

CIVIL-MILITARY AFFAIRS IN HASHEMITE IRAQ:

AN EXAMINATION OF PAST MILITARY CONDUCT IN IRAQI POLITICAL LIFE

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER YOUSSEF ABOUL-ENEIN, USN
BASIL ABOUL-ENEIN

As U.S. forces take stock of the fact that 70 percent of Iraqis voted in the December 15 elections, it is vital to examine the history of how and when the Iraqi army played so prominent a role in the political life of the country. By exploring the history of Iraq's civil-military affairs, we can begin to diagnose telltale signs of what worked and what did not work in Iraq's difficult birth as a nation-state and maintaining Iraq's borders despite fierce sectarianism along religious and ethnic lines. In his essay "The Second Learning Revolution," which appeared in the book *Rethinking the Principles of War*, Major General Robert Scales advocated that military decision-making has been pushed to lower and lower ranks. He pointed out that in Operation Iraqi Freedom, junior officers and NCOs are making decisions that were the purview of colonels during the Cold War.

It is therefore of utmost importance to equip them and American military planners with an understanding of the evolution of Iraq, its military and their relationship with civil authority. America's war colleges must not shy away from the treasures to be found in Arabic books that discuss military affairs. This essay will explore Iraq's military relationship to the Hashemite dynasty that lasted from 1921 to 1958. It will rely primarily on the work of Dr. Akeel Al-Nasseri who in 2000 wrote a seminal study entitled *Al-Jaysh wal Sultah Fee Iraq Al-Malaki*, which is translated as *The Military and (Political) Authority under the Iraqi Monarchy 1921-1958* (Dar Al-Hassad Publishing, Damascus, Syria: 2000). Note that under Saddam Hussein this Iraqi historian published this work in Syria and in his adopted homeland of Sweden. One of the benefits of the liberation of Iraq is the hope that Iraqi intellectual life suppressed under Saddam will blossom

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once again. Readers will learn the methodical history of Sunni domination of the armed forces, a remnant of Ottoman times and carried over by the British when it ran Iraq as mandate from 1922 to 1932. In addition, the different currents that undermined the Iraqi monarchy of Feisal I and his dynasty to Feisal II would lead to the Arab world's first military coup d'état and bring such external players as Nazi Germany, the Vichy French, and the British in World War II.

The Iraqi army under the monarchy went through four phases of political development leading to the July 1958 revolution that finally brought Iraqi officers into complete control of the country:

- * Foundation phase (1921-1932),
- * Destabilization phase (1932-1941),
- * Radicalization phase (1941-1949), and
- * Overt Factional phase (1949-1958).

Seeds of the Foundation Phase: Ottoman Military Administration of Iraq

Before the creation of modern Iraq in the aftermath of World War I, the Ottoman Turks administered the region as three distinct quasi-autonomous entities. The three regions centered on Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra. Each of these separate provinces had a duly appointed Ottoman Pasha from 1534 to around 1870 that governed on behalf of the Ottoman sultan and collected taxes for Constantinople. Ottoman governor of Baghdad Midhat Pasha restructured the

three provinces of Mesopotamia with Baghdad retaining central control over Mosul and Basra. Although not in existence at the time, Iraq was slowly taking shape with Baghdad becoming the central capitol of the Mesopotamian province. The Ottomans realized that with the sheer size and central location of Baghdad, this province and whoever the Sultan selected to govern it dictated the course of the smaller urban areas of Mosul in the north and Basra in the south. This dispels the theories that the British created modern Iraq; it instead inherited three Ottoman provinces centrally run from Baghdad.

The Ottomans used a divide and rule system of keeping dominance over Mesopotamia. It capitalized on divisions between:

- Urban mercantile aristocratic families versus agrarian tribes that farmed along the Euphrates River;
- One tribe against another in Iraq's desert and semi-nomadic regions;
- Shiite versus Sunni; and
- Various Shiite hawzas (circles of influence that competed within Shiite Islam for a following).

The latter half of the 19th century saw significant reform of the Ottoman army. Chiefly these reforms included opening European-style (Prussian) military academies and the creation of a modern general staff. For Arab subjects of the Ottoman Empire, the pivotal reform was the opening of officer ranks, military schools, and officer academies. Arabs began to experience military service as a full-time profession in the late 19th century. Arab officers trained in the 1870s onward would rise to command in Syria, Iraq, and Egypt. Mesopotamia was the hub of military activity, and the 16th Ottoman army was charged with providing security



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Students at the imperial military middle school in Baghdad pose for a photograph. The photo was taken towards the end of the 19th century.

in the three provinces along the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

The origins of a modern army in Iraq can be traced to 1870. Ottoman governor Midhat Pasha (Pasha is an honorific Ottoman title equivalent to Lord) established an intermediate military school in Baghdad. This institution was tailored to take children that completed elementary school and provided three years of instruction in technical military fields (drill, artillery, engineering and tactics). By 1914 and the outbreak of World War I, three intermediate schools were opened: two in Baghdad and one in Suleimaniyah. If they passed this phase of their military education, they matriculated to the only military high school located in Baghdad, which served as an academy preparatory school. Those who excelled in their studies here would enter the Ottoman Military Academy in Constantinople. Mesopotamia (the three provinces of Baghdad, Mosul, and Basra) was allocated 60-70 slots yearly, the largest share of any of the Ottoman Arab dominions. After four years at the academy, they were commissioned as second lieutenants, and a few went onto further specialized training in areas such as cavalry, infantry, engineer, medical, etc.

