CHAPTER THREE
The Hashemite monarchy 1932–41

Iraq began its existence as a formally independent state in an ambiguous way. The British presence was as visible as before, with most of the British advisers and officials staying at their posts for the time being, a British military mission training the Iraqi army and the RAF retaining control of the bases at Habbaniya and Shu‘aibah. British-owned companies were as conspicuous as ever in all the major sectors of the economy and British influence on the king and his ministers remained strong. Nevertheless, Iraqi politics were increasingly shaped by distinctively Iraqi forces which had emerged in the preceding decade as the state had begun to take on greater definition. Against a background of communal and rural unrest and disputes about the nature of Iraq itself as a community, intense rivalry for patronage and fierce competition between client networks for influence characterised this regime of power.

These processes drew in different political worlds and histories, obliging their protagonists to cohabit a world of Iraqi state politics, defined by those who controlled the centre, sometimes creating commonalities, but also exacerbating differences. It was a world that was increasingly secular in nature, revolving around questions of economic privilege and around calls for redistribution of wealth and the assertion of fundamental rights, as well as around varying interpretations of national identity and duty. Sectarian and communal identities were often important in shaping people’s responses to these various issues and could surface at moments of crisis, but they by no means determined those responses. In certain settings and organisations, Iraqis from different backgrounds were discovering common concerns. However, such is the nature of politics that this could create new forms of antagonism, as much as it allowed new forms of co-operation to emerge.

Key state institutions became instruments in the hands of powerful individuals and their followings, encouraging factionalism among
officials and throwing into question the nature of their loyalties. Nowhere was this phenomenon more apparent than in the officer corps of the Iraqi army (the strength of which grew from 12,000 to 43,000 during the period 1932–41). Army officers emerged as significant political players, attracting patrons and clients and helping to shape the rules of the political world. This was possible in part because of a shared centralizing, authoritarian vision of political order among much of the political elite, notables and senior state servants alike, which assigned to the armed forces a leading role in the disciplining and definition of Iraqi society. Revolts in the provinces rejecting this vision provided the background against which the men at the centre of the state developed their ideas of social order and national discipline, as well as the means of imposing it through strategies of co-optation and coercion. The distinction between the ‘rural’ and the ‘urban’ was breaking down at a certain level of society. Common interests arose among those who now saw the countryside not as the basis of a distinctive moral order, but rather as an area of human and material resources to be pressed into service for the benefit of those who controlled the state.

Independence also encouraged substantive debate about the character of Iraq, as state and community. In particular, tension developed between the advocates of Iraq’s Arab identity and those who advanced the idea of a distinctive Iraqi national community. This led to differences over domestic as well as foreign policies. With the achievement of independence, Iraq was formally a sovereign state which could determine its own relations with other sovereign states. This opened up considerable scope for the making of a distinctively Iraqi foreign policy. However, it also meant that the direction of that policy became a matter of contestation, often expressed in vivid symbolic form the opposing ideas held by different factions in Iraq about the country’s national identity and thus its national interests. In addition, although formally sovereign, Iraq could not easily escape British influence. Given Great Britain’s position in the Middle East at the time, this restricted the scope of Iraqi foreign policies in its immediate region. As Rashid ‘Ali Al-Kailani was to discover to his cost during the Second World War, Iraq’s foreign policies would not be allowed to run counter to perceived British interests. These limitations were frustrating and posed acute problems for the authority of successive Iraqi governments.

On the domestic front, the partisans of the varying ideas of Iraq had little difficulty in agitating on the fundamentally authoritarian role of the state: the nationalists – whether Iraqi or Arab – the task of forming the nation was too important to allow the ‘divisiveness’ of democratic processes to intervene, for the radical critics of the social order, the entrenched power of the landed elites and others could be broken only by forceful government action. In both cases, therefore, there was convergence on the need for a strengthening of the state: the first to protect the established order and to induce the virtuous national ideal on a notoriously recalcitrant society, reforming it where necessary in accordance with their views of desirable social discipline; the second to act as the agent for the reconstitution of that society and the dispossession of the privileged elites who had hitherto obstructed the route to progress.

COMMUNAL IDENTITIES AND TRIBAL UNREST

To begin the new era, King Faisal sought a more consensual form of government and consequently asked for Nur Al-Sa’id’s resignation, appointing the relatively neutral Naji Shawkat prime minister in his stead. In February 1933 a new parliament was elected, containing a large majority of nominal government supporters (many of whom had been Nur’s clients), but also containing a substantial number of supporters of the Ikba Party. Within a month their attacks on Shawkat had forced him to resign. The king then appointed Rashid ‘Ali Al-Kailani (head of the Royal Diwan, but also a leading figure in the Ikba) to form a government in which the Ikba Party was well represented, but which also included others, such as Nur Al-Sa’id, identified with the 1920 treaty. By holding out the prospect of office to the leaders of the Ikba Party, the king had tempted them in effect to accept the treaty, despite their earlier rejection of it. This caused a rift with Ja’far Abu al-Tunnum and provoked discontent in the ranks of the Ikba Party itself, contributing to its eventual disintegration a few years later.

The alienation of Abu al-Tunnum, with his more diverse following and particularly with his Shi’i connections, reinforced the impression of a Sunni-dominated state, as members of the Sunni Arab elite accepted office at the expense of their erstwhile allies. The king was sensitive to this, but had no intention of overturning a system of patronage that privileged his own position as well as that of the almost exclusively Sunni Arabesharifian officers. Thus, when in early 1933 a government employee published a book attacking the Shi’a for being traditionally disloyal to the state and demonstrations of protest erupted throughout the predominantly Shi’a areas, the king made some gestures to placate communal feeling, but
the structural imbalance remained. Nor would it be seriously altered by those in control of the Iraqi state. Few were bold enough to advocate a policy that might have placed their own positions in jeopardy.

These rumblings in the Shia areas were an ominous prelude to the future cohesion and direction of Iraq. So too were the events of the summer of 1933 involving the Assyrian community. The Assyrians had failed to persuade the League of Nations in 1922 to recognise their right to autonomy, and their fears for the future had led them to think about establishing an autonomous enclave in the north of the country, if necessary by force. In May 1933, the leader of the Assyrians, the Mar Shimun, went to Baghdad for discussions, but when the talks broke down the Iraqi authorities detained him. This caused alarm among the Assyrians and a large number of armed men tried to cross into Syria in July, hoping that the community as a whole could find sanctuary there. When the French authorities turned the Assyrians back, detachments of the Iraqi army tried to disarm them on their return. Arguments erupted and in the ensuing fight dozens of Iraqi soldiers and Assyrians were killed.

