did not collaborate. Within each group we have different groups who did or did not collaborate for a variety of reasons. Does this answer your question?

Hawra: well, yes sure. Actually, I asked a question and then sub-questions followed. But I think it was clear, because you are saying that you cannot really draw a line between groups. [It is difficult to say] that Shi'a were struggling against the British and the Sunnis were collaborating with them. It is from both sides actually...

Hawra: Do you believe that the independence was a collective goal for all Iraqis? Like the Assyrians, for example, were not very enthusiastic and they actually wanted more autonomy. That was very clear in the 1930s and especially 1933 when the genocide happened. So, do you think it is a collective goal of all Iraqis?

Amir Taha: Well, I think for a large extent it is a nationalistic myth, which all Iraqis rose up for the same reason, and that is to fight the British. I think that this can be said for all supposed national

uprisings. People join social movements for a variety of reasons; for some people it might be a true ideological conviction, but for other it was like: 'okay may be if I join this movement, I might get some benefit out of this'. For others it was peer pressure. For other it was like: 'okay, I am joining this because I am a part of this tribe. If my tribe decided to fight the British, I represent myself as a person from this tribe. I think at that time, a variety of interests came together, rather that it was one collective uprising...

Hawra: So, you are saying that the whole idea of collective struggle was romanticised?

Amir Taha: it was an important myth to create an Iraqi national identity. Every nation-forming movement has to rely on a romanticised past and a certain myth. If you, do historical research, this myth kind of breaks apart. People, like I said, join these kind of movements for a variety of reasons.

Hawra: Do you think there is something such as an Iraqi collective identity.

Amir Taha: well, it would be great if it was the case. I think – and this counts for all countries', the idea of a collective identity and imagined community. This is an important term, by the way. Look it up later... It is an important concept of an author, who I think his name is Anderson. He conceptualised this idea. Basically, in every country there is no way that you would actually know everyone. So, you imagine yourself to be a part of a larger community which is not really there.

If we look at Iraq now, you have a variety of classes, identities and so on. Iraqis in Baghdad are different from Iraqis in Basra. Middle class Iraqis are different from underclass Iraqis. Iraqis in different cities are different from each other. Iraqis in the countryside are different from each other. They all have a different understanding of themselves and they also have different interests as well. I do not think the elite always have the same interest as the majority of Iraqis. If you would have some kind of collective identity in Iraq, these differences would not be so large. In my impression, a lot of understandings of Iraqi identity are very Baghdad-centric, which often exclude the South and the North or something like that. But nonetheless, maybe you could say if there is some kind of collective understanding of 'Iraqi', it is how they experienced the past forty years; the Saddam Hussein regime, American invasion, I think these were more defining for the Iraqi self-image, which ties Iraqis much more together than the supposed Iraqi past or supposed collective identity 'whether we all fit in it', or the supposed Iraqi-ness 'for example, that everyone should Pacha/Patja [Iraqi dish].. I think the experience of war and violence ties Iraqis together much more...

Hawra: so you are saying that it does not really divides them?

Amir Taha: the experience of war, violence and invasion ties Iraqis much more together than a collective understanding of what an 'Iraqi' is, which relies on a certain idea of what is an Iraqi culture, literature and past. Once again, Iraq contains a variety of regions and classes that all had a different interest and understanding of themselves and Iraq. This could not be unified in some kind of idea of a collective identity which takes all these differences into account. So, yeah, this is my cynical perspective.

Hawra: I am quiet interested in what you said; that war unifies people. After the invasion of 2003, many outsiders like me thought that Iraqi identity is actually quiet fragile. And that the gap between different groups are now bigger than it was before. So, how come you say that it unifies people?

Amir Taha: No, I am not saying that it unifies people. Rather, in my view, it is the only true commonality that they have with each other. But this is also not [completely] true, because you have language, certain histories together. But, I think the specific experience of war and violence, it is something that all Iraqis have in common. I think, if Iraq want to build some kind of a collective identity, it has to take this specific experience with war and violence more into account than some kind of idea of what an 'Iraqi' is. If you ask people 'what an Iraqi is', they will all give different answers, most likely. But the way they all had to experience war, violence, uprooting and so on, could be important building a stronger Iraqi identity that ties everyone together. I do not think in 2003, it was because of a fragile Iraqi identity. I think for a large part it has to do with how violence of post-2003 was, and the way how it all went... I mean, after 2003, certain outside actors, be it the Americans, but also terrorist groups, who are not originally from Iraq, became involved. And this also played into all kinds of fissures. These groups has all kind of interests a divided Iraq.