Foundation Phase: Arabs Who Passed Through the Ottoman Military Education System

One the eve of World War I, about 1,000 Iraqi officers were in the service of the Ottoman sultan. Arabic sources divided those officers into two major camps during the outbreak of the war and its four-year duration.

(I) The first group of about 250 joined the Arab Revolt and fought under the banner of the Sherief (Sherief is an honorific

title denoting descent from Prophet Muhammad's family) Hussein of Mecca and his three sons Abdullah, Feisal, and Ali. They were stimulated by British promises of creating an Arab homeland that stretched from Arabia to the Levant and Iraq. After World War I and the leaking of the Sykes-Picot Agreement that divided Ottoman lands into British and French spheres of influence, they felt their cause had been betrayed and evolved into infamous Arab nationalists, playing an important role in the development of modern Iraq and the evolution of what today is the fighting force known as the Arab Legion. This group included Jafar Al-Askary and Mouloud Mukhlis. Others included Nuri Said and Jawdat Farouki. Their efforts along with British intelligence officers like T. E. Lawrence were able to keep the Ottomans diverted in suppressing an Arab Revolt in Arabia, tying down divisions that would have been used in a drive towards occupying the vital Suez Canal in Egypt. It is this group of officers that fought with the Arab Revolt, encircling the Ottoman garrison in Medina, occupying the Red Sea port of Yanbu, and finally marching with General Edmund Allenby's British forces to Palestine and Damascus. They would form the core of loyal military officers for both King Abdullah bin Hussein of Jordan and King Feisal bin Hussein of Iraq.

(II) In the second group of Ottoman graduates who were Iraqi, about 300 remained in Ottoman service and considered defiance of the sultan a sacrilege. They fought and commanded Ottoman troops in the Balkans, Mesopotamia, Palestine, Russia, and Greece as well as in the Sinai. This group would return to become repatriated into the new Iraqi army under King Feisal and would play a role on the fringes of the new Iraqi mandate. To what degree they felt bitter regarding the dismantlement of the Ottoman Empire is not clearly known, but one can assume that their loyalty to King Feisal was always suspect.

Jafar Al-Askary would be the first of King Feisal's military leaders to arrive in what would become Iraq and would serve as war minister in Iraq's provisional governments, of which several existed until 1932. In 1920, Jafar Al-Askary began the process of repatriating and absorbing Iraqi military personnel dispersed in the Middle East and in Ottoman theaters of battle to form the new Iraqi army. Among the challenges he faced during the First Provisional Government (January 1920-September 1921) were balancing those Arab officers who wanted to remain in Syria to fight the French while fomenting a revolution against the French mandate on the Levant, but on the other hand retaining those same leaders into the nucleus of a new Iraqi army. During the Second Provisional Government (September 1921-August 1922), War Minister Askary focused on Iraqi troops under Ottoman service held as prisoners in such places as ship hulks in Greek harbors and those stranded in Arabia. Aside from bringing in former trained Arab combatants who had served in the Arab Revolt or under Ottoman colors, Askary and a dozen Hashemite officers from the Arab Revolt debated other aspects of creating a modern Iraqi army. That discussion included:

- Deciding to field an all-volunteer force;
- Determining who would be eligible to serve in the army;
- Creating zones of training whereby those joining in the north of Iraq would train at Hilla and those joining in the southern or central regions would train in Baghdad.

Arab Views on the British Mandate of Iraq

Two political attitudes existed among this cadre of Arab officers and troops brought together from Ottoman service. One argued for an alliance with Britain and allowing the mandate to take its course to create a modern and regionally powerful Iraq. Others were on the fence and supported whichever side was winning street skirmishes. Another significant portion was known as the radicalists, who wanted immediate independence and union with Syria. They rejected King Feisal and the British mandate. This group included seniors officers like Sabbagh, Sidqi, Shabeeb, and Jawad; all of whom would provide a host of officers that served in Iraq's military. It was in this climate that King Feisal and his advisors began promoting and assigning Sunni, Sherifan (Arab Revolt) officers to senior ranks in Iraq's new army. Out of 304 officers who returned to Iraq after World War I, 191 were Sherifan (Sunni and primarily non-Iraqi) and eight were above the rank of colonel. Of those eight senior officers, only three were non-Sherifan (Iraqi). What evolved under the monarchy was an officer corps dominated by 30 primarily Sunni families with the lion's share of Iraq's military leadership coming from these families: Askary, Said, Saddoun, Suweidi, Sahrurdi, Shabandar, Bajaje, Gaylani, Daftari, Jaderjee, Hashimi and Ayubi. These 20-30 military families intermarried and promoted one another's interests within the Iraqi armed forces of the monarchic period. Their families dominated the Iraqi officer corps. Their descendants exist in today's Iraq and no doubt continued attempting to protect their interests even during the Baathist period. Some of these officers were eliminated by Saddam Hussein who saw them as elitists; others perished in the wars against Iran, Kuwait, and the United States. The question today remains if these families will attempt to reinstitute the old order and what their views are on Iraq's new military. Perhaps a key question is: how many of the descendants of these families with a martial tradition in Iraq are part of the Sunni Arab insurgency?