This incident galvanised both the political world in Baghdad and the Iraqi forces on the spot under Colonel Bakr Siddiqi, commander of the northern region. The Assyrians, despite the small size of the community, were represented in the Iraqi press as a threat to the national integrity of Iraq and, it was hinted, as part of a sinister design by Great Britain to re-establish its control over the northern part of the country. However remote this was from the truth, the Assyrians' long association with Great Britain in the Iraq Levies and their continuing role in guarding the British air bases helped to reinforce this impression. Bakr Siddiqi was authorised to deal with them as ruthlessly as he wished. In August 1933 this led to the massacre of hundreds of Assyrian villagers by the Iraqi armed forces, joined by Kurdish tribesmen who took the opportunity to loot dozens of Assyrian villages at the same time.

The crushing of the Assyrian 'threat' was treated as a great victory for the Iraqi army and for Bakr Siddiqi personally, who was promoted and given a victory parade in Baghdad. For some, this was a dismal beginning to Iraq's independent existence. For others, however, it represented the triumph of the new state over those who threatened the unity of the country, whilst at the same time it crushed a community associated with service to Great Britain. In addition, it was taken to vindicate the resources devoted to the Iraqi army and greatly raised its status as a 'saviour' of the country. The adulation set Bakr Siddiqi thinking about the future role of the army not simply in defending the state from external enemies, but also from internal dissent. As commander of the southern region during the next couple of years, this was a role which he helped to define when faced by successive tribal revolts in the mid-Euphrates.

In the wake of these events, King Faisal's health deteriorated and he left Iraq in September 1933 for medical treatment in Switzerland, dying within a week of his arrival. He was succeeded by his son, Ghazi, a young man of twenty-one who had little interest in the political world, but whose general sympathies were broadly pan-Arab. Like many in Iraq, he also resented British domination. These sentiments drew him closer to the members of the Ikla Party initially, although he eventually formed his own circles of favourites, based on personal likes and dislikes and not much influenced by his late father's choices. However, he showed neither his father's sensitivity to the forces at work in Iraqi society nor his acumen in drawing them into the circles of royal patronage.
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Ghazi was the product of a system which exacerbated Shi‘i resentment of the Sunni-dominated state during the next few years. This took a number of forms. In the ruling circles it was exemplified by the resignation of two Shi‘i ministers in late 1933 when the cabinet decided to divert funds allocated for the Gharrafa dam to the army. For them this indicated that the government was less concerned about the largely Shi‘i communities which would have benefited from the dam than about the expansion of the armed forces through conscription – another move which met with much protest in the Shi‘i areas of southern Iraq.

Jamil al-Midfa‘i was then confronted by a spreading tribal rebellion in the Diwaniya region, led by two powerful tribal shi‘a who had been in close touch with Yasin al-Hashimi of the Ikhana Party. When Talib al-Hashimi, the chief of staff of the Iraqi army and brother of Yasin, refused to crush the revolt, al-Midfa‘i’s suspicions of a plot were confirmed and he too resigned. Yasin al-Hashimi, portrayed as the only man who could ‘save’ the situation because he had largely instigated it, was then asked by the king to form a government in March 1935, having effectively carried out a coup d’état against his rivals.

Within a week the tribal rebellion was over – or, at least, that part of it led by the allies of Yasin al-Hashimi. It was followed by the spectacular entry of the two chief rebel shi‘a in Baghdad, being entertained by large armed retinues, determined to present a petition to the king and to remind al-Hashimi of their power. This curious month of the tribal ‘invasion’ of Baghdad in April 1935 can be seen as a tribal swansong, reproducing as theatre what had been a real threat; the creation of the city by rural tribesmen. It convinced many in Baghdad that this was a manifestation of the ‘old Iraq’ which needed to be eliminated by the march of progress. For the Sunni ruling elites it also presented an opportunity to portray the Shi‘i tribesmen, clerics and shi‘a as obstacles to the needs of a modern state.

Considerations such as these helped to colour the government’s attitude to the threat of further tribal unrest on the mid-Euphrates, among tribes which had no connection with al-Isha, but which had been in touch with some of the younger ‘ulama of Najaf. The latter were suspicious of the area with which al-Hashimi’s tribal allies could be bought off, despite their earlier claim to be standing up for ‘ulami’ rights. Fearing the repercussions, the government arrested the core of a large prominent clerical followers of Kifsh al-Ghita in May, thereby provoking uprisings which spread rapidly in the lower and mid-Euphrates. However, the government had no compunction about using force to suppress the rebellions. Bakr Sidqi declared the protest for the Shi‘a in parliament and the judiciary, and used the full power of the newly formed Iraqi air force and the army against the tribesmen. He scattered them with relative ease and by the end of May the revolt was brought to an end, the tribes no longer a threat to the power of the central state.

This was not the end of tribal unrest. It would erupt from time to time, sometimes for very local reasons and sometimes due to more
general causes, such as resentment at conscription. However, the tribes, at such, were not a direct threat to the state or to the elites commanding the state. Apart from anything else, they were too fragmented. The events of 1935 did not constitute a rising of 'the tribes' or 'the Shia' against the government, although distinctly tribal and Shia communal sentiments were at work. Very particular motives were also influential – motives relating to the security of specific shaikhs in their tribal world, or to their fears about tax assessments or land settlements that might disadvantage them in relation to their neighbours. Furthermore, for every Shia's tale of tribal section which revolved against the government, there were several which either helped the government or which remained neutral, waiting to see the outcome of the encounter between government and tribal forces before risking their own villages by taking up arms.

The voicing of distinctively Shia grievances, although heard frequently enough in the countryside, where it was generally reduced to a muttering sectarian call for an end to Sunni tyranny, was largely the work of the urban Shia intellectuals, both clerical and lay. These complaints were derived from the confessional imbalance at the heart of the Iraqi state. The realisation that the Shia's not only outnumbered the Sunni Arabs, but also constituted an overall majority in Iraq encouraged Shia activists. The clerics tended to press for greater communal representation, proportionate to the size of the Shia's community, whereas many laymen believed that this could be achieved only by more thorough application of democratic principles in Iraq. For the urban secular Shia this had the advantage of allowing them to escape from the communal dominance of the clerical hierarchy, but also brought many into conflict with the tribal shaikhs who still controlled the lives of the great majority of the Shia in Iraq.4

SOCIAL CRITICISM AND POLITICAL CONSPIRACY

Meanwhile, another kind of solidarity was beginning to emerge in Baghdad, represented by the group of intellectuals and professionals who had been associated with the newspaper Al-Ahali since its appearance in 1932. These men came from a variety of backgrounds, but they were all of the younger generation (in their mid-twenties in 1932) and were critical of the cliques and factions which had risen to prominence in the Iraqi state. They deprecated the way in which the ruling elite manipulated elections to their advantage, relying upon informal networks to cement an 'establishment' which successfully excluded most other aspirants to power and used their state offices to enrich their positions as major landowners in Iraqi society.