Hawra: Thank... Actually, I want to like this somehow, to the British mandate. Would you say –or maybe you already said it-, that the British aimed to create a so-called Iraqi identity just to stabilise certain areas? To hold them under their control?

Amir Taha: I think that the British tried to... I do not think they were actively trying to create an Iraqi identity. But, I think the British centralising the project, and the indigenous reaction to this centralising project, those in combination helped create a framework of what an 'Iraq' could be. [Unintelligible], the fact that Iraq was caught out in a certain map, already says something about, at the very least, someone who is Iraqi has to live in this territory. This in itself a starting point of

identity-forming. Not only that, I do not think there was a purposeful act of the British creating an Iraqi identity. What happened caused the slow emergence of Iraqi identity for a variety of reasons.

One of them –for example- is that after large people in the country side, after the repressive nature of all these tribesmen and the changing of economy, a lot of them moved to the cities. This brought a lot of Iraqis into contact with each other. These new large masses who came from the countryside, for the first time ever, they came outside their villages. They came to a place where others were not a part of their villages, who were not a part of their tribes, and some kind of a new form of group need to be defined. I think this was also an important development that helped... that made it necessary...that there is something larger than only my village and my tribe. Because in the city, there is no tribe, there is no village. To create some kind of way to live with each other, some kind of a collective identity started to emerge. As a reaction to British politics inside of Iraq, as a reaction to the Iraqi indigenous intellectuals who were working on this.

Hawra: So there is not only one factor...

Amir Taha: yes, there is not only one factor.

Hawra: talking about tribes and tribal identities... this is also something that stood out for me in your thesis. One of your interviewees stated the following talking about the Baathists: "they were considered disloyal to family and tribe, criminals, irreligious infidels and they were not considered Ahl Alwilaya, because they placed their interests over the interests of Ahl AlShinafiyah" (Taha, The Intifada in Shinafiyeh, p. 84) This statement reminded me of the description that Willem Floor gave about Ahwaz or Khuzestan as they call it in Iran. Willem Floor is a Dutch writer who wrote many books about Iran. He also wrote a journal article about the Ka'b tribe in Ahwaz. Ka'b were ruling this area. They were kind of autonomous. They were not really under the control of the Persians or the Ottomans. He said that describing these tribesmen, they are only loyal to their tribe, to their tribe's leader, and even their tribe's leader has a difficulty in controlling them. (Floor, The Rise and Fall of the Banū Ka'b. A Borderer State in Southern Khuzestan, 2006, p. 77) He also said that they almost did not have any understanding of central governments. (Floor, The Rise and Fall of the Banū Ka'b. A Borderer State in Southern Khuzestan, 2006, p. 77) They did not know any phenomenon as a central government. We know that Ahwaz and southern Iraq have a lot of things in common; cultural, religious and even sectarian. Do you think that the tribal system in general challenged the centrality of power in Iraq? Like the British tried to create a central point of power, which was Baghdad. The

tribes which did not really have an understanding of a central government... were they imposing a threat? Or a challenge to the central government?

Amir Taha: So are we talking about Baathists?

Hawra: No, it is about the British: how they dealt with the tribes at that time. Because these tribes [seem] to not have an understanding of a central government. Do you think they imposed a threat or challenged the central government?

Amir Taha: well, given the 1920 revolution, the tribes were the most dangerous, or potentially, the most dangerous group for the British. They tried to co-opt the tribes as much as they could by, once again, collaborating with tribal chiefs, by giving them power over the tribes. And I think that the power of tribes fluctuated. So, there were times when they were very powerful. And there were times where the power diminished when the central government was able to assert its dominance over the territory of Iraq as effective as possible.

Hawra: when was that?