King Feisal I

When King Feisal was evicted from Syria in 1920 by French forces, the British in the 1921 Cairo Conference installed him

as King of Iraq and decided to transition the country to independence in 10 years (1922-1932) under his rule. King Feisal of the Hashemite clan of Mecca knew that he was a Sunni outsider from Arabia asked to rule over Iraqis, and this placed him in a difficult situation. However, he was attuned to the ways in which the Ottomans governed Iraq and quickly assessed that:

- * The Shiite hawzas stood against the British mandate;

- * The mercantile urban families stood against Hashemite (sometimes called Sherifan rule) in Iraq;

- * The Sherifan officers of the Arab Revolt who fought for Arab self-determination on the British side now stood against the British experiment in Iraq, but were divided on which course the new country should take. Should Iraq follow Iraqi nationalist or Arab nationalist agendas? Should Iraq attempt to regain the unity of Arabs as it was under the Ottomans? Or should Islam be the unifying force of the country?

Initially, the urban elite of Iraq's major cities refused to build a middle and upper middle class cadre around King Feisal or serve in the newly created Iraqi army. A few Iraqis did join the army as officers but were against a monarchy they deemed as alien so they sought to undermine it from within. Clerics, both Sunni and Shiite,



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Prince Feisal became King of Iraq in August 1921. When he died of a heart attack in Switzerland in 1933, his son, Ghazi, took the throne.

directed their anger at the British primarily and excluded demonstrating against King Feisal. They had stimulated the 1920 uprising that opposed the enforcement of the Sykes-Picot Treaty and the mandate systems. The rebellion would last well into 1921 and lead to a commitment of thousands of British troops. A key leader of the 1920 Revolt was Shiekh Al-Dhari, a Sunni clerical leader who incited an urban riot against British forces in Iraq. His descendents today head the Muslim Ulema Council in Iraq, a Sunni Islamist and Salafi inspired organization that some argue is the peaceful face of the Sunni insurgency in Iraq.

Iraqi officers of the 1920s could be classified as:

- * Collaborators of the British and the Hashemite monarch in the name of stability and order;

- * Urbanites who strive towards a gradual shift in political power to the urban mercantile class;

- * Tribal chiefs who sent their sons to look after regional interests and policies from Baghdad unfavorable to their tribe or region;

- * Ottoman officers who joined the Iraqi army as mercenaries;

- * Pan-Arabist intelligentsia who strove towards a unified national agenda with Syria, Jordan and the Lebanon;

- * Iraqi intelligentsia who strove to create an Iraqi national identity and regional hegemony; and finally

- * Those who safeguarded Shiite or Sunni interests through the use of their military commissions.

British Views on the Creation of Modern Iraq

The future of Iraq would be the subject of much debate among British colonial officials. The Cairo clique represented by Sir Percy Cox felt that immediate independence for Iraq coupled with indirect British rule would be the best course for the newly emerging nation. In that manner, King Feisal could establish himself without overt British support that would undermine his tenuous legitimacy as King of Iraq. The Delhi clique, represented by A. T. Wilson, wanted direct British rule over Iraq as the only means of guaranteeing short term stability until such time that Iraq's mandatory status ended, and they could have institutions of governance and national unity. The British discussed Iraq's

divisions and among the proposals was the creation of an Iraqi army as a means to foster national identity. More importantly, the key determining issue in London was how to manage the Iraqi mandate with as little investment in security and actual commitment of British forces. This debate was clearly demonstrated in the memoirs of Winston Churchill, but perhaps a more concise case for getting Iraqis to assume more responsibility for securing British interests in Mesopotamia was found in three letters written by T. E. Lawrence to three different British newspapers between July and August 1920. Central concepts of these three letters are:

* A criticism of British policy makers essentially “setting up in Mesopotamia a government which is English in fashion and is conducted in the English language.” He advocated raising two divisions of local volunteer troops and making Arabic the official language of government, and also looked to the dominions of Canada and South Africa as a model on how Iraqi governance should evolve under the British mandatory system.

* Advocating the tapping of British officials with significant experience in India, Sudan, Egypt and other colonies to act as advisors to King Feisal behind the scenes.

* Warning against being compared to the Ottomans; citing they killed 200 Arabs yearly to maintain the peace. He argued that the 1920 Revolt cost more than 10,000 Arab lives, and that the British were losing their legitimacy as a benign hegemon. (*T.E. Lawrence in War and Peace* by Malcom Brown. Stackpole Books, 2005)

Arabic books focus on King Feisal’s insecurities in governing Iraq including his eviction from Syria in the Battle of Maysalun in 1920, being non-Iraqi, being a Sunni ruler imposed on a Shiite majority, and perhaps the most pressing tactical problem for the new king was that some Iraqi tribes had more weapons caches than he.