The Ahali group, as it came to be known, saw in particular that many of Iraq's financial difficulties and profound social and economic problems could be laid at the door of its principal landowner, the government. Desperate to extend and reinforce their landholdings and revenues, the large landowners, whether rural shaikhs, state officials or urban merchants, had ensured that the state gave priority to their own interests, even when this was apparently at the expense of the state itself. Thus, in 1933, the government had strongly backed the introduction of a consumption tax which effectively reduced the taxes payable by them to the state, but had done nothing to relieve the burden of rent due from their tenants. In 1932, their influence had ensured that the Land Settlement Law incorporated none of Dowson's recommendations concerning short state leases and the distribution of lands to small peasant farmers. Instead, it became the chief instrument for the government to bestow and to confirm proprietorial rights on individuals – most of whom were already powerful and well connected. In 1933, the dominant influence of the landowners was again apparent in the Law Governing the Rights and Duties of the Cultivators. This gave landowners wide powers over their tenants, holding the latter responsible for crop failures, making them vulnerable to eviction at short notice on one hand, and tying them to the land until all their debts to the landowner were discharged on the other. Given the condition of peasant indebtedness in certain areas, this caused many to flee the land for a life of destitution in the jinjel (reed and mud hut slums) around Baghdad. In these circumstances, it was not surprising that trenchant social criticism of the status quo should have emerged. At the time it was given voice by 'Abd al-Fattah Ibrahim, a Marxist, and Muhammad Hafid, who was more of a social democrat by inclination. The Ahali group's adoption of the vague term al-Sha'biyya (literally, 'populism') as its first principle allowed it to disguise significant differences among its members. Some advocated collaboration, others held out for land reform within a strengthened parliamentary system, whilst others believed the prior task should be moral renewal. The founding of the Baghdad Club in late 1933 encouraged debate and drew in people from widely varying backgrounds, with Muhammad Salih al-Quza'aa's Workers' Federation of Iraq which organised a strike at the British-owned electric power company in Baghdad in late 1933. The federation was suppressed by the government as a result,
but many of those generally sympathetic to the idea of organised labour gravitated to the circles of Al-Hasawi. Equally drawn to the group was Ja’far Abu al-Timman, whose own party was disintegrating. Sympathetic to the idea of social reform, he was also attracted by the emphasis the group placed on patriotism (mutaqarr – suggesting specifically Iraqi loyalties) over nationalism (jan-natwa – suggesting loyalty to the ideal of an Arab nation). Foremost members of the Iha Party, such as Kamal al-Chadiri and Hijmat Salimian, also saw in the group a sympathetic audience for their own criticism of the status quo, diverse as these were.

Advocacy of social and economic reform raised the suspicions of many who saw the group as a front for the spread of communism. In fact, the communists of Iraq were taking a different road. In May 1933 the first central committee of the Iraqi Communist Party was formed, but by the end of the year many of its members had been arrested and its newspaper closed down. This did not prevent the charge of communism being levelled at the Ahal group, suggesting a threat both to the existing social order and to Islam, whether Sunni or Shi’. These fears allowed Arab nationalists to take over the Baghdad Club in 1935, playing also upon the Ahal group’s apparent indifference to Arab nationalism and to the various Arab causes, such as Palestine, which were receiving growing attention in Iraq.

In these circumstances, the group began to organise itself more systematically, forming a central committee that included Ja’far Abu al-Timman, Kamal al-Chadiri and Hijmat Salimian. However, there was no attempt to create a mass movement and its sympathisers came largely from the political and administrative elites, including the officer corps. Here the links between Hijmat Salimian and General Bakr Sidqi were to be decisive in shaping the political role of the group, leading to the coup d’état of October 1936 and the overthrow of the government of Yasin al-Hashimi.2

Al-Hasami had suppressed the Shi’i tribal unrest with armed force, but he also recognised that behind many of the disturbances lay the resentment of particular tribal sheikhs at their exclusion from the spoils of office. Consequently, in the general elections of August 1933 he ensured that many of them entered parliament. Having been drawn into the network of government patronage (much strengthened by al-Hasami’s introduction of a law which effectively licensed the spoils system), they seemed more supportive of al-Hasami. However, this could not prevent opposition to conscription (affecting a convenient rallying point for other grievances) from appearing in the province.

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In August 1935, in the northern Kurdish region, a revolt broke out to throw the Iraqi authorities. Its origins lay in feuds and mutual mistrust among the Kurdish tribes, but the fear of conscription also played a part. It was not finally crushed by the Iraqi armed forces until March 1936. More obviously due to fears of conscription was the rebellion of the Yazidi Kurdish community of the Jebel Sinjar. The government refused to allow the Yazidis collective exemption from conscription and they showed their defiance by refusing to enlist. This led to the declaration of martial law in the area and to an outbreak of fighting in October 1935 which ended in the victory of the government forces. Some hundreds of Yazidis were killed and imprisoned and a dozen or so villages were destroyed. However, the government victory was a hollow one. Yazidis continued to evade conscription and, when pressed by government security forces in the coming years, either resisted with force or simply migrated across the border into Syria. In southern Iraq some of the Shi’i tribes of the lower Euphrates also rose in rebellion against the conscription law. As in the other cases, deep-seated grievances against central government and local factors contributed to the rebellion. However, al-Hasami had no compunction about ordering in the armed forces to crush the rebellions with a new characteristic ruthlessness.4

Although intended to serve as an example to other tribes, the harsh reaction of the government towards provincial rebellions could not prevent them from breaking out, given their many underlying causes. The tribesmen may not have counted on success in any strategic sense, but there were numerous grounds for provocation and in each case they may have hoped that the government would listen to their particular grievances. Thus, in early 1936 an uprising broke out in the Gharraf region. It was crushed, but was followed within a relatively short space of time by a more serious uprising near Rumayla and, in June, by an uprising near Diwaniya. As ever, a mixture of motives came into play. Particular sheikhs were either disappointed with the treatment they had received from the government, or their authority within their tribe was in question, possibly because of previous government attempts to interfere in the selection of the sheikh. Equally important was the problem of both a long-standing and an immediate nature provided a broad base for grievances. These discontent were heightened by the government’s apparent disrespect for distinctively Shi’i customs and by the threat of conscription. Once more, Bakr Sidqi was ordered to suppress the uprisings – a task which he accomplished with little difficulty and with few scruples about the severity of his methods.
In Baghdad, Yasin al-Hashimi’s authoritarian instincts became even more apparent during 1936. He legislated by decree, developed the police and intelligence services and came down hard on any criticism of his government, whether in Baghdad or in the provinces. Under the influence of Arab nationalism, in the Ministry of Education, he introduced compulsory military training into schools, echoing ideas about the virtues of military discipline fashionable in some European and Middle Eastern states at the time. Convinced that his opponents in the capital were colluding with the tribes (as he himself had done when in opposition), he not only crushed all signs of provincial revolt with great severity, but also closed down critical newspapers, such as Al-Muqaddam, and tried to prevent public protests in Baghdad itself.