Amir Taha: I think there was during the [unintelligible], it is difficult for me to say. But for example, under Abdel Karim Qasem [Prime Minister of Iraq 1958-1963], and early Baathist Iraqi, like until the 1980s, before Iraq invaded Iran. There was a less need to rely on the tribes. If I can give an example about Saddam [Hussein]. The more Iraq, weakened with the years because of war with Iran, invasions of Kuwait, sanctions and so on, Saddam had to rely more and more on the tribes. More often, he had to visit tribal chiefs. More often, he had to rely on them for maintaining control in the south of Iraq. For some reason, tribal culture, or tribal understandings of culture, or the tribal power was never really fully eliminated in Iraq. Because, when their power was really being boosted up by those who were in power. And when the governments felt they did not need them, they were able slide them apart to a certain extent, but not fully. But each time the government was able to empower and disempower the tribes. Even now, when the Iraqi government is rather small and only involved in mainly security matters, the tribes are powerful. So, if this somehow gives you an idea of what the dynamics were between the tribes and the central government. For a large part, it has to do, initially, with that a lot of people did not understand what a central government was. But later on, it was also that the tribes were used by the state to delegate control, somehow...

Hawra: in my culture we have tribes as well, so I am kind of familiar with the tribal dynamics, I just wanted to make sure it was also similar in the case of Iraq. I think it is now clearer. This is perhaps my last question... I am trying now to make a link between the current instability of Iraq and the British Mandate. Many factors led to this current instability such as war, invasions, terrorist groups, maybe Iranian or Saudi interference... Do you think it is possible to somehow, link this instability to the early origins of the state building or the British. Is my question a little bit clear?

Amir Taha: This is a very important and historical question. I do not think that I am able to fully answer it now. But I do think that the way the initial set up of the centralisation efforts were not fully... this is difficult, because we have to talk about this without also taking into account the Qasem regime, the Baath Party regime... these two regimes, were in my view, very significant for why the instability in Iraq..

Hawra: but weren't it the British who brought the Sunni Arabs –especially- to power. And even after the withdrawal of the British and the fall of the [Hashemite] monarchy, the Sunnis kind of remained in power. So you think, that the instability that was created in Iraq was because of 'Sunni' regimes? Wasn't it something that the Iraqis inherited from the British system?

Amir Taha: Oh, okay, I now understand your question... The way certain groups were elevated during the British rule, somehow, hindered the Iraqi progress. I think a large part... Well, this is a difficult question... I find it hard to answer, because, yes, the British had, what they call, 'retarded' Iraqi State-formation in the sense that they never really wanted to give 'real' independence to Iraq that could represent all Iraqi people, or that it would really and fully develop Iraqi institutions on their own. For example, the army was never really actively developed. It always had a lack of material, training... it wasn't really integrated into the institutions. The British had to rely on militias or their own armed forces. This way you create a certain dependency in Iraq that was problematic for Iraq to develop the rest of its institutions in an effective way. I know what I say sounds contradictory, but in the end, the only thing that was successfully modernised in Iraq was the army... Somehow... but the army itself was also lacking. The army was able to neglect other possible institutions of inclusivity in Iraq. But the original institution [unintelligible] in Iraq were set up to empower the large landowners, to empower, urban elite who worked with the British. And indeed ex-ottoman elite were also evaluated because they were much easier to collaborate with. And also, I think there is an article about this why for some strange reason a large segment of the army came from Mosul and Tikrit [a city in the north], because tribal ties of one of the first generals in Iraq was from Mosul and he brought in his own tribe.. This created a very strange power imbalance at the beginnings of the Iraqi independence...

Hawra: [power imbalance] that would continue? Or it didn't really continue?

Amir Taha: well, yeah, this is the thing. Because there is not one factor... Because after, you also had a large state... there was a large oil boom, that made the state immensely powerful and those who had in the state were able to, without concerning the Iraqi population, to impose certain policies at the cost of Iraqi representation and Iraqi participation, where power imbalance only became larger. To say, they were Sunnis is also problematic, because it is also a diverse groups with diverse relations to the British and the state and so on. But, it could explain why certain regions possibly were more used to being empower or more dominant and certain segments in these regions were more, what they call, rejectionist or the post-2003 order and which is somehow also has to do with the British... This is a very difficult historical question. I think that you attempt to ask this question is impressive! This is not an easy question. I hope, somehow, I could have helped you in trying to at least approach this...