The British crafted the 1922 Anglo-Iraqi Treaty that defined the terms of the 10-year mandate and imposed the following security terms that would be a source of constant tension between Askary, Nuri Said and King Feisal on the one hand and British authorities on the other. Issues of contention that relate to security included:

* Cooperating with British forces to quell internal riots and civil disobedience;

* Defining a percentage of Iraq’s total revenue that would go to the military;

* Assigning a British flag officer as inspector general of the Iraqi army;

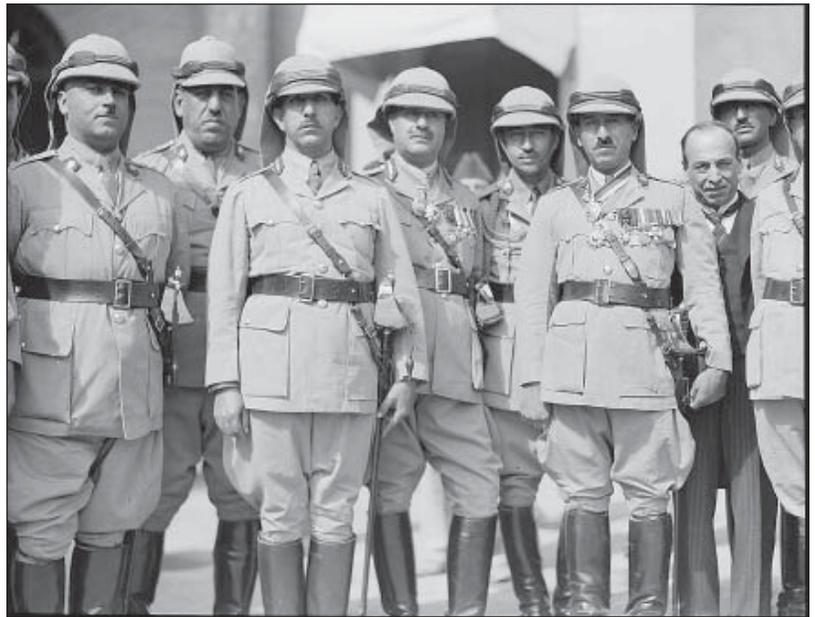
* Providing the British high commissioner in Iraq unimpeded access to Iraq’s military installations and oversight of all Iraqi military operations carried out by the army;

* Permission to recruit 7,500 Iraqis as levy forces;

* Basing six Royal Air Force squadrons in Iraq; and

* Agreeing to undertake the training of the Iraqi officer corps and furnish advisors and trainers in Iraq.

The problems with this treaty included the Levy Force evolving into a better equipped and elite Iraqi force that was resented by the regular Iraqi army. Arab historians single this out as an example of how the Baathists would model their Republican Guard



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British officers gather for a photograph outside the palace in Baghdad in 1932.

forces on the British Levy Force. The Iraqi Provisional Government ruling on behalf of King Feisal sought to reduce the initial four battalions used to secure British installations and officials from four in 1922 to two after 1927. The terms of the treaty further undermined King Feisal’s legitimacy and bolstered the radicals within the Iraqi military establishment. Oversight over the Iraqi army and its internal security operations would be the main contention point between four provisional governments, being an all-consuming issue of the Third Provisional Government of Prime Minister Saddoun (January 1928-April 1929). Initial Iraqi plans for an all-volunteer force was re-debated with Iraqi generals seeing a general draft as a means of wresting control from the British. However, there were those generals vested in the preservation of the Hashemite monarchy who viewed a general draft as bringing sectarianism and training Shiites, Kurds, and undesirable Sunni tribes who would then form a ready force under a tribal sheikh at the expense of the central government. Objections to the idea of a draft were voiced by Kurds and a minority sect known as Yazidis. Prime Minister Nuri Said was among those who stood against conscription and expansion of the army initially. His opposition would change, however, when he realized the need for a wider security force after the British mandate ended in 1932 and as the expansion of the army became a defining issue in ending British oversight of Iraq. In the end, the Iraqis would adopt a three-layered defense force of regular volunteers, four-year conscripts and three-year conscripts. The government forced Yazidis and other minorities to submit to conscription, and this further undermined the armed forces.