In appearing to set himself up as dictator, al-Hashimi alienated many, including the king, who became increasingly nervous of al-Hashimi’s ambitions. More dangerously, he also alienated General Bakr Sidqi, who was well aware of the key role he himself played in suppressing provincial dissent and who suspected that the prime minister’s brother, Taha al-Hashimi, chief of the general staff, was blocking his own promotion. Personal friction and resentment at this lack of recognition led Sidqi to listen sympathetically to Hikmat Sulaiman’s plans for the topping of Yasin al-Hashimi’s government.

**The coup d’État of 1936**

In October 1936, Taha al-Hashimi left Iraq on a visit to Turkey, appointing Bakr Sidqi acting chief of the general staff in his place. In collusion with Hikmat Sulaiman and the forewarned leaders of the Ahali group, Bakr Sidqi ordered units under his command to march on Baghdad, heading the ‘National Reform Force’. At the same time, leaders were dropped on the capital, announcing that the army had asked the king to dismiss Yasin al-Hashimi and to appoint Hikmat Sulaiman as prime minister. Simultaneously a message to that effect was delivered to the king who probably had foreknowledge of the coup and forbade any attempt at resistance. The air force heightened the drama by dropping a number of bombs near the prime minister’s office, hastening Yasin al-Hashimi’s decision to resign (he left the country and was to die in exile in 1937). The king then called on Hikmat Sulaiman to form a government. Ja‘far al-A’askari, al-Hashimi’s minister of defence, tried to take a message from the king to Sidqi, requesting that the army stop its march on Baghdad, but Sidqi believed this was part of a ploy to crush the coup and ordered his officers to intercept and kill al-‘A’askari. The move was promptly carried out, thereby earning Sidqi the enmity not only of al-‘A’askari’s political associates, but also of a large number of officers who had entered the armed forces under al-‘A’askari’s patronage.

Hikmat Sulaiman forced his new administration principally from his associates in the Ahali group, leading to a cabinet that included a higher proportion of Shi‘i ministers than had any previous administration. Bakr Sidqi, now chief of the general staff, busied himself consolidating his personal power base in the armed forces. His influence on the policies of the new government lay chiefly in the realm of foreign affairs. Like Sulaiman himself, he wanted to encourage closer links with Iran and, in particular, with Turkey since he shared with Sulaiman a strong affinity with all things Turkish.

Iraqi independence had allowed for some scope in the development of an Iraqi foreign policy, at least as far as regional states were concerned. This was to be an important symbol of Iraqi sovereignty which no government could afford to ignore. In addition, King Ghazi came to see that as the political field in which he could best make his mark, leading occasionally to friction with his ministers, but also used by them sometimes to divert the censure of the British. In terms of the sympathies and interests of much of the ruling Sunni Arab elite, the Arab world attracted most of their attention, especially the territories of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Transjordan. As the first of the League of Nations Mandates to achieve independence, Iraq could be presented as the vanguard of those emerging states, increasing the obligation for Iraq to assist them in their own independence struggles and holding out the possibility of an Iraqi leadership role among the states of the Fertile Crescent. However, the difficulty was that any independent foreign policy to that area would bring Iraq up against the controlling interests of Great Britain in particular, facing any Iraqi government with the choice between subservience and defiance which had so vexed Iraqi leaders under the Mandate.

For politicians such as Hikmat Sulaiman who had little sympathy with the pan-Arab sentiment and ambitions of most of the ruling elite, there were also other reasons for looking elsewhere in shaping a distinctively Iraqi foreign policy. The emergence of Iraq as a territorial state demanded that attention be paid to its boundaries and to its powerful neighbours. Two pressing questions was particularly to face any Iraqi government seeking to secure Iraqi state interests. The first concerned Iraq’s only access to the sea via the Shatt al-‘Arab, a waterway which
constituted the frontier between Iran and Iraq and which therefore raised Iraqi fears about its vulnerability. The second question revolved around the attitude of Turkey and Iran, respectively, towards the Kurdish question, with Iraq's permeable frontiers and the recently discovered oil fields of the region heightening the Iraqi sense of vulnerability in this area as well.

As far as the Shatt al-'Arab issue was concerned, the Treaty of Erzerum of 1878, the Constantinople Protocol of 1913 and the Delimitation Commission of 1914 had established Ottoman control over the whole of the waterway up to the Persian shore. This was the frontier which Iraq had inherited. In 1932 Iraq challenged this delimitation and demanded a revision of the Iraq-Iran boundary to the Tigris (median line of the deepest channel). Iraq rejected this demand. Tension between the two countries rose, marked by claims and counter-claims that each side was assisting or giving refuge to rebels, or that the other was interfering in the flow of water for irrigation. Occasionally, armed clashes erupted on the border between police or gendarmerie units.

During 1935, Iraq felt so perched on the issue that it took its case to the League of Nations, although without success. This led to direct negotiations between Iraq and Iran in 1935, but the compromise worked out by Nuri al-Sa'id (minister of foreign affairs at the time) and the shah of Iran was rejected by the Iraqi cabinet since it involved ceding some control over the Shatt al-'Arab to Iran. The government of Hikmat Sulaiman, backed by Ba'ath Si'dqi, had other priorities. For them it had become crucially important that Iraq should be assured of tranquility relations with its powerful eastern neighbour, even if it meant making concessions. This resulted in the Iraq-Iran Frontier Treaty of July 1935, which settled the border question by establishing the frontier at the Tigris for four miles in the vicinity of the Iranian port of Ahwaz, but otherwise recognized Iraqi sovereignty across the waterway up to the Iranian shore.

Despite opposition to this treaty in Iraq, it cleared the way for the establishment of the union with Iran and Afghanistan in an alliance aimed ostensibly at countering Soviet penetration of the area. There may have been some concern about this rather remote possibility in Baghdad. More importantly, it expressed the Iraqi government's desire to secure stable and regular relations with Iran and Afghanistan, and its reference to the Tigris valley as a buffer zone, was a warning issue for the Arab nationalists in Iraq and elsewhere.

An inclination towards an 'Iraqi first' policy was shared by most of those associated with the new regime. For many, however, it meant primarily concentrating on social reform. Accordingly, the formation of the new government was greeted by demonstrations of support in towns throughout Iraq, arranged by various radical discussion groups, by the informal and underground labour associations and by the embryonic Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), all expecting that the new government would now be achieved. Hoping to build on these sentiments, the Ahali group sponsored the formation of the Popular Reform Association (Jam'iyya al-Irshad al-Sha'bii). Its executive committee included four of the most reform-minded ministers, Kamal al-Sabti, Hikmat Sulaiman, Din Ibrahim, 'Iyad al-Timman and Naji al-Asil, as well as 'Abd al-Qadir Imsilī (editor of Al-Ahali and later a prominent figure in Iraq's communist movement) and the laqadurar leader Sahil al-Qazzaz. It called for greater democracy, land reform, and the regularization of trade unions. Specifically it demanded the repeal of the Law Governing the Rights and Duties of the Cultivators and the introduction of progressive income tax and inheritance tax, as well as a minimum wage and a
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maximum working day. The association brought together all those who wanted some of the fundamental injustices of Iraqi society to be addressed and promised a radical programme of legislation for the new parliament.

