

**The Shaping of the Middle East:
British Policy and the Kurdish Question,
1914-1923**

Submitted by Mohammad Sabah Kareem to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Middle East Politics, July 2017.

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Abstract

The period between 1914 and 1923 was one of the most important phases in Middle Eastern history; and it was one that shaped the political map and boundaries of the area to exclude any Kurdish political entity. The thesis argues that the British Empire played a most important role in shaping the future of the region. The central argument of the study is that British diverging views and strategies formed a decisive factor in thwarting the emergence of any Kurdish state in the post-Ottoman era and furthermore, the on- the- ground colonial officials were key in directing the British perceptions with regard to the future of Kurdistan. Mark Sykes, in the period between 1915 and 1919, and Gertrude Bell, between 1919 and 1923, were the most important colonial officials that determined the future of Kurdistan.

British policy concerning Kurdistan was heavily affected by Britain's relations with other Great Powers including France, America and Russia. The conflicting interests of these powers in the region had a critical effect on the political future of Kurdistan. In relation to this Imperial Game, the study confirms that the oil issue has complicated the settlement of Kurdistan, and in particular it was an important factor behind the British policy decisions with regard to Southern Kurdistan and its integration into the Iraqi State. In addition, the regional Turkish, Armenian and Arab nationalist movements significantly complicated the settlement of the Kurdish Question, in Britain's perspective.

This study demonstrates how policy decisions regarding Kurdistan were closely linked to the way information was conveyed to the British policy-makers. It argues that biased reports created an unfavourable perception regarding the Kurdish Question. On the ground, the only sources of information available to the Government were British officials, agents, missionary groups, and the press, and their bias towards the interests of others, such as the Armenians and Arabs, created a negative image of the Kurds which affected the Kurdish cause as far as the foreign policies of the Great Powers were concerned.

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Thank you

Mohammad Kareem

List of Abbreviations

CO:	Colonial Office Files
FO:	Foreign Office Files
AIR:	Air Ministry
I.O:	India Office
S/S:	Secretary of State
WO:	War Office Records
CHAR:	Churchill Archive
TNA:	The National Archives (Kew)
RDS:	Royal Dutch-Shell
TPC:	Turkish Petroleum Company
APOC:	Anglo-Persian Oil Company
KRG:	Kurdistan Regional Government
IS:	Islamic State

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Introduction

In 1915 during the debate concerning the future of the Ottoman Empire in the last century, Arthur Hirtzel, Political Secretary of Indian Office, stated that the Kurdish question would be an important factor in the future of the Middle Eastern settlement. He argued that, without settling this question, the region would not witness peace and stability. Although it has been more than a hundred years since Hirtzel's notification, the Kurdish question has remained unsolved and the Middle East has witnessed more violence and instability than ever before. Writing on this issue four decades later, Wadie Jwaideh, the Iraqi American historian, writing on this issue observed that, 'Their (the Kurds') behaviour is one of the important factors in the future stability and security not only of the Kurdish-inhabited countries, but of the entire Middle East. Thus, it is important to know the Kurds and to understand their aims, their political orientation, and the course they are likely to pursue'.¹

In recent decades, the importance of the Kurdish Question has grown rapidly, in particular, regarding the recent new developments and revolutionary waves witnessed in the Middle East in the aftermath of the Iraq War in 2003. It seems that the region has been undergoing a transformation regarding its borders and political entities. The appearance of Islamic State (IS) and its control of substantial territories in both Iraq and Syria has created a major challenge, vis-à-vis the post-World War One political system, by carrying the slogan 'the end' and 'death' of the Sykes-Picot Agreement. The borders of Syria and Iraq, in particular, are in a state of flux and the ongoing situation in these countries has increased the significance of the Kurdish question since Kurds have been significantly involved in the conflict in both countries especially in fighting IS. As a result of these circumstances, the Kurdish autonomous region of Rojava, the Western part of Kurdistan, emerged as a de facto political entity. Furthermore, the Kurdish Peshmerga in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has controlled most territories, where they have claimed areas such as Kirkuk and its oilfields and Mosul province. In addition, the KRG leadership announced that they

¹ Wadie Jwaideh, *Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development*, Syracuse University Press, New York, 2006, p. xvi.

would hold a referendum for Iraqi Kurdistan's secession and independence, on 25th September 2017.

Despite these new developments, it seems clear that solving the Kurdish question cannot be achieved without great difficulty; and the prospect of a Kurdish independent state, in any part of Kurdistan would not be materialised due to the complexities of the Kurdish situation and the risks and challenges that would be faced both internally and externally.² Most of these complexities and difficulties are deeply rooted in the events of the years 1914 - 1923 when the future of the Kurds was determined and the political map of the Middle East was shaped - and the Kurds had been left out. David Fromkin, the American historian, notes that the settlement of 1922 'does not belong entirely or even mostly to the past; it is at the very heart of current wars, conflicts, and politics in the Middle East.' The artificial states such as Iraq, Syria, Israel, Lebanon, the 'children of England and France' are at the heart of the problems in the Middle East crisis.³

Specifically, the British Empire played a most influential part in determining the future of the Middle East, including Kurdistan. The Kurdish question was deeply affected by British policy decisions in the region and the legacies and implications of those decisions are still very dynamic in Kurdistan's current situation. This thesis, therefore, examines the British policy regarding the future of Kurdistan from the outbreak of the First World War, to the end of the Lausanne Conference in 1923.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Britain's highest concern in the East was to safeguard the routes to India, in particular, against potential Russian expansion. The Middle East was as the 'Clapham junction' of British Empire communications between

² Most challenges would come from the regional powers, in particular Iran and Turkey, because they are going to oppose any Kurdish independent state in any part of Kurdistan as it would encourage their Kurdish inhabitants to demand similar political rights. The regional actors, Iran and Turkey in particular, are playing central role in the direction of the situation of the region and its reflection of the Superpowers interests in the region too.

³ David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 2009, p. 571.

the three continents of Europe, Africa and Asia.⁴ Protection of Ottoman territorial integrity was Britain's chief strategy in order to prevent this Russian threat. Accordingly, Britain viewed that any local opposition and attempts against Constantinople would threaten this strategy. So its attitude towards the Kurdish movements were factored into this framework as the British chiefly perceived the Kurds as a destabilizing element; they were seen as, 'these restless and turbulent Koords'⁵ that posed a threat to their interests.

Celili Celil, A Kurdish Russian historian, described the nineteenth century as a period of Kurdish movements against Turkish rule.⁶ The most notable examples include the Kurdish Emirates of Soran 1836, Botan 1847, the Yazdan Shir uprising, and Sheikh Ubedullah 1880-1881. The British government had always supported Constantinople in its suppression of the Kurdish movements since Britain supposed that the Kurdish uprisings and attempts to rebel would serve the strategic interests of the Russian project in penetrating the region.⁷ In addition, there was a British assumption that there was a Russian intrigue lay behind the Kurds' resistance to Ottoman rule.⁸ As the London *Standard* reported, 'there is one fact amongst others of great gravity, and which the ambassadors and consuls of England and France communicated a month ago; and this is the general rising of all Kurdistan. In the first instance the intrigues of Russian in that vast region only armed some hordes, and disturbed some pashas. Now from 40 to 50000 Kurds keep field and defeat one after the other the Turkish corps who are opposed them'.⁹

⁴ Peter Mangold, *What the British Did: Two Centuries in the Middle East*, I.B. Tauris, London- 2016, p. 1.

⁵ *Territory, Revolt and Nationalism, 1831-1979*, Edited by Anita Burdett, British Documentary Sources, Volume 1(1831-1855), Cambridge Archive Editions, 2015, p. xxviii..

⁶ Jalili Jalil, *Nahdhat Alakrad Althaqafia Walqawmia fi Nihaayah alkrm Altasa Ashr walbidaya Al karn al Ashrin*, T: Bavi Nazi, Wilato, Kedr, Rabita Kawa lil thakafa al kurdia, Berut, 1986, p14.

⁷ See: Sabah Abdullah Ghalib, *The Emergence of Kurdism with Special Reference to the Three Kurdish Emirates within the Ottoman Empire 1800-1850*, PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 2011.

⁸ See: *The Standard (London, England)*, Thursday, September 01, 1836; Issue 2906. 19th Century *British Library Newspapers: PartII*; *Caledonian Mercury (Edinburgh, Scotland)*, Thursday, November 5, 1835; Issue 17841, Sourced from the British Library, Gale Document Number: BB3205420792; David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, I. B. Tauris, London, 2004, pp38-47; Othman Ali, *British Policy and the Kurdish Question in 'Iraq, 1918-1932*, Ph.D., University of Toronto, 1993, pp51-97.

⁹ *The Standard (London, England)*, Thursday, September 01, 1836; Issue 2906. 19th Century *British Library Newspapers: Part II*

Although the outbreak of World War One shifted British policy towards the Turks, Russia remained, as previously, a major British concern. Hence, the wartime arrangements were similar to the pre-war period concerning strategic and economic imperial requirements. The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 had served the colonial powers' requirements as it proposed carving up the Ottoman Empire between them. That is, the map drawn in the Sykes-Picot Agreement reflected strategic buffer zones; and the future of Kurdistan was heavily affected by this Imperial Game because this system did not consider its future.

The developments that followed the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 and the Wilsonian principles of self-determination challenged European imperialism and, encouraged the Middle Eastern peoples, including the Kurds, to demand the rights to self-rule. In particular, Woodrow Wilson's approach to the new world order challenged the European international system that was based on the balance of power and 'cultural and racial superiority'. This was because he called for the new world order to be subject to the open door markets and to forming sovereign states based on self-determination.

To harmonize its empire's goals with the new developments, the British government opted to liberate the Ottoman peoples under Turkish rule and to implement the concept of self-determination. From this time onward, it was supposed that the post-war settlement would be based on the principle of self-determination and nationality. The Imperial Powers reluctantly agreed to rule the colonial world under the new mandate form in order to replace colonial imperialism by encouraging self-rule and this characterized the beginning of the end of the European Imperialism.¹⁰ However, there was little indication that the European Powers genuinely intended to implement those principles but fundamentally they used them as a tool for imposing policies and agendas that served their interests. So, the proposal for self-rule was 'vague and unhurried' and nothing significant or effective had been done to prepare the inhabitants for independence.¹¹ Nevertheless, it established a new form of nation-

¹⁰ Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 225; Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: the failure of nation Building and History Denied*, Columbia University Press, New York-2003, p.5.

¹¹ John Darwin, 'Imperialism in Decline? Tendencies in British Imperial Policy between the Wars', in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 3, (Sep, 1980), p.657.

states, under the mandate system, aimed at serving Imperial interests rather than the actual wishes of the people.

In her recent book *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire, 2015*, Susan Pedersen, a historian specializing in the British Empire at Columbia University, analyses the mandate systems in the Middle East, Africa and the Pacific in an attempt to answer the question ‘what difference did the mandates system make’? She argues that Mandate territories were not governed better than colonies, and in some cases were ruled ‘more oppressively’; demands for political rights were met more with ‘repression than conciliation’.¹² Indeed, the League of Nations and the Mandate System became ‘an organ of constructive co-operation on colonial matters’¹³, in particular, following the San Remo Conference in 1920 it became an Anglo-French project ¹⁴ which was manipulated in order to legitimize imperial rule in the mandate territories. Pedersen argues that by 1921 ‘it was growing clear that, whatever purposes the mandates system had been devised to serve, extending the right of national self-determination was not one of them. Populations placed under mandate responded by resisting its imposition almost as strenuously as had the imperial powers.’¹⁵ So in the long term, the European Middle Eastern system, in the aftermath of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, had worsened and complicated the situation of Kurdistan in the long term. As David Fromkin states: ‘As a result the events of 1914-1922, while bringing to an end Europe's Middle Eastern Question, gave birth to a Middle Eastern Question in the Middle East itself.’¹⁶

Kurdistan was one of the notable examples of a county that had been heavily affected by the international political system, the ‘internationalization processes’. The ‘democratic principles’, were mostly used for the benefit of imperial interests by undemocratic means at the expense of the wishes of the inhabitants. This was very true in the case of Kurdistan, when the referendum was used to justify Feisal’s

¹² Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire*, Oxford University Press, 2015, p.4.

¹³ Ibid, p. 5.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 35.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 3.

¹⁶ Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace*, p. 563.

Kingdom. However, Sheikh Mahmud's demand ¹⁷ for a Kurdish referendum in Kurdistan was rejected by British.

This thesis, therefore, will study and analyze the British policy and its attitude towards the political future of Kurdistan between 1914 and 1923 by considering the different views within the British Empire system. It will discuss why different parts of the British government had different agendas and strategies, and, the different priorities of each individual department and circles in determining a British Middle Eastern policy. The thesis will also discuss why some views were considered and others not, and the impact of this on the future of Kurdistan.

In short, this thesis examines the ambiguous attitude that lay behind British policy concerning the future of Kurdistan. That is to say, even though during the post-war period there was not a coherent and obvious British foreign policy regarding the Kurds, there were still different sets of views and understandings of the Kurdish situation. One of the main challenges of this research was to understand and analyze, despite all the contradictions, how the discussion of these policies took place and to what extent the views it produced contributed to its development. However, the main objective of the thesis is to understand how these views eventually came together to form a more cohesive and decisive set of policies that were dictated by the political changes the world witnessed and which made it necessary for Britain to adopt a clearer policy towards Kurdistan.

The analysis of these views and discussions is crucial to an understanding of the causes behind the unsettlement of the Kurdish question that is, Kurdistan's absence from the Middle East's political map. Analyses of the arrangements and discussions have been carried out of both wartime and post-war periods such as the de Bunsen Committee 1915, the Sykes–Picot Agreement, 1916, the Paris Peace Conference, the Sèvres Treaty 1920, the Cairo Conference, 1921 up to the conclusion of the Lausanne Conference in 1923. In particular, there have been analyses carried out of the particular on-going views and discussions about the Kurdish situation within the British government and where the discussion concerning Kurdistan fitted in to the

¹⁷ The most powerful Kurdish leader in Southern Kurdistan during and after the World War One, who ruled the first and second Kurdish governments in Sulaymania, which was established in the post-war period and demanded Kurdish independence and led the Kurdish armed struggle against the British between 1919-1930.

overall policy debate about the Ottoman Empire. Also, there have been analyses of how British decision making took place regarding Kurdistan and how the views of the British officials on the ground fitted into British decisions in the region and also, the impact of oil, on British policy decisions regarding the future of Kurdistan.

The most controversial question on the subject is whether the Kurdish failure, in the post-war settlement, was the result of the Kurds' inefficiency together with their tribal structure and lack of leadership and national feeling, which is an interpretation emphasized by the British. Or, was it due to the ambiguous and contradictory British policy adopted towards Kurdistan which is stressed by certain Kurdish researchers.

According to the official British view the Kurds failed to obtain their own state because there was not an appropriate Kurdish family in existence that was able to rule the country since: the Kurds were mostly a tribal society, were disunited, and they lacked any kind of national feeling. This basic conception regarding the Kurdish question in the British policy makers' mind lasted up to the time of the final decision on Kurdistan. This general assumption was not only about Kurdistan since it was a familiar argument made by British imperial rulers about various other areas. For instance, the British argued that Egypt and India were not nations and they were not eligible for self-determination.

One could argue that the British disregard of Kurdish aspirations was due to the fact that the Kurds responded to the Ottoman Caliphate's call for Jihad, and fought alongside Ottoman troops against the Allies during World War 1, and that this decision influenced the British policy-makers to ignore the Kurds. This study, however, argues that there is no evidence to suggest that the Kurds' position in the War played any significant role in influencing British views; British documents in fact indicate the opposite.¹⁸ Essentially, the Ottomans' declaration of Jihad was a failure, and had little impact on the majority of Muslims in the Empire.¹⁹ Although certain Kurdish groups fought alongside the Ottomans against the Allies, the majority of Kurds did not participate, and in fact suffered from Turkish policies. Most Kurds refused to take part

¹⁸ *Precis of Affairs in Southern Kurdistan during the First World War*, Office of The Civil Commission, Baghdad, 1919, F0371/4192. T.N.A

¹⁹ Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace*, p. 109.

in the Turkish campaign because they considered the Turks their real enemy; in particular, Kurdish religious leaders played a key role in the failure of this Turkish project, as they perceived the Turks to be 'the hereditary enemies of the Kurds'.²⁰ At the beginning of the war, 700 Kurds refused Vali Mosul's call to fight the British in Basrah, because they thought themselves on good terms with the English,²¹ and considered the Turkish conflict with the Allies as having nothing to do with them. In spring 1915, small Kurdish forces fought alongside the Turkish forces, but they returned to Kurdistan after the Battle of Shaiba, April 1915. Kurdish tribes in Western Kurdistan only furnished a small mounted contingent in the Turkish forces.²² The Turks did not receive as much aid from the Kurds as they did from the Arabs;²³ Arabs fought against Allies on more occasions than the Kurds did, as Curzon reminded Turkish in Lausanne.

Nonetheless, Kurdish tribes suffered considerably at the hands of the Turkish army,²⁴ and the Young Turks openly threatened the Kurds with massacres, calling them "the second Armenians" and "another enemy within the house".²⁵ In addition, Kurdish revolts against Turkish rule broke out during the War in Dersim, Botan, Kharput, Bitlis, Mardin and Diyarbakir. Turkish policies led the Kurds to prepare to welcome the Allies, but Russian behaviour and harshness towards the Kurds impeded the headway of these relations.²⁶ This proved a valuable service to the Turks, who subsequently instigated non-Muslim groups, such as the Armenians and Nestorians, against Kurds; this played a key role in dragging the Kurds into the war against the Allies.²⁷ For instance, between 1915 and 1916, Rawanduz and surrounding areas destroyed by Russian army, and who looted the Khanaqin town, near Iranian border.²⁸ Kurdish tribes continually sent letters to the British, complaining that the 'Russians

²⁰ Precis of Affairs in Southern Kurdistan.

²¹ British High Commissioner, Constantinople, 5 January 1919. F.O 608/95. T.N.A

²² Military report on Mesopotamia (Iraq): Area 8 (Western Kurdistan), The General Staff, British Forces in Iraq, 1923. IOR/L/MIL/17/15/45

²³ Letter from Lieutenant-Colonel William George Grey, Indian Army, Political Agent, Kuwait to Sir Arthur Hirtzel, Secretary, Political Department, India Office, 16 Jun 1915. British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/L/PS/18/B225; Curzon of Keldeston to Ismet Pasha, 14 December 1922. Records of the Kurds, V6, pp218-223.

²⁴ Memorandum compiled as a result of interviews with various of the Prisoners of War in camp-at Sumerpur, Miscellaneous papers on Middle East, 1915-1916. DDSY(2)/11/117

²⁵ *Records of the Kurds: territory, revolt and nationalism, 1831-1979*. British documentary sources. Volume 5. 1914-1920, p102

²⁶ 'Kurdistan and the Kurds'. IOR/L/MIL/17/15/22.

²⁷ Kurdistan Committee, Constantinople, to High Commissioner to Henry Calthrope, British High Commissioner Constantinople, 2 January 1919. FO 608/95; Precis of Affairs in Southern Kurdistan during the First World War, Office of The Civil Commission, Baghdad, 1919, F0371/4192. T.N.A

²⁸ 'Kurdistan and the Kurds'. IOR/L/MIL/17/15/22.

would depopulate the country and that they were driving the people into the arms of the Turks'.²⁹ Given all the above argument, it can be concluded that the participation of a part of the Kurds against the Allies, at the beginning of the War, did not have any notable impact in the British thinking towards the Kurds.

The thesis suggests that although studies have previously been carried out on this topic³⁰ this field needs a wider and more multidisciplinary approach, that includes the complexity of the Middle Eastern situation.

For example, in his book entitled *A Modern History of the Kurds*, David McDowall, the British historian, presents British official interpretations respecting the Kurdish question arguing that the absence of a suitable Kurdish leader to fit the British requirement to administer the Kurdish regions caused the British to be reluctant about the question. He argues that the lack of appropriate and modernist tendency among the Kurdish leadership and the Kurdish society led to the loss of the most significant opportunity for establishing the independence of Kurdistan. He also argues that Mahmud was not a Nationalist but a religious person, and his aim was to establish a 'personal fiefdom' rather than a Kurdish national state.³¹ He also emphasizes that the failure of the Kurdish Nationalist movement was a result of the internal factors due to the perpetual internal rivalries in Kurdish society and the lack of an appropriate leadership. McDowall's views are similar to Mark Sykes's in that the Kurds' identity did not appear or be recognized because they lacked both 'civic culture and an established literature'.³² Saad Eskander considers that McDowall's study is similar to that of Wilson's interpretation of the imperial mind.³³ Although, Kendal Nezan, the Kurdish

²⁹ 'Kurdistan and the Kurds'. IOR/L/MIL/17/15/22

³⁰ Robert Olson: *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion, 1880-1925*; Othman Ali: *British Policy and the Kurdish Question*; Saad Basheer Eskander: *Britain's Policy towards The Kurdish Question, 1915-1923*, Ph.D., LSE, 1999. David McDowall: *A Modern History of the Kurds*, Kamal Madhar Ahmad: *Kurdistan during the First World War*, Translated by Ali Maher Ibrahim, Saqi Books, London, 1994, and Wadie Jwaideh: *Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development*.

³¹ McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, p. 156.

³² Ibid, p. 2.

³³ Eskander, *Britain's Policy towards the Kurdish Question*, p. 15

scholar, agrees that the lack of a Kurdish moderate leadership is key to the failure of the Kurdish question, he doesn't believe that factor would have had an important influence on the British decision in determining the future of Kurdistan. Nezan argues that if the existence of Kurdish independence served French and British interests they would have easily established it: 'If Anglo-French imperialism had required an independent Kurdistan, they would have set up one, of their own accord, since the Kurdish leadership was at about the stage of underdevelopment as its equivalent in many Arab countries'.³⁴

The works of Robert Olson, Othman Ali, and Saad Eskander make the most significant contribution to the topic since they analyze many aspects of the British perspective towards the Kurdish situation. They emphasize that in the absence of a coherent British policy towards the Kurdish question the on-the-ground British Officials managed to formulate British policy decisions respecting the future of Kurdistan. W.R. Hay, British Political Officer in Kurdistan between 1918 and 1920, pointed out 'In newly occupied districts the A.P.O was usually allowed considerable independence. It was only when the routine began to crystallize that it became the P.O's duty to exercise control'.³⁵ The discussions in the existing literature concerning the 'men on the spot', chiefly focus on the role of officials such as A.T Wilson and Percy Cox, and Winston Churchill.³⁶ This study confirms the importance of these individuals in shaping the direction of British policy towards the future of Kurdistan, but it also examines the subject from a different angle.

Eskander's work, specifically, makes the most significant contribution to the topic since he analyses many aspects of the British perspective towards the Kurdish situation. Eskander emphasises the strategic considerations of the British Empire position in relation to the future of Kurdistan and argues that the oil factor was a

³⁴ Kendal Nezan, *The Kurds under the Ottoman Empire' -in- A People without a Country, the Kurds and Kurdistan*, (ed.) Gerard Chaliand, Translated by Michael Pallis (London: Zed Books, 1993), p.

³⁵ W.R. Hay, *Two years in Kurdistan: experiences of a political officer, 1918-1920*, Sidgwick & Jackson, London, 1921, p. 3.

³⁶ Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism*; Ali, *British Policy and the Kurdish Question*, pp. 53-90; Saad Eskander, Britain's Policy in Southern Kurdistan: The Formation and the Termination of the First Kurdish Government, 1918-1919, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Nov., 2000), pp.139-163; and Southern Kurdistan under Britain's Mesopotamian Mandate: From Separation to Incorporation, 1920-23, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Apr., 2001), pp. 153-180.

secondary issue in determining British policy towards the future of Kurdistan.³⁷ This study, however, shows that oil was a significant motive behind British decisions regarding the future of Southern Kurdistan (Mosul), and this significantly affected Kurdistan's political future. Despite the strategic importance of Southern Kurdistan, its oil resources played a major role in the future of the region, and this was an important dynamic of the Imperial Game in the Middle East. The conflict and rivalries would never have happened in connection with the region without the existence of the valuable oil resources. I would also argue that oil played crucial role in determining the future of Kurdistan by complicating its situation and contributing the partition of the country.

Previous work on this issue, such as that of Marian Kent and Helmut Mejcher, indicates that oil was a powerful motive behind the British Middle Eastern policy, in particular with regard to the control of the Mosul Vilayet and integrating it into the Iraqi state.³⁸ The most recent contribution to the field is Ian Rutledge's book, *Enemy on the Euphrates: The Battle for Iraq, 1914–1921*. Rutledge argues that the British government's growing knowledge of the oil resources in Mesopotamia influenced British imperial aims in the Middle East. In particular, he shows that the influence of people such as Admiral Slade, Mark Sykes, Maurice Hankey (the cabinet secretary), and other oil lobby groups, were vital in directing the British decision to occupy and retain British dominance in Mesopotamia, in particular, the Mosul Vilayet. Rutledge concludes that the imperial quest for oil 'runs like a sinuous black thread through this particular piece of historical tapestry during the years 1914 to 1921 and beyond'.³⁹ However, the impact of this factor on the Kurdish question has not been given sufficient consideration. This thesis will analyse the importance of oil and the implications for British policy decisions with regard to the future of Kurdistan. Chapter three will discuss this issue in detail.

The most recent contribution to the field is Ian Rutledge's book, *Enemy on the Euphrates: The Battle for Iraq, 1914–1921*. Rutledge argues that the progression of the British government's knowledge of the oil resources in Mesopotamia influenced the

³⁷ Eskander, *Britain's Policy towards the Kurdish Question*, p. 11.

³⁸ Marian Kent, *Oil and Empire: British policy and Mesopotamian oil, 1900-1920*, New York: Barnes & Noble, 1976; Helmut Mejcher, *Imperial quest for oil: Iraq 1910-1928*, Ithaca Press, London, 1976.

³⁹ Ian Rutledge, *Enemy on the Euphrates: The Battle for Iraq, 1914–1921*, Saqi Books, London, 2015, p.31.

British imperial aims in the Middle East. In particular, he shows that the influence of people such as Admiral Slade, Mark Sykes, Maurice Hankey (Cabinet Secretary), and other oil lobby groups were vital in directing the British decision to occupy and retain its dominance in Mesopotamia, in particular, the Mosul Vilayet. Rutledge concludes that the 'imperial quest for oil': runs like a sinuous black thread through this particular piece of historical tapestry during the years 1914 to 1921 and beyond.⁴⁰ Chapter Four will discuss this issue in detail.

In addition, Eskander in his discussions concerning the 'men on the spot', chiefly focuses on the role of officials such as A.T Wilson and Percy Cox, and Winston Churchill.⁴¹ This study confirms the importance of these individuals in shaping the direction of British policy towards the future of Kurdistan, but it also examines the subject from a different angle.

This study contributes to the field by adding different dimensions and by investigating the question from different perspectives. It argues that the roles of Mark Sykes from 1915 to 1919, and Gertrude Bell from 1919 to 1923, were fundamental in determining the future of Kurdistan by contributing significantly to the absence of Kurdistan from the political map of the Middle East. The thesis illustrates that since Mark Sykes and Gertrude Bell, two prominent British politicians, worked extensively in the Middle East, they were, arguably, the two most influential British officials responsible for making the Middle East borders and its political map. Indeed, the views of Mark Sykes (1915-1919) and Gertrude Bell (1919-1923) were crucial in formulating Britain's perspective toward the future of Kurdistan.

⁴⁰ Ian Rutledge, *Enemy on the Euphrates: The Battle for Iraq, 1914–1921*, Saqi Books, London, 2015, p.31.

⁴¹ Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism*; Ali, *British Policy and the Kurdish Question*, pp. 53-90; Saad Eskander, Britain's Policy in Southern Kurdistan: The Formation and the Termination of the First Kurdish Government, 1918-1919, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Nov., 2000), pp.139-163; and Southern Kurdistan under Britain's Mesopotamian Mandate: From Separation to Incorporation, 1920-23, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Apr., 2001), pp. 153-180.

Sykes played a vital role in shaping the British Middle Eastern policy, the Arab policy (Sharifian family)⁴² and Zionism project,⁴³ he gave the outlines of a coherent general policy with regard to Islam in the Near East,⁴⁴ and worked in diminishing the role of the Government of India in the Middle East.⁴⁵ This study offers a new interpretation of the Sykes-Picot agreement in relations to the future of Kurdistan, by looking at the important role played by Mark Sykes in determining the Middle East political map, and how this was reflected in the British wartime arrangements with the French, the Arabs and the Jews as well. It examines Sykes's specific role in determining the future of Kurdistan by neglecting its cause in the Middle Eastern settlement, which has not been considered by the previous literature. I would emphasise that fundamentally the British perception of Kurdistan was influenced by Mark Sykes's views, in particular, that the Kurdish Question was not recognised in British foreign policy and therefore Kurdistan was excluded as a political entity in the new Middle Eastern map. In short, Sykes's understanding of Kurdistan was translated into the British policy-making process, both during the war and in the post war period, which Sykes's policies with regard to Kurdistan were largely implemented.

Likewise, in the post-war period, between 1919-1923, Bell, who was Britain's Oriental Secretary in Baghdad, was instrumental in shaping the Iraqi state, was the architect of the political views that Baghdad presented towards Kurdish question. Bell and Cox were prominent in obstructing the establishment of the Kurdish independent state as outlined in the Cairo Conference. The thesis argues that the contention between the Colonial Office and Baghdad was not really between Cox and Churchill, as previous works, as much as between their advisers, represented, mainly, by Gertrude Bell, Oriental Secretary at Baghdad, and Hubert Young, Assistant Secretary in the Middle East Department. Churchill specifically was not concerned by (to him) minor issues such as the Kurdish question, but the broader considerations of Empire, and even he did not want conflict with Cox. In 14 June 1921, in Parliamentary debate,

⁴² Note on the Khalifate, Mark Sykes, 25 May 1915. DDSY(2)/11/1; War Committee: Evidence of Mark Sykes, 6 July 1916. DDSY(2)/11/15; Policy in the Middle East. III. The Arab Movement, Memorandum by Mark Sykes, 1915. IOR/L/PS/18/B219.

⁴³ Sykes to Ronald Graham, 15 March 1917. DDSY(2)/12/7; Sykes to Sckolow, 14 March 1917. DDSY(2)/12/7; Sykes to Balfour, 9 April 1917. DDSY(2)/12/7; Memorandum: Palestine and the Balfour Declaration, Devonshire, January 1923. CAB 24/158/61. T.N.A

⁴⁴ Sykes to War Office, Cairo August 1915. DDSY(2)/4/97

⁴⁵ War Committee: Evidence of Mark Sykes, 6 July 1916. DDSY(2)/11/15).

Churchill stated that 'I think I am right in leaving these matters entirely in the hands of Sir Percy Cox.'⁴⁶ That was, probably, the main reason behind Churchill's contradictions with regard the Kurdish Question.