Hawra: Maybe it is an idea to summarise your answer... Just to confirm what I understood. Haha, it was quite a long answer... So, you said that it is very difficult to establish that link [between the British Mandate and the current instability], because many events happened after the independence. So, it is difficult to attribute this instability directly to the British. But, there are some elements that Iraqi politics inherited from the British and that is for example the army which was quiet lacking and exclusive, right?

Amir Taha: Yes

Hawra: And it [army] also had kind of a tribal image... somehow... or tribal elements, maybe?

Amir Taha: No, the first who became generals brought in their own tribes later on to also join the army, which somehow, cause that the generals tended to be from a specific region, wherefore, their power persisted even after the British.

Hawra: I think, that was mostly you answer, if I am not mistaken?

Amir Taha: yes, more or less...

Hawra: did I miss something?

Amir Taha: yes... No... No, you did not miss something, but just keep in mind that directly linking to the British dominance of Iraq to post-2003 is a very difficult task, because you have to look at long term developments rather than direct links. I might not have the answer for you, but maybe you can think of it in this way: what kind of formations took place under the British that still persist to this day? What kind of impact did the British have during that time? What kind of institutions did they make up that still persist to this day and how they fell eventually...

Hawra: can you maybe name, except the army, another institution that persisted to this day?

Amir Taha: I think the bureaucratic system. I think the British administration... do you what I mean with the bureaucratic system? Like can you imagine it?

Hawra: I think of state institutions, like ministries and municipalities?

Amir Taha: Yes, but that is one side. Can you imagine that if you want to apply for something that you have to go with your papers to a municipality hall and then you have to talk to several people and then they send it to the capital of the province and then look at it there...

Hawra: so it is a very complicated system?

Amir Taha: yes! And very vulnerable for corruption. The fact, that till this day, Iraq is highly centralised. If you want to get something done in Iraq, administrate wise, and you live in, let's say Shinafiyah, your application has to go all the way Baghdad. They have to approve it there and then it goes all the way back. I think this is a legacy... to a large extent... how the British set up Iraq: a very centralised way.

Hawra: why do you think they wanted to do that?

Amir Taha: I think this way, you can maintain power over the provinces in one place, in the capital city. And you could somehow also empower local elites from... it would work [unintelligible]. Instead of local elite working... for example, if you had a decentralised government, local elite would be able to accumulate their own power to their tied with the community. This way, they had to get their power tied to Baghdad. And who is in Baghdad? Either Saddam regime, or the British, or whatever... You have to research this on your own, but I think that the system till today very vulnerable for

corruption and it is also very exclusive. Let's say: it does not empower the south or the north. Because everything goes through Baghdad. I think this is not very conducive for an inclusive government. So let's say: the army, centralised government and this even goes for the education system. But you have to see how and in what ways...

Hawra: I think this is quite clear. I kind of missed that. I already did some research about the centrality of power in Iraq, but I kind of missed the point of bureaucratic system. And I am really grateful that we discussed that now. I miss only one point... I am sorry for taking much of your time... 'A notion of collaboration' I already sent this to you through e-mail. I think there is a notion of collaboration that each group has towards or against the other. Like 'the Sunnis are the Ottoman/British collaborators', 'the Kurds are American collaborators'. Now, especially with Iran interference in Iraqi politics many Shi'a are considered as 'Iranian collaborators'. Also Assyrians, maybe, and that was clearly reflected on the Assyrian Affaire in 1933, they were considered British collaborators. Do you think this notion still exists? And how does it impact the society?

Amir Taha: okay, so the concept of the collaboration? Or specifically these peer of the groups?

Hawra: yes, [the last one].

Amir Taha: well, regarding the Shi'a, it is inherently always imagined that they are secretly all of them are Iranian agents. I think this is more myth than reality. It also deny the individual agency of individual Iraqis in the south. I do not think that all the Shi'a in southern Iraq look the same way to Iran.

Hawra: I know, but how does it impact the people? It, somehow, exists... different groups look at each other, maybe, to a certain extent, from this point of view.