Solutions to King Feisal’s Problems

To address the challenges of ruling Iraq, Feisal brought in loyal officers and troops who fought with him during the Arab Revolt, an event made famous by the notoriety of T. E. Lawrence. His first order of business was to create a security force that maintained internal order and suppressed any vocal objections to his rule. Feisal I and one of his trusted military advisors Tewfik Suweidi

worked to create a cadre of loyal Sunni officers from remnants of the Arab Revolt. This system evolved in time to 61 army officers who maintained oversight and security for King Feisal. Fifty-one were former Sherifan officers who fought in the Arab Revolt. This situation would remain until 1941. Although the British attempted to create a parliamentary monarchy in Iraq, what developed was a parliament rife with dissent and revolutionary ideas aimed at undermining King Feisal. In the early formation of the Iraqi monarchy, the Shiite clerical leaders saw the new Iraqi army as the only defense against Wahabi encroachment from Saudi Arabia, a matter that preoccupied Iraqi Shiites in the 1922 Karbala Conference. The Iraqi army supported by the British Royal Air Force (RAF) was used to subdue Saudi incited tribes and keep Iraqi Sunni tribes from coming into the Al-Saud confederacy. The urban intelligentsia saw in the Iraqi army a chance for Arab self-determination denied them by the European victors of World War I, a chance for unity, and a return to past glories of the Arab empire.

Military training slots were allocated for sons of tribal chieftains as a means of guaranteeing loyalty. This was not a new development but a carry over from Ottoman times. It made much political sense as it allowed King Feisal to undermine the hold the 20 to 30 martial families had in the Iraqi military.

Uprisings and Revolts: Towards the Destabilization Phase

Modern Iraqi history is replete with serious riots, insurrections, and violent incitements so it is a testament to coalition forces and Iraqi security forces that rioting and violent protests have not been as prevalent.

Iraqi forces supported by the British RAF put down 130 uprisings and revolts between 1921 to 1932. After the British Mandate ended in 1932, there were 10 major uprisings in five years centering in the Kurdish regions, Nasiriyah, Diwaniyah and Basra.

Worse was to come after Iraq became an independent nation in 1932 leading to the pro-fascist government of Prime Minister Rashid Ali Al-Gaylani in 1941. Starting with the Colonel Bakr Sidqi Revolt in 1936, six major military coups took place in five years. These officers would be

motivated by the examples of Kemal Ataturk in Turkey and Shah Reza Pahlavi in Iran who were seen ridding themselves of foreign influences and dictating modernity, order, and independence. Both were former military officers. Some Iraqi officers were a product of the same Ottoman schools that produced Kemal Ataturk, and matters in Iraq were made worse during Prime Minister Nuri Said's use of the army to eliminate political enemies. The Iraqi army was not immune to the political turmoil in the country and the various nationalist, monarchist, Marxist, reformist, and fascist currents. The first communist cells within the army were uncovered in 1935. In 1937, more than 65 soldiers were imprisoned for supporting the Iraqi Communist Party. In 1938, Military Regulation 51 was imposed for any person or persons importing subversive doctrines into the armed forces.

1941: Radical Expressions, Rashid Ali Gaylani and the Nazi connection in Iraq

The discovery of huge oil fields near Kirkuk and the installation of King Feisal I placed Iraq firmly under British control. Yet the rise of anti-British sentiments gave birth to several anti-colonialists and Arab nationalist movements, the British resorted to military force when British interests were threatened, as in the Rashid Ali Gaylani coup of 1941.

Rashid Ali Gaylani was born in 1892 to a prominent aristocratic Sunni family in Baghdad. He studied law in Baghdad and began his career in Iraqi politics in 1924 in the government led by Yasin al-Hashimi, who appointed Gaylani Minister of Justice and then Minister of the Interior. Both men opposed any British involvement in the Iraq's internal politics. They rejected the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty signed by the Pro-British government of Nuri Said in 1930 and formed their own Party of National Brotherhood to promote a nationalist agenda. Gaylani would ascend to the prime ministership in 1933.

During the 1930s, Gaylani was highly influenced by Haj Amin al-Husseini, an ex-Ottoman artillery officer turned school teacher. He is better known as the grand mufti of Jerusalem, who had been exiled from the British Palestine for his anti-British activities. Husseini was active in organizing anti-Jewish riots in the late



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghazi_of_Iraq

King Ghazi succeeded King Feisal and ruled from 1933 until 1939 when he died in an automobile accident.

1920s and found support in Hitler's Germany. By 1940, Gaylani thus dubbed his own association of fierce Arab nationalists comprising four colonels—the Golden Square. It was at that time that the ideological foundations of what in later years became the Baath Party were laid. Baathism is a fusion of Arab nationalism with fascist ideas created by two Syrian students studying in the Sorbonne: Salah-al-Din Bittar and Michel Aflaq. The party wasn't organized until 1947. Due to requirements of the Anglo-Iraq treaty, Iraq broke relations with Nazi Germany in September 1939. As a prelude to independence, the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930 preserved for Britain important stakes in Iraq, specifically:

- *Commercial interests in Mosul and Kirkuk oil fields and air bases next to Baghdad and Basra;

- * Vital strategic land and air link with India; and

- * The right to transport troops through Iraq.

In March 1940, Gaylani replaced Nuri Said as prime minister. Consequently, when Italy entered the war in June 1940 Iraq did not sever relations with Rome. When Gaylani was appointed prime minister in 1940, Iraq had experienced the

untimely death of King Ghazi in a car accident and the ascendancy of a weak regency of the new four-year-old King Feisal II. The power would be in the hands of his uncle, Prince Abdal-Illah. (Prince Abdal-Illah stepped down in 1953 when Feisal II came of age, but he continued to be a close chief adviser and companion of the young king. He was also a strong advocate of pro-Western foreign policy.)