Another significant issue analyzed this study is that the lack of Kurdish lobbyist groups in the British Empire played a decisive role in the political future of Kurdistan. Crucially, this aspect has not been examined or at least not sufficiently specified in previous literature. Other nations -Arab, Armenian, Turkish, Assyrian, and Jewish- had strong lobbyists and supporters within the British Empire. These lobbyists automatically acted against Kurdish aspirations in favour of the people's claims. Major Noel, often described as 'the second Lawrence' was probably the only British official to support Kurdish claims vigorously. Although his views influenced positive British perspectives towards the Kurdish question to some extent, he was a junior official and was not as influential as others such as Mark Sykes, A.T Wilson, Percy Cox, Gertrude Bell and T. E. Lawrence.

Furthermore, this study demonstrates how policy-decisions regarding Kurdistan were closely linked to the way information was conveyed to the British policy-makers. It argues that biased reports created an unfavourable perception of the Kurdish question. On the ground, the only sources available to the Government were British officials, agents, missionary groups, and the Press, and their bias towards the interests of others such as the Armenians and Arabs, created a negative image of the Kurds and obstructed their cause in the foreign policies of the Great powers. Chapters One, Three and Five discuss these matters.

A central argument of this study is that British perceptions of the Kurdish question were significantly influenced by the divergence of strategies and agendas between the Indian Office, the Government of India, the Foreign Office and the War Office. This theme has not been fully understood previously. The conflicting views reflected two main schools, India and Foreign Office. These two-competing school of thoughts continued to influence British Middle Eastern policy including Kurdistan. The issue reflected in the British wartime policy discussions during de-Bunsen Committee, the Allied discussions (Sykes-Picot agreement) and the post-war settlement. The Government of India and Indian Office's view, presented by The Secretary of State for

⁴⁶ Middle Eastern Service.HC Deb 14 June 1921 vol 143 cc265-334.

India and Hirtzel, was to support the settlement of the Kurdish Question. The Secretary of State for India stated that most memoranda did not pay proper attention to the Kurdistan problem. He noted that if the British found it necessary to create a military force in Mesopotamia, it was the Kurds and not the Arabs that they should rely upon. With this given, 'the establishment of an independent Kurdistan would be in British interest' as had been the case with the creation of Nepal.⁴⁷ On the other hand, Mark Sykes representing the Foreign Office opposed the recognition of the Kurdish Question.⁴⁸ Eventually, India's stance in relation to Kurdistan's position did not consider because since that time the role of India reduced from the policy making in the Middle East, and then, in the post-war period India was removed from the direct administration policy in Mesopotamia. But the Indian Government still influenced Mesopotamian affairs through the Indian Office and the other personalities on the ground, such as Wilson and Cox. The Indian intervention obstructed the creation of a coherent and unified British Middle Eastern policy,⁴⁹ and contributed to the complications of the Mesopotamian situation and the ambiguous British policy towards the region, including Kurdistan. Different approaches were also represented at the Cairo Conference: the Colonial Office were pro-separation and the British Civil Servants in Baghdad were pro-integration. Further, Lloyd George's pro-Greek policy vis-a-vis Winston Churchill's pro-Turkish strategy had serious consequences for the Kurdish situation. Altogether, the study emphasises that the disagreements of the policies within British Empire had a very negative impact on the Kurdish situation which examined throughout the thesis. This issue was closely associated with the rise of nationalism such as the Turkish, Armenian, and Arab movements which had a considerable impact on the British policy in connection with the Kurdish question. These issues will be discussed in Chapters Two, Three and Five.

This study explores the key feature of Britain's relationships with her Allies in connection with the Kurdish question. It argues that Anglo-French relations had

⁴⁷ Remarks by The Secretary of State for India on Appendix I, 6 April 1915, British Desiderata in Turkey in Asia., CAB 27/1. T.N.A

⁴⁸ This will be discussed in detail in the subsequent chapter.

⁴⁹ Busch, Britain, India and the Arabs, pvi.

profound consequences for the Kurdish question. Chapter Three examines and discusses the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the post-war rivalry with regard to the Middle East settlement during the peace conference and its consequences concerning the Kurdish settlement. It also discusses the San Remo and Sèvres Agreements and the consequences for Kurdistan. Although Russia had been absent from the post-war Allied Middle East settlement, she was engaged with the events in particular with respect the Kemalist movement. More importantly, Russia factor had always been in the Britain's mind in any actions it might take it in the region.

America's position in relation to the future of Kurdistan which has not been sufficiently understood, will be explained throughout the thesis. Although the United States did not have a clear idea about Kurdistan and the Kurdish question, its attitudes and policies had a significant impact on the Kurdish situation and the American Middle Eastern position influenced the future of Kurdistan in three ways. In the beginning the Kurds were encouraged by the Wilsonian concept, but in the event the Americans did not support the idea of for Kurdish self-determination. Also, American missionary groups influenced the US policy towards the post-War settlement which had a negative impact on the Kurdish question. Furthermore, American interests in the oil resources of Mosul Vilayet and their demand to keep an 'open door' policy were the most important dynamics in the United States' policy reflections on the Kurdish question. This thesis shows that, apart from the positive aspects of the self-determination principle, the American policy had always had negative outcomes for the future of Kurdistan. American support for both the Christian question and the Kemalist movement in the Middle East formed a significant dimension of the American policy on the British Kurdish perspective.

The study consists of thematic and chronological approaches. The study relies on a wide range of archival materials collected mainly in the British archives. The National Archives in Kew, British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, The papers of Sir Mark Sykes, 1879-1919: the Sykes-Picot Agreement & the Middle East, Hull University Archives, Churchill's Archives at the University of Cambridge, the Gertrude Bell Archive at Newcastle University, and Records of the Kurds: Territory,

Revolt and Nationalism, 1831–1979 13 Volume Set: British Documentary Sources, Cambridge Archive Editions (26 Nov. 2015), edited by Anita Burdett, are the most important primary sources. Although the British archives presented the British official view and make biased justifications for Britain's policy decisions and actions, they provide quite useful information about the subject and reveal many aspects of the geography, society, and economy of Kurdistan.

The memoirs of the British officials provide valuable information on the situation in Kurdistan, in particular works including C.J. Edmonds, *Kurds. Turks and Arabs*, and, *Kurds, Arabs and Britons: The Memoir of Col. Lyon in Kurdistan, 1918-1945*, edited by David K. Fieldhouse, Dr. G. M. Lees, *Two years in South Kurdistan*, (1928).⁵⁰ These are valuable sources for understanding the nature of British attitudes towards the Kurdish question, especially in Southern Kurdistan. Edmonds was one of the key British Officials who dealt with the Kurdish question at the time, and he was close to the events in Kurdistan which mentions in his study. Likewise, Col. Lyon was a British inspector and Political Officer, between 1918 - 1945 in both Mesopotamia and Southern Kurdistan, he reveals very significant information and aspects of the nature of the British attitude to the future of Kurdistan. He also indicates that Kurds were tricked by the British authorities in Mesopotamia, chiefly by the pro-Sharifian, and worked systematically towards the integration of Kurdistan into the Iraqi state by different means.⁵¹

Regarding contemporary Kurdish sources, the Kurdish memories of Rafiq Hilmi and *Chim Dee* (Sulaymaniya, 1972) by Ahmad Khawaja, recorded the situation in Kurdistan, in particular, emphasizing Sheikh Mahmoud's relations with the British. Ahmad Khawaja presents the situation and events in Kurdistan purely from Sheikh Mahmud's perspective by showing that the British were responsible for the destruction of the Kurdish autonomy under Sheikh Mahmud, in particular, those such as Wilson,

⁵⁰ Other valuable sources on the subject are: Sir Arnold T. Wilson, *Loyalties: Mesopotamia - Volume 1: 1914-1917, Volume 2: 1917-1920, A Personal and Historical*, Oxford University Press, London (1936); S.H. Longrigg's, *Iraq 1900-1950* (London, 1953) and W. R. Hay's, *Two Years in Kurdistan* (London, 1921).

⁵¹ This will be discussed in Chapter Two and Five.

Major Soan. But even he considered that Major Noel was against the Kurds' desires, however, the reports of the latter prove quite differently.⁵²

Hilmi's account, despite his nationalist sentiments, could be considered to be more balanced than the contemporary Kurdish sources in his portrayal of the situation in Kurdistan and the Kurdish-British relations. Hilmi's analysis of the situation is very useful since it reveals Kurdish-British relations and the attitudes of the officials towards the Kurds and their cause because he had close relations with Sheikh Mahmud and some British authorities in Mesopotamia and Kurdistan. In his criticism of Sheikh Mahmud's rule, Hilmi writes that his lack of fear and his apathy contributed to his mistakes, and that running the government was by no means similar to running a clan.⁵³ On the other hand, Hilmi blamed the British for the failure of the establishment of the Kurdish state by showing a negative attitude to the Kurdish question, and in particular, intriguing against Sheikh Mahmud's rule.⁵⁴

Thus, this thesis illustrates that the future of Kurdistan was essentially determined by British policy decisions. That is, the on-the-ground officials, the contradictory British strategies and agendas profoundly affected the Kurdish question. Moreover, the Great Powers' clash of interests and plans had significant consequences for the Kurdish question and the Oil question factor had an enormous influence on the British policy concerning the future of Kurdistan. Also, the weakness of the Kurdish nationalist movement played a part. Finally, the rise of the Nationalist movements such as those of the Arabs, the Turks and the Armenians played a principle part in the British Kurdish policy.

I would argue that this study contributes into the imperial history in the Middle East since it shows the nature of the Imperial Game, the Nationalist movements and the relations between Imperial powers and the local peoples. It also shows the nature of international relations and the diplomacy at that time. This study tells us about the nature of the British Empire and how the British operated in the occupied areas and engaged with the colonial societies at that time since what applied to decisions regarding Kurdistan, probably applied in many other areas. Indeed, there are lessons

⁵² Ahmad Khawajah, *Cheem De: Shorshakani Shaykh Mahmudi Mazin*, Aras, Hewler, 2013, p118

⁵³ Hilmi, *Memoirs - Yadasht 1908-1923*, Translated by: Fereydun Rafiq Helmi, p.109.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, pp.133

to be learned from this study which help our understanding of the nature of the British Empire, the nature of Empires and international relations more generally during the period under discussion since it casts a light on the complexity of global system, which shaped the future of the region and created a legacy that has deeply impacted on the current Middle Eastern crises.

Chapter Two

The British Policy discussions regarding the future of Kurdistan: From the Outbreak of the WW1 to the Collapse of Sheikh Mahmud's First Government in June 1919.

Introduction

'Sykes was most unusual man, a man fertile imagination and visionary plans and schemes and the ability to argue persuasively in their favour at any given moment...until his death in 1919, a figure of considerable influence behind scene of Middle Eastern policy.' Busch, *Britain, India and the Arabs*, p.67.

This chapter argues that British policy discussions in connection with the future of Kurdistan between 1914 and 1919 were heavily affected by the 'on the ground' officials' attitudes. It aims to shed light on the important role played by some key British figures in decisions concerning Kurdistan's future; and the evidence described in this study suggests that their views and attitudes influenced the crystallization of the British policy on the Middle East in general and Kurdistan in particular. In an examination of its impact on the Kurdish question, the chapter pays particular attention to Mark Sykes's dominance in the formulation of Britain's political agenda in the Middle East which featured principally in the de Bunsen report of 1915, and the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, as well as the British-Arab policy. In particular, the chapter analyses how the partition of Kurdistan, according to the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the British commitments to the Arabs complicated the political situation and jeopardized the future of Kurdistan.

This study offers a new interpretation of the Sykes-Picot agreement in relation to the future of Kurdistan, by looking at the important role played by Mark Sykes in determining the Middle East political map, and how this was reflected in British wartime arrangements with the French, the Arabs and the Jews as well. Scholars such as Kedourie, Busch and Fromkin have studied Sykes's role in shaping British Middle Eastern policy and the making of the Sykes-Picot agreement. This study, however, emphasises the Kurdish dimension, which has not been considered by the previous literature. It examines Sykes's specific role in determining the future of Kurdistan.

In this chapter I will be looking in detail at Sykes's views before looking in more detail at the Sykes-Picot agreement in the subsequent chapter, which is closely connected to the Anglo-French diplomacy. To do this, I shall examine the subject from the perspective of the role played by Mark Sykes in shaping the British Middle Eastern policy and its impact on the future of Kurdistan since this approach has not been taken before and therefore the role not fully understood. I would emphasise that fundamentally the British perception of Kurdistan was influenced by Mark Sykes's Orientalist and imperialistic views, in particular, that the Kurdish Question was not recognised in British foreign policy and therefore Kurdistan was excluded as a political entity in the new Middle Eastern map. In short, Sykes's understanding of Kurdistan was translated into the British policy-making process, both during the war and in the post war period. In this connection, David Fromkin concludes that the policy outline Sykes had drafted 'was realized after the war, and was embodied in documents formally adopted (for the most part) in 1922'.⁵⁵ As far as Kurdistan's situation is concerned, Fromkin's statement is true, since Sykes's policies with regard to Kurdistan were largely implemented.

The following section discusses new developments after the war and their impact on Kurdistan. Finally, the chapter discusses the policy discussions held in the post war-era and the extent to which the attitudes of the 'men on the spot' affected Britain's policy towards Kurdistan and the inclusion of Southern Kurdistan into Iraq. It emphasises the different interpretations made by the British and Kurdish sides and pays particular attention to the collapse of Sheikh Mahmud's government. The internal factors will be examined in my analysis which focuses on the British assumption that

⁵⁵ Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace*, p. 562.

the reasons why Kurdistan failed to achieve self-determination were its lack of leadership and its disunity. In short, this chapter argues that the lack of suitable Kurdish leadership and the weakness of national sentiment among the Kurds did not play the major role in the British policy decisions concerning the future of Kurdistan.

British policy discussions regarding the Kurdish Question during the First World War.

Prior to 1914, the independence and integrity of the Ottoman Empire had been the principal doctrine of the British Middle Eastern policy throughout the nineteenth century.⁵⁶ In particular, securing the routes to India had always been a key strategic concern for the Empire since the early 19th century. In the light of these considerations, the British policy towards Kurdistan in the pre-war period was characterized by an opposition to the Kurdish independence movements. In the case of the Kurdish Emirates, the British supported the Ottoman Government in the suppression of local authorities, especially the Soran Emirate.⁵⁷ The British also opposed Sheikh Abdallah's movement of 1880 - 1881 because they thought that it would jeopardise Britain's imperialistic and political presence in the Middle East and in particular, that it would lead to an alliance between Iran and Russia.⁵⁸

On the other hand, during the pre-war period the British were interested in Kurdistan strategically and economically, since from a strategic point of view Kurdistan was vital, especially against Russia. This was because potentially it was a region from which Russia could threaten Britain's position in the Middle East. This concern caused them to send their agents to negotiate with the Kurdish chieftains in order to win them over to their side. They collected data and drew maps of the Kurdish areas and provided a very detailed account of most of the strategic positions such as mountains,

⁵⁶ Elie Kedourie, *England And the Middle East: The Destruction Of The Ottoman Empire, 1914-1921*, Bowes & Bowes, 1956, pp. 9-28

⁵⁷ See: Ali, *British policy and Kurdish Question*; Saad Basheer Eskander, *Sarhaldan u Rwxani Systami Mirshini la Kurdistan (The Rise and Fall of the Emirates System in Kurdistan)*, T: Jawhar Kirmanj, Sulaymani, 2004.

⁵⁸ Olson, *the Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism*, p. 7.

rivers, valleys, cities and villages. In spite of these concerns, the Kurdish case did not gain support within the British Empire.

Indeed, certain Kurdish leaders contacted the British to ask for their support in guaranteeing Kurdish political rights and to take them under British protection, particularly because many notables viewed the outbreak of World War I and its developments as a great opportunity for them to gain their political rights. These notables realized that external assistance was needed, and the best power they should rely on was Great Britain due to its influence in international affairs. Hence, on several occasions Kurdish leaders and tribal chieftains showed their loyalty and service to the British authority in order to secure some degree of autonomy and administration under British protection. Before the war, some chieftains such as Ibrahim Pasha Milli, Hussain Agha of Zakho and Sheikh Abdul Salam Barzani proposed a similar approach but their request was not approved by the British.⁵⁹ Sheikh Mahmud contacted the Great powers and asked for a solution to the Kurdish question while the boundary between Ottoman and Persia was being discussed before the outbreak of the war. However, this request did not lead to any concrete result.⁶⁰ Also, during the first months of the war, Shariff Pasha offered his services to the British expeditionary forces in Mesopotamia but his offer was dismissed. The question to be posed here is why these Kurdish requests and offers were not accepted and the answer should be examined from both the British and Kurdish points of view.

Evidently, during the course of the war the Kurdish question had not been considered by ministers at the high level. Instead, it was discussed in the context of the Asiatic Turkey settlement with the involvement of different British departments, such as the India Office, the Foreign Office, the War Office, and individual politicians and officials each side dealing with the matter from its own perspective. On the other hand, the question became a strategic concern for all the agencies and officials involved. Mostly, Kurdistan's position was viewed in connection with Empire's wider strategy as well as economic factors which affected the whole of Mesopotamia.

⁵⁹ Ali, *British Policy*, p. 84.

⁶⁰ M.R. Hawar. *The Leader Sheikh Mahmud and Southern State of Kurdistan*, Vol.I, (London: Jaf Press, 1990) p. 184.

It seems that before the Ottoman Empire entered into the war, the Kurdish question was not a point of discussion within the British Empire, but, this changed in December 1914 when Sharif Pasha offered Britain the Kurds' support. Unfortunately, there is no testimony or document concerning the nature of the discussion available to us; the only information we have is that the offer was rejected. According to the British official interpretation, the rejection was due to the fact that they did not have any clear military plan to occupy this remote country.⁶¹ This is because until that moment there was no long-term British policy regarding Mesopotamia since Britain's specific objectives were to secure Basra and the Persian Gulf.⁶² Also, it seems that up until then, they had not yet dealt with the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire.⁶³ The discussions, however, only started a couple of months later, when the government set up the de Bunsen committee, under the chairmanship of Sir Maurice de Bunsen, to determine the British desiderata in the Asian Ottoman territories during and after the First World War. On 30 June 1915 the committee submitted a report to the War Council by an inter-departmental committee, to consider British desiderata in Turkey-in-Asia.

For the first time, on 14th March 1915 the Kurdish question had been raised explicitly within British circles by Arthur Hirtzel, the Political Secretary to the India Office. In his notes on *The Future Settlement of Eastern Turkey in Asia and Arabia*, Hirtzel extended his argument to the Kurdish question in connection with the political future of Mesopotamia (see Map 1). This document is very crucial to the study of the Kurdish situation because it contains basic key ideas and views underpinning the British policy discussions on the subject, both during and after the war. Hirtzel acknowledged that the Kurdish question would be an important factor in any post-Ottoman settlement. He states that the territory is, 'A belt of mountainous country, with a population of some 3,000,000, whose characteristics are well known, it lies between Armenia, which will presumably fall to Russia, and the plain of El Jezireh, from which

⁶¹ *Precis of Affairs in Southern Kurdistan during the First World War*, Office of The Civil Commission, Baghdad, 1919, F0371/4192; Wilson, *Loyalties Mesopotamia*, Vol 2, p. 130.

⁶² Kedourie, *England and The Middle East*, p. 175.

⁶³ But in the case of Arabs since November 1914, on Kitchener's instructions, an assurance granted to Sharif of Mecca that if 'the Amir and Arabs in general assist Great Britain in this conflict that has been forced upon us by Turkey, Great Britain ... will guarantee the independence, rights and privileges of the Sherifate ... It would be well if your Highness could convey to your followers and devotees . . . the good tidings of the freedom of the Arabs and the rising of the sun over Arabia.' Note by the India Office on Arabia', 26 April 1915, appendix XXVIII, CAB 27/I, I44.

no barrier separates it, and the only pass through which Russia can emerge to the Mediterranean—the pass of Bitlis-lies in its heart'.⁶⁴ Therefore, he urged his government to settle the question since it, 'at once raises the Kurd[ish] question in its acutest form. It has already been suggested that the Kurd[ish] question may be found to be the crux in the future arrangements of eastern Asiatic Turkey'.⁶⁵

Although, Hirtzel stressed the importance of the Kurdish question in the future settlement of the Middle East, he did not propose any assurance to Kurdistan regarding its independence, rather he excluded this option because he claimed 'If it were possible to set up Kurdistan as an independent whole, under the rule of a Kurd{ish} family the problem would be comparatively simple. But it is not. It is understood that there is no suitable family available; and it is very doubtful whether the real Kurd[ish] question, which is mainly an agrarian question, can be solved from within'.⁶⁶ This was a general British assumption towards the Kurds that had always been emphasised by the British to justify their actions in Kurdistan. This will be explained throughout the thesis.

Also, the Russian factor dominated Hirtzel's argument with regard to the future of Kurdistan. The situation was very complicated and its settlement was extremely influenced by the Anglo-Russian rivalry in the region. As indicated above, Hirtzel thought that an independent Kurdistan as a whole was impractical because of the absence of a suitable Kurdish family to rule the country. Therefore, he argued that the only alternative was to place the country under one of the Great powers' administration, - either Russian or British. However, bringing Kurdistan into the Russian sphere would endanger the British position in the region: 'If it were under the political influence of Russia, we should never have a moment's peace'. Equally, it was undesirable for Britain to control the country because of the difficulties of undertaking Kurdistan's foreign relations and the responsibility of protecting the Armenians from Kurdish threats. In addition it was very unlikely that Russia would accept having 'the British district on her flank'. Ultimately, Hertzil concluded that the only alternative was to leave Kurdistan under Russian influence but it was necessary to make an agreement with

⁶⁴ The Future Settlement of Eastern Turkey in Asia and Arabia, Note by Secretary, Political and Secret Department, India Office, 14 March 1915, CAB/24/1. T.N.A

⁶⁵ *ibid*

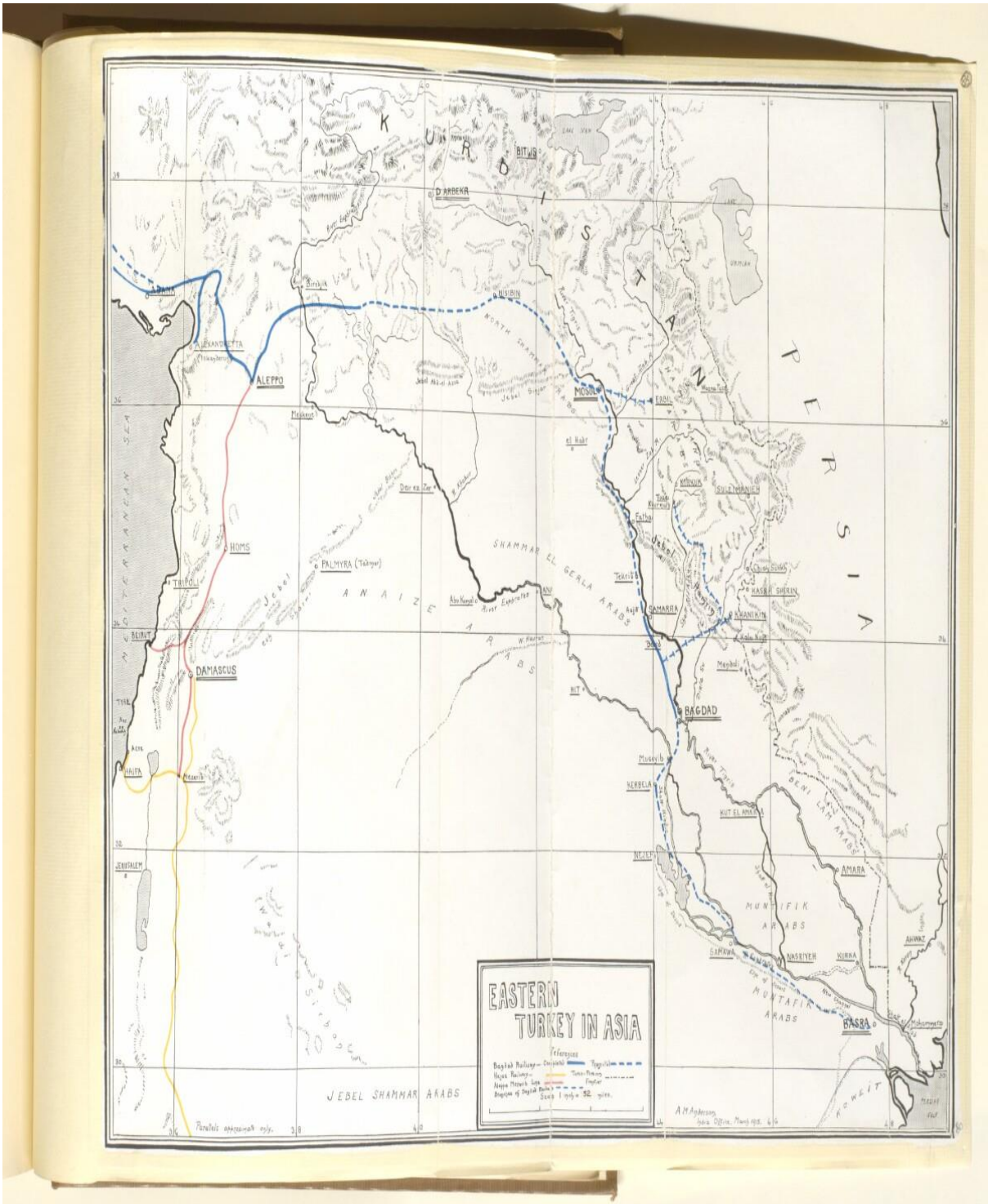
⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

her that the portion of Kurdistan in Mosul (southern Kurdistan) would come under British control because of both strategic and economic factors.⁶⁷ Furthermore, in commenting on the Hertzle's report, the Marquess of Crewe, the Secretary of State for India, stated that most memorandum did not look at Kurdistan problem properly. He noted that if the British found necessary to create a military force in Mesopotamia, the Kurds not the Arabs that they should rely. In this case the establishment of independent Kurdistan would be in British interest as the case of Nepal.⁶⁸

Nevertheless, these views of the Government of India and the India Office regarding the Kurdish Question were not considered, in particular because of the divergence of interests within the British Empire's departments. The Government of India, it made less contribution in policy decision-making regarding the future of the region. In the de Bunsen and Sykes-Picot agreement, and the McMahon-Hussain correspondence most of policies were outlined without any significant influence of the Government of India. Mark Sykes, specifically, played a crucial role in diminishing the role of India Government in the Middle East affairs. He was severely critical of India's view regarding the Kurdish Question. In particular, he rejected Hirtzel's opinion in favour of the recognition of the Kurdish question.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Remarks by The Secretary of State for India on Appendix VI, 6 April 1915, British Desiderata in Turkey in Asia, CAB 27/1. T.N.A



Map1⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Notes and private telegram from the Viceroy regarding the future settlement of Eastern Turkey in Asia and Arabia, March 1915.' British Library: India Office Records, IOR/L/PS/18/B21313, Qatar Digital Library.

Reshaping the Asiatic Ottoman Vilayets: Mark Sykes and the future of Kurdistan

Mark Sykes was a key figure in, and had considerable influence on the formulation of British Middle Eastern policy.⁷⁰ He advocated a 'pro-Arab policy'⁷¹ and suggested the formation of the Arab Bureau to deal with the Middle East question.⁷² Sykes was influential in the Foreign Office and his views on Kurdistan were highly significant in determining its future during and after the war. In particular, Sykes's views affected the de Bunsen Committee and the Sykes-Picot Agreement.

Sykes travelled extensively in the Ottoman Vilayets including Kurdistan. He studied the region's history, geography, and tribes and met many of its chieftains. Hence, Sykes was an important source for the British Empire especially the Foreign Office and the War Office. He drew maps of Kurdistan which were used especially by the War Office and provided information to the Royal Geographical Society. He also published articles about Kurdish tribes.⁷³ During his wartime journey to the Middle East, Sykes found that there was not a central British policy, but that the conflicting views of

⁷⁰ Shane Leslie, *Mark Sykes: His Life and Letters* (London, 1923), p. 288; Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, p.109; Busch, *Britain, India and the Arabs*, p. 67; Robert McNamara, *The Hashemites: The Dream of Arabia*, The American University in Cairo Press, 2009, p. 51.

⁷¹ Sykes used this term in his discussions with regard the future of the region. Memorandum: The Arab Revolt. Precis of Evidence of Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Mark Sykes, Bart. M.P, at a Meeting of the War Committee, July 6, 1916. CAB 24/2/27.

⁷² Mark Sykes, Constitution and Function of the Arabian Bureau, 5 January, 1916. IOR/L/PS/10/576/.; Memorandum: The Arab Revolt. Precis of Evidence of Sir Mark Sykes, at a Meeting of the War Committee, July 6, 1916. CAB 24/2/27. T.N.A

⁷³ See: Mark Sykes, "The Kurdish Tribes of the Ottoman Empire." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 38 (1908): 451-486.

Cairo, the Foreign Office, India and War Office led to confusion. Each institution acted alone without cooperation with the others. Sykes proposed the idea of establishing an Arab Bureau aiming 'to harmonize British political activity in the near East' and to promote the British in the region.⁷⁴ Earlier, on 4 October 1915, he wrote a private letter to Lord Robert Cecil, on the necessity of cooperation in the Middle East. The letter envisaged the future administration of Iraq and also seems to have influenced the formation of the Arab Bureau.⁷⁵ The idea was approved by London, and became a core of British policy making in the Middle East under Sykes's supervision. The Sharifian solution was a product of this Bureau, which had a considerable impact on the future of the region, including Kurdistan. On January 7 1916, the an inter-department conference was held to consider Sykes's suggestion. The conference concluded by establishing the Arab Bureau.⁷⁶

As mentioned earlier, during the war he represented the War Office in the de Bunsen committee, and then he was the British representative in the Sykes-Picot Agreement where he was the most influential person in shaping British policy, 'submitting memorandum, refuting others, providing detailed maps and interpretative material on little-known subjects, such as the Kurds and the Caliphate'.⁷⁷ The Hon. W. Ormsby-Gore, M.P, who also served in the Arab Bureau in 1916 and 1917 and was Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1922 to 1929 (with a short break in 1924), described Sykes's role in the formulation of the British Near Eastern Policy: 'Mark Sykes was the chief motive force in London behind the British Government's Near Eastern policy in the war. He inspired both the Arab and Jewish policies and was chiefly responsible for securing their adoption by Ministers at home. He was an invaluable champion of any cause, and he embraced the cause of the non-Turkish

⁷⁴ Mark Sykes, Constitution and Function of the Arabian Bureau, 5 January, 1916. IOR/L/PS/10/576/.