However, this prospect alarmed many. Faced by mounting opposition, Sulaiman suppressed hostile newspapers and intensified purges of officials suspected of disloyalty, but alarm at the reformists' intentions was spreading to Sidiqi's supporters in the officer corps. Their vision of an authoritarian regime ruling over a disciplined society was deeply antithetical to many of the reformists' ideas. As the latter discovered, the balance of established power was tilted firmly against them, despite their influence in the cabinet. The general elections of February 1937 produced a parliament in which they were greatly outnumbered by Bakr Sidiqi's nominees and by the combination of conservatives, nationalists and tribal shahids who saw the spectre of communism behind the Popular Reform Association. Sulaiman made some concessions to the reformists in the ambitious government programme unveiled at the opening of parliament, but little was achieved. Even the modest proposal to distribute a limited amount of government land to individual peasant proprietors was represented as the beginning of radical land reform and was blocked through the vehement opposition of a wide range of disinterested allies in the chamber.

For Sulaiman the support of the reformists counted for less than the continuing alliance with Bakr Sidiqi. In March 1937, Sidiqi publicly attacked the reformists for being secret communists and for advocating the dissolution of all the fixed points of Iraqi social and political life, confident that reform sympathisers amongst the army officers were in a minority. A series of strikes in March and April over questions of pay and conditions of work were taken up by those reformists who wanted to put on a show of defiance against their growing exclusion. However, this only hardened the lines of conflict. Hikmat Sulaiman showed his own authoritarian preferences by using police to end the strikes, arresting some of the organisers and sending others into internal exile.8

Similar tactics were employed by the government in its dealings with the tribal shahids of the mid-Euphrates. Alarm at the implications of land distribution proposals had been compounded by the familiar complaint by some tribal shahids that they had been unjustly excluded from the 1937 parliament. Sulaiman had tried to reassure the shahids that the government intended them no harm and had done much to settle the tribal disturbances which had marked the last year of al-Hashim's

premiership. However, when it seemed that certain shahids were preparing for open rebellion, Sulaiman agreed with Bakr Sidiqi that pre-emptive action should be taken. In May 1937 the armed forces moved into the mid-Euphrates and arrested the leading shahids, provoking the very rebellion which the government had tried to prevent. In a manner on for much of the summer, but the government forces showed that they were able to contain it, while Hikmat Sulaiman tried conciliation of the shahids once again.

More significant than the rebellion itself was the cabinet crisis which followed, since Sulaiman and Sidiqi had sent troops to suppress the impending revolt without consulting their colleagues. For the reformists, this was the last straw and in June 1937 four ministers resigned - Abu al-Faraj, Kamal al-Qadi and Ibrahim, Salih and Yusuf al-Din Ibrahim. They criticised the government for its lack of commitment to genuine reform and condemned Sulaiman for his secrecy and for the nepotism and favouritism which he condoned. The resignation of four of his seven ministers weakened Sulaiman, but also gave him the opportunity to make a final break with the reformists. In their place, he appointed men more acceptable to Bakr Sidiqi and his following in the officer corps. The conservative, authoritarian direction became clear with the subsequent suppression of the Popular Reform Association and the exile of some of its most prominent leaders.

However, by this stage, the centre of gravity had shifted to the officer corps itself and away from the cabinet. Within the armed forces, resentment at Bakr Sidiqi's favouritism combined with more general concern about the leadership's seeming neglect of pan-Arabism and the 'duties' which an Arab nationalist creed was assumed to bring with it. These sentiments led to a plot in the officer corps to assassinate Bakr Sidiqi. The opportunity presented itself in August 1937 when Bakr Sidiqi passed in Mossul on his way to visit Turkey. He was shot, together with his close associate Muhammad al-Jawad, the commander of the Iraqi air force, at Mossul airfield.

By killing Sidiqi, his opponents within the army severely weakened the loyalty of the armed forces to the government, as Hikmat Sulaiman discovered when he ordered the arrest of some of the conspirators and their transfer to stand trial in Baghdad. The commander of the Mosul garrison, Amin al-UMari, refused to comply and instead sounded out the sympathies of the army commanders in the north. Having gained their agreement, he declared that the northern army command would no longer obey the orders of the government, implicitly threatening the
country with civil war. When the army commander of one of the major military bases near Baghdad also declared himself in support of al-'Umari, Hikmat Sulaiman found himself caught between opposing army factions. Growing numbers of officers declared themselves in support of the rebellion and the hitherto dominant supporters of the late Bakr Sidqi found themselves isolated and outnumbered, forcing Sulaiman to resign in the middle of August 1937.

MILITARY POLITICS: PAN-ARABISM AND ARMY CONSPIRACIES

The emergence of the seven senior officers (Husain Fawzi, Amin al-'Umari, Salah al-Din al-Salbakh, Mahmud Salman, Karril Shibhi, 'Aziz Yamouti and Fehmi Sa'idi) who had conspired to kill Bakr Sidqi and had caused the collapse of Hikmat Sulaiman's government introduced an era in Iraqi politics where civil, pan-Arabist politicians held office only with the consent of these men. They were not much concerned about the details of day-to-day government, but they would intervene periodically when two issues came to the fore. The first was the question of the attitude of the government towards pan-Arabism. This was not simply a question of foreign policy, even though it often came to a head over specific foreign policy issues. It was more of a question of their vision of Iraq's identity which they felt was the duty of any government to preserve.

These officers, all Sunni Arab by origin, tended to share a pre-dominantly pan-Arab view of Iraq's identity and destiny, giving them an ambivalent attitude towards the state of Iraq itself. On the one hand, it could be seen as a temporary edifice, due to disappear once the Arabs as a whole had won their independence from the European imperial powers, when, in theory, a single state should be constructed to encompass all the Arabs. On the other hand, they were officers in the armed forces of the Iraqi state which, even if still tied to Great Britain in various respects, was formally independent. It was thus a regime of power capable both of shaping and disciplining its own society and of playing a leading role on the larger stage of the Arab world.