Though Abdal-Illah supported Britain in the war, he was unable to assert control over Gaylani, who used the start of World War II to further Iraqi nationalist objectives. He refused to allow troops from India and Australia to cross through Iraq to the North African front. He also rejected calls that Iraq break ties with Italy and sent his justice minister, Naji Shawkat, on a secret mission to Ankara. This mission's intent was to make contact with the German ambassador to Turkey, Franz von Papen, and win German support for his government. The allies and Britain in particular grew concerned with Iraqi negotiations to renew ties between the Nazi regime and Iraq. The discussion between Nazi and Iraqi officials included promises to provide military support to Germany when its armies reached Iraq. At a later meeting, Haj Amin Al-Hussieni's private secretary acted as the representative for the Iraqi government, Gaylani guaranteed Germany that Iraq's natural resources would be made available to the Axis war effort in return for German recognition of the Arab state's right to independence and political unity.

By December 1940, the British demanded the removal of Gaylani, and in January he was replaced with General Taha Pasha el Hashimi, another pan-Arabist who was more palatable to Britain. This only aggravated Iraqi mistrust of Britain and their supporters in the government, and together with some of his pro-Axis colleagues, Gaylani made plans to assassinate Abdal-Illah and depose Taha el Hashimi. This was an elaborate plot to seize power. However, as elements of the Iraqi military began siding with Gaylani, Abdal-Illah fled the country March 31, and on April 3, Gaylani regained power.



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King Feisal II was a month away from his fourth birthday when he inherited the throne. Feisal's uncle, Prince Abdal-Illah, ruled as regent until 1953 when Feisal turned 18.

feet at its highest point. The base had a force of 96 mostly obsolete aircraft. The British had 2,200 troops to defend the base and 12 armored cars. It housed a Flying Training School of 1,000 airmen supported by 9,000 civilians, many of them British dependents. Its

defenses consisted of a seven-mile long iron fence and a constabulary of 1,200 Iraqi and Assyrian levies. By the second day of fighting, a few more Blenheim fighter bombers arrived. Encouraged by hints of German assistance and German triumphs in Greece and Crete, Gaylani began to move against the British by breaching the 1930 British treaty rights and besieging the air base of Habbaniya on April 30, 1941. British infantry began shuttling by air from Shaibah to reinforce Habbaniya. The Vichy French government in Syria aided the new Pro-Axis Iraqi government and provided a conduit for German assistance to keep the Iraqi National Defense Government alive. Gaylani collaborated with Nazi German intelligence units and eventually accepted military assistance from Nazi Germany.

Tactically, there were two major British military installations in Iraq; one was at Basra and the second was the airbase at Lake Habbaniya, west of Baghdad. To secure Iraq, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill ordered General Archibald Wavell to protect the Habbaniya airbase. General Wavell felt overcommitted and short of resources needed to reinforce Iraq. With the presence of Italian divisions in North Africa, he thought that Iraq was a minor aggravation. Wavell left Iraq's RAF base lightly guarded by a locally recruited constabulary (levy force) backed by armored cars. Despite overstretched British forces in Egypt and North Africa, Churchill insisted on overthrowing the Gaylani regime in order to preserve British strategic interests in the Gulf. The prime minister understood this was a war of engines and turbines in the air, sea and land, and this required petroleum. An Indian division sailed for Basra, and a hybrid force of a British brigade composed of Arab Legions assembled in Jordan under the command of General Sir Edward Quinan.

Hitler ordered planes and arms to be sent to Baghdad in support of Gaylani. German Luftwaffe units arrived in Mosul on May 12, 1941. Hitler's 30th Directive on the Middle East was reported to have said "The Arab Freedom Movement is (in the Middle East) our natural ally against England. In this connection, the raising of rebellion in Iraq is of special importance. Such rebellion will extend across the Iraq frontiers to strengthen the forces which are hostile to England in the Middle East, interrupt the British lines of communication, and tie down both English troops and English shipping space at the expense of other theatres of war. For these reasons I have decided to push the development of operations in the Middle East through the medium of going to the support of Iraq. Whether and in what way it may later be possible to wreck finally the English position between the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf, in conjunction with an offensive against the Suez canal, is still in the lap of the gods..."

According to the book *The Second World War: The Grand Alliance, Volume III* by Winston Churchill, captured Nazi leader Rudolf Hess, who served as Hitler's secretary, pointed out in an interview with the British Foreign Office that "in any peace settlement Germany would have to support Rashid Ali and secure eviction of British presence from Iraq."

Resenting the Royal Navy's July 1940 attack on the French fleet lying at anchor at Mers-el-Kébir in Algeria, French Admiral Jean Darlan negotiated a preliminary agreement with the Germans and offered to release Vichy war stocks in Syria, including aircraft, and permit passage of German war material across Syria, providing a Syrian air link for the Germans to support Gaylani from the Axis-occupied Dodecanese Islands. German agents, with ample

funds, proceeded to stimulate anti-British and anti-Zionist feeling among the Arab peoples of the Levant and Iraq. The Luftwaffe had been operating attacks on the Suez Canal from bases in the Dodecanese and could have easily operated in Syria especially with airborne troops. With Syria under German tutelage, Egypt and the oil refineries at Abadan would have come under heavy air attacks, and the communication lines between Palestine and Iraq would have been severed. In addition, the British diplomatic position with Turkey (a technically neutral country) would have weakened.