⁷⁵ Mark Sykes to Lord Robert Cecil, 4 October 1915. DDSY(2)/12/1

⁷⁶ Report of an inter-Department Conference, 10 January 1916. IOR/L/PS/10/576/1

⁷⁷ Aaron S. Klieman: Britain's War Aims in the Middle East in 1915, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 3, No. 3, The Middle East (Jul., 1968), p. 251.

peoples whose land had been subject to Turkish misrule with all the generosity and enthusiasm for which he was so remarkable. He never failed to see the big issues, and consequently perhaps was impatient of detail. His ideas were rough-hewn like his drawings, and his methods direct and at times boisterous. Consequently, he was better in London than in the East, where, in the Arab world especially, every issue and every move is complicated by personal or parochial cross currents which tried the patience and ingenuity of every British officer who was trying to help on the spot and usually exasperated Mark at home'.⁷⁸

Sykes' most important views regarding the Kurdish question can be found in the remarks in Hirtzel's notes on the political future of Kurdistan. On 15 March 1915, Sykes heavily criticized Hirtzel arguing that he had misinterpreted the situation. Sykes had asserted that the Kurdish problem was not similar to the Armenian, Bulgarian or Irish nationalist or Polish ones, because, 'The Kurds have no sense of nationality of any kind whatever. They have a subconscious sense of race and certain tribal instincts, but they are entirely uninfluenced by the idea of nationality as modern Europeans understand the word'.⁷⁹

It is evident that Sykes's vision of the Asiatic Ottoman settlement reflected, and was influenced largely by his Orientalist and imperialist approach to the subject. Sykes believed that the Orient should be re-defined as a landscape of nations, Arab, Armenian and Jewish, which needed to be liberated from the evil Turks. Nevertheless, the Kurds had no place in his approach to the Asiatic Ottoman settlement since they were divided among the new political administrations whether along strategic or ethnographic lines. As Edward Said states, 'For the agents of the Great Powers the Orient was an idea that had a history, a tradition of thought, and imagery'.⁸⁰ The Orient was also viewed 'as if framed by the classroom, the criminal court, the prison, the illustrated manual. Orientalism, then, is knowledge of the Orient that places things Oriental in class, court, prison, or manual for scrutiny, study, judgment, discipline, or governing'. Furthermore, in his talks on both Cromer and Balfour, Edward Said states that their overall policies and writing show that 'Orientalism was a rationalization of

⁷⁸ From: Leslie, *Mark Sykes*, pp. 288-89.

⁷⁹ Remarks on Sir A. Hirtzel's note by Lieut-Colonel Sir M Sykes, 15 March 1915, CAB 27/1.

⁸⁰ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin Books, London, 2003, p. 5.

colonial rule' which ignores 'the extent to which colonial rule was justified in advance by Orientalism, rather than after the fact'.⁸¹

Within this framework, Sykes played a leading role in Lloyd George's Orientalist policy campaign in the Middle East. The campaign was reviewed, and referred to the ancient East as 'the cradle of civilizations'. History constituted the basis and the vision through which the Ottoman Empire was presented not as a unified entity, but as a tortuous conglomeration which might well be taken to pieces again.⁸² It also focused on 'the glorious past and damnable present of the Orient'. Mark Sykes, therefore, was the key performance indicator of this propaganda, a self-styled amateur Orientalist, who had become known in parts of Whitehall as 'almost our greatest authority on Turks and Arabs'.⁸³ Sykes's vision was that the Armenian, the Jewish, and the Arab nations comprised 'the genuine, historical basis of the region, which had been repressed by the Ottoman Turks. He argued that these nations had therefore to be liberated and revived by Britain and her allies, to enable the area to regain 'the glories of its ancient past'.⁸⁴

Nevertheless, with regard to the Kurdish issue, Sykes did not apply the principle of liberating repressed people from the Turks; in contrast he used the Kurdish oppression under the Ottoman and Persian rules as the justification for avoiding the settlement of the Kurdish question. He argued that there was no problem in excluding the Kurds from the settlement of the Middle East because they did not have any sense of nationality and they lacked any tradition of state in their history: 'In the present situation there are Persian Kurds, Turkish Kurds and Russian Kurds at one and the same time, besides Kurds who are subjects of all three states'. He admitted that the Armenians and Jews had been disintegrated in a similar way to the Kurds, but he supposed that they had a strong sense of tradition and state formation in their history, unlike the Kurds. 'No Kurd repines over his lost Empire. The Kurdish national songs do not tell of the palmy days when Kurdistan was really Kurdistan'.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Ibid, p.41.

⁸² James Renton, Changing Languages of Empire and the Orient Britain and the Invention of the Middle East, 1917–1918, *The Historical Journal*, 2007, p. 652.

⁸³ FO to W. R. D. Beckett, Batavia, 20 Apr. 1917, FO 395/139/65527.TNA. From Ibid.

⁸⁴ James Renton, *Changing Languages of Empire*, p.653.

⁸⁵ Remarks on Sir A. Hirtzel's note by Lieut-Colonel Sir M Sykes, 15 March 1915, CAB 27/1.

Sykes further argued that the Kurdish national identity and academic "intelligentsia" were almost non-existent and he claimed that there was no historical and political legitimacy of Kurdistan to be a national homeland for the Kurds as they claimed. Finally, he concluded that: 'a consolidated Kurdistan is an impossibility. There is no reason why the distribution of the Kurds should dictate frontiers or why Kurds should be regarded as a people who require consolidation'.⁸⁶

Sykes wanted to create what Said called, an "imaginative geography"⁸⁷, by inventing a national memory for these groups in order to place them on the map which he believed fitted with Imperial demands. This process was to be selective, by 'manipulating certain bits of the national past, suppressing others, elevating still others in an entirely functional way.'⁸⁸ T.E. Lawrence called him 'the imaginative advocate of unconvincing world movements', a man of preconceptions, who "would take an aspect of the truth, detach it from its circumstances, inflate it, twist and model it".⁸⁹ Against this background, it can be argued that Sykes was prejudiced because in his discussions he showed only the negative side of the Kurdish situation and did not refer to any positive examples in their history in terms of a desire for, and attempts towards self-determination and independence. Sykes's statement that the idea of nationalism is unfamiliar to the Kurds is a valid one; but it did not only apply to the Kurds because the vast majority of the Middle Eastern peoples were uninfluenced by the nationalist ideology and only a very few people were familiar with the concept as it was understood in Europe. Evidently, the modern concept of Nationalism is a European product that emerged in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, while in the Middle East it became a powerful phenomenon only in the aftermath of the First World War.

In addition, it is important to distinguish between 'the European categories of nationality', on which Sykes based his study of the Kurdish situation, and the people's desire for self-rule and independence which was quite explicit in the Kurds' case.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Said, Edward W. "Invention, Memory, and Place." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2000.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p.178.

⁸⁹ Anthony Sattin, The Man Who Created the Middle East by Christopher Simon Sykes – review, *the guardian*, 13 November 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/>; Charles Townshend, *When God Made Hell: The British Invasion of Mesopotamia and the Creation of Iraq, 1914-1921*, Faber & Faber, London-2010, p.263

Arguably, the Kurds expressed a desire for self-rule in their efforts for independence at least during their modern history in the formation of emirates and their resistance to foreign rule through uprisings and revolts in the post-emirates era. The most notable of these was the Sheikh Ubedallu Nehri revolt between 1880 and 1881 aiming for an independent Kurdistan 'we want our affairs to be in our hands'⁹⁰, which is considered by some scholars to be the emergence of Kurdish nationalism.⁹¹ In this regard, C. J. Edmonds, a British political officer and expert on the Kurds, noted that despite the centralized policy implemented by the Ottoman and Persian Empires many Kurdish Emirates existed in Kurdistan until the middle of the nineteenth century.⁹² Similarly, in response to Kemalist claims at the Lausanne Conference, Lord Curzon stated that the Kurds were entirely different from the Turkish race and the continual Kurdish uprisings, from the nineteenth century up to the immediate post-War period, proved that 'the Kurds were unwilling to be part of Turkey'.⁹³ Major Noel expressed the point more explicitly by considering these movements during the nineteenth century specifically to be attempts at independence. He challenged the interpretation, mainly from the Porte, that these Kurdish movements were nothing but 'seditious and turbulent' and did not have any connection with the Kurdish national aspirations. Noel pointed out that there were three significant Kurdish movements within less than only fifteen years in, 'an organized and systematic manner'. It seems as if 'the revolutionary fever had inflamed the brains of the whole mass of Kurdish nation'. As an expert on the Kurdish situation and through his personnel contacts with many of the of the Kurdish national movement leaders Noel concluded: 'I can affirm without fear of exaggeration, that the sentiment of Nationality and the love of independence as deeply rooted in the heart of the Kurds as in that of other nations'.⁹⁴

Sykes's other argument against finding a resolution to the Kurdish question - that the Kurds lacked the traditional national statehood in their history, also proves to

⁹⁰ Mcdowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, p. 53

⁹¹ For example: Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement Its Origins and Development.*; Olson, *The emergence of the Kurdish nationalism.*

⁹² C. J. Edmonds, *The Kurds of Iraq*, *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Winter, 1957), p. 55.

⁹³ Othman Ali, *The Kurds and the Lausanne Peace Negotiations, 1922-23*, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 2006, p. 523.

⁹⁴ Noel's notes on Kurdish situation, British High Commission, Constantinople 23th July 1919, F.O/608/95.

be very controversial. First of all, during the pre-nationalism era, the Empires and states were not based on racial considerations, rather, they characterised the dynastic, powerful leaders and religious norms. So it is not accurate to identify the ancient Empires according to the modern concept of nation-states, nation, and nationalism. The formulation of National identity was typically derived from the narratives of the nation's past. Whereas, these narrations, as Said argues were 'never undisputed or merely a matter of the neutral recital of fact'.⁹⁵ Even the definition of nation itself is a subject for dispute. Seton-Watson, the historian and political scientist, concludes that no scientific definition of a nation can be devised; yet the phenomenon has existed and exists.⁹⁶ Secondly, Kurds were able to establish many Kurdish states in Emirate form during Islamic history as well, and furthermore, the Kurds claim that the Median Empire was the Kurdish Empire despite the notion that it was a Persian Empire.

However, this discussion is beyond the scope of this study, but if it could be assumed that Sykes's claim: that the Kurds lacked a traditional state is correct, it does not justify their exclusion from the Middle East's political settlement. In connection with this, İsmail Beşikçi, a Turkish scholar and expert on the Kurdish question believes that the division of Kurdistan was carried out due to the Imperial rivalry that erupted between 1915 and 1923, and he denies that the question of whether the lack of Kurdish statehood at that time, or throughout their history, played any role in the matter; and he stresses that this argument is simply meaningless.⁹⁷

Apparently, Sykes's principle in dealing with the Middle Eastern Peoples was based on his assumption involving, 'strong and weak' elements. Sykes's understanding of Politics can be seen in this framework as well since his definition of politics was that: 'In politics there is no right or wrong. Strength and guile are the only standards...In international politics it is the same. A country makes a treaty under compulsion and stands by it as long as it is the weakest'.⁹⁸ Considering the above, it seems clear that Sykes viewed the Kurds within this perspective and that the logic of power was the basis of his approach in dealing with the future of Kurdistan.

⁹⁵ Said, *Invention, Memory, and Place*, p.177.

⁹⁶ Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nations and States: an Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado-1977, p5.

⁹⁷ İsmail Beşikçi, *International Colony Kurdistan*, Taderon Press, London, 2004, p. 31.

⁹⁸ Leslie, *Mark Sykes*. p. 204.

Mark Sykes's vision, as outlined above, dominated and shaped the British perception of the Kurds; and his ideas concerning the future of Kurdistan were translated into the British policy during the wartime period. This was particularly relevant after the de Bunsen Committee and the Sykes-Picot Agreement which had a profound impact on post-British perspectives relating to the Kurdish question. In this regard Maria O'Shea, researcher on the Kurdish studies, states that 'The backgrounds of writers on Kurdistan, as well as their purposes, affected both their own views and the ways in which those views influenced external policies towards the Kurds'.⁹⁹ Accordingly, Sykes' publications and views were instrumental to Britain's attitude to the societies of the Middle East, including the Kurds.

But the crucial question to be examined is why Sykes was so opposed to considering the Kurdish question in favour of the division of Kurdistan. To answer this question it is important to analyse his views and compare his stance pre-war with that of his view during the war. Specifically, as Elie Kedourie noted, his perspective of Oriental history contradicted the Sykes-Picot's proposition,¹⁰⁰ but the new circumstances might have convinced him to change direction. Sykes was a product of the era in which he lived. That is to say, his views and attitudes reflected the new developments in international and regional circumstances. He supported the notion of an integration of the Ottoman Empire for securing Britain's Imperial position in the East. He thought that the collapse of the Ottoman Empire would lead to the end of the British presence in the region because of Russia's potential domination. Sykes warned the House of Commons that 'the disappearance of the Ottoman Empire must be the first step towards the disappearance of ours'.¹⁰¹ On June 29, 1914 he made a speech to the House of Commons on the Persian Gulf to the effect that the Ottoman break-up would produce a German frontier in Mesopotamia, a Persian break-up and a Russian frontier. 'Great Britain will then be like a stranded whale on a mud-bank with a river hippopotamus charging down'.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Maria O'Shea, *Trapped Between the Map and Reality: Geography and Perceptions of Kurdistan*, Routledge, 2012, p. 95.

¹⁰⁰ Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, p. 109.

¹⁰¹ Asquith, Letters, p. 402. From Fromkin, *A Peace*, p. 75.

¹⁰² Leslie, *Mark Sykes*, p. 233.

Then, shortly before the outbreak of the war, Sykes's attitude to the Turks changed after he lost faith in the Young Turks and envisaged the collapse of their rule. To prevent the region from chaos and instability he came up with an alternative doctrine for transferring authority from the Turks to the native states, the Armenians, Arabs and Kurds. In March 1914, he presented a new scheme to the House of Commons for redesigning the Ottoman Empire: 'Even supposing the Ottoman Empire fails! There are the seeds of native States which exist in the provinces of the Ottoman Empire at the moment which could be made into independent states. If the worst comes to the worst, there are Armenians, Arabs, and Kurds who only wish to be left in peace to develop the country'.¹⁰³ He also presented positive views towards the Kurds. For instance, in his criticism of the notion of Western superiority, he gave an example of the Kurds: 'here we Europeans must bow to the East, for after a century of revolution and fuming, and chattering and legislating, we are not as near as true fraternity and equality as Kurdish Aga'.¹⁰⁴

Sykes had previously believed that these people could not govern themselves but his attitude changed immediately after he turned to the anti-Turkish elements. He supposed that these 'native seeds', including Kurds, would be ready for self-rule with the Western powers' assistance in training them.¹⁰⁵

However, the onset of war completely shifted the notion of protecting the integrity of the Ottoman territories particularly after the Ottoman Empire entered the war against the Allies. In February 10, 1915, Sykes wrote a letter to Noel Buxton, M.P: 'The Committee of Union and Progress has made an end of the Ottoman Empire as far as we are concerned. The war has completely transformed our strategic position in the East and in the world. My idea always was that by preserving the Ottoman Empire in Asia the Great War might be averted, but that part having failed there is an end to it'.¹⁰⁶

Subsequently, Sykes was convinced that in order to solve the long-standing Imperial Game, the 'Eastern Question', it was necessary to reconcile between the

¹⁰³ Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, p. 78.

¹⁰⁴ From Charles Tawsand, *When God Made the Hell*, p. 262.

¹⁰⁵ The future of the Near East by Mark Sykes, the Pelican Press. No date. DDSY(2)/4/192.

¹⁰⁶ Leslie, *Mark Sykes*, p. 237.

regional ambitions of France and Russia as well as British Imperial interests in the region on the one hand, and between the Allies and Arabs on the other.¹⁰⁷ He went further by calling for unity between the Arabs, Jews and Armenians and encouraged the Arab leaders to this purpose by telling them that if this Entente would come to reality 'then your national movements become recognised in every country in the World'.¹⁰⁸ The wartime arrangements presented in this wider imperial strategy reflected, in particular, on the Sykes-Picot Agreement. It can be argued that shortly before the outbreak of war, the Kurds had been included in the new Sykes's scheme for an Asiatic Turkey, but they were excluded from his wartime proposal. It is reasonable to interpret this radical change in Sykes' attitude to the Kurds' situation as the recognition that the Kurdish question did not fit with the British imperial interests in the region, and he supposed that it would further complicate the Middle East settlement. Sykes's doctrine concerning the future of the Middle East was purely imperialistic in that he viewed Kurdistan's situation in the context of the Imperial Game in the region; and the balance of power between the Allied powers in the Middle East and the globe, more generally.

As the chief British representative in the Allied wartime negotiations Sykes was well aware of Russian and French imperial ambitions. Britain's strategic concern to avoid sharing a border with Russia was central to its wartime aims as well as the economic considerations, in particular, securing the oil sources of the region. Perhaps, it was in both powers' mutual interests to maintain a fragmented Kurdistan which served as a buffer zone between the two rival powers; making France the buffer between Britain and Russia is an example of this imperial strategy. According to his biographer, Shane Leslie, giving Mosul to France was Sykes's idea of creating France as a buffer between Russia and Britain.¹⁰⁹

In addition, the settlement of Kurdistan since it was entangled with both Armenian and Arab issues, meant that substantial Kurdish areas were claimed by Armenians and Arabs. The Arabs claimed Southern and western parts of Kurdistan which is reflected

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 253.

¹⁰⁸ Letter from Sykes to the Arab leaders, November 16, 1917, in Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, pp. 86.

¹⁰⁹ Leslie, *Mark Sykes*, pp. 449-50.

in the McMahon–Hussein Correspondence.¹¹⁰ Likewise, many Kurdish areas in northern Kurdistan were claimed by the Armenians whose claims had strong support from the western countries. Sykes also advocated the Armenian question at the expense of the Kurdish one, as he asked, 'could there be any guarantee that a Muslim could rule Christians or that a Christian would accept Muslim dominion?'¹¹¹ Sykes, the advocator of both the Armenian and Arab questions knew that the recognition of the Kurdish question would conflict with the national ambitions of both Armenians and Arabs as well as the Imperial power's ambitions. Therefore, he concluded that there was no need to worry about the exclusion of Kurds from the settlement and the division of their country. This was reflected in his scheme that he proposed to the de Bunsen Committee, Sykes considered: the Great Powers zone of spheres, the Armenian principally under Franco-Russian protection, the Nestorian state under French protection, and the establishment of the independent Arabia under British protection, and special administration for Jewish in Palestine.¹¹² (See Map (A) and (B)).

¹¹⁰ Sykes states that the Arabs desire an independent state or confederation including the "vilayets of Damascus, Beirut, Aleppo, Mosul, Baghdad, and Sanjaks of Urfa, Deir Zor, Jerusalem.' Sykes, Cairo, to Cox, Mesopotamia, 22 November 1915. FO 882/13. From, Charles D. Smith, *The Invention of a Tradition: The Question of Arab Acceptance of the Zionist Right to Palestine during World War I*, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Winter, 1993), p54.

¹¹¹ See Chapter six.

¹¹² Secretary, Committee of Imperial Defence, *British Desiderata in Turkey and in Asia: Report, Proceedings and Appendices of a Committee Appointed by the Prime Minister, 1915*, CAB 27/1. T.N.A.

Map (2) ¹¹³



¹¹³ Ibid.

Map (3) 114



114 Ibid.

Sykes's pro-Arab policy and its impact on the Kurdish question

From my argument above it appears that Sykes was biased towards other nations such as Arabs, Armenians, and the Zionist movement but was against Kurdish aspirations. It is true that Kurds were tribal and divided, but one possible argument could be made is that there are similarities between the social structure of the Nations living in the region since there were no important differences between Kurdish society and that of other neighbouring nations, especially the Arabs. Furthermore, there were conflicts between the different parties in the Arabian Peninsula such as, Ibin Saud, Ibn Rasheed and Shareef Hussain. Therefore, Sykes's argument could be applied to the Arabs as well, but he did not focus on these aspects; but, on the other hand, in the case of the Armenians, Jews and Arabs he highlighted the glorious image of their stories.

Thus, Sykes tried to restore the glories of the Arabs and to promote the idea of Arab nationalism which played a key role in shaping a pro-Arab British policy. He believed that British interests would be protected by controlling the routes from Egypt to India expressing the belief that the Arabs were the most important element for safeguarding this imperial strategy. He argued that this was the main reason to call for a pro-Arab policy, 'Our policy should be to protect Arabia as a whole from without, leaving each situation to develop on its own lines from within, though it may be preferable to regard the Sherif of Mecca, if he assume the Caliphate, as an ally rather than a protege like the Shaykh Koweyt'.¹¹⁵

However, Isaiah Friedman writes, 'although there was hardly any evidence of Arab nationalism at that time, Sykes did his best throughout the war to foster it'. Friedman argues that Sykes aimed to revive the Arab nation and to establish a new Middle East under Sharifian rule, and that these were not only "illusions".¹¹⁶ In this

¹¹⁵ Leslie, *Mark Sykes*, p. 248.

¹¹⁶ Isaiah Friedman, *British Pan-Arab Policy, 1915-1922: A Critical Appraisal*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, 2011, p. 6.

connection, the Hon. W. Ormsby-Gore stated that 'Mark always underestimated the particularism of the Arabs. He imagined that the Sherifial family had then more power than they had, and though he never believed that anything in the nature of Arab unity could be achieved in a few years, he was carried away by the hope that tribal jealousies, city rivalries and family ambitions would, at any rate in war time, be subordinate to the main idea of starting again free of the Turk'.¹¹⁷ Hence, Sykes had suggested rivalry between the Arabs and the Turks.¹¹⁸ Arnold Wilson also criticised Sykes' method in dealing with the Middle East situation: 'In September 1915, Sykes visited Mesopotamia...he had come with his mind made up, and he set himself to discover facts in favour of his preconceived notions, rather than to survey the local situation with an impartial eye'.¹¹⁹

Presumably, Sykes's pro-Arab sympathy led him to draw a picture of the Kurdish situation in favour of the Arab question. Consequently, the key ideas presented by Sykes in the War Cabinet meeting on December 16, 1915 shaped the British Middle Eastern Policy. His views influenced the meeting which was attended by H. H. Asquith (the Prime Minister), Herbert Kitchener (the Minister of war), Arthur Balfour (First Lord of the Admiralty) and Lloyd George (Minister of Munitions) and he impressed the Prime Minister and his colleagues by pretending that he was fluent in Arabic and Turkish but in fact, 'he could speak neither'.¹²⁰ With regard to the Kurds, Sykes showed that in the east of the Tigris there were pro-Arabs and claimed that the Kurdish officers, coming from this Kurdish area were 'nearly all at one with the Arab officers'. Sykes added that 'Wherever there are, nomadic Arabs, there it is a sense of breed, and they are not fanatical, and they would fall in with the Sharif, as would also a large section of the Kurds'.¹²¹

The Arab ambitions advocated by Sykes and other British officials, especially in the Cairo circle, damaged the Kurdish question and British policy decisions regarding the Middle East. It is likely that Sykes had been influenced by the Arabs during his journey to the region, especially after his interview with Muhammad Sharif al-Faruqi, a

¹¹⁷ From: Leslie, *Mark Sykes*, pp. 288-89

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 243.

¹¹⁹ Arnold. T. Wilson, *Loyalties: Mesopotamia*, p. 152.

¹²⁰ James Barr, *A Line in the Sand*, p. 8.

¹²¹ Remarks on Sir A. Hirtzel's note by Lieut-Colonel Sir M Sykes, 15 March 1915, CAB 27/1.

young Iraqi member of the Al Ahd society, in Cairo. Faruqi claimed that ninety percent of the Arab officers in the Ottoman military were members of the al-Ahd society and that some of them were Kurdish officers. In criticizing the latter's claim, Ian Rutledge, an economist and historian, argues that '...the lies began almost immediately Faruqi arrived in Cairo. He knew very well that only a tiny proportion of Ottoman army officers belonged to Al Ahd: his figure of ninety percent was pure fabrication. He also knew that his claim that Al Ahd included part of the Kurdish officers was misleading to say the least- there were perhaps no more than a handful of members who were of Kurdish origin.'¹²² ¹²³

Historically, it seems clear that the Kurdish nationalist movement did not have any explicit connection with the Arab nationalist movement. Especially, the Kurdish regions were fundamentally disengaged and independent from the Arab world whether through the Emirates and uprisings throughout the Nineteenth century, or during and after the First World War. The position of Southern Kurdistan and its political ambitions were very distinct from those of their counterpart, the Arabs. In particular, the position of Southern Kurdistan had always been distinct: ethnically, culturally and politically from the counterpart of the Arab country. The post-war period also confirmed this when the Kurds denied being part of the Iraqi Arab state, as I shall discuss more thoroughly in Chapter Five. A Foreign Office's map of 'racial Mesopotamia racial divisions' on 1916 clearly indicates the distinction between Kurdish territories and Arab territories. The map even identified the disputed areas between the Kurds and Arab Territories. (See Map 4).

¹²² Rutledge, *Enemy on the Euphrates*, p.157.

¹²³ Eskander, *Britain's Policy*, p.132.

MESOPOTAMIA
Racial Divisions.

Map 2



283. "Mesopotamia, Racial Divisions" Collier Series, 1915 [10 1/2 x 16 1/2]
 and copyright © 1915 by Collier's Publishing Co. Reprinted from the National Geographic Magazine, original page 261 x 161 mm, reproduction here at 1/10th of the original size.

Map (4)¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Records of the Kurds, Vol 13, p. 18.

Contrary to Farouqi's claims, the majority of the Fertile Crescent Arabs, both the elite and the population at large, that entered the First World War were committed to the preservation of the Ottoman Empire. Even the idea of separatism was not acceptable to educated Arabs. For instance, both Sati al-Husari and Shakib Arsalan supported Ottomanism and a pan-Islamic ideology.¹²⁵ Perhaps, Sheikh Muhiddin Kurdi from the Azhar was the only Kurdish individual that Sykes had met in Cairo.¹²⁶ Sykes stated that Sheikh Muhiddin Kurdi thought there was no hope for a Kurdish state due to 'language, religious, divergence, and the wide determination of the Kurdish people in tribes'. Sykes described him as follows: 'personally he believed that militant Islam waning force, Bahatism was typical of future development'. It is probable that Muhiddin Kurdi did not represent Kurdish national aspirations and the evidence of his posture can be found in the fact that despite running a publishing company in Cairo with Zaki al Kurdi, they never published a book to serve the political or cultural cause of the Kurds, until the 1930's.¹²⁷ But the real question is why Sykes did not meet with other Kurdish people with nationalist views such as Thurayya Bedir Khan, a member of the Bedir Khan family that actively engaged in the Kurdish cause. He lived in Cairo and before the war he formed a political society there to serve the Kurdish question. On the other hand, in July 1915, Sykes met the representatives of various parties in Cairo such as Syrian, Arabian, Armenian, and other Muslims in order to listen to their views. For instance, he met Nubar Pasha on the Armenian side to listen to the Armenian perspective which was to be considered in the future Middle East settlement.

Sykes persistently promoted the recognition of Arab nationality and its aspiration to his Government. In a memorandum dated 1915, Sykes outlined the policy which should be followed in the region: 'Line 1- to back the Arabic-speaking peoples against

¹²⁵ William L. Cleveland and Martin Bunton, *A history of the Modern Middle East*, Westview Press, pp.131-32.

¹²⁶ Policy in the Middle East. II. Select Reports and Telegrams from Sir Mark Sykes, NO.14, 14 July 1915, Cairo. Ref: IOR/L/PS/18/B218.

¹²⁷ See: Imad Abdul Salam Raouf, *Matbaha Kurdistan Al ilmia*, <http://www.alukah.net/>

the Turkish Government on one consistent and logical plan.'¹²⁸ Sykes went further when he asserted that the success of the Pan-Arabism would guarantee the maintenance of British interests in the region: 'if we have a permanent monopoly and enterprise and European assistance, military and civil, in the Mosul, Baghdad and Basra provinces, and we administer the Baghdad and Basra province for the duration of the war, I think that we need no fear for the future if Pan-Arabic succeeds, and if does not, we have given nothing away'.¹²⁹

Then, in a meeting of the War Committee, on July 6, 1916, Sykes further emphasised that, 'Towards all Arabs, whatever their condition, whether independent allies, as Ibn Saud and the Shereef, inhabitants of protectorates, spheres of influence, vassal States, we should show ourselves as pro-Arabs', and he urged that they regenerate the Arab culture and language and protect them from the external powers. 'That where we govern we shall employ Arabs in the administration where we do not employ Englishmen, and that where we employ Arabs we intend to give them the executive authority of their rank, and that we do not recognise any social distinction between an Englishman and an Arab of the same rank, and, further, that we do not intend to introduce the idea of a ruling race'.¹³⁰

It would be useful at this point to discuss and explain Sykes's arguments outlined above, in terms of the wider British Empire system, notably, the conflict strategies and policies between the British Empire departments, and in particular in connection with the profound disagreements that existed between India's and Cairo's approach to the Middle East. The formulation of British Middle Eastern policy was chiefly influenced by two opposing schools of thoughts represented by the Government of India and by the Foreign Office. In the Middle East the Cairo Centre, backed by the Foreign Office, supported the Hashemite scheme, whereas Baghdad, backed by the India Office, was opposed the project.

On the one hand, Cairo believed that the revival of the Arab Caliphate would be the best tool for the British to use in order to control the Muslim world vis-à-vis the Pan-

¹²⁸ Policy in the Middle East. I. Memorandum by Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Mark Sykes, 15 November, 1915, Ref: IOR/L/PS/18/B217.

¹²⁹ Sir Mark Sykes to Percy Cox, (Mesopotamia), Cairo 22 November 1915.FO 882/13.

¹³⁰ Memorandum: The Arab Revolt. Precis of Evidence of Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Mark Sykes, Bart. M.P, at a Meeting of the War Committee, July 6, 1916. CAB 24/2/27.

Islamism propaganda and Russian expansion. On the other hand, the Indian Government considered this policy to be a threat to their interests in the Islamic world arguing that replacing the Turkish Caliphate with an Arabic one would lead Indian Muslims to resist this foreign (British) intervention in such an important matter and would endanger the British position in the region.¹³¹ The main priority of the Government of India was the opinion of the 70 million Muslims living in the Indian Empire, who might pose a threat to the stability of the Empire. The Indian Government strongly opposed the Cairo project guided by the Foreign Office for intriguing with Sharif Hussain. This Indian opposition was based on the misconception that Cairo was willing to create a united Arab country, which would create the idea of unity between Arab and Indian Muslims to create a united political Islam. They feared that Hussain could establish a kingdom that would include the Indian Muslims.¹³² Hence, from a British- Indian point of view, the Cairo policy, intriguing with the Sharif of Mecca, was not less dangerous than the policy of Constantinople in fuelling insurrection of Indian Muslims.¹³³ The one clear feature of these conflicting policies was that the Indian Government supported Ibn Saud, an opponent of Sharif of Mecca who was sponsored by Cairo. The Government of India advocated the policy of balance of power within Arab affairs, especially regarding Sherif and Ibin Saud, to prevent the emergence of a powerful Arab country (United Arabia) that would endanger the British interests in the East.¹³⁴

The India Office criticised the Cairo policy which was conducted with Sharif in view of the existence of conflicting Arab claims among Arab chiefs, especially by Ibn Saud's rival.¹³⁵ In this connection, Austen Chamberlain, the Secretary of State for India, expressed serious reservations about Sharif Hussain. Chamberlain noted, 'my information is that the Grand Shareef is a nonentity without power to carry out his proposal...' He also believed that the Arabs had little hope of achieving unity.¹³⁶ Likewise, the India Office challenged the idea of using Faruqi and Misri in Mesopotamia which had been suggested by McMahon. Chamberlain told Edward Grey, the Foreign

¹³¹ See: Busch, *Briton, India, and the Arabs*, p. 62.