These views and to some extent their ambivalence had been in evidence since the ending of the Ottoman occupation and, in many of their particulars, resembled late Ottoman thinking on national identity and the importance of authoritarian command and military discipline in the creation of an ordered society. Most current and most plausible initially among the former Ottoman officials and officers who formed the administrative elite of the new state, they had been reinforced during the 1920s by the appointment of Sati' al-Husri as director-general at the Ministry of Education. A former Ottoman official whose family came from Aleppo, al-Husri had come to Iraq after the fall of the shari'ah administration in Damascus, and was well connected to the shari'ah elite of the new state. In this position, he was able to lay the foundations for a highly centralised, tightly disciplined and elitist education system in Iraq and to determine a curriculum (and the context of textbooks) based on a secular understanding of Arab nationalism.

Deeply insensitive to the specific character of the communities which he found in Iraq, al-Husri was regarded with suspicion by Kurds and by Shi'ite traditionalists. Both groups saw him as typical of the centralising, hegemonic Sunni Arab-dominated state - which in most respects he was. For that very reason he was able to retain his influence for the first two decades of Iraq's existence. However, within the Ministry of Education itself, al-Husri was displaced by Fadhl al-Jamali. A Shi'i from al-Kazimiyah, he shared many of al-Husri's views on Arab nationalism and on the virtues of military discipline in the formation of a modern society. However, he differed significantly from al-Husri in advocating a more decentralised, less elitist educational system and ensuring that resources were distributed more equitably in the provinces. This provided opportunities in particular for the Shi'i majority, hitherto largely excluded by al-Husri, and led to the training of a new generation of Iraqi teachers to replace the Syriants and Palestinians favoured by al-Husri. Al-Jamali's educational system, although promoting Arab nationalist ideas, was sensitive to a distinctively Iraqi context. Even the Kurds who naturally rejected the system's Arab nationalist bias made the most of the opportunities offered by decentralisation.

At the same time, however, the educational system became increasingly militarised as politicians tried to insulate the virtues of discipline and obedience in the hope of creating an ordered, submissive society out of Iraq's fractious population. This project was inextricably linked to certain ideas about the social functions of an Iraqi and a larger Arab identity. As such, there was a contradiction at its core. By introducing military training to schools and teachers' training colleges in 1935, or by establishing the paramilitary Fatawa (youth) movement in 1939, state officials were trying to ensure disciplined acceptance of the status quo in the name of some variety of nationalism. Yet the complex of relationships and power that constituted the status quo was far removed from any such national, collective ideal. It was founded instead on economic privilege, status
When Hikmat Sulayman resigned, Jamil al-Midfa' was asked by the king to form a government, but consented only once he knew that he had the approval of the rebellious officers. Al-Midfa's predecessor tried to pursue a policy of letting bygones be bygones, largely in order to survive. Elections were held and in December 1957 a new government was formed, but its general composition had changed little, save for the disappearance of Bakh Sidqi's nominees and of the reformists associated with the radical wing of the Arab group. However, decisive power now lay with the officer corps. Al-Midfa's initially tried to placate these influential army officers by giving them senior posts. Yet they did not trust him and there were always plenty of politicians eager to exploit that mistrust. In December 1958 forces were concentrated at Rashid camp near Bagheda, and al-Midfa's was informed that there could be no discontinuing the fighting, whereupon he immediately resigned. The chief of the general staff then told the king that the army had lost confidence in the government and that either Nuri al-Sa'id or Tahah al-Hassani (both had been busy cultivating the officers in question) should be form a new administration.

When Nuri al-Sa'id was asked by the king to form a government, he too found that his power depended largely on his ability to placate the "circle of seven." To some degree he was able to do so because of the views they shared on the importance of the question of Palestine. During the previous few years, Nuri al-Sa'id had made considerable efforts to establish a role for Iraq and thus for himself in Palestine. In 1945, with the outbreak of the general strike organized by the Arab Higher Committee in Palestine, Nuri had made several unsuccessful attempts to mediate between the Arabs and the Jewish Agency and then between the Higher Committee and the British authorities. His professed hope was to bring all sides together to form a coalition to the Palestine problem within the framework of a larger Arab federation of the Fertile Crescent, led by the Hashemite dynasty. This was an idea that he repeatedly sought to promote, making much-publicized visits to various Arab capitals and suggesting that he held the key to a reconciliation between the British and the Palestinian leader Hajj Amin al-Husayni. This proved not to be the case, but it served to create the impression in Iraq that Nuri al-Sa'id's more than any other of the established politicians, was determined to work for the cause of Palestine. This stood him in good stead with the pan-Arab officers of the Iraqi army. Consequently, when he became prime minister, he was careful to pursue these initiatives, personally heading the Iraqi
brother-in-law in that he was more tolerant of the continued British presence in Iraq. Indeed, he was in some respects positively enthusiastic about the link with Great Britain, seeing it as one of the principal guarantors of the Hashemite dynasty. This meant that he had little in common with the Arab nationalist army officers whom he tended to regard as social upstarts, unworthy of his cultivation. The regime's attitude was to be a complicating factor since Iraqi politics were increasingly overshadowed by the approach and outbreak of war in Europe. The relationship with Great Britain came to the fore once again, partly because the growing number of British demands reminded the officers and others of the more controversial aspects of the 1930 treaty. At a time when the British were increasingly intolerant of dissent or reluctance to comply by Iraq, many of the Arab nationalist officers were wary of being drawn into the British orbit. Strongly influenced by the example of National Socialist Germany, the image of which had been astoundingly promoted by the German ambassador to Iraq during these years, Fritz Grobba, the officers resented Great Britain's demands and were, in any case, convinced that the Axis Powers would win the war. Many of the civilian politicians and the regime found themselves caught between two opposing forces and relatively helpless as a consequence.

Before this pattern of events became clear, Nuri organised general elections in May which returned a parliament predictably dominated by men selected by him. However, Nuri knew that parliamentary support was no match for the kind of power represented by the army. Prudently, he ensured that he stayed on good terms with the 'circle of seven', particularly with its four leading members, Salih al-Din al-Sabagh, Fathi al- Sa'id, Mahmoud Salman and Kamal Shibli. These four colonels formed the guardedly named 'Golden Square' that had become the effective arbiter of power in Iraq.

IRAQ IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

With the outbreak of war in Europe in September 1939, Great Britain asked Iraq to sever diplomatic relations with Germany, to intern all Germans and to give whatever assistance Great Britain would require under the terms of the treaty. Nuri al-Sa'id was quick to comply and assured Great Britain of Iraq's full support. Additionally, he introduced censorship, cutbacks, rationing, requisitioning and all the regulations needed to place Iraq virtually on a war footing. His government now had
the power to rule by decree and by administrative regulation, causing great concern among Nuri al-Sa'ld's political opponents, since they rightly feared that these powers would be used against them.