Unfortunately for Berlin, by the time Hitler was moved to declare that “the Arab liberation movement is our natural ally,” Churchill had preempted Axis intervention in Iraq. The Iraqis made things worse for themselves when they mistakenly shot down the plane of Major Axel von Bloomberg, Germany’s negotiator sent to coordinate military support for the Gaylani coup. Despite energetic efforts by Dr. Rudolf Rahn, the German representative on the Italian Armistice Commission in Syria, to run trains of arms, munitions and spare parts to the insurgents through Turkey and Syria, and the intervention of approximately 30 German planes bolstered by a dozen Italian planes, Iraq’s five divisions proved no match against the British forces backed by about 200 aircraft.

Iraqi forces comprised one infantry brigade plus two mechanized battalions, one mechanized artillery brigade (equipped with twelve 3.7cm howitzers), one field artillery brigade (equipped with twelve 18 pounders and four 4.5cm howitzers), 12 armored cars, one mechanized machine gun company, one mechanized signal company, one anti-air/anti-tank battery. In view of the situation, London decided to organize a relief force to go to the aid of Habbaniya. This force was named Habforce and consisted of the 1st Cavalry Regiment supported by one royal field artillery regiment. One mobile infantry battalion and three mechanized squadrons from the Transjordan Frontier Force were assembled. This force was short of equipment and would have to travel a total of 535 miles to reach Habbaniya.

Major General John Glubb was then a major in command of the small task force of Arab Legion that reached Habbaniya on May 18 after crossing 500 miles of desert. As the British forces advanced towards Iraq

from Jordan, RAF bombers virtually annihilated the Iraqi air force, and extended their attacks to Syrian air bases that serviced German He-111 bombers and Me-110 fighters. The Iraqi army established itself on the high ground to the south of the Habbaniya airbase. An Iraqi envoy was sent to demand that no movements of either ground or air were to take place from the base. The British refused this demand and opened fire on the Iraqis, knowing the relief force was only hours away.

The British forces surrounded at Habbaniya consisted of 2,000 troops, 20 armored cars and a few Bristol Blenheim fighter bombers. With help from the ground forces at the base and the Iraqi levies comprised mostly of Assyrians and Kurds, the Iraqi troops were pushed back to Fallujah through a combined air, ground, and artillery assault. The air battle was taken to the remaining Iraqi airbases. Habbaniya had essentially lifted the siege with its own resources. A secondary mission of Habforce was to establish a line of communication across the desert and in addition to provide a flying column for operations. This roving column came to be known as the Kingcol after its commander, Brig. Gen. J. J. Kingstone. The Kingcol (derived from Kingstone’s first four letters of his name and col for roving column) would be composed by the headquarters of the 4th Cavalry Brigade and Signals, Household Cavalry Regiment, one battery of 60th Field Regiment, 1st Anti-Tank Troop Regiment, a detachment of the 2nd Field Squadron, two companies of the 1st Essex Regiment, a detachment of 166th Light Field Ambulance, a desert mechanized regiment, Arab Legion detachment (minus)

from Jordan under Glubb, supported by eight attack armored cars.

Once the allied reinforcements arrived in two columns (Kingcol, headed by Brig. J.J. Kingstone and Habforce, headed by Major General John George Walters Clark) across the desert from Palestine and Transjordan, the Iraqi army was cleared from Fallujah and pursued along the river valley to Baghdad, which fell within a week with the nominal restoration of the regent and the pro-British government. Using Iraq as a staging area, British forces invaded Iran with a Soviet intervention from the north on August 25, 1941, installing pro-British Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Unsettled by Vichy France’s invitation to the Germans to use Syrian air bases, Churchill ordered the invasion of Syria and Lebanon, which fell on July 14 after a six-week campaign. Nuri Said was reinstalled as prime minister of a pro-British government on October 10, 1941, and Iraq broke diplomatic relations with Vichy France a month later. Allied (British) occupation of Iraq continued until October 26, 1947. The last British soldier left Iraq on May 30, 1959, with the closure of the strategic Habbaniya airbase in Iraq.

Gaylani fled to Iran, then Istanbul, and finally ending up in Berlin where Hitler provided him protection. After World War II, he lived in exile in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, returning to Iraq only in 1958 following the revolution that overthrew Iraq’s Hashemite monarchy. Once again, he attempted to seize power, and plotted a revolt against Brig. Gen. Abdul Karim Kassim’s government. The revolt was foiled, and Gaylani was sentenced to death but later pardoned. In 1961, Gaylani was



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President Harry S. Truman, Prince Abdal-Illah, and other representatives of the governments of the U.S. and Iraq gather on the porch of the White House in May 1945.