¹³² Busch, *Briton, India and the Arabs*, p477.

¹³³ Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace*, p110

¹³⁴ 'Middle East Committee. Note Prepared for Meeting of 12 January 1918. Policy in regard to Bin Saud'. IOR/L/PS/18/B279

¹³⁵ See Busch, *Briton, India, and the Arabs*, pp. 71-73

¹³⁶ Chamberlain Memorandum, 8 November 1915, FO 371/1286. From *ibid*, p.79.

Secretary, that the India Office was not aware of any significant influence possessed by Al-Misri and Al-Faruqi in Mesopotamia.¹³⁷ Lord Hardinge, Viceroy of India, also opposed the McMahon pledges to Hussain for Arab independence. On 15 November 1915, he wrote: I devoutly hope that this proposed independent Arab State will fall to pieces, if it is ever created. Nobody could possibly have devised any scheme more detrimental to British interests in the Middle East than this. It simply means misgovernment, chaos and corruption, since there never has been any consistency or cohesion amongst the Arab tribes. Had it not been for opposition from India Cairo would months ago have appointed a new Khalif! I cannot tell you how detrimental I think the interference and influence of Cairo have been.¹³⁸

The Government of India and India Office were not impressed with Sykes's attitude to the Indian administration nor his schemes. Lake, the Chief of Staff, regarded Sykes's reports as, 'so visionary and strategically impractical that we should not have recommended him for the work'.¹³⁹ Sykes, indeed, worked to diminish the Government of India's role in Middle East affairs, by showing that it was incapable of handling the Arab Question. He claimed that Indian Muslims were sympathetic to the Ottoman Empire, and that the British officials in India were influenced by this pro-Turkish atmosphere to 'unconsciously or consciously sympathise with it'. Consequently, he concluded that anything which was anti-Turkish was antipathy to the Indian Government. He suggested the coordination of Middle East policy by a Mesopotamian administration under direction of the Foreign Office in London and the appointment of Percy Cox as a High Commissioner.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Busch, *Britain, India and the Arabs*, p.95

¹³⁸ Harding Private Nicolson, 15 November 1915, Nicolson papers, FO 800/378. From: Busch, *Britain*, p.80.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, p.100.

¹⁴⁰ Memorandum: The Arab Revolt. Precis of Evidence of Sir Mark Sykes, at a Meeting of the War Committee, July 6, 1916. CAB 24/2/27. T.N.A

Sykes criticised the divergence of views within the system of Empire in dealing with the situations in different regions. He specifically criticised the Government of India for regarding the Mesopotamia issue from purely an Indian perspective and not as an Imperial question. Sykes pointed out that all the people he met in Mesopotamia were of the opinion that the country should not be administered under India. He believed the Government of India was unsuited to and incapable of this role.¹⁴¹ Sykes thought that the Government of India was not capable of running Arab affairs because it might be subjected to the opinion of Indian Muslims, who were mostly anti-Arab. He suggested that Arab policy should be dealt with from one centre directly under the War committee, and that the existing India staff should be transferred under the Foreign Office to direct the Arab policy. He argued to the Prime Minister that there should be a definite Arab policy.¹⁴²

Although the majority of civil servants and military were from the Government of India, it made less contribution in policy decision-making regarding the future of the region that it had desired. In the de Bunsen and Sykes-Picot agreement, and the McMahon-Hussain correspondence most policies were outlined without any significant influence of the Government of India. Nevertheless, the Government of India and India Office's views were irrelevant in the discussions about the Arabs. Cairo's views dominated British Middle Eastern policy in which Sykes' vision was prominent. Ultimately, London aligned with the Cairo Circle and the British Arab policy was mainly based on it. It should be noted that Sykes's opposition to Hirtzel's views regarding the Kurdish question reflected the difference of views in the Foreign Office, especially the Cairo department which Sykes had recently joined, and the Indian Office which Hirtzel represented. In short, Hirtzel was against a united Arabia,¹⁴³ whilst Sykes supported it.

In view of the above, it is reasonable to believe that Sykes's opinions, especially in connection with Kurdistan, constituted a decisive factor in Britain's attitude to Kurdistan and this together with Sykes' domination of the interdepartmental committee, might have contributed to further enhancing his role in masterminding the political map of the Middle East. He was the only member of the committee who had toured most of

¹⁴¹ Mark Sykes Papers, DDSY(2)121.

¹⁴² . War Committee: Evidence of Mark Sykes, 6 July 1916. DDSY(2)/11/15

¹⁴³ See Fromkin, *A Peace To End All Peace*, p.106.

the territories in the Ottoman Empire.¹⁴⁴ Ultimately, under Mark Sykes's guidance, the Arab Bureau in the Cairo circle was at the core of British Middle Eastern policy-making which was responsible for outlining British relations with the Arabs. In particular, under his guidance, the Cairo Circle advocated the policy of the 'Hashemite solution'. Hirtzel defined the Arab Bureau as, 'the central organ through which His Majesty's Government will lay down principles and policy in respect of Arab propaganda in the East, and ... the General staff in Mesopotamia must therefore work in strict, conformity with the indications received from the Bureau'.¹⁴⁵ The Hashemite solution policy became Britain's central policy regarding the whole Middle East settlement; and importantly, it had an impact on the Kurdish question, in particular, the inclusion of Southern Kurdistan into the Iraqi state.¹⁴⁶

Lack of information on the situation might be another factor that prevented the emergence of the Kurdish question in British foreign policy. Specifically, the Cabinet and MPs in London had little knowledge about the Ottoman Empire in general and Kurdistan in particular. In relation to this, Sykes complained about the lack of literature about Ottoman history in the English language because London's information mostly relied on German sources.¹⁴⁷ Speaking of the Kurds, Captain Hay, Political Officer in Erbil 1918-1920, said that, 'we have never heard of, or heard of them only as the wildest of brigands'.¹⁴⁸ Another example of the lack of knowledge of the situation is that Sykes's first suggestion in 1915 about the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire into Russian, French and British central South and North sections, relied on the Sykes-Picot Agreement. In this context, Edward Said remarks that Western knowledge of the Orient could be defined as a system of Europe and the relation between knowledge and power. He suggests that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, understanding and knowledge of the East had been translated into activity, thoughts and action for the purpose of political domination.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 146.

¹⁴⁵ From Buch, *Britain, India and the Arabs*, p. 106.

¹⁴⁶ This will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

¹⁴⁷ Sir Mark Sykes, *The Caliphs' Last Heritage: A Short History of the Turkish Empire*. From Fromkin, *A Peace To End All Peace*, p. 86.

¹⁴⁸ W.R. Hay, *Two Years in Kurdistan: Experiences of a Political Officer, 1918-1920*, London-1921, p. 2.

¹⁴⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, p197.

Sykes was in touch with Petrograd, Paris, Rome and India with regard to the military and political developments in the Middle East. He also continuously informed London on the developments in negotiations, proposing outline schemes to the advance Britain's policies.¹⁵⁰ Sykes continued his Middle Eastern approach when he outlined Britain's post-war policy aims. Summarizing the Eastern trend of events in a letter to Lord Robert Cecil in October 18, 1917, in which he set out Britain's policies and noted that it was desirable:

(a) That we should do all in our power to foster and revive Arab civilization and promote Arab unity with a view of preparing them for ultimate independence.

(b) That we should promote to the best of our ability the permanent settlement of the Armenian question.

(c) That we should, so long as we are responsible, pursue a policy in Palestine which will take into equal consideration the safeguarding of the rights of the indigenous population, the wise and practical development of the Zionist movement, and the safeguarding of the various interests in the Holy places.¹⁵¹

Therefore, Sykes's negative attitude to the Kurdish question lasted at least until the end of the war. In the last week of the war, Sykes rejected a scheme regarding the fate of Kurdistan proposed by Arnold Toynbee, the official in the Foreign Office. Toynbee indicated that, 'If there is to be an individual Mesopotamia under Arab government with British administrative assistance, the natural corollary would be an autonomous Kurdistan, likewise assisted by H.M.G and performing towards Mesopotamia as the NW frontier province performance to India. This was proposed by Cherif Pasha. Such a Kurdistan would include not merely the country south of the lesser Zab, but Rawanduz, Hakkiari, and Bohtan districts up to the line, wherever that may be drawn, of the Armenian frontier'.¹⁵²

Nevertheless, it appears that Sykes's attitude to the Kurdish question changed shortly before his death. This might have related to the change in his perception of

¹⁵⁰ Sykes, Cairo, to Prodrone, London, April 27 1917; 25 April 1917.DDSY(2)/11/35

¹⁵¹ From: Leslie, *Mark Sykes*, p. 274.

¹⁵² Toynbee to Sykes, memorandum, 22 October 1918, FO 371/3407. Cited in David McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, p118.

Arab nationalism. During his last tour, between October and December 1918, Sykes realized that he had overestimated Arab nationalism and Arab rebellion.¹⁵³ With regards to this point, T. E. Lawrence noted: 'In the last week in Paris he tried to atone. He returned from a period of political duty in Syria after his awful realization of the true shape of his dreams, to say gallantly, I was wrong: here is truth.'¹⁵⁴ Although, we do not possess precise evidence to support the reasons why Sykes changed his views on Kurdistan's future, the change in his view of the Arab situation must have affected his attitude towards the Kurds and made him realise that he had been prejudiced against them, previously. In addition, the developments of the last phase of the war impacted positively on the Kurdish situation and had an immediate impact on Britain's attitude to Kurdistan. Kurdish nationalist activities increased in Paris, Cairo, Istanbul and Southern Kurdistan, which, to a certain extent, might have influenced British thinking about the future of the Kurds and British-Kurdish relations in general. Subsequently, in January 1919 Sykes suggested the creation of an independent Kurdish state, with the inclusion of Mosul, under British protection.¹⁵⁵ However, this plan was rejected by the French. This was probably his last engagement with the Kurdish question since in Paris; in February 1919 he contracted Spanish Influenza and died at the age of 39.

Overall, during the First World War, the question of Kurdistan was not recognised in British policy since Sykes was the key figure and mastermind in forming British policy in the Middle East. Hence, his negative attitude to the subject of the future of the Kurds had a considerable impact on the British policy-makers' minds, and prevented the question ever being raised in policy discussions. Hence, the Kurds were excluded from any schemes connected with the Middle East settlement. It was Sykes's schemes that impacted on the wartime arrangements especially the Sykes-Picot Agreement according to which Kurdistan would be divided into three parts. Most importantly, the negative image that Sykes drew of the Kurds had influenced the British officials and London's attitude to the subject. His concept of disunity, and the lack of leadership and nationality amongst the Kurds will be discussed in the next section.

¹⁵³ Friedman, *British Pan-Arab Policy*, p133

¹⁵⁴ T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, p22

¹⁵⁵ Peace Conference Delegation, proposal to establish independent Kurdish Emirate, 5 February, 1919, FO 608/95. T.N.A. I looked at the papers of Mark Sykes in Hull University but haven't found any commenting of Sykes regarding this question.

The developments of the War and the Impact on British-Kurdish relations, 1917-1918

Political developments in the last phase of the war increased the importance of Kurdistan's position in British strategy. Britain had tried to gain Kurdish support against the Turks, and in order to do this, dispatched certain intelligence officers to Kurdistan to contact the Kurdish chieftains.¹⁵⁶ Up until this point the British had no direct involvement in the Kurdish situation,¹⁵⁷ but, the occupation of Baghdad in March 1917 had the effect of increasing British interest in the Kurdish situation because from Britain's point of view Kurdistan was vital to the security and stability of Mesopotamia from external threats. But the settlement of Kurdish question was not on the British agenda. The British primarily looked at the question in terms of the Mesopotamian strategic point of view. As discussed above, the Kurdish question did not get any popularity among the British Empire. From this event onwards, British involvement in Kurdish affairs became inevitable. According to British documents, 'With our occupation of Baghdad, followed by our advance up the [River] Diyala, problems connected with Kurdistan assumed a new and vital interest for us, not only in connection with the wants of the immediate military situation, but owing to the increasing certainty that the Kurds would not only be neighbours during the period of the War but some of them permanent subjects after it. The importance of securing their support and trust at this juncture could, therefore, scarcely be over-estimated'.¹⁵⁸

Owing to the Russian occupation of some Kurdish territories as well as the current British military situation the British military did not advance to the region. On the other hand, the British constantly received letters and representations from Kurdish tribes of Jaf, Bajalan, Sharafbani, and Talabani and from the notables of Qizil Robot, complaining about the brutal behaviour of Russian troops. Mustafa Pasha of Khanaqin

¹⁵⁶ Ali, *British Policy*, p. 83.

¹⁵⁷ *Precis of Affairs in Southern Kurdistan during the First World War*, Office of The Civil Commission, Baghdad, 1919, F0371/4192, p2. T.N.A

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 2.

begged the appointment of a British Officer to Khanaqin but this was denied because the British feared it would lead to conflict with the Russians.¹⁵⁹

According to the British document mentioned earlier, the Russian factor played a key role in preventing the development of British-Kurdish relations. While Britain succeeded in winning the allegiance of several Kurdish Chieftains, this did not prevail due to the bad behaviour of Russian troops towards the Kurds during the war which affected Kurdish relations, not only with the Russians but also with the British: 'In short Russian methods and excesses had proved a valuable asset to the Turks. We were ourselves rapidly losing prestige with a race (Kurdish) who has always been friendly to us, while the Russian position in Southern Kurdistan was rapidly becoming untenable with the possibility of the country being thrown open to the enemy as far as Qizil Robot and Mandali'.¹⁶⁰ Most Kurds refused to take part in the Turkish campaign of Jihad because they considered the Turks their real enemy; in particular, the Kurdish religious leaders played a key role in the failure of this Turkish project, as they perceived the Turks to be, 'the hereditary enemies of the Kurds'.¹⁶¹

Following the Bolshevik revolution on October 1917, the British strategy and overview of the region rapidly shifted, particularly owing to the withdrawal of Russian troops from Kurdish areas, a move which left a political and security vacuum in the region. Immediately, British forces occupied Khanaqin and dispatched Major Soan as the first British official in Kurdistan to engage with Kurdish affairs. Then other officials were appointed in Kirkuk, Kifri and Tuz and, after the occupation, to other districts.

According to the Sykes-Picot Agreement the Mosul Vilayet was carved up between the French zone (A), and the British Zone (B). Britain's objective of dividing the region was to make France a buffer state between her and Russia. While this strategy was no longer valid, British forces occupied the city despite the Armistice being declared a week before the occupation. The aim of this military advance was to force France to compromise on the Mosul Vilayet in their favour.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, p.3.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, p.1.

¹⁶² This question will be discussed in the subsequent chapter.

Additionally, in the last stages of the war, there were some developments in terms of principles of democracy, nationality, and the rights of self-determinations such as Wilson's announcement, and the Revolutionary ideas of Bolshevism which I mentioned in the introductory chapter. These statements influenced the Kurds' aspiration to demand their political rights. In addition, the British attitude towards Arabs, in particular the recognition of the Sharif of Mecca, and their proclamation to Arabs in Baghdad, further induced educated Kurds and leaders to demand Kurdish rights; and they were promised that Britain would treat them in a similar way as the Arabs, that is, they would be considered as a separate nationality under British protection.¹⁶³

Thus, Kurdish political activities increased, in Sulaymania, Istanbul, Cairo and Paris which impacted on the British view of the Kurdish situation. In June 1918 Sharif Pasha, once again, contacted Percy Cox, the British Chief Political Officer in the British military in Mesopotamia, to find a solution to the Kurdish question. Pasha urged that the British should take constructive steps to unite the Kurds as a whole and declare a clear policy regarding the Kurds as they did with the Arabs in Mesopotamia by establishing the Kurdish state in Southern Kurdistan.¹⁶⁴ Sheikh Mahmud then contacted the British and invited them to Kurdistan in order to consider Kurdish political rights.

Consequently, Britain began to study the Kurds' proposals. For example, in the late stage of the war Arnold Toynbee proposed an autonomous Kurdistan which had already been suggested by Sharif Pasha.¹⁶⁵ However, Sykes rejected this idea since, possibly, at this stage, he still had negative views of the situation. But the occupation of the Mosul Vilayet and the establishment of a Kurdish Government in Sulaymania was a significant step in the evolution of Kurdistan in the British policy. The following section will discuss the question.

¹⁶³ Precise, p.7.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 8; Bell, Review of Civil, Administration, p. 60.

¹⁶⁵ Toynbee to Sykes, memorandum 22 October 1918, FO 371/3407. In David McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, p.118.

British policy discourse on the Kurdish question between 1918 and 1919

There were a variety of arguments about which policies should be adopted in the Middle East in order to secure British interests in the whole region. In the Foreign Office, Curzon was in favour of consolidating the British Military position especially against the Russian threat. In contrast, the Government of India believed that the Bolshevik threat was political rather than military. Therefore, in the Indian Government's opinion, Britain should win the nationalist and local elements in the Middle East to counter the Russian threat, otherwise, the British military presence in the region might drive the nationalists into Bolshevism's arms.¹⁶⁶

A study of the British perspective of the future of Kurdistan has to be considered within this framework, and in particular with regard to Mesopotamia since Britain's main concern was how to maintain peace and stability in this country. The other significant problem was which part of Kurdistan was necessary to the British in order to secure safety with a minimum of financial and military burden. However, the focus was on whether Britain should interfere in Kurdistan's affairs or should leave the country to its own destiny and therefore discussions examined different possibilities as to the conditions and status applied to Kurdistan would serve British aims more. Three alternatives were considered: an independent Kurdish entity under British influence; its integration within the Arab state of Mesopotamia; and, self-determination. That is to say, in the post-war period, the British did not have an explicit policy to deal with the Kurdish question, but because of the influence of different political, military and financial circumstances, their attitude had to change several times, especially between the Armistice of the war and the Treaty of Lausanne 1923.

It is important to note that the period immediately following the war, from November 1918 to February 1919, constituted a significant moment for Kurdistan in the British policy because the occupation of Mosul brought the British administration into direct relations with the Kurds.¹⁶⁷ Moreover, the establishment of the Kurdish government in Sulaymania under Sheikh Mahmud's rule was the most obvious point in the evolution of British policy not only regarding Southern Kurdistan but the whole of the

¹⁶⁶ Fromkin, *A Peace To End All Peace*, p. 471.

¹⁶⁷ Bell, G. L. 1920, *Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia*, London, p. 57.

region. Britain's appointment of Major Noel to take charge of Kurdish affairs was another important factor in the development of British-Kurdish relations. This is because Noel was actively engaged in Kurdish affairs and persistently urged his government to consider the Kurds since he supported the formation of an independent Kurdistan. Therefore, Robert Olson, an American historian who is an expert on the Kurdish Question, regards the British Kurdish policy during 1919 as 'the Noel policy'.¹⁶⁸ Therefore, it is very important to discuss the early stage of the British administration and the development of the situation of Kurdistan by analysing the engagement of the political officers and the high commissioners in Baghdad.

The emergence of the Kurdish Government in Southern Kurdistan:

Even though the subject of the establishment of the Kurdish government and Sheikh Mahmud's uprising in 1919 has been studied extensively, an examination of the narrative is essential in order to explain and understand the whole picture of the nature of Kurdish-British relations during the period. These narratives were closely linked to previous events as well as the later developments of the British policy discussions respecting the future of Kurdistan.

As mentioned above, the question of establishing the Kurdish state in Southern Kurdistan was proposed by Shariff Pasha when he met Percy Cox at Marsellia in June 1918. In the meantime, Kurdish notables invited the British to come to Kurdistan to form an administration and they urged them to take Kurdistan under their protection. Sheikh Mahmud in particular played a significant role in the development of the Kurdish-British relations. That is to say, before the armistice he sent two of his representatives with a letter, to the British authorities requesting them to declare a policy with regard to Kurdish aspirations, 'do not exclude Kurds from the list of liberated people'.¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, the occupation of Mosul brought the British administration into direct relations with the Kurds.

¹⁶⁸ Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism*, p. 53.

¹⁶⁹ Clear line, from political Baghdad to secretary of state for India, London, No. 9351, 1st November 1918. Air 20/512. T.N.A

Following the occupation, the Kurds, specifically in Southern Kurdistan, became an important strategic element for the British Empire in the region through which their future was to be considered. On 27 October 1918, Wilson, the British High Commissioner in Baghdad, supposed that it was necessary to form the Kurdish tribe's federation outside Turkish domination, and under the influence of the external power that controls the Mosul Vilayet.¹⁷⁰ Then, three days later Wilson discussed the Shariff Pashas' proposal concerning the Kurdish question, and suggested forming 'a central council of chiefs' in Southern Kurdistan under British auspices and recommended that Sharif Pasha should come to Southern Kurdistan for several months to communicate with people. Wilson added: 'if he is willing to stay and suitable I would endeavour to give him such a practical backing as would place him in a position to exercise authority and influence in our interests and those of his compatriots'.¹⁷¹ He also expected that the instructions in respect of the policy regarding the Mosul Vilayet would arrive soon: 'I trust that I may be informed at the earliest possible day of the decisions of His Majesty's Government as to a policy to be adopted locally in Mosul Vilayet'.¹⁷²

Consequently, the British decided to establish indirect rule in Kurdistan particularly because of the lack of forces and the financial crisis.¹⁷³ Nevertheless, Wilson's proposals were not approved and instead the dispatch of Noel to Kirkuk was adopted, probably as a temporary policy concerning Kurdish affairs. This was mostly related to the uncertainty of the political situation of the Mosul Vilayet in connection with the provisions of the Sykes-Picot Agreement on the one hand and the Mesopotamia political map on the other. Therefore, London considered that this political situation would be decided at the peace conference.

Noel was appointed on 31 October as the Political Officer in Kirkuk Division. As British document states, the 'Kirkuk division extends from the lesser Zab to Diyala and North East of the Turko-Persian frontier'. To arrange orders and law in the area: 'You have been appointed political officer, Kirkuk division, with effect from November 1st..., for the present it must be considered as falling within the sphere of military occupation

¹⁷⁰ Political Baghdad, office of the civil commissioner Baghdad, 30th of October 1918, No. 9267. Air 20/512. T.N.A

¹⁷¹ Political Baghdad to the secretary of India, 30 October 1918, Air 20/512. T.N.A

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Bell, Review of Civil, Administration, p. 63.

and administration of this force, and you should proceed on this assumption in your dealing with local chiefs, bearing in mind that it is improbable that the military authorities will see their way to detach troops permanently to Sulaymaniya or to other places east of our present line. It should be your object to arrange with local chiefs for a restoration and maintenance of order in areas outside the limits of our military occupation, for the exclusion and surrender of enemy agents, and for the supply of commodities needed by our troops'.¹⁷⁴

Noel was also instructed by H.M.G to explain to the Kurdish leaders that 'there is no intention of imposing upon them an administration foreign to their habits and desires'.¹⁷⁵ Therefore, he arranged a conference where approximately sixty chiefs from Southern Kurdistan and representatives from Persian Kurdistan attended.¹⁷⁶

It was not long before Noel was impressed by the Kurds' feeling for self-rule. In a telegram dated 14 November sent to Baghdad, he indicated that upon his arrival in Sulaymania he found that national feeling was very strong and the, 'national movement is so virile that I do not foresee so much difficulty in creating (a) Kurdish state under our protection and with control by political officers over general policy provided we take prompt and vigorous action now. Movement so strong (at all events here at Sulaymania) that I strongly advise immediate dispatch of qualified officers to assume direct charge of principal administrative services'.¹⁷⁷ Noel also recommended immediate initiation of arrangements of similar Kurdish movements in a Kurdish centre in north Mosul. Wilson determined that Noel's latter recommendation would be considered as soon as possible.¹⁷⁸

Indeed, Noel strongly advocated the extension of the Mahmud's government to other Kurdish areas. On 19 of November he suggested the appointment of Kurdish governors through Sheikh Mahmud to the districts of Koy Sanjaq, Rania, and

¹⁷⁴ Telegram from political, Baghdad to Secretary State for India, London, No. 9309, 31th October 1918. Air 20/512. T.N.A

¹⁷⁵ *Precis*, p.9.

¹⁷⁶ Telegram from political, Baghdad to Secretary State for India, London, No. 9301, 31th October 1918. Air 20/512. T.N.A; Telegram from political Baghdad to Secretary of India, London, No. 9927, 17th November 1918. Air 20/512. T.N.A

¹⁷⁷ Telegram from political Baghdad to Secretary of India, London, No. 9927, 17th November 1918. Air 20/512. T.N.A

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Rawanduz which were able to turn out the Turks. He also recommended moving north to, 'counterbalance the growing influence and authority of Sheikh Mahmud', and he urged the necessity of sending political officers to the northern districts.¹⁷⁹ Based on Noel's recommendations certain Kurdish notables were appointed as governors to certain Kurdish districts, such as Haj Pir Dawd of Shaun who was appointed as a governor of Koy Sanjaq, Said Beg, son of Abdulla Pasha, to Rawanduz and Abbass Salem Agha to the Pishder district.¹⁸⁰ Simultaneously, the British suggestion of 'Kurdistan for the Kurds' under British protection was achieving great popularity, and shortly, all the neighbouring tribes indicated their desire to join the Kurdish confederation government.¹⁸¹ On his first visit to Sulaymania Wilson had already signed a document with Kurdish party agreement that should any Kurdish tribes, from Greater Zab to Diyala, desire to join Sheikh Mahmud's government they would be allowed to do that.¹⁸²

It is worth noting that Britain's financial and military difficulties played a key role in its decision to establish indirect rule in Southern Kurdistan. The tribal administration form founded by the British in Kurdistan was quite similar to the Sandeman System which was applied in Baluchistan and the Bruce or Maliki System adopted among the Mahsud or Wazir societies in the North-West frontier of India.¹⁸³ According to Wadie Jwaideh such forms of management which were based on the tribal system completely failed to achieve their goal and it produced the same outcome in the administration of Kurdistan.¹⁸⁴

As a matter of fact, in the initial stage almost everything went in the right direction, and there was good cooperation between Noel as a British political advisor and Sheikh Mahmud as a Governor of the Kurdish administration. Noel's approach was based on applying a political solution in Kurdistan, which he thought to be the sensible way to be adopted towards the Kurdish areas and vital for the security of the

¹⁷⁹ From political Sulaymaniyah to political Baghdad, 19th November 1918, Air 20/512.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Précis, p.10.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ For details see: Jwaideh, *The Kurdish national movement*, pp165-166; Christian Tripodi, "Good for one but not the other"; The "Sandeman System" of Pacification as Applied to Baluchistan and the North-West Frontier, 1877-1947, *The Journal of Military History*, Volume 73, Number 3, July 2009, pp. 767-802.

¹⁸⁴ Jwaideh, *The Kurdish national movement*, pp.165-166.

whole area. Firstly, he explained that the extension of British influence in the region had to serve British interests by avoiding a financial and military burden. Indeed, it was compatible with Kurdish aspirations and vital for securing Mesopotamia from any external threats, in particular from Turkey and Russia.

Therefore, Noel realized the necessity of the establishment of an independent Kurdish state under British protection; he believed that this would be easy to achieve at that moment especially since he had the support of the British Government. Otherwise, he warned that the danger of the delay or non-establishment of this state would lead to destabilization and instability in the region and it would create a huge problem for Britain and its Allies.¹⁸⁵ His analyses and assessments of the Kurdish question were quite logical, and the events which followed in the region proved his predictions to be right since they highlighted how an unsolved Kurdish question could have a disastrous effect on the whole region for a long time.

To achieve this goal, Noel tried to expand Sheikh Mahmud's administration in order to become the basis for the new Kurdish state that he proposed. He asked for British political and military assistance in districts such as Rawanduz. For that reason he sent Wilson a telegram on 23 November suggesting options for the extension of Mahmud's government to Rawanduz. One option was to provide military assistance to Sheikh Mahmud in order to enter Rawanduz; the other was to send him to Rawanduz and Nehri with the mission of promoting Kurdish tribes spreading the idea of an independent Kurdistan under British protection.¹⁸⁶ In his reply Wilson agreed to the second option but his intent was quite different from Noel's project regarding Kurdish independence. Wilson expressed his support for a British protectorate instead of British indirect rule as Noel had proposed, and he thought that Kurds could not govern themselves because of internal disagreements: 'I think it is necessary in the interests of law and order to lay due emphasis on a British protectorate, and responsibility on British officials to maintain order, as Kurds cannot rule themselves any more than Arabs owing to internal dissensions and a strong external government is necessary'.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ Telegram from political Baghdad to Secretary of state for India, 27th November 1918; from political Sulaymania to political Baghdad, 23th November 1918, Air 20/512.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid

¹⁸⁷ Telegram from political Baghdad to political Sulaymania, No. 10360, 26th November 1918. Air 20/512.

There were several factors behind the failure of Noel's scheme and Sheikh Mahmud's administration the most important of which was that Wilson and certain British officials in Mesopotamia played a significant role in preventing a Kurdish independent entity. Wilson had an imperialistic attitude and was a strong supporter of the concept of direct administrative rule in the British colonies. As a consequence, his plan was to transform Mesopotamia into a British protectorate.¹⁸⁸ Indeed, most British officials shared this view and advocated on behalf of Britain's direct rule in Southern Kurdistan due to its strategic position for maintaining security and peace in Mesopotamia. Therefore, the centrality of Mesopotamia became a major factor in determining the fate of the Kurds. It seems clear that the British authorities in Mesopotamia did not favour a strong and powerful Kurdish Government; their intention in establishing the first government was to ensure order and stability and therefore, they were against Sheikh Mahmud's expansion project which Noel advocated. The British wanted Sheikh Mahmud to represent them and to obey their instructions exclusively. Thus, they were actively against the Kurdish administration in Sulaymania because they thought that its success could foster the rise of a Kurdish autonomy, or independence, which would trigger a similar pattern in the Basra Vilayet. This political point of view and negative attitude towards the Kurdish question was important in preventing the emergence of the Kurdish independence entity.

The British authorities mainly depicted the Kurdish government as a tyrannical and tribal system rather than a political administration. One way that the Kurdish government was underestimated was that the British authorities had used specific terms and descriptions such as in Major Soane's words, 'a retrograde tribal system'. Gertrude Bell also underestimated the national movement in Sulaymania, stating that it was not genuine, but 'an artificial product of the personnel ambitions of the Kurdish leaders, who doubtless saw in Kurdish autonomy an unequalled opportunity for furthering their interests.'¹⁸⁹ Hawar and Eskander argue that the reason behind such depictions of Kurdish autonomy was to 'pre-empt any criticism' of the eliminating of the Kurdish entity, and avoid any blame for 'the subsequent political instability'.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917-1920 A Clash of Loyalties*, p105.

¹⁸⁹ Bell, *Review*, p. 63.