At this stage the 'circle of seven' in the officer corps saw no reason why Iraq should not comply with Great Britain's requests. Nor were they perturbed by the strengthening of Nuri's position since they knew that he was aware of the terms on which he occupied the office of premier. For his part, Nuri still believed that he could maintain the balance between their brand of Arab nationalism and the demands made upon him by the government of the British. He therefore made no objection — whatever misgivings he may have felt privately — when the officers invited the defeated leader of the Palestine revolt, the mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amaz Dajani, to Baghdad in October 1939. The mufti was to become an influential figure during the following two years, keeping alive both the cause of Palestine and the hostility towards Great Britain which caused enmity. Nevertheless, Nuri tried to exploit the opportunity to mediate once again on the Palestine issue by seeking to persuade the mufti of the virtues of the British White Paper on Palestine of May 1939. Although obliged to criticise the White Paper in public, Nuri approved of its abandonment of partition, of its limitation on Jewish immigration in its terms, and of its promise of eventual independence for a unified Palestine. However, he was unable to bring the mufti round to his point of view and the differences between the two men became ever sharper, contributing to the growing polarisation of Iraqi politics.

For Nuri al-Sa'ld's political opponents, the only hope of removing him lay in cultivating rival officer factions. When Nuri al-Sa'ld's close associate, Rustum Haidar, the minister of finance, was assassinated in January 1940, some of these tensions erupted. The assassination was the work of a disgruntled civil servant who had moved in the circles of anti-British and pro-Axis Iraqis. Consequently, Nuri chose to see this as part of a more general plot organised by his enemies and seemed ready to use the Haidar case as he had done the alleged 'plot' of March 1939 to ensure and to eliminate his political rivals. Their unspoken communicated itself to the officer corps. Here a rift was developing between some of the older members of the 'circle of seven', particularly General Hussian Fawzi, the chief of the general staff, and the younger officers opposed to whom Nuri enjoyed closer relations. This led to the crisis of February 1940 when Nuri resigned as prime minister and his military allies promptly demanded his reinstatement, mobilising their forces at Rashid camp and apparently preparing to march on the capital. General Fawzi mobilised his forces at...
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army and elsewhere, it was also increasingly difficult for Rashid 'Ali to comply with the growing number of British requests with the alacrity expected by the British government in wartime. In July 1940 a dispute arose concerning British requests to transfer troops through Iraq. The Iraqi government eventually agreed, but the prolonged argument over the exact section of the treaty which authorised this gave the British the impression that the prime minister was more concerned to placate pro-Axis sentiment in Iraq and indeed the Axis Powers themselves than to fulfil Iraq's obligations to the Great Britain under the treaty. The same impression arose over the question of Iraq's relations with Italy in the summer of 1940. Nuri al-Sa'id proposed that Iraq should sever relations, but this was rejected in the cabinet and Rashid 'Ali failed to give Nuri his full support. Consequently, by the autumn of 1940 British officials were making it known that Rashid 'Ali would have to go. For Rashid 'Ali, general knowledge of the British attitude made his survival as prime minister a matter of principle. To resign would look like an act of abject surrender. Quite apart from the question of the war and the attitudes of the Axis Powers, this evoked powerful feelings of resentment in Iraq about British intervention. Rashid 'Ali successfully tapped into these sentiments, which he undoubtedly shared, but in doing so he became ever more closely identified as the figurehead and symbol of the anti-British (and in the context of the war pro-Axis) movement in Iraq. As events were to show, this was a dangerous position to hold.

Despite his set-backs in cabinet, Nuri al-Sa'id was also reluctant to resign. Nor was the whole of the cabinet against him. At this point, in January 1941, the regent decided to intervene. He took the unprecedented step of letting it be known that the government should resign. Rashid 'Ali, secure in the knowledge that he now enjoyed the support of the Golden Square, and aware that the regent had no constitutional power to dismiss him, refused the regent's request. When the regent insisted, Rashid 'Ali persisted in his refusal, but found to his dismay that most of his ministers were prepared to hand in their resignations.

Rashid 'Ali promptly enlisted the help of al-Sabagh, who threatened the regent with direct military action if he insisted on Rashid 'Ali's resignation. The regent was forced to comply. Nuri (now out of the cabinet) mobilised his parliamentary following, leading Rashid 'Ali to demand that the regent disband parliament. The regent did not sign the dissolution order and left Baghdad for Diwaniya where he knew that he could rely on loyal army units. This put a new complexion on events and obliged Rashid 'Ali finally to resign at the end of January 1941, since the officers of the Golden Square had made it clear that they were not prepared to risk civil war simply to keep him in office.

The regent then asked Taha al-Hashimi to form a government. He had the initial support of the officers of the Golden Square, since they regarded him as an Arab nationalist and he too had his own networks of influence in the armed forces. However, when he once again tried to break up the Golden Square, they, together with General Amin Zakî (acting chief of the general staff) and Rashid 'Ali, decided to move against both the regent and al-Hashimi in April 1941. They forced al-Hashimi to write a letter of resignation, but the regent, realising that the palace was being surrounded by troops, managed to escape, making his way to Basra and eventually to Transjordan. As the armed forces took over Baghdad, he was joined to exile by Nuri al-Sa'id, Jamil al-Muhammad I and 'Ali Jawdat, all opponents of Rashid 'Ali.9

THE COUP D'ÉTAT OF 1941 AND THE BRITISH MILITARY OCCUPATION

The coup d'état of 1 April 1941 was significantly different from previous ones. It was no longer simply aimed at replacing one prime minister with another. Instead, it was directed against the monarch — in the shape of the regent Abd al-Illah — whose authority was constitutionally necessary to legitimise the actions of the armed forces and their civilian allies. The regent's refusal to play the game obliged the conspirators to find new ways of sanctioning their behaviour. These proved to be a curious mix of the old and the new. The first move was the establishment of a Government of National Defence, presided over by Rashid 'Ali al-Kailani and justified by the need 'to safeguard the country's integrity and safety'. At the same time the regent was indicted for trying to undermine the army for harming national unity and for flouting the constitution. This mixture of national salvationism and constitutionalism marked the rhetoric and the actions of the new regime. Rashid 'Ali put a motion before parliament deposing Abd al-Illah and replacing him as regent with a cousin of the king, Sharif Sharaf. Surprisingly, given the fact that the parliament contained a large number of people who were by no means sympathetic to Rashid 'Ali, the motion was passed unanimously. Thereafter, matters could proceed with a semblance of constitutional propriety since the new regent, Sharif Sharaf, promptly signed the order approving Taha al-Hashimi's resignation, and authorised Rashid 'Ali to form a government.
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In seeking to abide by forms of legality, Rashid 'Ali was concerned to carry with him much of the Iraqi political elite who were discontented by the flight of the regent and wary of the power of the Golden Square. Regardless of constitutional niceties, these men were upstarts. Their undisguised appearance in politics seemed to presage a more radical dis-

persal of power, not because of their ill-defined political programs, but because they were "unknowns". Through their power in the army, they brought with them a self-sufficiency or at least an inde-

pendedence of the old networks of family patronage. It was this which

implicitly threatened the influence of the established families and per-

sonalities, contributing to the unease of much of the elite once the army

officers began to act in their own interest, no longer as the clients of others.