Amir Taha: So, you are saying possibly, let's say, the Sunnis suspect the Shia' of being collaborators with the Iranians?

Hawra: yes, or the other way around.

Amir Taha: yeah, of course, these notions exist, but I do not think they reflect reality. If this, somehow, answers your question. You want me to elaborate on what I mean with this?

Hawra: yes.

Amir Taha: So, let's take Iran for example. Iran has ties in the south with certain political groups. But Iran has also ties with... what was it called in Kurdistan? You have these to Barzani and Jalal Talibani [two Kurdish figures].. Was it Jalal that had relations with Iran?

Hawra: yes, but how does it impact the interactions between people I the society?

Amir Taha: this is difficult to measure. Scientifically speaking... I think these myths have large mobilisation power. They could easily be exploited to mobilise people who are sensitive to these kind of myths. I think a large of ISIS mythology is that Iran and the Shi'a are secretly trying to destroy Islam from the inside. This whole idea that Shi'a are Iranian collaborators goes back to the time of Saddam.

Hawra: But it also goes back to the Ottoman and Persian wars, At least, writer such as Phebe Marr, who is an American historian specialised in Iraqi modern history, she says that the Ottomans were at the beginning indifferent about the Shi'a. But after the wars started between the two empires, they started to suspect this group of collaborating with the Persians because they share the same sectarian faith or the same sect. So, don't you think that the roots of this divisions lie in the Ottoman history?

Amir Taha: No I do not think that the roots of this division lies in the Ottoman history, but I think the roots of this myth. This whole idea that the Shi'a are collaborating with Iran. At least to use this myth to commit violence against a certain group by relying on this myth has been used a variety of times throughout history. But this does not mean that they explain certain divisions. The way that this myth has been mobilised to commit violence has created a lot of drama and a lot of scars. But it does not explain the divisions on their own. Because at the same time, Iraq was also known for a lot of intermarriage between the Sunni and Shi'a. Even turkey, even the Ottomans, you have a large How to say... this whole tradition for the love for the family of the prophet has always played a large role in the Turkish peninsula... So, it was not like this destruction of Shi'a operated. Because, Iraq was also on the border between the Persian and the Ottoman Empires. Those who had the Marja'iyah were there. There was a certain anxiety about who would work with each. I think the fact that Iraq was a border, rather than the Shi'a were there, was a much more decisive factor for why the Ottomans used this myth to repress possibly the Shi'a during certain conflicts. It was not all the time.

Hawra: I think it is clear. Maybe if you want to elaborate furthermore on other groups not only the Shi'a...

Amir Taha: Yeah... whether the Kurds are collaborating with the Americans?

Hawra: or [on the notion of] 'Christians or minorities are the gateway of western imperialists to interfere with Iraqi politics', maybe that is also a perception of certain groups?

Amir Taha: yeah... that could be explained because, once again, part of it was myth and the other part of it was the British did indeed rely on Christian minorities in the Middle East to – also the French- assert their dominance, wherefore there is a myth that every Christian in the Middle East is a secret collaborator with the west. But once again, this is a myth that could be used by elites...

Hawra: to push certain agenda?

Amir Taha: yeah, to push certain agenda rather than there is an inherent division amongst the masses.

Hawra: So, you are actually denying that there is a real division between people, but it is more like the agenda of the elite for hegemonic [purposes]...

Amir Taha: Yes, for a large part. I don't think people out of their own start... let me formulate it this way: if you look at the history of Iraq, depending on what is hegemonic, people acted differently regarding different sects, regarding different ethnicities. For example, before 2003 intermarriage between Sunnis and Shi'a was more prevalent. But afterwards, self-interest and self-survival based also on the new Iraqi constitution that says basically 'in the government you need to have one Shi'a, one Sunni, One Kurds' .. This does not really help... people also start to see themselves as part of such a group... It is [now] a top-down progress rather than a bottom-up. I think co-existence was much more the norm than conflict... I think that divisions are not inherently violent or conflictive. They could be used for creating conflict, but not on their own... That how I feel it...

Hawra: okay, great... I think I asked all my questions and I have some good answers. Thank you very much.