¹⁹⁰ Mohammad Rasool Hawar, *Sheikh Mahmudi Qaraman u Hukumataki Khwarwey Kurdistan*, vol1, Black Rose, London, 1991, p. 256; Eskander, *Britain's Policy in Southern Kurdistan*, p.149.

Ultimately, it was decided to curb Mahmoud's power and influence and to that end, in March 1919 a meeting was launched, attended by Wilson, Soane, Leachman, Major Noel, Gordon –Walker and several others. The situation in Southern Kurdistan was discussed and it was agreed that a new policy line should be adopted and Mahmud's power curtailed. Hence, Major Soane was appointed in place of Noel to act in this direction.¹⁹¹ It was decided that the plan should be implemented immediately because they predicted that the political situation in Southern Kurdistan might be develop rapidly. There were two possibilities, the British might succeed in their plan to reduce Sheikh Mahmud's power gradually or the latter might attempt 'an independent flight' before their plans matured.¹⁹²

After his appointment as political officer at Sulaymania, Soane made every effort to reduce Mahmoud's influence and prevent his endeavours to achieve independence, 'we hoped that before he decided to do so we should have sufficiently curtailed his power as to render him harmless.'¹⁹³ Soane detached certain areas such as Kirkuk, Kifri, Halabja, koi Sanjaq and Rawanduz from Sheikh Mahmud's rule.¹⁹⁴ He also replaced many of Mahmud's subordinates by others who were mostly outsiders. This caused tension between Mahmud and the British authorities in Mesopotamia since Mahmud was very suspicious of their intentions regarding his rule, and he was particularly and deeply irritated by Major Soane's manners and intrigues with Mahmud's rival tribes, especially the Jaf in Halabja and Kifri districts. Hence, in a letter to Wilson, Mahmud complained about Soane's actions and asked that he be replaced by another Political Officer. A decade later, Wilson wrote that he intended to visit Sulaymania to settle the issue, but the visit was not to be, as Mahmud revolted against the British in May.¹⁹⁵

Nevertheless, Major Soane, began to reduce Mahmud's influence and then to destroy the government, and was entirely opposed to Noel's positive role in establishing the foundation of the first Kurdish government under Sheikh Mahmud's rule. Indeed, it can be argued that if Noel was the founder of the first Kurdish

¹⁹¹ Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917-1920*, p. 134; Jwaideh, *Kurdish*, p.178.

¹⁹² Dr. G. M. Lees, *Two years in South Kurdistan*, *Journal of The Royal Central Asian Society*, 1928, p.256.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 258.

¹⁹⁴ McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, p.157

¹⁹⁵ Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917-1920: A Clash of Loyalties*, p. 136,

government, Soan was its destroyer. Regarding this issue, in his private diaries Lt-Colonel H.L Scott, an officer of the British Army in Mesopotamia emphasised the role of Major Soan in the destruction of the Kurdish government in 1919, 'All my sympathy (is) with (the) Sheikh. His complaints (were) just, we have no fixed policy in Kurdistan' and this was something that Scott supposed the British could not have until a conclusion of the Paris peace conference. 'There is no doubt that we set Shaykh Mahmud up as a figurehead intending to rule through him. Then Soane found him too strong and set to undermine his influence, by intrigue with the other Aghas. Naturally the Shaykh objected - it is a sorry story..., you ask what our policy in this country is to be; frankly we do not know. That is the cause of half the trouble. Some sort of Arab autonomy we suppose. Same applies to Kurdistan'.¹⁹⁶

Dr. G. M. Lees was one of the British officials that had to undertake the implementation of the new policy against Mahmud's rule. Lees was dispatched to Helabja as a political assistant, on 15th March 1919. Before reaching Halabja he went to Kifri and stayed a few days among the Jaf tribesmen. Lees recorded that the first outward sign of a change in policy was that he 'paid the headmen of the various sections of the tribe the monthly subsidies previously paid by Shaikh Mahmud, the total subsidy of the latter in Sulaimani being deducted by an equivalent amount'. Lees noted that consequently the Jaf tribe chiefs warmly welcomed the British and their new policy towards Sheikh Mahmud as they had been previously dissatisfied with the British support for Mahmud.¹⁹⁷ A few years later, Lees himself realized that the policy lines directed in Baghdad were against the Kurdish interests therefore he resigned from his position. He indicated that he was requested by two officials from the High Commissioner, 'to rejoin the Civil Administration and use his influence with the Jaf tribesmen to raise a force of sowars in order to reoccupy Sulaimani'. Lees revealed that he had to do at the first time 1919, but he refused to do again as he thought that it 'was a case of exploiting certain friendly people without any sincerity of purpose'.¹⁹⁸

Also, Major Soane, despite his role in eliminating the Kurdish government, and then ruling the region 'with a rod of iron',¹⁹⁹ he played an important role in promoting

¹⁹⁶ Lt-Colonel H.L Scott, Mesopotamia 1919, CAB 45/99. T.N.A

¹⁹⁷ Lees, *Two years in South Kurdistan*, p. 256.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 271.

¹⁹⁹ McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, p. 158.

the Kurdish language and culture through publishing a Kurdish magazine *Peshkawtn* and his scholarly contribution to Kurdish. Then, he became an advocate of Kurdish self-rule in Southern Kurdistan and stood against the project of the inclusion of the region into the Iraqi State which was the main reason behind his dismissal from the post by the High Commissioner of Baghdad.²⁰⁰

On the other hand, the Kurdish nationalist movement was an important factor in the failure of the Kurdish question in general and the destruction of the first Kurdish government in Sulaymania. Sheikh Mahmud, in particular, contributed significantly to the collapse of his government because he failed to unite the Kurds in Southern Kurdistan or at least in Sulaymania province; and instead of creating an institutional government; he tried to consolidate his power through appointing people from his clan or his followers. He had created, as Hilmi noted, a wall of 'ignorant and illiterate armed men'²⁰¹ and in addition, his lack of diplomatic and political skills greatly affected his relations with the British. In his memoirs Rafiq Hilmi evaluates Mahmud's Government and the causes of his failure and notes that Mahmud was running a government, 'by no means, similar to a clan... He did nothing to establish a sound and strong foundation for the newly created Independent state of Kurdistan... he did not create any adequate administrative structures and did not set up a system to define a set of rules and regulations for running the business of the government. The Sheikh would only hear the peoples' problems through the wall which he had set up for himself. That wall of ignorant and illiterate armed men who, instead of advising him wisely and intelligently to right the wrongs being committed by some of their followers, in their own interests as well as that of their master and his people, would pour fuel the over the fire, egging the Sheikh to act forcefully to protect the Rulers' integrity and dominance'.²⁰²

Therefore, it could be concluded that the failure of the first Kurdish government in Sulaymania, was caused by various factors. First, the contradiction in the British-Kurdish aims in the establishment of the government created tension between Mahmud and the British authorities. The British found that Mahmud's ambitions for expansion and strengthening his influence in the region did not fit with the British strategy and the on- the-ground officials such as Wilson and Soane played an

²⁰⁰ This subject will be discussed in detail in Chapter five.

²⁰¹ Hilmi, *Memoirs*, p. 124.

²⁰² *Ibid*, pp. 109, 123&124.

important role in eliminating Mahmud's rule. On the other hand, the internal Kurdish factors contributed significantly to the failure of the Kurdish administration. The disunity and enmity between the Kurdish tribes especially Mahmud's Barzinja and Jaf caused one of the biggest obstacles to the success of a Kurdish entity. This was exploited by the British to undermine Mahmud's rule followed by the destruction of his government.

British and Kurdish interpretations: The concept of the lack of leadership:

As already mentioned, the role of local factors, such as the lack of Kurdish leadership and national feeling as well as the disunity among the Kurds was considered by some historians to be the main cause of the failure to find a solution to the Kurdish question in the post-war settlement; and this argument dominated Britain's policy discussions relating to the future of Kurdistan both during and after the First World War.

However, it is important to examine whether this question was indeed the crux of the matter or purely used to justify Britain's attitude to the Kurdish question. Apparently, the British persistently used a rhetoric argument about the legitimacy of the Kurdish leaders asserting that they did not represent the Kurdish people and this is certainly true of Sharif Pasha and Sheikh Mahmud. The British claimed that Sharif Pasha did not have the Kurds' mandate to represent them in the Paris Peace Conference. For example, a telegram from the Foreign Office to Admiral Webb questioned Sharif Pasha's legitimacy 'There is nothing beyond his word and the alleged arrival of an emissary from Kurdistan to support his claim'.²⁰³ In reply, Admiral Webb supposed that 'Sharif has not been elected by anyone except by himself.'²⁰⁴ Yet, certain British documents and Kurdish sources show that Sharif was supported and recognised as the Kurdish representative in the latter conference by such as The Kurdish Party in Istanbul and Sheikh Mahmud in Southern Kurdistan. In January 1919 the delegates of *Jamhīa Tahali Kurdistan*, met with Admiral Calthorpe, The British High Commissioner at Constantinople, when they presented a Kurdish request and

²⁰³ Cypher telegram from Foreign Office to Admiral Webb, Constantinople, 3 September 1919, FO 608/95. T.N.A

²⁰⁴ Decypher. Admiral Webb, Constantinople, to Foreign Office, 8th September 1919, FO 608/95. T.N.A

advocated their support of Sharif Pasha as their representative in a demand for Kurdish political rights at the Paris Peace Conference. They also asked to send their representative to Paris to assist Sharif Pasha. The Kurdish correspondents at the meeting were Sheikh Abdulla Nahri, Khalil Badrkhan, Mustafa Pasha Baban, Abdul Ahad Dawud, Mulla Said Nawras (Said Nawrasi), and Mulla Ali Raza.²⁰⁵ Also, Said Abdul Qadir, the President of *Jamhia Tahali Kurdistan*, told De Robeck that Sherif Pasha was the only representative for the Kurds.²⁰⁶

In the same way, in Southern Kurdistan Sheikh Mahmud recognised Sharif as the Kurdish voice at the Paris Peace Conference, and to that end he gathered people to sign a petition authorising Sharif Pasha to be their delegate for the Kurdish cause at the Conference.²⁰⁷ Sheikh Mahmud sent two of his delegates to Paris to support Sharif on behalf of people in Southern Kurdistan. In his memoirs, Hilmi states that this was the only good thing that Mahmud did and he goes on to explain how the efforts of the British authorities in Baghdad prevented a Kurdish delegation sent by the Kurdish government from reaching Paris to join Sharif Pasha.²⁰⁸

On the other hand, Eskander suggests that the destruction of the Kurdish autonomous entity by the British authorities in Mesopotamia was not due to its failure. On the contrary, the Kurdish government led by Mahmud was successful in fulfilling its tasks as defined by Noel, in establishing political stability, the reactivation of economic life, and obtaining the friendship of the local Kurds, without entailing military, political or financial commitments from Britain.²⁰⁹ Eskander states that the fall of the Kurdish government was due to the negative British attitude to Sheikh Mahmud's influence and he especially emphasises Wilson's role in destroying the Kurds' government.

Some argue that the lack of appropriate and modernist tendency among the Kurdish leadership and society had an impact on the loss of the most significant opportunity to establish Kurdistan's independence. McDowall argues that due to the absence of a suitable Kurdish leader to fit the British requirement to administer the Kurdish regions they were reluctant to grant autonomy. Kendal Nezan, although

²⁰⁵ See: Ahmad Othman Abubakr, *Kurdistan In the period of Peace*, pp. 83-128.

²⁰⁶ De Robeck, Constantinople, 11 December 1919, FO 371/4193. T.N.A

²⁰⁷ Hilmi, *Memoirs*, p. 107.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Eskander, *Britain's Policy*, p160

agrees that the lack of modernist Kurdish leadership had played in determining the Kurdish fate, this did not have a significant influence in British decisions regarding the Kurdish question. He argues that if Kurdistan's independence served French and British interests they would have established it, 'if Anglo- French imperialism had required an independent Kurdistan they would have set up one, of their own accord, since the Kurdish leadership was still in the stage of underdevelopment in many Arab countries.'²¹⁰ He also argues that if those Kurdish leaders had announced an independent Kurdistan it would have been de facto, which Britain and France would have accepted, but the diversity and rivalry between Kurdish leaders in this period prevented the emergence of such a state.

I disagree with Kendal's analysis because Kurdistan was in a very difficult situation due to the famine and destruction caused by the war and it was not easy to establish an autonomous rule without assistance from the outside powers. Furthermore, the establishment of a unified Kurdistan contradicted allied plans and arrangements, especially the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 because Kurdistan, according to this Agreement had been divided between France and Great Britain. In addition, almost the whole region was under allied domination, and the allies had the power to prevent the emergence of such a state. Therefore, the Allies would have strongly opposed any declaration of independence. Sheikh Mahmoud's' experience in Sulaymania provides clear evidence of this because shortly after announcing the independence of Kurdistan, in both 1919 and 1922, he was defeated by the British. Additionally, the geopolitics of Kurdistan were very complicated due to boundary disputes with different parties - that is, Armenia in the north, Turkey in the north-west, Mesopotamia in the south-west and Persian in the east.

Nonetheless, Kendal's argument might be correct regarding the Kemalist movement which had risen in central Kurdistan at that precise moment. The movement was successful and became a de facto national movement in the region. In the end the allies were obliged to negotiate with them to the extent that they were forced to accept them as the new representatives of the Turkish state. Whereas, this movement was different because Turkey had an established political tradition for long time being, in

²¹⁰ Kendal Nezan, *the Kurds under the Ottoman Empire, in: A People Without A Country: the Kurds and Kurdistan*, Edited by: Gerard Chailand, T: Michel Pallis, Olive Branch Press, New York, 1993, pp.30-31.

contrast the Kurds had been suffered from the ongoing conflicts in the region and their lands had been divided into different countries for centuries.

Undoubtedly, the lack of Kurdish leadership affected British policy to some extent but it was not a central factor, and furthermore it has been exaggerated by certain scholars. However, I agree with Nezan's analysis of the issue. It is important to compare Kurdistan's situation and the role of its leaders with the neighbouring peoples in the region, in order to find out whether there was a significant difference between them culturally and socially. For instance, the structure of Arab society was similar to the Kurdish one especially considering their tribal and religious sectarian dominant features. The Sharifian family is the best example for this comparison; although he was described in British documents as weak and unfit for administration, Shareef Hussayn's oldest son, Amer Abdulla was appointed by Britain as a ruler of Transjordan. Also, despite the fact that Lawrence knew that Faisal was not a leader, he was 'weak and timid' and at 'Heart pro-Turk', he strongly supported him.²¹¹ Then, Feisal was imposed on the Iraqi people, especially on the Kurdish inhabitants in Southern Kurdistan. However they refused him and the plebiscites were boycotted by most of the population. After his trip to the Mosul Vilayet, Feisal stated that 'with exception of South Kurdistan and possibly Kirkuk the whole Vilayet of Mosul is ready for immediate election'.²¹² Despite that, the British imposed him on the Kurds. In addition, there was rivalry among Arab leaders for the control of the region. Particularly between Shareef Hussain and Ibn Saud in Hijaz as mentioned earlier. This did not affect British support and they formed Arab states such as Iraq, Trans Jordon and Hijaz.

The British view is illustrated clearly in the case of Ibin Saud. In one debate in Parliament Churchill talked about Wahhabism and described Wahhabis as people who kill all who did not share their opinions and make slaves of their wives and children. He added that 'Women have been put to death in Wahabi villages for simply appearing in the streets, and it is a penal offence to wear a silk garment. Men have been killed for smoking a cigarette, and as for the crime of alcohol, the most energetic supporter of the temperance cause in this country falls far behind them'. Nevertheless, the British

²¹¹ Friedman, *British Pan-Arab Policy*, pp. 6-7.

²¹² Telegram from the acting High commissioner of Iraq to the secretary of state for the colonies, 30 May 1923, FO 608/97. TNA

funded this group. Churchill said to the House of Common: 'Under the advice of Sir Percy Cox, and of my counsellors here at home, we have arranged to continue the subsidy which Bin Saud has hitherto received from the British Government of £60,000 a year, together with a lump sum of £20,000'.²¹³

If the British had intended to appoint a Kurdish leader to administer a Kurdish state, at least in Southern Kurdistan, they would not have faced the kind of difficulties that they faced in the case of establishing Feisal as the king of Mesopotamia. However, they imposed Feisal on the Kurdish people by using political influence as well as military force particularly the Air Forces in order to oblige the Kurds to accept his rule, as I shall discuss this in detail in Chapter Five.

²¹³Middle Eastern Service., HC Deb 14 June 1921, Vol 143 cc265-334, House of Common.

Chapter Three

The Anglo-French Relationship and its Impact on The Kurdish question between 1914 and 1923

This chapter aims to analyse Anglo-French rivalry in the Middle East between 1914 and 1923, and the impact on the Kurdish question. My findings are mainly based on the British archives as well as the existing literature on the subject. Several studies have been carried out on Anglo-French relations including the Middle East during both the war and post war periods,²¹⁴ however, the Kurdish question has never been addressed satisfactorily. Although scholars such as Robert Olson, David McDowall, Othman Ali, and Saad Eskender have examined the topic, I argue that this field needs a wider and more multidisciplinary approach to include issues concerning: the complex situation in the Middle East such as the Syrian and Turkey questions, the principles of self-determination and nationality and the issues related to oil the question.

To do this, I shall examine the role that Anglo-French relations played in the future of Kurdistan. For example, the Sykes-Picot Agreement which framed the first proposal for the division of Kurdistan was an important aspect of the two European Powers' relations in the region. However, the Agreement became the centre of the dispute between the British and French especially regarding the Syrian and Mosul Vilayet.

This chapter also casts light on the way in which the British selectively adopted the language of self-determination for their own purposes when it suited them. They

²¹⁴ The most important literature regarding this era is: Elie Kedourie, in both his volumes: *England and the Middle East*, and *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth: the McMahon-Husayn Correspondence and its interpretations 1914-1939*, Cambridge University Press, London 1976; Howard, *The partition of the Turkey*; Henry H. Cumming, *Franco-British rivalry in the post-war Near East: the decline of French influence*, Hyperion press, 1981; Jukka Nivakivi, *Britain, France, and Arab Middle East*; David Fromkin, *A Peace To End All Peace*; Martin Thomas and Richard Toye, *Arguing about Empire: Imperial Rhetoric in Britain and France, 1882-1956*, Oxford University Press, 2017.

encouraged Arab self-determination in Syria to counter French ambitions, but prevented it in places such as Mesopotamia and Kurdistan. In addition, the chapter demonstrates that the French military intervention in Syria to terminate Feisal's government had a negative effect on the Kurdish question in several ways. The most important outcome was that the centre of Arab nationalism and pro-Sharifism transferred from Damascus to Baghdad. After his appointment as King of Iraq, Feisal brought 300 former Ottoman officers to Baghdad to become the core of the Iraqi elite administration for the ensuing years.²¹⁵ This strengthened the Arab nationalists' influence in Mesopotamia regarding British policy at the expense of the Kurdish aspirations.

Furthermore, this chapter argues that the conversation between Lloyd George and Clemenceau in December and the abandonment of Mosul did not have an immediate and direct impact on the British administration's attitude towards Kurdistan in Baghdad, especially Wilson's, as is understood by certain researchers. In addition, it claims that Anglo-French conflict of interests played a key role in preventing the emergence of autonomy or independence for the Kurds. This was due to the adoption of diverse policies towards the Turkish settlement. The British were determined to diminish Turkish influence in the region, but the French wanted to rebuild Turkey's rule by supporting them diplomatically and militarily which led to the failure of the British plan. Consequently, this resulted in the partition of Kurdistan between Britain, France, and Turkey.

A significant dynamic of the imperial rivalry in the Middle East was the use of the nationalist movements by the Great Powers, notably the British and the French, against each other's positions which escalated the situation in the region and contributed to creating an obstacle in the way of the post-war settlement. That is to say, Britain utilised Arab nationalism in order to safeguard its position in the region, specifically against the French. The French, on the other hand, supported the Turkish movements against this British strategy; and this imperial rivalry profoundly impacted on the future of Kurdistan by diverting attention to the Arab and Turkish questions.

²¹⁵ Toby Dodge, 'The British Mandate in Iraq, 1920-1932', *The Middle East Online Series 2: Iraq 1914-1974*, Cengage Learning EMEA Ltd, Reading, 2006, p. 2.

From the outbreak of World War One to the Sykes-Picot Agreement 1914-1916

Throughout the nineteenth century, relations between the British and the French were shaped by an intensive rivalry that at times erupted into open conflict. The Fashoda Incident of 1898 can be seen in a similar light - as the climax of mutual competition and the ensuing tensions between both countries.²¹⁶ This incident increased French imperialist tendencies and created a long term hostile view of Britain's policy in the Middle East.²¹⁷ However, the emergence of Germany as a Great Power posed a potential threat to both British and French imperial interests alike. Therefore, in April 1904, the two European powers signed the Entente Cordiale, an agreement representing a comprehensive settlement of long-standing disputes between them. Indeed, this document was to become a platform on which the Anglo-French Alliance in World War I would be formed ten years later.²¹⁸ However, it had never covered the future of the Ottoman Empire and the lands it encompassed.

In the immediate aftermath of the outbreak of World War I, the 'Entente' attitude towards the Eastern Question remained on pre-wartime lines whereby the key objective was to avoid the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. Harry N. Howard points out that from the middle of the Nineteenth Century to the outbreak of the First World War, most of the central issues in European politics were 'due to a possible or probable threatening partition of the dominions of the Sultan'.²¹⁹

However, the new circumstances ensuing from the rapid developments related to the war caused an alteration of this strategy, particularly after the Ottoman Empire entered the war on the side of the Central Powers. This dramatically changed the

²¹⁶ See: J. F. V. Keiger, *France and the World since 1870*, Great Britain 2001, Arnold, a member of the Hodder Headline Group, London, p174; Thomas and Toye, *Arguing about Empire*, pp 49-82

²¹⁷ British interests in the Mediterranean and Middle East report by *Chatham House Study Group Royal institute of international affairs*, Oxford University press, London-New York-Toronto, 1985, p4; Regarding the Fashoda incident Sykes often complained that Englishmen and Frenchmen in the Near East still suffered from 'Fashoda' minds. Shane Leslie, *Mark Sykes*, p 289

²¹⁸ Keiger, *France and the World*, p175.

²¹⁹ Harry N. Howard, *The partition of Turkey: A diplomatic history 1913-1923*, Howard Fertig, New York, 1966, p.19.

political calculus of the Allies, insofar as it was decided that it was in their interest to negotiate and determine a common approach towards the eventual partition of the Ottoman Empire. In the context of the post-war developments, the foregoing can be seen as one of the most fundamental political decisions made during the war vis-à-vis the future of the Middle East. It terminated the Eastern Question which was the most controversial question that had been raging up until the beginning of the war,²²⁰ but it also represented an impetus for the new phase of a long tradition of Anglo-French rivalry, which although being “barely beneath the surface” during the war re-emerged similar to that of pre-war lines.²²¹

Given the magnitude of its consequences, it is not surprising that the above mentioned decision was incubating for some time. The discussion regarding the final solution to the Eastern Question began in early 1915 and was concluded in the first inter-Allied secret agreement after a series of negotiations that took place between 4th March - 10th April 1915. According to this agreement, the Russians acquired the Turkish Straits and Constantinople. The necessity of forming a new independent Moslem state with the possibility of the inclusion of Arab areas as suggested by the British, was approved. However, there were certain regions, namely the Levant, Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Armenia and Kurdistan, the post-war status of which remained undetermined.²²²

Although the British did not have a coherent policy with regard to the future of the Middle East, they were primarily concerned to avoid clashing with their allies. However, France’s and Russia’s ambitions and demands that called for annexation of regions belonging to the Ottoman Empire forced the British to alter their strategy. This, however, necessitated the formulation of their own policy and aims for the region. As Joshua Baylson emphasised, the British Middle Eastern policy in the period 1914-1921 can be characterised as a ‘drift and reaction rather than initiative’.²²³

²²⁰ Fromkin, *A Peace To End All Peace*.

²²¹ Richard Davis, *Britain’s Middle Eastern Policy 1900-1931: Dual Attractions of Empire and Europe*, Histoire@Politique. Politique, culture, société, N11, mai-août, 2010, p.5.

²²² Howard, *The partition of Turkey*, pp.183-184.

²²³ Joshua C. Baylson, *Territorial Allocation by Imperial Rivalry: the human Legacy in the Near East*, the University of Chicago, Chicago, 1987, p.95.

One aspect that strongly influenced Britain's strategy in the Middle East was France's regional ambitions since, the colonial and missionary purposes informed French aims in the region to a considerable degree. Consequently, these very aims significantly shaped the wartime inter-allied secret agreements, particularly the Sykes-Picot agreement that reflected both countries' ambitions in the Middle East. In March 1915, Paul Cambon, the French Ambassador in London informed Grey, the British Foreign Minister, that the French Foreign Minister wished to discuss both powers' aspirations in the Middle East. Grey replied that the Cabinet 'had not yet time to consider our desiderata' in the region. This might be one reason that drove the British government to appoint a Committee, under the head of de Bunsen, to formulate definite British desiderata in the Asiatic Turkey.²²⁴

Given the specifics of this study, it should be noted that at this stage the British plans with regard to Kurdistan were not governed as much by French activities as they were by Russian involvement and ambitions in the area. The primary concern of the British was therefore to counter the growing influence of Russia in the region that, given the strategic and economic importance of Kurdistan, could potentially represent a threat to British interests and position in this part of the Middle East. In March 1915, Arthur Hirtzel, The Secretary to the India Office, expressed this concern by assuming that 'if it (Kurdistan) were under the political influence of Russia, we should never have a moment of peace'²²⁵, as discussed in the previous Chapter. Likewise, Lord Kitchener stressed the strategic importance of the areas inhabited by Kurds whilst predicting that any attack from Russia would come through Armenia and Kurdistan.²²⁶ Therefore, both Kitchener and Mark Sykes would argue against sharing a territorial boundary with Russia, which would essentially allow, 'a Franco-Russian domination of the line from the Gulf of Iskenderun to the Persian Gulf'.²²⁷

The above assumptions were to inform both the work of the de Bunsen Committee and the Sykes-Picot Agreement. The de Bunsen Committee's conclusions

²²⁴ British desiderata in Turkey in Asia, 1915. CAB 27/1. T.N.A

²²⁵ The Future Settlement of Eastern Turkey in Asia and Arabia, Committee of Imperial Defence, March 14, 1915. CAB 24/1. T.N.A

²²⁶ Memorandum, Alexandretta and Mesopotamia, Committee of Imperial Defence, March 16, 1915. CAB 24/1. T.N.A.

²²⁷ Ibid; Notes on political situation, 1915, Hull University Archives. DDSY2-04-096. Papers of Mark Sykes, Hull University Archives.

became a basis outline of the British Government's discussion with its Allies. Indeed, the idea of extending the French sphere of control to the Persian border near Urmia was proposed with the argument that this is 'where she had missionary interests'. Yet, it was clear that the primary aim of this proposal was to use the French as a buffer between the British and Russian zones.²²⁸

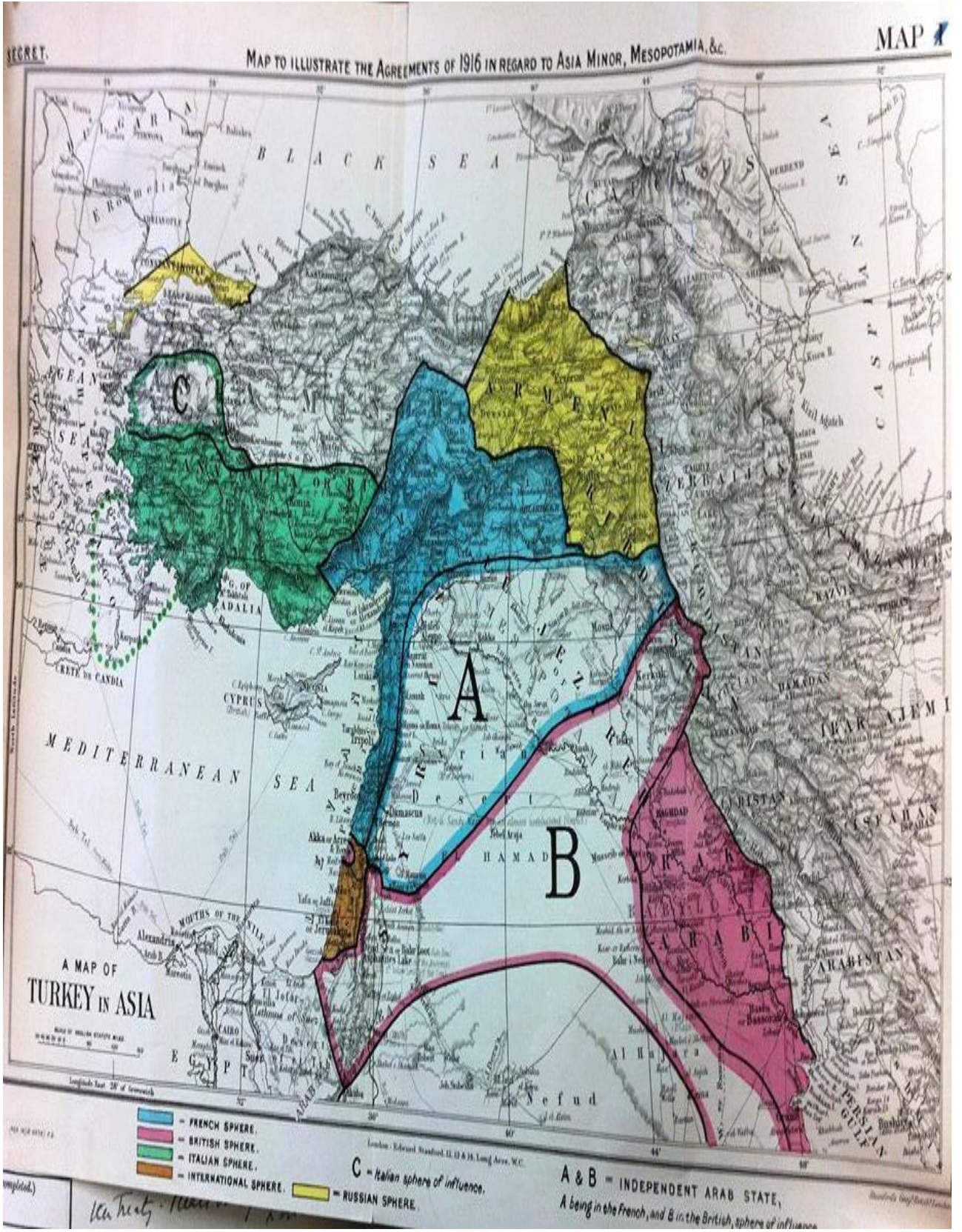
It is evident that the recommendations of the de Bunsen Committee would become the basis of British policy towards the Middle East as well as the guiding elements of Britain's negotiations with her Allies regarding the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire. The Committee's conclusion indicated the partitioning of Kurdistan and never referred to the country's political rights. This was, then, to convey to the Sykes-Picot agreement as well.