The events of April 1941 seemed to many to exemplify the dangers of such a development. The government was left with a want of constitutional propriety to these proceedings was intended to reassure

the prime minister that their world was not on the verge of collapse.

However, Rashid 'Ali was also aware of the need to persuade the

British that no fundamental change had occurred. Thus, he hastened to

reassure Great Britain that Iraq would respect all its obligations under

the treaty. For their part, the British were deeply alarmed by the return

of Rashid 'Ali to power and by the strongly nationalist colour of his new

cabinet. They were also aware of the fact that a "shadow government"

existed, composed of Rashid 'Ali and a few members of his cabinet,
together with the four officers of the Golden Square and Haji Amin al-

Husaini. Consequently, Great Britain withheld recognition of the new

government, belying Rashid 'Ali's claims to constitutionality, and took

the decision to test the intentions of the government by requesting per-

mission to land troops in Iraq under the terms of the treaty.

Rashid 'Ali agreed to the British request, but soon found himself under

intense pressure from the Golden Square and from his cabinet

colleagues to impose conditions which would effectively limit the capac-

ity of Great Britain to land any more troops in Iraq. The British saw this

as confirmation of their worst suspicions and rejected all limiting condi-

tions outright. Instead, they pressed ahead with troop landings at Basra.

This was met by an official protest from the Iraqi government which

then authorized units of the Iraqi army to take up positions overlooking

the British air base at Haliuniya. The British command was informed that all air activity must cease forthwith and that any plane trying to take off would be fired on. The British rejected this demand and in turn demanded that the forces overlooking the air base should be withdrawn - and that failure to do so would be regarded as an act of war.

The Iraqi forces refused to comply and, consequently, the British

troops under General Asar buổi ordered his forces to attack on 2 May.

Fighting lasted for some days, but eventually the Iraqi troops were forced

to fall back towards Baghdad and took up position at Falluja. By this

stage, however, the British were sending more troops from India and

a British force was being prepared in Transjordan to cross the desert to

Iraq. In this situation, Rashid 'Ali, backed by those in the army and in

his government who saw this as an opportunity for a more general

assault against British influence in Iraq, sought the help of the Axis

Powers. Naji Shawkat was sent to Turkey to impress upon the German

authorities Iraq's urgent need for military assistance. Both Germany

and Italy naturally favoured any attempt to undermine British power in

the Middle East and enlisted the support of Vichy France to this end, but

the timing was such that the Axis Powers could do little to tilt the balance

of forces in Iraq against Great Britain. In the event, Germany and Italy

sent some shipments of small arms and about thirty warplanes to Mosul,

but they played a negligible part in the campaign.

Meanwhile, British forces built up in Iraq, occupying Basra and

cutting Baghdad off from the north. Although numerically superior, the

Iraqi units could not withstand the military power which Great Britain

brought to bear and it was not long before the British forces reached the

outskirts of Baghdad. The government of Rashid 'Ali and the Golden

Square disintegrated, demoralised by the relentless advance of the

British forces on the capital. Nor did the great majority of Iraqis seem

particularly involved in the plight of the government. Despite calls for

jihad by a number of clerics and despite the best endeavours of the

government media, those sections of the Iraqi population which might

have made a difference to the military outcome - the Shi'ite tribes of

the south and the Kurdish population of the north - failed to respond to

the government's rallying cry. On the contrary, in many cases Kurdish

and Shi'ite tribal leaders assisted the British forces.

By the end of May Rashid 'Ali and the members of his government,
as well as Haji Awn al-Husaini and the officers most deeply implicated

in his regime, had fled Baghdad, leaving the mayor of the city, Arshad

al-'Umari, to negotiate an armistice with the British forces. The col-

lapse of the government also gave some measure of the population and of

the security forces the opportunity to wreak a violent and vicarious revenge

upon the Jewish community of Baghdad. The Jafar (the text signifies pursuing things to excess and violent dispossession) as it was known,
claimed the lives of nearly 200 Jewish Iraqis and was accompanied by the looting and destruction of Jewish businesses in the city. Already tar-
geted by anti-Zionist Arab nationalists in the 1930s, many of the Jews
of Iraq saw these events as a turning point in their relations with their
Iraqi compatriots. After two days, when the looting threatened to
come more widespread, the Iraqi and British authorities finally
decided to intervene and forcefully restored order to the city. This
allowed the regent 'Abd al-lah to enter Baghdad, accompanied by
Nuri al-Sa'id and the others who had flown in the wake of Rashid 'Ali's
coup in April.13

In this way, the immediate crisis came to an end. The activities of the
army officers and of Rashid 'Ali's government had threatened the inter-
ests of the regent, Nuri al-Sa'id and others, as well as the British in a
number of ways. They had no difficulty, therefore, in agreeing on a
common strategy for dealing with the problem. The fact that this strat-

ey was based on military action and force majeure was due in part to the
underlying nature of the contesting British power in Iraq, as well as to the
conditions and exigencies of wartime. However, it had also been due in
due to the developing patterns of Iraqi politics, whereby armed force or
the threat of it had become the means of deciding in whose hands
command of the state should lie.

The Iraqi state itself was thus becoming not simply the arena of
significant political action, but also an array of procedures, attitudes
and practices. These grew out of the actions and visions of those who
were able, for a variety of reasons, to wield significant power over the
greater part of the Iraqi population and constituted the field of dis-
tinctively Iraqi politics. Although contested by those who felt excluded
or disadvantaged by this regime of power, it nevertheless had come to
represent an increasingly well-defined set of preoccupations, articu-
lated by the people who had succeeded in mastering it. Regardless of
personal or factional differences, or even of significant ideological
divergence, certain features became apparent. Principally,
these comprised the importance of personal trust, the determination
to preserve inequality, whether materially or status-based, and the
prominence of the disciplinary impulse, expressed primarily through
the use of coercion. These features made any construction of an Iraqi
identity ambiguous, since it was obvious that any such identity would
be determined largely by individuals who had an overdeveloped sense
of Iraq as an apparatus of power and an underdeveloped sense of Iraq
as a community. The emergence of army officers during the 1930s as

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the supreme arbiters merely made these features crudely apparent.
The restoration of the regent and the return of Nuri al-Sa'id and his
allies gave the semblance of a restoration of civility, but the same rules
and the same logic applied. They would merely take on different forms.
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5 THE HASEMITE MONARCHY 1941-58


4 THE HASEMITE MONARCHY 1941-58

For a sympathetic view of Regent Abd al-Bah, see G. de Guerry, Three Kings in Baghdad 1921-1958 (London, 1961), pp. 176-78. The picture thus emerges, including some British Foreign Office archives, series FO 351, in rather less flattering