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Prince Abd-Allah and Prime Minister Nuri Said take part in a ceremony in Baghdad in November 1942. Nuri Said served as prime minister for 14 terms over the course of 28 years.

released from prison by a special amnesty, settling in Beirut. He died in Lebanon four years later. Gaylani's reputation was revived by Saddam Hussein, and he was portrayed as a national hero. In the *Memoirs of the Qadriah Order (Tazkara-Qadriah)* written by Sayyad Tahir Allauddin Al-Gaylani, grandson of Abd ar-Rahman al-Haydari al-Gaylani, wrote:

“Sayed Rashid Ali al-Gaylani: Son of Sayed Abdul Wahhab Al-Gaylani, as trustee of Awqaf (Religious Endowments) and seasoned statesman with political vision, he was held in high esteem. He was opposed to the enslavement of Iraq and in (the) national interest served as Prime Minister. Subsequently the Government consulted him on important national issues. The people were by and large fond of him because of his growing sympathy for their cause. Notwithstanding his political consciousness he was exceedingly pious, virtuous, close to almighty God, fearing God with abstemious life-style.”

Conclusion

There are many things that American forces and military planners can learn from the British experience in Iraq, as well as the construct of the Iraqi military during the Ottoman and monarchic periods. But first, the writings on Iraq's development as a nation-state need to be rediscovered and reinterpreted with an eye to Operation Iraqi Freedom, which has taken Iraq into a new and more promising phase as a nation-state. Primary sources can be found in British memoirs and writings as well as several key Arabic books that allow a fuller view of the evolution of the Iraqi military and how it has interjected itself in the country's political life. British influence in Iraq was limited to only a small segment of the population, the Sunni Arabs and in the end the focus of the British presence in Iraq was to maintain access to strategic bases and air-routes to India as well as energy resources. Therefore Iraq's constitution and electoral politics during the monarchy were geared towards maintaining Britain's position in Iraq. The U.S. and coalition partners over eight decades later have striven to include and empower the various segments of Iraqi society and even when the Sunnis boycotted the January 2005

elections, other population groups within the Iraqi Provisional Government showed great statesmanship and included Sunnis in the drafting of the constitution and in the government in general.

The U.S. has finally fulfilled the dream of Iraqis since the creation of the nation-state to shape and mold a truly national security force that shall further cement the national identity. Integrating Iraqis in quelling violence was also a key improvement in the management of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The British handling of the 1920 Revolt lasted four months and led to more than 450 British and 8,450 Iraqi casualties. On the positive side, the British did lay out the seeds of modern industrial capabilities for Iraq in the political, military, and economic as well as petroleum sectors. The British focus was not to get Iraq on its feet and give the Iraqi people the liberty to choose their form of government. Therefore, they could never fully develop Iraq's industrial capability. In many ways, the insurgency of today retards that development; but not to the extent seen with the anger of Iraqis against the British mandate. It is vital to distance Operation Iraqi Freedom from any references to the old British mandate system. This includes rebutting such news channels as Al-Jazeera in which *imperialism, colonialism, occupier* and the United States are used interchangeably in programming. This conjures up memories of the past for many Iraqis, which is an unfair and out of context characterization of U.S. intentions in Iraq. Other lessons learned from the Iraqi monarchy include the need to be constantly vigilant for anti-government cells within the Iraqi military and the need to enshrine in culture and in the constitution an apolitical officer corps, emphasizing the peaceful and constructive methods officers can use to bring forth grievances to seniors. Finally, there need to be more studies at the war college level on Iraqi civil-military affairs from the Ottoman period, the Hashemite period, the rule of the generals and Baathist period. Arabic books on the subject need to be translated, analyzed and debated. Perhaps the most incisive study done during Operation Iraqi Freedom on past lessons to be learned in governing Iraq was sadly not a book, but a booklet published in 2003 entitled *U.S. Policy in Post-Saddam Iraq: Lessons from the British Experience* edited by Michael Eisenstadt and Eric Mathewson. It was this Washington Institute for Near East Policy booklet that stimulated this work. The U.S. military needs more such papers and studies.

Lieutenant Commander Youssef Aboul-Enein is a Navy Medical Service Corps officer specially assigned as Middle East Policy Advisor at the Office of the Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. He is the author of many essays and reviews in Army, Marine Corps and Navy publications.

Basil Aboul-Enein has recently completed his graduate studies and works as a part-time Arabic language instructor. He is currently seeking a commission in the United States Navy. Both brothers share a passion for Middle East history and politics, and much of this material is part of their debates on Iraqi history as it relates to current events.

Youssef and Basil Aboul-Enein wish to thank Captain Eugene Smallwood, MSC, USN Special Assistant for Current Operations at the Bureau of Navy Medicine and Surgery for editing, discussing and providing useful comments that enhanced the quality of this essay. In addition, the authors wish to thank the Pentagon and Georgetown University librarians for providing items both in Arabic and English for this piece. Use of Arabic sources represent the authors' understanding and translation of the material; any errors or omissions are their own. A complete list of references used for this article is on file and available through *Infantry Magazine*.