From the Sykes-Picot Agreement to the Armistice

The Sykes-Picot Agreement 1916

The Sykes-Picot Agreement is often seen as the most significant contribution to diplomacy between the Allied powers during the course of the war; and essentially it was responsible for drawing the post-war geopolitical map of the whole of the Middle East. Although, the agreement was never implemented, it became the basis of the post-war order; and since it was the main focus of the Anglo-French diplomats it had negative consequences for the whole region. After a series of negotiations between Mark Sykes and Francois George Picot, representing the British and French respectively, an agreement was reached on 16 May 1916. The secret agreement outlined the territorial delineation of both countries' spheres of control in the region. Moreover, it was agreed that both countries would recognise and take under their protection independent Arab states emerging in either French (A) or British (B) zones of influence that were also determined through this agreement. These zones provided both countries with a platform on which to establish either direct or indirect administration or control over areas comprising their particular zone. The aim was to help a newly emerging political unit that was to either unify an Arab state or to construct a confederation of several Arab states.

²²⁸ Jukka Nivakivi, *Britain, France and the Arab Middle East 1914-1920*, the Athlone Press, University of London, London, 1969, p.34.



Map (5)²²⁹

With regard to Kurdistan, as mentioned earlier, its 'fate' was determined not only by the power struggles of Britain and France, but also by Russia's ambitions in the area. Hence, Russia's participation on the territorial delimitation through the Sykes-Picot agreement was a particularly significant development. Thus, Russia was promised control of the regions of 'Erzurum, Trebizond, Van, and Bitlis, up to a point subsequently to be determined on the littoral of the Black Sea to the west of Trebizond. According to the agreement, the region of Kurdistan to the south of Van and of Bitlis between Mush, Siirt, the course of the Tigris, Jezireh-ben-Omer, the crest-line of the mountains which dominate Amadia, and the region of Merga Var, were to be ceded to Russia; and that starting from the region of Merga Var, the frontier of the Arab State were to follow the crest-line of the mountains which at that time represented a border between the Ottoman and Persian dominions'.²³⁰

Based on the arrangement outlined above it is apparent that the most significant result of the Sykes-Picot agreement with respect to Kurdistan was its division among three spheres of influence: Russian, French and British. Hence, this agreement profoundly shaped the future of Kurdistan,²³¹ as it was the first proposed partition of Kurdish territories previously under Ottoman rule. It can also be argued that under this agreement, the Kurdish nation had to make the biggest sacrifice compared with other Middle Eastern nations. Unlike the Kurds, almost all the other nations in the region obtained their independence, for example, the Arabs, the Turks, the Armenians, and the Jews.

The Effect of the Sykes-Picot agreement on the future of Kurdistan

As argued above, the Sykes-Picot agreement had a significant impact on the future of the whole region and it became a prominent point of dispute in Anglo-French relationships both during and after the war. Furthermore, the agreement is deemed to be the most significant secret treaty made during the course of the war, representing the incorporation of imperialistic tendencies of two major European powers in terms

²³⁰ Sir Edward Grey to Count Benclendorff, Foreign Office, May 23, 1916, CAB/24/9. T.N.A

²³¹Based on the British archives, I will explain in this chapter how this agreement influenced the Kurdish question and prevented the emergence of the Kurdish independent entities.

of partitioning the Middle East without considering the aspirations of the people in the region, and which Andrew and Kanya described as a 'fundamental error of judgement'.²³² In Hogarth's words it was 'a purely opportunist measure'.²³³ Consequently, the Agreement shaped the situation in the whole of the Middle East for years to come.

Without exaggerating the role of Sykes and Picot's personalities in the negotiation of the agreement, it is worth highlighting certain aspects of their backgrounds. George Picot was a key figure in the extremist 'Party colonial'. At this time, the foreign policy in France was dominated by 'Party Colonial with largely extremist views'.²³⁴ According to Clayton, the Director of British Military Intelligence in Cairo, Picot was an enthusiast of a great French possession in the Eastern Mediterranean and one of "the Anglophobe school of 1898".²³⁵ On the other hand, Mark Sykes had played the most prominent role in the formulation of the British Middle Eastern policy, as discussed in the previous chapter. The Egyptian scheme was to establish an Arab caliphate in the Arab-speaking areas of the Ottoman Empire under the leadership of Sharif Husain. The objective was to safeguard the India route of the British Empire between Cairo-Persia-India, against any powers in particular the Russian and French influence in the region²³⁶, as well as the pan-Islamic anti-British propaganda promoted by the Turkish-German axis.²³⁷

Regarding the agreement itself, it was widely criticised by British politicians and the military, as they thought that the agreement did not correspond with Britain's aims in the region. Perhaps the British military advances in Mesopotamia stoked up the assumption of the Sykes-Picot agreement in the British perspective, in particular, after the occupation of Baghdad on March 1917. In his analysis of the Unmaking of the Sykes-Picot agreement Elie Kedourie points out that the latter event increased the belief among the British officials and experts in the Middle East and London that it was

²³² Keith Jeffery, Great power rivalry in the Middle East, *the historical journal*, volume 25, December 1982, p.1033.

²³³ Dr Juliette Desplat, 'Dividing the bear's skin while the bear is still alive', Monday 16 May 2016, The National Archives blog.

²³⁴ Jeffery, *Great power rivalry*, p.1032.

²³⁵ Clayton to Governor General, Khartoum, 28 January 1916, FO/882/12. T.N.A

²³⁶ Jeffery, *Great power rivalry*, pp149, p.168.

²³⁷ Renton, *Changing Languages of Empire*, 2007.

'inadequate and unworkable'.²³⁸ They criticized the transference of control of the Mosul Vilayet to the French; and Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister, noted that the agreement was an obstacle 'causing all the trouble with French'.²³⁹ In this context and vis-à-vis the post-war disputes between Britain and France regarding the Middle East, Balfour stated that: 'The Sykes-Picot agreement ought never to have given Mosul to France. But it did; and that through no fault of the French, but in consequence of a miscalculation of Lord Kitchener who was unwilling to have territories in which Britain was interested coterminous with a military Monarchy such Russia then was'.²⁴⁰

From the British point of view, the agreement was out of date and did not correspond with the new circumstances that emerged following the signing of the agreement. In particular, the British found themselves in the position that most of the territories they were given to them according to the agreement were under their physical control, such as Mesopotamia, Palestine, and Syria. Hence, the British felt that the terms of the Sykes-Picot agreement would not fit with their position. Sykes himself concluded that the agreement was 'dead and gone'.²⁴¹ On October 3, 1918, Lloyd George pointed out that 'he had been refreshing his memory about the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and had come to the conclusion that it was quite inapplicable to present circumstances, and was altogether a most undesirable agreement from the British point of view. Having been concluded more than 2 years ago, it entirely overlooked the fact that our position in Turkey had been won by very large British forces, whereas our Allies had contributed but little to the result'.²⁴²

Furthermore, the institutional differences within the British Empire affected the Anglo-French relationship and their understanding of the terms of the Sykes-Picot agreement, particularly as each institution had its own priorities and specific approach regarding the direction of British foreign policy in the Middle East. For instance, whereas the India Office cooperated with Ibn Saud, the Emir of Najd, the Cairo circle

²³⁸ Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, p.110.

²³⁹ Nevakivi, *Britain, France*, p. 42.

²⁴⁰ Documents on British foreign policy, series I, vol. IV, p374, Memorandum by Balfour, September 9, 1919. Cited in: Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, p.34.

²⁴¹ Sykes to Wingate, 3 March 1918. Sykes to Clayton, 3 March 1918. Sykes MSS FO 800/221. In : C. M. Andrew and A. S. Kanya-Forstner, *The French Colonial Party and French Colonial War Aims, 1914–1918*, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Mar., 1974), p. 101.

²⁴² The Minutes of the War Cabinet, October 3, 1918, CAB 23/14/35. T.N.A

had close contacts with Shariff Hussain in Mecca. In addition, Arthur Balfour, the Foreign Secretary, worked with Zionists who wished to establish the homeland for Jews in Palestine. These apparent contradictions in the set of policies created 'flagrantly clashing lines of policy' and complicated compatibility with those followed by the French.²⁴³

Additionally, the Russians withdrew from the war following the Bolshevik revolution in October 1917, and the subsequent publication of the secret agreements between the Allied powers had a profound effect on the processes surrounding the creation of the new geopolitical map of the Middle East. The traditional concept of the power balance no longer fitted the new circumstances in the region. France as a third party in the Imperial Game was a necessary element in both British and Russian calculations, whereas the latter's withdrawal from the region made France's position unnecessary and undesirable from the British perspective.²⁴⁴ Therefore, the strategic concern that ensued from transferring the control of Mosul to the French with the aim of creating a buffer against Russians was made invalid. Thus, the British were adamant that Mosul should be under British control; in Sykes' words, 'we should establish our political influence in the Mosul area'.²⁴⁵

Indeed, the absence of Russia in the regional geopolitical power equation created a massive vacuum with respect to the British territorial acquisitions as determined by the Sykes-Picot agreement. In this regard, Harold Temperley, the British historian, commented that: 'If Russia had not collapsed, her geographical and strategic position would have enabled her to enforce with ease whatever settlement the victorious powers might have agreed upon for the Northern provinces of Turkey. But the fall had an immense gap in the iron ring of hostile armies by which Turkey had previously been encircled'.²⁴⁶

²⁴³ Nevakivi, *Britain, France*, p.44.

²⁴⁴ Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, p.134.

²⁴⁵ Mark Sykes's letter to Lord Robert Cecil, 13 October 1917. In Leslie, *Mark Sykes*, p.274.

²⁴⁶ *A History of the Peace Conference of Paris*, Edited by H. W. V Temperley, Vol.VI, Henry Frowde, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1924, p.42.

Given these new circumstances, the traditional Anglo-French rivalry reappeared with their ensuing disagreements resulting in frequent delays in formulating the final settlement regarding the post-war partition of the Ottoman Empire.²⁴⁷ This had substantial consequences for the future of the region. The most significant outcome was the emergence of instability and a political vacuum in the area²⁴⁸ that was then exploited by Turkish nationalists such as Mustafa Kemal as a means to their political rise whilst employing slogans such as 'Islam against the western powers'. The activities of Turkish nationalists were also to become one of the most difficult issues for the Allies to deal with during the key post-war conference in Paris. Since the war-weary Allies were not ready to send their troops to the region to fill the vacuum created by the withdrawal of Russia from territories assigned to it by the Sykes-Picot agreement, they relied on Greek troops to occupy these territories. Yet, such a policy precipitated dramatic repercussions for the whole region, causing deep anxiety and instability among all involved parties. In particular, it became a direct threat to Britain's position and interests, vis-à-vis Mesopotamia and Kurdistan.

Consequently, this situation significantly shaped the situation for the Kurds with their future remaining unsettled and bound up with the Turkish question. To put it simply, the postponement of the post-war settlement of the territorial composition of the Middle East did not favour the Kurds' ambitions for self-determination. This was due to the fact that the situation right after the end of the First World War was more conducive to the creation of an independent Kurdish state than ever before, especially before the events of May 1919 and, most importantly, the Greek occupation of Smyrna and its direct impact on the growth of the Turkish nationalist movement. In this regard, one can highlight Noel's mission in Southern Kurdistan and numerous other Kurdish territories that concluded the validity of the calls for Kurdish independence. However, the idea was never fully considered; and one of the major reasons for this was the postponed settlement of the Turkish question as is clearly indicated in the contemporary British discourse with respect to the problem of Kurds and its solution: 'One of difficulties that threatens the peaceful settlement of Kurdistan is the delay of the final decision of the peace conference and the impossibility therefore, for the

²⁴⁷ Ibid, p.43

²⁴⁸ Ibid, pp. 43-44.

present, of our making a definite pronouncement as to our policy in the country..., while slowness of adopting a definite policy he is apt to be regarded as hesitation born of weakness'.²⁴⁹

Another example of the Allies' indecisiveness in terms of finding a solution to the Kurdish question can be seen during the Anglo- French conference on the Turkish settlement in late December 1919, during which Curzon proposed the outline of British policies regarding the Kurdish question to the French. One of the most important points was the rejection of the application of the mandate system to Kurdistan with the exception of its southern parts. Further, Curzon suggested that the Kurds should be granted the right to choose whether they wanted a unified country or a confederation of several political entities. However, Berthelot, the French Foreign Minister, although accepting these ideas, expressed his preference to delay dealing with the pertinent issue until the question of Mosul was solved.²⁵⁰

In the same way, Wilson's concept of the new world order represented a considerable challenge in terms of its application in the post-war period. Wilson's philosophy was based on the principle of liberty and democracy which, however, stood in direct opposition to the imperialist and secret agreements signed between the Allies as a means of negotiation between them concerning the shape of the post-war world. Indeed, Wilson stated that the principle of self-determination, together with others of his famous fourteen points, should be applied in the process of constructing the new world order.²⁵¹ It is apparent that the secret agreements between the Allied powers were incompatible with Wilson's ideas. This governed a change in the British views regarding numerous issues surrounding the post-war settlement. In this respect, Sykes, in his letter to Picot, stressed that 'President Wilson's voice is now the important one and the ideas that do not fit in with his speeches won't have much influence on the peace conference'.²⁵² To deal with this challenge, they had to propagate 'Wilsonianism' in the Middle East before Wilson himself²⁵³, thus avoiding any imperialistic tendencies that they could be accused of. In other words, Wilson's principles forced the British to change their tradition of applying an imperialistic system and to accept the new form

²⁴⁹ Precis of affairs in Southern Kurdistan, F.O 371/4192. T.N.A.

²⁵⁰ Anglo-French conference on the Turkish settlement, December 1919, CAB/24/95. T.N.A

²⁵¹ For detail see: Manela, *The Wilsonian moment*, pp.15-35.

²⁵² Nevakivi, *Britain, France and Arab*, p. 50.

²⁵³ *Ibid*, p.82

of indirect rule.²⁵⁴ Therefore, even if the Sykes-Picot agreement allowed the two powers to annex territories under their control, Sykes himself insisted that this was 'quite contrary to current trends'.²⁵⁵

Meanwhile, this new situation facilitated an opportunity for the British to insist on modifying the provisions of the Sykes-Picot agreement and to put pressure on France to accept these developments at the international level. This acceptance would be demonstrated by issuing a joint statement similar to the one made by President Wilson. Thus, the Anglo-French joint declaration in November 1918 was the result of Wilson's influence; and this is evident in the pressure the British put on the French to abandon their insistence on implementing the terms of the Sykes-Picot agreement given that these terms were incompatible with the new era.

Furthermore, these new concepts and statements influenced to a large extent, the aspirations of the people in the Middle East whilst providing an impetus for demanding their rights in line with the democratic principles promulgated by Wilson. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, the Kurds were not an exception to this since they were driven by those principles and demanded that they be applied to them in a similar way to other nationalities in the region.

The above-mentioned new development in the Anglo-French approach towards dealing with the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire was also translated into their attitude towards the Kurds' situation after the war. Contrary to the Sykes-Picot agreement, a proposal was made suggesting the creation of a confederation of Kurdish tribes that would be autonomous yet under the protection of foreign powers; and the establishment of the first Kurdish government can also be seen in this context.

However, Anglo-French rivalry played a significant role in blocking a reasonable Middle Eastern settlement by causing a chaotic situation in the region, especially in Syria, and the implications of this chaos impacted the whole area including Kurdistan. Although France insisted on the application of the Sykes-Picot agreement, it clearly opposed ideas of self-determination promulgated by President Woodrow Wilson. As

²⁵⁴ Brown, *international policies and the Middle East*, p.117.

²⁵⁵ Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs*, University of California Press, Berkeley - Los Angeles London, 1971, p.186.

such it would become one of the main obstacles in the way of implementing a post-war settlement in the Middle East which I shall discuss in the following section.

From Armistice to Sevres 1918-1920

In the final stage of the war, the British insisted on consolidating their power in the Middle East. Therefore, in order to secure their control over Syria and Iraq, they delayed their negotiations with Turkey. This jeopardised not only their relations with Turkey but also with their French allies.²⁵⁶ The British efficiently achieved their aims by militarily controlling the territories of Mesopotamia, Syria, and Palestine, and then controlled Mosul just shortly after the Armistice but this British consolidation was largely at the expense of French interests in the region.

Under these circumstances, Britain's post-war policy aimed at preventing any confrontation between nations and maintaining peace and order both in the east and west. Although, the British did not have any territorial ambitions in Europe, they worked to prevent any other power dominating the continent. However, their goal in the east was to secure British control over the region and safeguard the Empire's communications.²⁵⁷

The British post-war Middle Eastern policy was complicated due to various wartime incompatible pledges and arrangements between different parties such as the French, Arabs, and Zionists. On December, 1918, the Eastern committee held a meeting with the purpose of discussing, among other topics, the policy to be adopted in Syria and Palestine, as well as its attitude towards the French, Arabs, and Zionist claims in the area.²⁵⁸ The problem on which the committee spent most time was how to reconcile two contradictory promises or, if they were not to be reconciled, which promise to keep and which to break. Kedourie, however, believes this was an artificial and untrue issue

²⁵⁶ The partition of the Turkey, p.210; Henry H. Cumming, *Franco-British rivalry in the post-war Near East: the decline of French influence*, Hyperion press, 1981, p.51.

²⁵⁷ W.N.Medlicott, *British foreign policy since Versailles 1919-1963*, Methuen, London, 1968.

²⁵⁸ Kedourie, *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth*, p.216.

created to justify the key ministers a ground to dispose of the Sykes-Picot agreement which French strongly opposed.²⁵⁹

At this stage, from the British perspective, France remained her major rival in the Middle East. Therefore, they tried to keep the French out of this competition as much as possible. In this regard, Lord Curzon, the Chair of the Eastern Committee stated: 'I am seriously afraid that the great power from whom we have most to fear in future is France'.²⁶⁰ Lord Curzon also pointed out that Britain would like the French out of Syria altogether. He criticised the Sykes-Picot agreement and counted it as impracticable. According to the War Office the only way to break the agreement was to operate behind "an Arab façade" and to appeal to the United States to support Wilson's theories of self-determination.²⁶¹ Lloyd George and other officials repeatedly asserted that Britain had no desire to take over Syria for herself; they claimed that they wanted France to relinquish her claims, not in favour of Britain, but in favour of an independent Arab nation led by Feisal.²⁶² However, the British did not believe that Arabs were capable of self-government; they meant the Arab state to be guided by themselves as agents of Great Britain. The principle of self-determination was one method Britain attempted to utilise in order to thwart France's influence in the region, particularly in Syria and Mesopotamia.

In short, self-determination as well as military occupation were the best methods against French claims in the Middle East. They were adopted in the cases of both Syria and Mosul. In respect of Syria, they played the Sharifian card in Syria. On October 3, 1918 the British fostered the Arab forces under Feisal to enter Damascus accompanied by Lawrence and Feisal announced the formation of an Arab government.²⁶³ The occupation of Syria raised the issue of British wartime promises given to the French and the Arabs.²⁶⁴ Subsequently, the Syrian question became the most controversial

²⁵⁹ Ibid, p.217.

²⁶⁰ Christopher M. Andrew and a. S. Kanya-Forstner, *The climax of French expansion 1914-1924* ,(Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981), p172. Cited from Fromkin, *A Peace To End All Peace*, p.376

²⁶¹ War cabinet, Eastern committee, p186. CAB 27/24. Cited from: Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace*, p. 343.

²⁶² Ibid, p.345.

²⁶³ Cumming, *Franco-British rivalry*, p.58.

²⁶⁴ See: Nevakivi, *Britain, France and the Arabs*, pp.69-88.

one between the two powers, and consequently, damaged the peace process and 'poisoned the whole Paris Conference'²⁶⁵

According to the Sykes-Picot arrangement Syria would come under France's sphere of influence. At the same time, Britain promised Sharif Hussain that they would give him Syria based on the Hussain-McMahon letters 1915. In his extensive analysis of the war time agreements and the making of the Sykes-Picot agreement, Kedourie argues that the abandonment of the Sykes-Picot agreement was not in complete contradiction to British pledges to the Arabs in the Husain-McMahon letters. Instead he showed that the Arabs were the third party in the agreement, hence the publication of the secret agreement by the Bolsheviks 'could not have been a great shock to Sharif'.²⁶⁶

The French, on the contrary, insisted that the Sykes-Picot agreement would be based on the Anglo-French understanding of the Middle East. Clemenceau, particularly, criticised the Hussein-McMahon agreement, and described it as, 'vague, and incomplete, and not signed by our representative'. He also, asserted that these agreements could not modify the terms of the Sykes-Picot one.²⁶⁷ Within the same frame, the Colonial Party played a key role by stressing the preservation of French interests in the Middle East, specifically in Syria. In particular, French foreign policy was influenced by the colonialist ideas of Picot and Gout.²⁶⁸ The Colonial Party worked against any attempts to diminish France's interests in the region and evidence of this is found in a discussion between Mark Sykes and Gout: 'I told Mr. Gout that I was certain there could be no satisfactory solution to the problem of the settlement of the independence of the Arabs of Syria unless they were given a proper access to the sea..., he confronted with all sorts of opposition, that the Colonial Party were furious at learning that Damascus was not to be under direct French control, and that one of their most violent leaders (whose name escaped me) had threatened to have Mr Briand impeached for treason for surrendering the Jewel of the East to barbarians and more

²⁶⁵ Frank H. Simonds, *Europe Would Like to Know What Our Foreign Policy is*, New York Tribunes, V II, September 12, 1920, p.2.

²⁶⁶ Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, p.38

²⁶⁷ Memorandum, the Syrian Question, 10 October 1919, CAB24/90. T.N.A.

²⁶⁸ C. M. Andrew and A. S. Kanya-Forstner (1974). *The French Colonial Party and French Colonial War Aims, 1914–1918. The Historical Journal*, 17, p 106.

to this effect'.²⁶⁹ Sykes noted that the Syrian Party in France was noisy, strong, anti-British; intransigent? 'I have private information that they consider picot has betrayed them'.²⁷⁰

Indeed, the wartime secret agreements and promises were the key problem that the peace conference faced with respect to the Middle East settlement in Paris, and this caused a major disagreement between the two powers.²⁷¹ Alternatively, Wilson suggested sending a commission to Syria to investigate on the spot the wishes of the people based on the principle of self-determination. Clemenceau accepted the idea but conditioned that this would be adopted in the other territories such as Palestine and Mesopotamia, a proposal which was opposed by Lloyd George. Hence the British were opposed to the commission since they recognized the possibility that it would be unfavourable to Britain in both Mesopotamia and Palestine.²⁷² The imperial ambitions of the two powers obstructed the application of the Wilsonian principle of self-determination whereby Wilson's proposal for dispatching the commission of inquiry failed.

French ambitions in Syria along with financial pressure and social unrest forced Lloyd George and the War Office to admit that Britain's withdrawal from Syria could no longer be postponed.²⁷³ Therefore, on 13th September the government decided to withdraw the British forces in Syria starting from November. Ultimately, Lloyd George acknowledged French ambitions in Syria, after failing in his attempts to exclude it from the country, and gave up his support of Feisal.²⁷⁴ On the contrary, Howard stated that Lloyd George, at the same time threatened Clemenceau on the grounds that British withdrawal from Syria and Cilicia would leave the French to face the Arabs without any support.²⁷⁵ In short, the conflict of interests between the two powers was a major cause of unrest and instability to the whole future situation in the Middle East, and played a

²⁶⁹ Mark Sykes to the assistant Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs S.W, November 1st, 1918, F.O 371/3414. T.N.A.

²⁷⁰ Sykes to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 9 April 1917. DDSY(2)/11/35

²⁷¹ Jeffery, *Great Power Rivalry*, p.1034.

²⁷² For details see: Paul C. Helmreich, *From Paris To Sevres: The Partition of the Ottoman Empire at the Peace Conference of 1919-1920*, Ohio State University Press Columbus, 1974, pp.64-79.

²⁷³ Ibid, p1035; Fromkin, *A peace To End All peace*, p.409.

²⁷⁴ Kedourie, *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth*, p.229.

²⁷⁵ Howard, *The partition of Turkey*, p.241.

fundamental role in jeopardizing the peace process. In this context, Cumming pointed out that the Anglo-French rivalry 'not only disturbed and threatened the orderly process of the peace Conference, but actually prevented the settlement of the near East question at Paris, and precipitated the Greco-Turkish war of 1919-1922'.²⁷⁶

These issues had remarkable consequences for the Kurdish question. First of all, they delayed the final decision of the Paris Peace Conference which impeded the peaceful settlement of Kurdistan, and this prevented the British from formulating a coherent policy regarding its future.²⁷⁷ An Official British document highlighted this issue: 'The question of the future policy to be adopted towards Kurdistan is one of greatest difficulty and requires most careful consideration nor can definite steps be taken with regard to its formulation until the extent of the mandates given to individual nations at the peace conference are known and particularly until some settled policy has been adopted towards Armenia, for with Armenia the future of the country is closely bound up. It must be recognised too that failure to deal adequately now with the Kurdistan question will leave a permanent sore threatening forever the peace of the middle-east (the Middle East)'.²⁷⁸

Moreover, the situation in Syria and the events that occurred had a direct consequence on the future of Mesopotamia as well as Kurdistan. Before the end of the first Arab government, Syria became the centre of the Sharifian and Arab nationalist circle, and most of the key Arab nationalists in Mesopotamia were serving under Feisal's rule in Damascus, such as Nuri Said, and Jaafar Al Askari. But after the collapse of the latter government because of French military intervention, many of those key nationalists and pro-Sharifiates who worked in Syria, went to Baghdad to play a similar role in the future administration of Mesopotamia. These circumstances had a great impact on the British policy and attitude towards the future of Mesopotamia and Kurdistan in favour of the Arab nationalists and at the expense of Kurdish ambitions.²⁷⁹ In this context, both A.T Wilson and Arthur Hirtzel expressed deep concern that the Arab officers back in Baghdad would propagate nationalism in the

²⁷⁶ Cumming, *Franco-British rivalry*, p. 75.

²⁷⁷ Précis, p.17

²⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 18.

²⁷⁹ This issue will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

region. Wilson described these officers as dangerous propagandists sent by Sharifians to undermine Britain's authority and advocate the inclusion of Mesopotamia in an independent Arabia.²⁸⁰

Furthermore, Young from the Foreign Office commented on one of the Baghdad telegrams that one of the first results of Syria being handed to France would be the return of the Baghdadis in Feisal's service. They cannot be permanently excluded in any case.²⁸¹ In Baghdad, Wilson was desperately striving to secure the benefits of the efficient British administration for the country and was still preventing Sharifian influence from entering the country.²⁸²

However, in order to counter the French in the Mosul Vilayet, the British adopted a scheme similar to the Syrian one. The British forces occupied the city despite the Armistice having been declared a week before. The aim of this military advance was to impose a de facto situation on France and to gain the favour of the Vilayet. Yet, due to French claims in the area, the British administration in Baghdad hesitated to formulate a convincing policy for its future. Regarding this matter, Bell suggested settling the issue by following the concept of self-determination.²⁸³ Perhaps, this was one reason behind Britain's understanding of the Kurdish people in Southern Kurdistan. The British allowed them to extend their administration through the region and establish a Kurdish government in Sulaymania which expanded in other Kurdish areas. It was suggested also, that any Kurdish territories were free to join the latter administration. At the same time, Noel was assigned to deal with Kurdish affairs and he actively worked towards an independent Kurdistan under British supervision.²⁸⁴

Apparently, the Eastern department committee believed that most of the people in the Middle East would determine in Britain's favour as a mandatory power rather than the French, if they had been given a choice. Curzon suggested: 'If we cannot get out of our difficulties in any other way we ought to play self-determination for all it is worth wherever we are involved in difficulties with the French, the Arabs, or anybody

²⁸⁰ Fisher, *Curzon and British Imperialism in the Middle East 1916-1919*, Frank Cass, London, 1998, p. 264.

²⁸¹ Lord Birdwood, *Nuri As-said: A study in Arab Leadership*, Cassel, London, 1959, p.119.

²⁸² *Ibid*, p.122.

²⁸³ Nevakivi, *British, France*, p. 98.

²⁸⁴ From political Baghdad to political Mosul, No. 10359, 26 November, 1918, Air 20/512. T.N.A.

else, and leave the case to be settled by that final argument knowing in the bottom of our hearts that we are more likely to benefit from it than anybody else'.²⁸⁵

Indeed, Southern Kurdistan was an area that was included in this British project. Therefore, at this stage, the propagation of self-determination in Southern Kurdistan was advocated by the India Office with the purpose of counteracting the French and Sharifine claims in the region. According to one of the India Office's memoranda: 'It is clear that, as far, at least, as southern Kurdistan was concerned, the people have exercised the right of 'self-determination' and have elected (with certain exceptions) to form themselves into a separate 'Confederation' under British guidance. This pronouncement and its formal acceptance by the Civil Commissioner appear to rule out (at any rate, as regards the Southern Kurds) Colonel Lawrence's suggestion of a central Arabo-Kurdish Kingdom. But, the difficulty with France remains; and the recent developments in Kurdistan emphasise the necessity of securing revision, at least, of that part of the Sykes-Picot agreement, which relates to the Mosul district and the Upper Tigris Valley. The desire for unity manifested by the Kurds at Sulaimaniya renders it more than ever indefensible to partition their territory into three arbitrary zones.²⁸⁶ Britain's idea that it was necessary to establish a separate Kurdish entity in the Mosul Vilayet together with the above British positive outlook towards the political situation of Kurdistan resulted in the growth of pro-British sentiment among the Kurds.²⁸⁷

Nevertheless, France maintained its claims over a large part of the Mosul region including the French zone in area (A), according to the Sykes-Picot agreement. This situation affected the future of the region by causing political uncertainty. In particular, it affected the British policy towards the region, and it can be considered one of the important factors that influenced the indecision of British policy in the area. Despite

²⁸⁵ Erik Goldstein, *British Peace Aims and the Eastern Question: The Political Intelligence Department and the Eastern Committee*, 1918, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Oct., 1987), p. 425

²⁸⁶ J.E. Shuckburgh, India Office, Memorandum, 14 December, 1918, F.O. 371/ 3386. Cited from Eskander, *Britain's Policy*, p.145.

²⁸⁷ From political Baghdad to political Mosul, No. 11452, 22nd December, 1918, Air 20/512. T.N.A.; Telegram from Noel to political Baghdad, No. 40, 10th January, 1919, Air 20/512.T.N.A; Political Baghdad to Noel, Sulaymania, No. 636, 17th January, 1919, Air 20/512. T.N.A.; Political Baghdad to political Mosul, No. 635, 17th January, 1919, Air 20/512. T.N.A.; Telegram priority from poldist Koi to political Baghdad, No.194, 1st February 1919, Air 20/512; Telegram priority from political Baghdad on tour on Mosul to poldist Koi, No.163, 1st February 1919, Air 20/512. T.N.A

Britain's creating a de facto situation through military occupation (as mentioned above) an obstacle remained since France's consent was required.

On 1st December, 1918, an undocumented conversation took place in London between Lloyd George and Clemenceau. In the meeting, the latter agreed to abandon Mosul and Palestine in favour of the British. But there are debates as to the terms and the conditions of the agreement. Some argue that Clemenceau's consent was not unconditional; in return he probably obtained British support against any possible future attack from Germany, as well as permission to allow French forces to enter Damascus. Indeed, the French perhaps obtained the share of the Mosul oil concessions they needed.²⁸⁸ Clemenceau commented on the event: 'I cannot admit that I consented without an equivalent to the extension of the British mandate to Mosul and Palestine. It would have been unprecedented that such concessions should have been made without any precise definition on paper, all the advantage being on the one side'.²⁸⁹ In addition, Clemenceau, in his malleable state, had agreed, but had said 'But Pichon will make difficulties about Mosul'.²⁹⁰ Nevakivi argued that one of the points reached in the discussion was that the French-British understanding in the Middle East would be based on the Sykes-Picot agreement.²⁹¹

It seems clear, however that the agreement was a private and undocumented deal between the two Prime Ministers who did not sign any sort of diplomatic protocol or agreement between them. Also, this arrangement faced strong criticism especially from the French. Contrary to what the secret conversation concluded, the terms the two Prime Ministers agreed remained without effect and their rivalry and disagreement on these questions which may have been agreed, lasted at least up to the signing of San Remo Treaty in 1920. Likewise, the Syrian and German questions remained controversial between Britain and France. Furthermore, the French parliament demanded a strict equal oil concession in Mesopotamia and Kurdistan after the

²⁸⁸ For details see: C. M. Andrew and A. S. Kanya-Forstner (1974). The French Colonial Party and French Colonial War Aims, 1914–1918. *The Historical Journal*, 17, p.104

²⁸⁹ Cited in: Helmreich, *From Paris to Sevres*, p 206.

²⁹⁰ HNKY 1/5. 4 December 1918. Stephen Pichon was the French Foreign Minister. Cited from: Gibson, Martin William, *British strategy and oil, 1914-1923*, Ph.D., 2012, University of Glasgow, p.139.

²⁹¹ Nevakivi, *Britain, France*, p.92.

agreement.²⁹² Consequently, it did not result in the solution of the tensions between them in the region. In Fromkin's words 'the two prime ministers had not even reached an agreement on 1st December about the Middle East'.²⁹³ In short, the agreement did not translate into practice due the fact that the French insisted that the whole Middle East settlement, in particular in the Mandate territories (Mesopotamia, Syria and Palestine), should be dealt with as one package. It is unreasonable to believe that France cede the territory without getting British consent, at least, in its claims in Syria, and probably, support them with regard to the German question. A French Memorandum clearly illustrates the point that an agreement was not reached because 'there could be eventual concessions on Mesopotamia and Palestine only if counterparts [*contreparties*] were agreed to'.²⁹⁴

What far more supports the above argument is that the agreement did not have an immediate effect on the situation on the ground in Mosul Vilayet. To do this, it is crucial to examine the effect of the event on the Kurdistan situation. According to Eskander the agreement had an immediate effect on Southern Kurdistan. He argues that soon after the agreement, A.T Wilson changed his policy towards Southern Kurdistan from indirect to direct rule. This interpretation is not accurate, yet, Wilson was unaware of the two prime ministers' conclusion. Probably, he knew about it during his tour in Paris in May 1919.²⁹⁵ Meanwhile, the British lacked policy and had diverging views regarding the region. Shuckburgh's minute of 13 December 1918, indicates the uncertainty and divergent views in London regarding the Mosul Vilayet and its impact on the situation in the region. Shuckburgh thought that the French presence in the region 'will inevitably be a source of constant friction. However, at Foreign Office Balfour was firmly opposed to impinging on Area 'A' of the Sykes-Picot agreement'.²⁹⁶

Besides, the French attitude did not change towards the Mosul Vilayet. On the contrary, France remained one of the main obstructions to a definite British policy in the region. In this regard, French involvement contributed to the unrest and anxiety in the area. According to the British perspective France's influence and propaganda in

²⁹² Memorandum, the Syrian Question, 10th October, 1919, CAB24/90. T.N.A.

²⁹³ Fromkin, *A peace to End all Peace*, p. 375.

²⁹⁴ Nevakivi, *Britain, France*, p. 92.

²⁹⁵ Fisher, *Curzon and British Imperialism*, p. 247.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

the region was characterised by two factors: 'In the first place it pointed out to the Christian that..., the French that always had a reputation of supporting a Christian supremacy even if the Christians were in a minority, that in the event of the French taking over the country the leadership by the Christian community was assured and that hence it behoved them to ask for French protection. Secondly, it was rumoured amongst the Moslems that the French were coming shortly, and that British rule was only a temporary measure rendered necessary by the needs of the moment and only intended to tide things over until the French would arrive.'²⁹⁷

Hence, this French move generated disorder and anxiety in Kurdistan, especially the policy regarding religion that had a detrimental effect on the relationship between Kurds and Christian communities in the area. This paved the way for a Turkish intervention aimed at disseminating an anti-British and anti-Christian feeling among Kurds under a Pan-Islamic propaganda that increased anxiety in the region. In turn, this led to incidents in the Kurdish districts and impacted negatively on the future situation of Kurdistan. Consequently, the relationship between the Kurds and the British deteriorated and several British officials were murdered by Kurdish insurgents; and, to some extent, these events influenced Britain's attitude towards the Kurds.

Additionally, Anglo-French rivalry played a key role in the unsuccessful attempt to settle the Kurdish question. At the first stage of the post-war period, the British contemplated the creation of a Kurdish buffer state between Mesopotamia and Turkey. Therefore, during the Peace Conference, Lloyd George stressed that Kurdistan should be separated from Turkey.²⁹⁸ Indeed, on different occasions the British suggested the idea that a Kurdish settlement should render them independent or autonomous. These proposals, however, faced French objections due to the divergence of interests between the two powers. For instance, in January 1919 Mark Sykes suggested a plan to establish an independent Kurdish emirate to include South Kurdistan but this faced French opposition due to its inconsistency with French goals and interests in the region. In particular, the French wanted to protect the Christians, as the French Foreign Minister, Jorge Picot, pointed out: That is contrary to French interests, and that it would sacrifice peoples who had been traditionally protected by the French, such as the

²⁹⁷ Précis, p.11.

²⁹⁸ Cumming, Anglo-French Rivalry, p. 71.

Chaldeans, Nestorians, etc.' These people, Picot claimed, 'look only to us to protection of which they have need'.²⁹⁹ Kurdish leaders were well aware of this French's attitude, and they indicated on many occasions that the French were not qualified to protect Kurdistan due to their strong support for Christians. In the Kurdish perspective, only Britain 'was capable of supporting the creation of a Kurdish confederation'.³⁰⁰

Meanwhile, Britain's and France's mutual suspicion that the other side would influence the Kurdish Nationalists negatively impacted on the situation. For instance, on 29th July Sharif Pasha submitted a proposal in which he announced that he had been elected the head of the future Kurdish state, and suggested the dispatch of a mixed commission of his own and British representatives to tour the predominantly Kurdish areas. His proposal, however, was rejected by the Foreign Office because in their view Sharif Pasha's long residence in Paris made him, 'entirely unfitted for this role'.³⁰¹ The French were not only reluctant to advocate Kurdish ambitions but they also placed an obstacle in the way of Kurdish aspirations. In this connection, on 27th June Sharif Pasha wrote to the French Minister for Foreign Affairs criticizing France's policy regarding the Kurds, indicating that he was at a loss to understand what his position was in France, and complaining that the French government had pitilessly stifled his political life by refusing to allow him to return to Constantinople where his presence was eagerly awaited, after the armistice.³⁰²

Furthermore, the British Foreign Office was concerned about the French ambitions in Kurdistan. It is very clear from one of the Foreign Office documents that France planned to send a mission of scientists to Diyarbakir in search of minerals and copper since, according to the same document, the area had one of the richest copper mines in the world, 'it is evident from the enclosed telegraph that the French have a greedy eye upon this district and it appears possible that they may involve themselves in

²⁹⁹ Foreign Office, 27th January 1919; inter-departmental conference on Middle Eastern Affairs, Secretary's note. Situation in Kurdistan.; Inter-departmental Conference on Middle Eastern Affairs, Secretary's Note, situation in Kurdistan, 15th September 1919.

³⁰⁰ Sir L. Mallet, Suggestion for French mandate for Constantinople, political Turkey and Middle East, March 18, 1919, F.O 618/116. T.N.A.

³⁰¹ Chpher telegram to Admiral Webb, Constantinople, Foreign Office, September 3rd. 1919. No. 1451. F.O. 608/ 385. T.N.A

³⁰² [Inter-departmental conference on Middle Eastern affairs. Secretary's note: situation in Kurdistan'. IOR/L/PS/18/B330](#)

Kurdish intrigues with the object of obtaining a hold upon it'.³⁰³ The British delegation at the Paris Conference confirmed the French intention of holding a mandate over the Kurdish territories between Armenia and Mesopotamia.³⁰⁴ Apparently, these British concerns about the French ambitions in the region were due to Curzon's rejection of Edwin Montagu's suggestions of forming a Kurdish state by making Turkey accept its independence. Curzon explained that it would encourage France to establish the same Kurdish autonomous state under their protection in Northern Kurdistan.³⁰⁵ To prevent this French influence in Kurdistan, the Foreign Office showed the French that they could not undertake this direction in the Kurdish territories outside of Mosul Vilayet.³⁰⁶

The American factor in the Anglo-British Rivalry and its influence on the Kurdish situation

The American aspect was one important dynamic of British-French rivalry in the Middle East. That is to say, the British wanted to involve the United States in the Middle East settlement as a counter to French ambitions. Specifically, Lloyd George's eastern strategy was to play off American anti-imperialist resentment against French and Italian claims. He diverted the president's anti-imperialist energy into critical scrutiny of Britain's rivals' ambitions in the region.³⁰⁷ The British Prime Minister succeeded in his plan to turn Wilson's attention in the Middle East into Britain's policy scheme by focusing on the French menace, in Wilson's view, in Syria against Arab ambitions. Meanwhile, he was quite successful in avoiding Wilson's attentions on British territories in the region.³⁰⁸ In this context, Frank H. Simonds, a member of the American delegation at the Paris Conference, criticised Wilson's policy and the way the British manipulated the Wilsonian concepts to Britain's benefit. However, the British did not want self-determination in the East, since they wanted to use it as a weapon to be adopted for

³⁰³ Lord Curzon to Belfour, Foreign Office, May 21st, 1919, F.O 608/67. T.N.A

³⁰⁴ Eskander, *Britain's Policy towards Kurdistan*, p. 233.

³⁰⁵ Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism*, p. 55.

³⁰⁶ Paul C. Helmreich, *From Paris To Sevres The Partition of the Ottoman Empire at the Peace Conference of 1919-1920*, Ohio State University Press, Columbus, 1974, p. 204

³⁰⁷ For More detail see: Fromkin, *A peace to End All Peace*, pp. 389-402.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 394-397.

the limited area in which 'the French were seeking a foothold solely'.³⁰⁹ Simonds added 'We, in the Paris Conference, moved by MR. Wilson's devotion to his fourteen points, were used to an unlimited extent in this particular matter. Hence, the British did not want the application of the principle of self-determination in the East because they saw it as a dangerous weapon regarding their own problems in Egypt, India and Mesopotamia. But they adopted it in certain places precisely to use it as a weapon with which "to beat their French rivals'.³¹⁰

Simonds further pointed out that they were repeatedly thrown against the French on issues of no concern to American national interests but of importance to President Wilson, especially as his principle of self-determination was involved. 'We opposed them at the Saar, we stood against them in Syria, we held out against the Rhine proposal, we stood firm against Polish hopes in the east of Germany'.³¹¹ Consequently, the American role in the peace process had become insufficient, especially in terms of supporting the application of the concept of self-determination. As many nations had confidence in the Wilsonian principle of self-determination and it had become a source of inspiration for those who wanted to obtain their national rights, one author called this stage, the 'Wilsonian moment'.³¹² However, in the spring of 1919, it became evident that expectations were disappointed because the general outlining policy of the Peace conference was that the old fashioned imperial tendency would remain in the international relationship.³¹³

Hence, the American role was to become occupied with Anglo-French disagreements and rivalries rather than one that exerted its endeavours to settle the question of the Near East inhabitants. In Cumming's words 'America was brought into the arena of Franco-British conflict in the character of the buffer'.³¹⁴ It can be argued that the Anglo-French rivalry and their policies had become one of the dominant issues in the peace conference and counted as one of the major obstacles to applying the Wilsonian concept of self-determination in the Middle East.

³⁰⁹ Frank H. Simonds, *Europe Would Like to Know What Our Foreign Policy is*, New Yourk Tribunes, V II, September 12, 1920, p. 2.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*,

³¹³ Ibid, p. 5.

³¹⁴ Cumming, *Franco-British Rivalry*, p. 84.

The evidence for this can be found in relation to different events and occasions, the most obvious one being the Anglo-French attitude towards Wilson's Committee to Syria and other regions in the Middle East to settle the question of Syria's future on the basis of the wishes of inhabitants. The decision to send a commission to Syria would have been a great opportunity to hear the people's voice in the whole Middle East because if successful, this scheme would have had a positive outcome on the political status in the region in favour of the local people's wishes. Perhaps, this would also have had a positive effect on the Kurdish situation. As it was, as discussed earlier, British and French imperial ambitions frustrated these outcomes.

America's preoccupation with Britain's bid to deter French and Italian ambitions contributed significantly to disrupting any positive role for the United States in the Middle East settlement. They were unable to play a part in promoting democratic principles, particularly the right to self-determination. Nonetheless, by the end of 1919 the dream of minorities to gain political rights based on the Wilsonian principles evaporated. In other words, the failure of the "Wilsonian moment" on which many people had drawn their hopes for independence, including the Kurds, erupted in the colonial peoples' revolt against the Imperial powers. Sheikh Mahmud's uprising, in May 1919, coincided with the global anti colonial movements in Egypt, India, China, and Korea. That is, these anti-imperialist movements occurred due to the failure of the peace 'to break the imperial power and allow the colonized people a voice as full members of the international community'.³¹⁵

A New phase in the Anglo-French negotiation:

America's withdrawal in summer 1919 from the peace process and her rejection of holding the Armenian mandate, radically altered the political situation in the Near East and was very much due to Britain's strategy and plans in the region. Afterwards, the British no longer insisted on countering the French as they had before; and financial pressure and the disbanding of the garrison was largely influenced by this 'new' British tendency. The French also tended to reach an understanding with Britain after the Americans departed. Hence, in November, 1919, Raymond Poincare, the French President, and Stephen Pichon, the French Foreign Minister visited London. In a

³¹⁵ Ibid, p. 224.

meeting with Lord Curzon, Pichon proposed that a discussion regarding the Turkey question should be initiated between them: 'America having disappeared from the scene as a factor in the settlement of the East, and all chance of an American mandate for any portion of the Turkish Empire having, in his opinion, vanished, there remained only two parties whose interests had seriously to be considered and reconciled, namely, Great Britain and France..., conversations must take place, and an understanding must be arrived at, before the Peace Conference addressed itself to the Turkish question'.³¹⁶

The suggestion was welcomed by Curzon. Then, there were further discussions as to the question followed by Clemenceau's visit to London in December. A substantial agreement came about in further meetings between Curzon and Berthelot which anticipated that supposed that there could be a possible termination of the two powers' disagreements.³¹⁷ Despite that, there were still substantially different views regarding a policy on the Turkish question and Kurdistan. On November, 1919 Lloyd George declared that the termination of the Turkish misrule over minorities would be the prime basis for the peace settlement. However, the French were anxious about the employment of nationalist and minority principles because of their suspicion of Britain's objectives in this case; and in particular they faced British aims in Syria, within the Arab scheme.³¹⁸

In December 1919, during the Anglo-French conference on the Turkish settlement, Philippe Berthelot, a French diplomat, proposed to Curzon that Kurdistan should be partitioned between the French and British. Curzon accepted the idea. In the next meeting, Curzon proposed the outlined policies regarding the Kurdish question to the French, of which the most important points were that they should not be an application of a mandate system for Kurdistan, whether French or British, or Anglo-French, except regarding the southern portion. Indeed, Kurdistan should not be maintained under Turkish rule even in a nominal form. He also noted that Kurds were quite capable of making a working agreement with the Armenians and Assyrians. Therefore, the

³¹⁶ Br. Doc, 4:879, Curzon memorandum, 11/12/19. Cited in: Helmreich, *From Paris to Sevres*, p.179.

³¹⁷ Cumming, *Anglo-French Rivalry*, p. 92.

³¹⁸ Montgomery, Alan Everard, *Allied policies in Turkey from the Armistice of Mudros, 30th October, 1918, to the Treaty of Lausanne, 24th July, 1923*, Thesis (Ph.D.), Birkbeck (University of London, 1969), pp. 51-52.

Kurdistan question could not be considered apart from the formation of the Armenian state on which the two powers were agreed. Further, he suggested that Kurds should be granted the right to choose whether they wanted a unified country or a group of entities, and should be guaranteed against any Turkish aggression. Although, Philippe Berthelot, Undersecretary to the Foreign Office, indicated his acceptance of these general ideas but he proposed to delay the question until after a discussion concerning Mosul question and other Arab countries.³¹⁹ At this stage, the French government succeeded in obtaining Britain's consent to leaving the Kurdish question unsolved.

In the December negotiation the powers did not reach an agreement with regard to the Kurdish question, and therefore it remained unsettled and bound up with the other questions in the region. Several factors contributed to this indecision. Clearly, each party suspected the other of engaging in secret negotiations with the Turks which played a fundamental role in the failure of this negotiation. France was anxious about British influence on the Constantinople government, and suspected that a secret agreement had been made between the British and the latter.³²⁰ In addition, the British pro-Greek policy had a remarkable influence on the French policy in the Near East especially its support for the Turkish Nation movement. Arnold Toynbee pointed out that the reason why the French advocated the Turks against the Greeks was because the latter had been backed by the British.³²¹

Additionally, France wanted to preserve her interests and investments in Turkey which held 5/6 of the Turkish Empire debts. Therefore, they directed a policy to preserve Turkish integrity under France's mandate. On 15th September, Louis Franchet d'Esperey, the French High Commissioner in Constantinople, advised the Minister for War that the best means of securing French interests was to extend 'a guiding hand to the Nationalist movement',³²² The French had lost confidence in obtaining their interests whereas the Constantinople government enjoyed British leverage.³²³ In this connection, Pichon thought that 'If the Turkish State was

³¹⁹ Curzon Memorandum, Anglo-French conference on the Turkish settlement, 31 December, 1919, CAB/24/95. T.N.A

³²⁰ Cumming, *Franco-British rivalry*, p123; Helmreich, *From Paris to Sevres*, p.180.

³²¹ Arnold Toynbee, *The Western Question in Greece and Turkey*, p. 39.

³²² Montgomery, *Allies policy*, p. 43

³²³ Cumming, *Franco-British Rivalry*, p. 123.

partitioned, France stood to lose both securities and influence'.³²⁴ Therefore, on December 5 and 6 George Picot met Mustapha Kamal in Sivas. In these discussions Kemal indicated his consent to a French economic mandate over all of Anatolia.³²⁵

In fact, the French tried to enhance their domination in Anatolia by exploiting the political and security vacuum in the region especially after the Turko-Greek conflict; the Greek occupation of Smyrna had altered the situation in the region.³²⁶ This incident played a key role in the growth of the Turkish Nationalist movement and had a significant impact upon French policy in the Middle East. Beyond this new circumstance the French began to become close to the Kemalist Movement which concerned the British Government. Curzon informed Balfour that the cabinet believed that the French planned to control the territories of the sphere of influence according to the Sykes-Picot agreement.³²⁷

In general, Anglo-French diplomacy was at the heart of the Middle East's instability and tensions during the post-War period. Their strategic and economic disputes over the Syria, Mosul, Kurdistan and Turkey settlements were the main obstacle in the way of achieving a reasonable Middle East settlement.

The negotiations of 1920 resulted in an understanding regarding the division of the Middle East between Britain and France by establishing a mandate system. The mandate system was supposed to be different from colonial rule, but its territories were not better administered than colonial ones. Nonetheless, it legitimised the colonial rule in the mandate territories, and restricted the right to national self-determination. The League of Nations and the mandate system became an instrument for colonial matters.³²⁸ The new system had a profound impact on the political future of Kurdistan, and significantly contributed to the marginalization and complexity of the Kurdish

³²⁴ Service l'Historique, I9/I755, Pichon to the ambassador in Washington, approx. 30 Oct. 1919. Cited in: A. E. Montgomery, *The Making of the Treaty of Sevres of 10 August 1920*, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Dec., 1972), p 775.

³²⁵ Helmreich, *From Paris to Sevres*, p. 183

³²⁶ This issue will be discussed in detail in Chapter Six.

³²⁷ Cumming, *Franco-British Rivalry*, p. 48

³²⁸ For more detail see: Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire*.

question. Firstly, the mandate system established and legitimized the decisive international borders of Iraq, which included southern Kurdistan, creating a permanent issue for the national aspirations of the Iraqi Kurds. Mandatory borders involved the denial of ethnic self-determinations. The people of southern Kurdistan resisted being placed within this mandate borders, but they were subjugated by the Royal Air Forces. Another important consequence was the collapse of Feisal's government in Damascus in 1920, which had a very negative impact on the future of Kurdistan. After the collapse of the Arab government in Syria, the Arab nationalist movement was transferred from Damascus to Baghdad. Subsequently, Baghdad became a hub for Arab nationalists and the pro-Sharifian movement, which was an important factor in obstructing the independent Kurdistan.³²⁹

From Sevres to Lausanne 1920-1923:

The following section will discuss the Anglo-French post-Sevres policy. The treaty of Sevres was signed on 10 August, 1920 between the Allied Parties and the Turkish Government of Constantinople and it constituted the first international recognition of Kurdish political rights. The treaty conceded that the Kurds had the right to an autonomous Kurdistan in predominantly Kurdish areas: east of the Euphrates, south of the southern boundary of Armenia, north of the northern frontiers of Syria and Mesopotamia. These Kurdish areas had to opt for independence within a year of the ratification of the treaty, and the Allied Parties did not have any objection if the Kurdish people in Southern Kurdistan wished to join the newly formed independent state.³³⁰ However, in the post-Sevres period many political developments affected the realisation of the terms of the treaty and this period indeed marked a significant turning

³²⁹ This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

³³⁰ Letter from Sir Maurice Hankey to Mr. H.W.Malkin: Treaty of peace with Turkey, Kurdistan, 21st August, 1920, CAB/24/104. T.N.A

point in the Allied Parties' policy towards the settlement of the Near East. This was mainly due to the continuous contrast within the different policies regarding the Middle East, and contradictions in diplomacy brought the region into a state of instability and turmoil. In particular, western powers used local people's rivalries in the region in order to exacerbate conflicts. A good example of this is the Turkish-Greek war. This had very negative consequences for the future of Kurdistan. Toynbee suggested that: 'The distant Western Powers were the protagonists in the war-after-the-war which has devastated considerable tracts of the Near and Middle East, while the local peoples, who were acting and suffering, were pawns'.³³¹

In order to understand this issue, it is worth explaining the two main powers' diverse interests and their different political and diplomatic approaches in the Near East and the outcome of their policy on the whole region's situation in general and the future of Kurdistan in particular.

Apparently, British and French hostility and conflicting interests played a central role in the region's instability and contributed significantly to perpetuating a state of war in Asia Minor. This also led them to conduct a different approach to securing their interests. Regarding this, Montgomery commented: 'Britain and France were divided by conflicting interests and bitter rivalry. They preserved the semblance of unity. But it was only by hard bargaining, jealous debate and reluctant compromise that they were able to reach agreement. In the struggle to create a common treaty they lost sight of the necessity to maintain a common purpose'.³³² The most significant outcome of the Allied 'selfishness and greed' was the rise of nationalist Turks,³³³ and followed by the tragic Turkish-Greek war.

Throughout the Turkish-Greek war the British supported the Greeks, whereas the French opposed them, and openly or secretly supported the Turks, because they did not want British hegemony in the region. The French thought that their support for the Kemalists would preserve their interests in the country and deter British influence in

³³¹ Toynbee, *The western Question*, P. 58

³³² A. E. Montgomery, The Making of the Treaty of Sevres of 10 August 1920, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Dec., 1972) p. 775.

³³³ Yücel Güçlü, The Struggle for Mastery in Cilicia: Turkey, France, and the Ankara Agreement of 1921, *The International History Review*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Sep., 2001) p. 598.

the region. Accordingly, French post-Sevres diplomacy largely focused on supporting the nationalist Turkish movement and a reconciliation of their disputes in order to preserve their interests in the region against British influence. In this context, Churchill criticised the British Near Eastern policy in a letter, on April 26 1922, to Lord Curzon: 'Another set of misunderstanding has arisen with France about Turkey, and I can well understand the many reasons you have for complaint against them there. At the same time the policy which has imposed upon us in regard to Turkey has been a policy contrary not only to interests of France but to those of Great Britain. Our continuing bolstering up of the Greeks and hostility to the Turks has been incomprehensible to the French, who have been unable in their mind to discern any British interests behind it, and consequently have continually suspected all sorts of extraordinary motives'.³³⁴

He also believed this pro-Greek British policy to be Lloyd George's personal policy and that he was not concerned with French interests,³³⁵ which had led France to react against the British interests and back the Turkish nationalists. Regarding the same issue, Arnold Toynbee observed that Anglo-French contrasting policies deeply impacted on the situation in Anatolia. He summarized the underlying causes of the Anglo-French Near Eastern policy as follows: 'France was backing Turkey tentatively against Russia and vigorously against Greece. Great Britain was backing Greece against Turkey because an aggrandized Greece dependent on British support would save Great Britain the trouble on herself imposing of her eastern peace-terms'.³³⁶ Toynbee further noticed that 'This is really a battle between England and France'. The Greek and Turkish pawns continued the French and English game. This pawn-playing, however, has not been so odiously cold and disingenuous as an analysis makes it appear. The trap in which the victims have been caught in order to be exploited was

³³⁴ Churchill, *The World Crisis: The Aftermath*, pp. 415-416; Frank H. Simonds, British Face Lone Battle In Near East, *The Washington Herald*, October, 5, 1922, p. 9.

³³⁵ Churchill, *The World Crisis: The Aftermath*, p. 421

³³⁶ Toynbee, *The western Question*, pp. 61-62.

not cunningly hidden. They rushed into it with their eyes open because they could not resist the bait'.³³⁷ In addition, the Turkish resistance³³⁷ against the French occupation, especially the French military defeats in Cilicia, was an important factor that caused the change of French policy towards Turkish nationalists and the opening of peace negotiations with Turkey, resulting in the French withdrawal from the region.

In addition, the French feared that Britain's attitude towards the Kemalists made them align with the Bolsheviks. To counter this, France therefore offered the British direct negotiation with Angora. This meant that the Turkish nationalists' perspectives and demands would be taken into consideration in the Near Eastern question. One significant outcome of the French stance was the strengthening of the Kemalist position which constituted a real threat to the British presence in Mesopotamia and Kurdistan in a moment in which a British military option against Turkish nationalists was out of question due to the lack of troops and financial pressure. In addition, they feared the growth of the pan-Islamic sympathy and the possible connection of the Kemalists with the Bolsheviks.³³⁸

Alternatively, the British found that it was impossible to secure a British position in the region without adopting a policy of friendly relations with Turkey. This change in the diplomatic and military situation was reflected in the British policy towards the Kemalist movement. Hence, Britain prepared for a concession to the French in respect of their policy and their attitude towards the Kemalists, to reciprocate for the French reconciliation with Arabs. Curzon wished that the upcoming Conference in London would be used to make a compromise with France regarding the Arab and Turkish cases. In his own words: 'A suggestion was made that, as we might be prepared to make concessions to the French regarding Mustapha Kemal, the French, as a *quid pro quo*' should make concessions which would facilitate agreement with the Arabs at Baghdad and Damascus and in Transjordan.'³³⁹

³³⁷ Ibid, pp. 84-85.

³³⁸ Busch, *Mudras to Lausanne*, pp. 173-174.

³³⁹ Conclusion of a conference of Ministers, House of Commons, 13 February, 1921, CAB/23/38.

Hence, early in 1921 Britain was ready to redesign its policy in the Middle East as well as towards the Arabs and Turks. On the international level the Foreign Office was busy with the London Conference Turkish settlement in order to reach a political solution with the other Allied powers. On the other hand, the Colonial Office prepared for the Middle East conference in Cairo, to determine British policy in the Mandate areas under the new formed Middle East department. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five. But the two issues were closely linked and reflected the wider British policy in the region. As far as Ottoman Kurdistan was concerned there was no British fixed policy. However, there were different sets of views presented in the two conferences in connection with the Kurdish issue mainly reflecting the Arab and Turkish factors on the one hand and the Anglo-French relations on the other hand.

The London Conference, held from 21 February to 12 March 1921, aimed to settle the Near Eastern question. It did not achieve its goals, but instead, complicated the situation even further. For example, as far as the future of Kurdistan was concerned it marked a further regression in the British policy towards the Kurdish question. The British tacitly gave up their commitments to guarantee a Kurdish state based on the provisions of the Sevres Treaty. M.P.A. Hankey, the Secretary of Cabinet, wrote in his notes: 'In regard to Kurdistan the Allies would be prepared to consider a modification of the Treaty in a sense in conformity with the existing facts of the situation, on condition of facilities for local autonomies and the adequate protection of Kurdish and Assyro-Chaldean interests.'³⁴⁰

Frankly, the British Government was ready for a revision of the Treaty of Sevres in favour of Angora. Hence, Curzon ordered his staff in the Foreign office to study carefully the possibility of modifying the Treaty of Sevres,³⁴¹ and it was at that point that the Foreign Office studied a proposal in which the questions of Kurdistan, Armenia, and Smyrna would be open to discussion or revision. Regarding Kurdistan, Curzon presented his view in the Cabinet and indicated his desire to consent to Turkish suzerainty over Kurdistan: 'As regards Kurdistan, we had originally contemplated the Kurds being autonomous under some sort of British supervision; but now, owing to our

³⁴⁰ Note by M.P.A Hankey the Secretary to the Cabinet on the proposals of the Allies in regard to the dispute between the Greeks and Turks, March 11th, 1921, CAB/24/120.

³⁴¹ Busch, *Mudras to Lausanne*, p. 236.

present position in Mesopotamia, this would be most difficult to arrange. If an agreement could be come to with the Kemalists it might be possible to arrange for some, sort of autonomous State of Kurdistan under Turkish supervision'.³⁴²

Perhaps Curzon's proposition reflected Major Young's proposal to unite Ottoman Kurdistan under Turkey's suzerainty. Young had argued that the provision that allowed Northern Kurdistan to opt for complete independence from Turkey within a year should be employed for all Kurdish areas including Southern Kurdistan and the Kurdish areas under French zone.³⁴³

Notwithstanding, the French and Italians objected to the plan of sending a commission of the principal Allied powers to Kurdistan,³⁴⁴ with a view of 'facilitating the development of that country and the provision of any assistance which may be required in its administration'.³⁴⁵ The set back of the Kurdish question was due to the disagreement between western powers as well as to the Kemalists' strong stand in the conference with the support of France and Italy. In this regard, Baker Sami, the Angora Chief Delegation, stood strongly against any decision to exclude Kurdistan from Turkey. However, he accepted the local Kurdish autonomy within Turkish integrity.³⁴⁶

Subsequently, the conference resulted in a significant victory for the Turkish nationalists because it gave them the chance to strengthen themselves as well as to obtain secret agreements with France and Italy. In particular, the Franco-Turkish secret agreement marked a significant phase in the two parties' relationship, terminated the war between them, and paved the way for the Franklin-Bouillon agreement in October 1921³⁴⁷ which had a considerable impact on the future of Kurdistan.

Thus, following the London Conference, the Kurdish question largely disappeared in the international context. In addition, the British policy towards the Kurdish issue reflected the development of the situation in the region. There are

³⁴² Conclusion of a Conference of Ministers, House of Commons, 13 February, 1921, CAB/23/38.

³⁴³ Notes on the possible revision of the treaty of Sevres. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

³⁴⁴ Eskander, *Britain's policy*, p. 348.

³⁴⁵ Treaty Series No. 12 (1920). Tripartite agreement between the British Empire, France and Italy respecting Anatolia, House of Common Parliamentary papers.

³⁴⁶ Busch, *Mudras to Lausanne*, p. 242.

³⁴⁷ Howard, *The Partition of Turkey*, p. 459.

different views regarding the post-London conference. It was felt that the British dealt with the situation in terms of its support of the Kurdish movement in Northern Kurdistan against Turkish nationalists. Olson argues that the failure of the conference increased British assistance to the Kurdish movement.³⁴⁸ On the other hand, Eskander argues that the Kurds did not gain any significant British support, but that they assumed a more defensive stance with respect to the Kurdish question.³⁴⁹

In fact, following the London conference, the plan to instigate a Kurdish movement against the Kemalists was still alive. However, the British hesitated to apply this scheme due to diplomatic and military factors. In November 1920, the creation of the Kurdish federations in Northern Kurdistan, to assist Abdulrahman Shernakh's anti-Kemalist movement, and Eastern Kurdistan under the leadership of Simko was considered.³⁵⁰ According to Percy Cox, the High British Commissioner in Baghdad, in the autumn of 1920, the demand for the Kurdish revolution was taken seriously and it was suggested that the following policies should be implemented:

- 1- Jazirat Al Omar must be occupied temporarily.
- 2- Kurds must be provided with arms.
- 3- Kurds must be offered a guarantee that they would not be handed over to French after being liberated.

However, the plan was not adopted mainly because it was considered to be impossible from a diplomatic point of view. In particular, it conflicted with French interests because the latter would not accept such a situation in those Kurdish areas stipulated in the Sykes-Picot agreement.³⁵¹

In June 1921, Cox noted that the failure of the London Conference suggested the option of restarting the Kurdish movement through the Shernakh tribes with the assistance of the Noel and Bederkhan families. Two months later, Cox reported that the new political developments in Persia and Turkey prompted them to support and encourage the Kurdish movement. He summed up the situation: 'There is a growing

³⁴⁸ Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism*, p. 65.

³⁴⁹ Eskander, *Britain's policy*, p. 333.

³⁵⁰ Memorandum, Foreign countries report, No. 51, 7th September, 1921, CAB 24/55/11.

³⁵¹ The high commissioner for Mesopotamia to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, No. 209, 21st June 1921, Air 5/556. T.N.A.

movement in the direction of Kurdish independence which favourably disposes towards Britain. If the proposition develops along these lines, it must sooner or later involve a breaking away of Kurdish districts from Persia and Turkey respectively. The altered attitude of the Persian Government towards Great Britain, and recent Turkish defeats in Anatolia, suggest that considerations which would formerly have prompted us to discourage such a movement have lost for the time being much of their importance'.³⁵²

However, the diplomatic and military success of the Kemalist movement played a key role in preventing the implementation of this policy. In particular, the Franklin-Bouillon agreement of 20 October 1921 had a significant impact on British policy. Only one week after the latter accord, the question came into discussion again, this time strongly opposed by Churchill. He wrote to Cox that he was against "any attempt at the present moment to encourage the Kurds"³⁵³ outside the British sphere of influence; and this was probably, one of the main factors related to the French stand regarding the matter since Churchill indicated that they were in a 'sharp argument' with France.³⁵⁴ Because the solution of the Kurdish question had been seen by the French as a British project it would mean it was automatically against their interests in the wider Middle East situation. The French had already objected to any British proposal for forming the Kurdish autonomy that was included in her sphere according the Sykes-Picot agreement. In short, the French factor was one significant reasons that Cox's plan failed. In his reply to Churchill Cox wrote 'While I agree that it is not time to give the Kurds any encouragement, I trust they may be kept in play..., we shall want every possible assistance should the present negotiations with Turkey break down'.³⁵⁵

³⁵² Foreign countries report, NO.51, 7th September, 1921, CAB/ 24/155.

³⁵³ C.O. 730/6 no. 519, Churchill to Cox on 11 November. Cited in: Olson, *The Second Time around: British Policy toward the Kurds (1921-22)*, *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, Bd. 27, Nr. 1/3 (1987), p. 101.

³⁵⁴ Telegram from Secretary of state for Colonies to the High commission of Iraq, 11th November, 1921. F.O. 371/6347. T.N.A.

³⁵⁵ British Empire Report, No. 58, 7th December, 1921, CAB/24/157.

The Franklin-Bouillon agreement:

The agreement which was signed on 20 October, 1921 in Angora by Henri Franklin-Bouillon, from the French side, and Yussif Kemal Bey from the Turkish side had a significant impact on the diplomatic tensions between the two powers.

The British government strongly criticised the secret agreement and claimed that it was directed against their interests. The British regarded it as an agreement signed by an ally with an enemy country without any previous consultation. Curzon presumed that the agreement established a state of peace between France and Angora and that it was France's official recognition in the Grand National assembly as being the sovereign authority in Turkey. In addition, it contravened the Anglo-French Treaty of 4 September 1914, and the London Pact of November 1915. Based on the agreement France handed over certain significant strategic areas to Mosul and Mesopotamia such as Nisibin and Jezirit Ibn Omer as well as handing back the Baghdad Railway to Turkey.³⁵⁶ Indeed, the agreement violated the treaty of Sevres which was what the National Assembly aimed at when it cancelled the Treaty. Furthermore, the British viewed that the object of the agreement was against their interests in the region, in particular because the Kemalists threatened their position in Mesopotamia and Mosul Vilayet.³⁵⁷

Specifically, according to the British authorities in Iraq the French intended to support the Kemalists following the Bouillon agreement, by funding them logistically and militarily. The plan was to give them arms and allow them to use the railways to transport their troops to Kurdistan. In return, the Kemalists promised the French priority oil concessions in the Vilayet of Mosul.³⁵⁸ In this regard, on January 27th, the Foreign Office had obtained 'irrefutable evidence', when Franklin-Bouillon himself acknowledged to Headlam Morley and Childs, of the Foreign Office, that 'the French

³⁵⁶ Memorandum: Curzon of Kedleston to the Count de Saint- Aulaire, November 5, 1921, CAB 24/129/102.

³⁵⁷ Cumming, Franco-British, p.145

³⁵⁸ Foreign Office, British Empire report, No. 58, 7th December, 1921, CAB24/157; Memorandum, M.E. Dept., Colonial Office: foreign incitement of the Turks to attack Iraq, December 13, 1921, CAB24/131/67.

army, upon withdrawal from Cilicia, had handed over arms, uniforms, munitions and ten aeroplanes to the Turks'.³⁵⁹ On 7 September, in the Cabinet meeting on the Near East question, Curzon spelled out that the failure of the Near Eastern settlement was chiefly due to the 'consistent treachery' of France, and their military and diplomacy support for the Kemalists.³⁶⁰

Moreover, the British were concerned about Turco-French influence on Kurdistan. They thought that the French were conspiring against them with the help of the Turks through the establishment of a Kurdish confederation under their protection 'while it would also be not inimical to the French aim of setting up a great Kurdish confederacy under French patronage, and the embarrassment of King Feisal in Iraq'.³⁶¹ In this regard, British reports indicated that the French government intended to set up a Kurdish entity similar to the Transjordanian in the area Urfa, Veranshire, Ras Al Ain, Mardin, Nisibin, under one of the sons of Ibrahim Pasha Milli. This was the outcome of a visit of Milli Chiefs to Beirut, where they were very well received by General Goureaud, the French High Commissioner in Syria and Lebanon.³⁶² Further, they reported that the Pan Kurdish Committee with its headquarters in Diarbaker, aimed at independence under French protection communicating through Ibrahim Pasha Milly.³⁶³

Therefore, the British political adviser in Kirkuk urged his government to declare, as soon as possible, an independent Kurdish state on the Iraqi border based on the wishes of the majority. In his view this was the only chance of preventing the Kurds from going to the Turkish side and blocking the advancing Turks.³⁶⁴

On 16th June, 1920, Amin Ali Bederkhan, president of Kurdish social association, offered to work with the French in the administration of the Kurdish districts

³⁵⁹ Montgomery, *Allied Policy*, p. 204

³⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 244.

³⁶¹ Possibility of a Turkish offensive in Northern Iraq. Memorandum by the secretary of state for war, 21st November, 1921. CAB/24/129. T.N.A

³⁶² The divisional adviser, Mosul, to High Commissioner, Baghdad, 2th July 1921, Air 23/256. T.N.A

³⁶³ From special service, Mosul to the divisional adviser, Mosul, No. G./235, 2nd July 1921, Air 23/256. T.N.A

³⁶⁴ From adviser Kirkuk to High commissioner, Baghdad, NO. P.A.773., 18th December 1922, Air 20/711. T.N.A

under their zone especially Jazeera Ibn Omer.³⁶⁵ However, regardless of Kurdish demands for their rights, the French relinquished these portions to Turkish Nationalists. Amen Ali Bederkhan strongly protested against the French agreement with the Kemalists especially the abandonment of certain Kurdish districts to the Kemalists. He accused the French of being responsible for all the Kurds' troubles due to France's support of the Turkish nationalists. He further predicted that the Kurdish distrust for the Allied would lead them to armed struggle.³⁶⁶

The period between the London and Lausanne conferences can be considered to be the end of the Sevres Treaty with regard to the future of Kurdistan, since Articles 62, 63 and 64 became meaningless. As a consequence the former Ottoman Kurdistan was divided into three spheres of influence: Southern Kurdistan under the British, the Northern part under Turkey, and the Western one under a French Mandate in Syria. This meant that the Kurdish question remained primarily a domestic affair in those areas and there was no question of Southern Kurdistan opting for union with Northern Kurdistan at any future date; hence the union of Kurdistan was not a valid option in the British perspective.

The Kurdish nationalist movement's attitude to Anglo-French policy

The Anglo-French policies reflected the divergence of the Kurds' sentiments and views regarding the future of their country and in particular regarding the two powers' plan for the division of Kurdistan into different zones of influence. Certain key figures within the Kurdish nationalist movement, such as Sharif Pasha and Said Abdul Qadir protested against this arrangement, demanding that Kurdistan should be treated as an ethnic and geographic unity. Therefore, they wanted protection by a single power.

Kurdish nationalist leaders were aware of France's ambitions in Kurdistan and its plan to divide it. According to Rayan, from the British High Commission in

³⁶⁵ Komalaw Rekraxawa Kurdiakan, 1918-1933, *la Balganamayaki Wazarati Daraway Baritani u Faranca*, Vol 1, T: Najati Najati Abdullah, Zheen, Sulaymani, 2007, p. 153.

³⁶⁶ Ibid, p.162

Constantinople, Said Abdul Qadir was informed in Sharif Pasha's letter from Paris that Kurdistan would be divided under French and British protectorates. In a meeting with Rayan Said Abdul Qadir strongly appealed to the British Government to adopt a policy in tune with Kurdish political aspirations. Abdul Qadir said to Rayan: 'we seemed to be leaving things to the French in Kurdistan' and added, 'his own correspondence from Paris led him to believe that the French were going to stretch up to Sivas, Kharput and a good deal further'. The French, he said, had made attractive advances to the Kurds, however, they did not accept the French proposal because they looked for British protection. Also, they thought that accepting this offer meant that they consented to the division of their country.

The Kurds were strongly opposed to the idea of dividing Kurdistan into different zones of influence between France and Britain. They thought it preferable to maintain the unity of Kurdistan under Turkish sovereignty, with a guaranteed autonomy, to a division between the French (Northern Kurdistan) and the British (southern Kurdistan). At the same time, in a letter, the Kurdish Committee in Constantinople wrote to the British in protest against the partition of Kurdistan and urged them to settle the question by taking into consideration its ethnicity and geographical location. However, the Bederkhan members did not trust the Turks and they did not appear to be totally against the idea of a partition. It can be argued that the two powers' rivalry caused deep division in the Kurdish nationalists' ambitions regarding the future of Kurdistan.

Conclusion

Anglo-French relationships between 1914 and 1923 had deeply impacted on the Middle East situation. Their wartime diplomacy resulted in the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916, which became the first guideline to the political map status of the Middle East. Accordingly, the Kurds' rights were completely ignored, and their lands divided into different spheres of zones among the Allied parties. However, Russia's absence in the region until after the October revolution in 1917 had such a deep impact on the Anglo-French relationships that the British regarded the Sykes-Picot agreement as invalid. This caused controversy between the two powers in the region.

Furthermore, the post-war rivalry between the two powers became the primary obstacle to the Middle Eastern settlement during the Peace Conference in Paris and this perpetual delay had negative consequences for the future of Kurdistan. The Anglo-French dispute over the Mosul Vilayet played an active role in British political decisions regarding the future of Southern Kurdistan. In addition, the conflict surrounding the Syrian question had a negative outcome regarding the future of Kurdistan. Due to the collapse of the Feisal's rule in Damascus because of the French military intervention, the Arab nationalist centre transferred from Damascus to Baghdad and this influenced Britain's policy in the region, and strengthened the pro-Arab perspective within the British political staff at the expense of the Kurdish aspiration. Presumably, this was one reason behind the inclusion of Southern Kurdistan into Mesopotamia.

Additionally, Anglo-French rivalry in the Middle East became one of the dominant issues in the peace conference meetings creating an obstacle to the implementation of Kurdish political rights. Remarkably, it subordinated the Wilsonian concept within the Nationalist and self-determination approaches. Instead, the two powers adopted imperialistic approaches primarily to protect their own aims and interests in the region. The British, in particular, used the principle of self-determination perfectly in the cause of their imperial projects. Their call for Arab claims in Syria based on the McMahon-Husain 1915 understanding was mainly aimed at curbing France's leverage in the region.

This rivalry played a key role in decisions regarding Kurdistan's future. Typically, the French objected to Kurdistan's independence or autonomy mainly due to their

suspicion that Britain would have an influence in the area. Occasionally, the British had similar views regarding the Kurdish question because of French ambitions in Kurdistan. This left Kurdistan without a settlement up to the San Remo Agreement in 1920. Despite the negative aspects of the Sevres Treaty, it marked a significant point regarding the Kurdish question. However, the Allied post-Sèvres policy played a key role in the cancellation of the Treaty to replace it with the Lausanne Treaty. Their conflict of interests in the Near East caused anxiety and instability in the region and obstructed the Turkey settlement. In particular, their contradicting policies, that is, the British pro-Greek policy on the one hand and French pro-Kemalists with its secret agreement on the other had the effect of destabilizing the area. Therefore, the French played a key role in consolidating the Turkish nationalists' position by supporting them both diplomatically and militarily. Indeed, France's policy led to the enforcement of the Nationalist pact instead of the Sèvres Treaty. This deeply damaged the situation in Kurdistan in different ways: firstly, it created the opportunity for Turkish nationalists to impose their hegemony throughout Kurdistan by spreading anti-Western and pan-Islamic sympathy propaganda among the Kurds. This constituted an impediment to the growth of Kurdish national feeling. Secondly, it empowered the Kemalist movement which de facto altered the political map in the region which forced the British to adopt a friendly policy towards the Kemalists and to negotiate with them in the Lausanne Conference held in 1922-1923 which in turn proposed a new treaty to replace the Sevres one.

Thus, the two powers' approaches and divergent policies subordinated the Kurdish question in favour of Turkish and Arab nationalists. Northern Kurdistan remained within the new constituted Turkey Republic whilst the Southern part depended on the Mosul question and was eventually incorporated into Mesopotamia.

This conflict of interests was in great part responsible for the deterioration of the situation in Anatolia. In particular, the military occupation of Smyrna by Greek troops had a dramatic effect upon the Turkish population since through the 'length and breadth of Anatolia' it had awakened a Turkish national feeling,³⁶⁷ that would lead to the Turkish-Greek conflict and which the Allied powers failed to control. Consequently,

367 Howard, the Peace Conference, p. 46.

due to these Allied policies and actions the Turkish nationalist influence regarding Kurdistan increased.

Chapter Four

The Oil Factor: its influence on International Affairs and its impact on the Future of Kurdistan

In this chapter I argue that Kurdistan's political situation was largely affected by the question of oil, and that this played a significant part in preventing the establishment of an independent Kurdish entity, whether it be a United Kurdish state or a Kurdish autonomy. In particular, due to the entanglement of the future of Kurdistan with other issues, the settlement of the question further complicated the situation. A key factor was that oil was an important variable in the British Military advance on Mosul and another, was Britain's decision regarding the inclusion of the region into the Iraqi state. This study shows that the importance of oil to the British could not be explained only from the perspective of their dependence on Mosul's oilfields; they also feared the other Great Powers' interest in them. Hence, this research contributes to the relevant literature since it examines the oil factor in terms of the Great Powers' rivalry in the Middle East. This adds to our understanding of Kurdistan and the Middle East since it explains the nature of international relations in general during the period; and it suggests that these relationships shaped the future of the region in the following years, and that are still deeply embedded in the current Middle East crises. Introduction

Although a number of works concerning the influence of oil on the Mosul Question have been produced no exhaustive attempt has been made with regard to the impact of the Question on the future of Kurdistan. The primary aim of this chapter is to offer a more comprehensive picture of the question by examining the impact of the oil factor on the British Kurdish policy especially in respect of the British decision to include the Mosul vilayet within the Iraqi state.

The chapter focuses on the connections between the oil, territory and boundary questions, and attempts to explain how oil shaped the future of certain regions thus determining their frontiers, and in particular, the Mosul vilayet (Southern Kurdistan). I also argue that the discovery of oil in Kurdish territories in the Ottoman Empire played

a significant role in bringing Kurdistan into the arena of the Great Powers' clash of interests and to do this, I highlight the influence of the oil factor in decision-making in the Middle East settlement. I also discuss how the Allies' economic motives subordinated the principles of nationality and self-determination which were purported to be the basis of the Peace Conference. This was especially true of the Mosul question since the League of Nations' commission adopted economic and strategic approaches rather than the ethnic one.

In addition, this study demonstrates how the oil lobbyist group together with the oil Companies influenced British military and political decisions, notably the occupation of Mosul in the latter part of the War. It shows how influential people such as Admiral Slade, Mark Sykes, Maurice Hankey, the Cabinet Secretary, and other Oil lobby groups were key in influencing British decisions to occupy and retain its domination in Mesopotamia, particularly in the Mosul vilayet.

The question of oil and its influence on Britain's war aims and policy especially regarding the Mosul Vilayet, have been heavily debated. Some argue that oil did not play a significant role in determining British perspectives concerning the Mosul vilayet in both its occupation on 1 November 1918 and then its inclusion into the new Iraqi state. In its perspective, however, the Empire's strategic considerations lay primarily behind British motives with respect to the Mosul vilayet. In particular, the British Official perspective denied the influence of oil on Britain's policy regarding the area and disclaimed any connection between oil and the inclusion of Mosul into the Iraqi state.³⁶⁸ Arnold Toynbee and Kenneth Kirkwood argue that Great Britain did not want Mosul on account of its oil, but for strategic reasons.³⁶⁹ Other historians share this British point of view or do not consider that the oil question was an important motive behind Britain's concerns about Mosul.³⁷⁰ By contrast, some historians believe that the oil question

³⁶⁸ For example see Curzon's speech at the Lausanne Conference, 23 January 1923, CO 730/46/4849.

³⁶⁹ Arnold J. Toynbee and Kenneth P. Kirkwood, *Turkey*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1927, pp. 279-80.

³⁷⁰ For example: Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism*; McDowall, *A History of Kurds*; Robert McNamara, *The Hashemites - The Dream of Arabia: The Peace Conferences of 1919-23 and Their Aftermath - Makers of the Modern World*, Haus Publishing LTD, London- 2009, p. 90; Eskander, *Britain's Policy towards the Kurdish Question*, p. 244.

played a central role in British policy decisions regarding the future of the region.³⁷¹ Kamal Mazhar, a Kurdish historian, also stresses the influence of the oil factor in the Imperial game in the region. He states that it was one of the main hidden factors both before and throughout the war in the Middle and Near East due to the Great Powers' rivalry in consolidating their influence and securing their interests.³⁷² In the same context, Mejcher Helmut indicates the influence of oil on Britain's policy towards Iraq, and points out that in the Cabinet and committee meetings the question of oil took less time than other issues. He argues that the reason that oil was not mentioned is because 'it was always in mind'.³⁷³ I shall analyse this view throughout the chapter.

The chapter is divided into three chronological parts. The first discusses the pre-war period from the beginning of the new century up to the outbreak of the First World War. It discusses the Great Powers' rivalry, in particular Britain, Germany and America, for granting oil concessions in the region. This is followed by an examination of the role of oil in the power game in the Middle East, both during and after the war. It will investigate the extent to which this factor played a role in shaping the Middle East's political map and the determination of its boundaries. This is followed by a discussion of three main points: the influence of oil in Britain's policy in terms of the Sykes-Picot agreement and the Occupation of the Mosul Vilayet in the latter part of 1918 and in particular the role oil played in the conferences held during the period, such as in Paris 1919, San Remo 1920, and Lausanne 1922-1923. Then it examines the impact of oil on the future of Kurdistan and, in particular, it considers the connection between Southern Kurdistan's oil and the inclusion of the area within the Iraqi state which had a deep impact on Kurdistan's future.

³⁷¹ Elizabeth Monroe, *Britain's Moment in the Middle East, 1914-1956*, (London: 1963), 103; V. H. Rothwell, Mesopotamia in British War Aims, 1914-1918, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Jun., 1970), pp. 273-294; Marian Kent, *Oil and empire : British policy and Mesopotamian oil, 1900-1920*, New York : Barnes & Noble, 1976; Helmut Mejcher, *Imperial Quest for Oil*, pp131-144; Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, p70; Liam Anderson and Gareth Stansfield, *Crisis in Kirkuk: The Ethnopolitics of Conflict and Compromise* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), p.15, and Ian Rutledge, *Enemy on the Euphrates*, pp.30-31.

³⁷² Kamal Mazhar Ahmad, *Kurdistan during the First World War*, translated by Ali Maher Ibrahim, London, Saqi Books, 1994, p.18.

³⁷³ Helmut Mejcher, *Imperial Quest for Oil: Iraq 1910-1928*, Ithaca Press, London, 1976, p.166.

The Pre-War Period

At the turn of the twentieth century there had been a remarkable change in the nature of the Great Powers' rivalry with respect to the Ottoman Empire. This was due to new developments, principally the emergence of Germany and America as the new rival powers in the area. In addition, the influence of the Baghdad Railway and the oil question impacted the Great Powers' game. In 1902 the Germans were granted the concession of the Baghdad railway project by the Ottoman government which became a central issue since the Railway would pass through the region which had become an international "danger zone". The question also exceeded the bounds of Turco-German relationships and became an international diplomatic dispute. Hence, its territories and its natural resources became 'stakes of diplomacy'.³⁷⁴

Oil comprised an important part of the Baghdad Railway and other road projects in the region. In particular, during the early twentieth century oil became a significant element in both industrial and military aspects of the Great Powers' strategy. In view of this, the British considered the Baghdad Railway project to be a strategic threat to their position and interests in the region especially in terms of the concept of securing the route to India. Therefore, the Indian government forged agreements with the Arab ruling Sheikhs to develop the oil fields and this was to be entrusted only to the British and to no other power. In October 1913 the Shaikh of Kuwait gave the undertaking to the British; and then the Turkish admitted the de facto reality.³⁷⁵

The question of oil and the Great Powers' political leverage in the Middle East were inextricably connected. The rivalry over the Middle East's oil resources in both Persian and Ottoman territories began before the twentieth century. However, the Russian-American competition over the Persian Gulf oil started in 1888.³⁷⁶ Then, at the turn of the century the British came to dominate through the D'Arcy group concessions

³⁷⁴ Edward Mead Earle, *Turkey, The Great Powers, and The Baghdad Railway: A study In Imperialism*. Macmillan, New York, 1923, pp. 4-8.

³⁷⁵ Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *Oil in the Middle East: Its discovery and development*, Oxford University press, London, 1954, p.26.

³⁷⁶ R. W. Ferrier, *The History of the British Petroleum Company: Volume 1*, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p.27.

granted by the Persian government and subsequently renamed the Anglo Persian Oil Company (APOC) of which 51% of the shares were owned by the British Government.

During this period the powers' struggle (chiefly Britain, Germany and America) over Mesopotamian oil increased. They initially dispatched technical missions to survey the oilfields. Then they followed with diplomatic intervention at Constantinople acting on behalf of companies and groups, the would-be concessioners.³⁷⁷ This became the basis of their claims and became a sharp diplomatic dispute between the powers, particularly Britain and the U.S. in the post-war years. A British Memorandum commented on the question stating that, 'In the period before the war a grant of concession from the Turkish government to exploit the oilfields of Mesopotamia; and more particularly those situated in the Vilayet of Mosul and Baghdad, was the subject of intense commercial and international rivalry at Constantinople. Opposing groups, principally British and German, although unable to obtain the concessions for themselves, were each strong enough to prevent their rivals from obtaining it; with the result that it was not until June 1914, when a fusion of the rival interests had arranged, that the concession was awarded to this combined group'.³⁷⁸

The Great Powers were aware of the existence of a large number of oil wells through observations and inquiries of travellers and geological missions throughout the nineteenth century; and foreign observers became increasingly interested in searching for petroleum in the area since geological reports and travellers recorded the potential of vast amounts of oil in the Kurdish regions. Early in 1871 a commission of German experts visited the Mosul and Baghdad vilayets to search for oil and reported in glowing terms.³⁷⁹ Then, during his journey to the region in the late nineteenth century F. R. Maunsell, observed oil deposits and published a report in a Journal entitled, *The Mesopotamian Petroleum Field*. He emphasised that the most important part of the Mesopotamian oilfields stretched from Mosul to Mendali, at a distance of 220 km, with a range of about 60 miles. He stated that oil was mainly located in the Kurdish territories: 'Close to Kirkuk, in the low sandstone and conglomerate ridges near the town, are several petroleum springs, which form one of the most important commercial

³⁷⁷ Marian Kent, *Oil and empire: British policy and Mesopotamian oil, 1900-1920*, p.17.

³⁷⁸ Memorandum: the oilfields of Persia and Mesopotamia, Intelligence Department, Naval Staff, Feb 26, 1919. F.O 608/273.

³⁷⁹ Longrigg, *Oil in the Middle East*, p. 14.

resources of the place... A few miles south of Kifri, in the low ridge called the Jebel Oniki Imam, are naphtha pits, which are also worked, but are not so extensive as those at Kirkuk. At TuzKhurmatli, on the same line of hills at Kifri, are also naphtha springs, situated about 2 miles east of the place, at the foot of the NeftDagh, or Naphtha Mountain'.³⁸⁰

French and German experts lodged similar reports. M. Jacques de Morgan, the French researcher, who travelled throughout the region in 1889-1891 and 1897, indicated Kurdistan's potential oil resources specifically between Kirkuk to Zuhab and Qasr-i-Shirin.³⁸¹ In 1901 a mission of German experts announced that the region had a vast amount of oil which they described as 'a lake of petroleum'. Therefore, they advised the development of these oilfields and in 1904 the Deutsche Bank obtained a contract with the Ottoman government with the option for one year, for a survey of the oil fields in the area.³⁸²

Additionally, between August and October 1908, L.C.Tassart of the prestigious Ecole des Mines travelled through the Tigris Valley, the Mosul region in Kurdistan. He wrote several reports on the economic value of the region and concluded that the main areas were located in Kurdistan, including Qayyarah, Zakhu, and Kirkuk and that certainly there 'appear to be signs indicating a vast oil-bearing region'.³⁸³ Thus, in the years before the First War with the growth of the Great Powers' awareness and knowledge of the existence of a large amount oil in Kurdistan, there was a substantial increase in their interest in the country; and it influenced their competition and efforts to gain possession of the oil resources in the region. As Edward Mead Earle commented on the matter 'Its deposits of oil alone were enough to arouse the cupidity of the Great Powers'.³⁸⁴

³⁸⁰ F. R. Maunsell, 'The Mesopotamian Petroleum Field', *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 5 (May, 1897), pp. 530-532.

³⁸¹ Ferrier, *The History of the British Petroleum Company*, p. 27.

³⁸² Earle, *Turkey, The Great Powers*, p. 15.

³⁸³ Edward Peter Fitzgerald, France's Middle Eastern Ambitions, the Sykes-Picot Negotiations, and the Oil Fields of Mosul, 1915-1918, *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 66, No. 4 (Dec., 1994) p.701.

³⁸⁴ Earle, *Turkey, The Great Powers*, p.5.

In the years before the First World War British interest increased in Middle Eastern oil, the Admiralty playing a critical role in the formulation of British oil policy in the region;³⁸⁵ its oil demands were translated into foreign policy by the Foreign Office. This led to the involvement of the British government in the oil question by providing diplomatic support through the negotiations for obtaining oil concessions.

The Great Powers also realised that oil would become an influential factor in the future. The Admiralties of both Britain and the U.S. were in the forefront of their respective navies' switch from coal to oil as their source of power. In particular, the British Admiralty played a key role in formulating the government's oil policy. Admiral Fisher, First Sea Lord from 1904-1910, persuaded the Navy to switch from coal to oil. Then, in 1913 Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, felt that the only way to safeguard its oil supplies was that the British government acquire a majority stake in a British oil company. Therefore, as early as 1914 the British government acquired 51 per cent of the shareholding of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. This marked a significant evolution in the British Middle Eastern oil policy, which Marian Kent describes as a 'radical move'.³⁸⁶ The central object of the formulation of the British oil policy was Britain's imperial position and her strategic requirements.³⁸⁷ While the rival parties' interests in oil concessions in the region especially those of the Germans and Americans, were the main obstacle to this British aim.

All the parties' struggles to gain possession of the oil resources from the Ottoman government significantly influenced international affairs and the political future of the region as well. In particular, these territories were among the most undeveloped economic regions in the world.³⁸⁸ At this point, it is worth providing a brief summary of this rivalry over oil concessions.

America's initial interest in the Middle East was connected to the Chester concessions. In 1899 Admiral Colby M. Chester was sent to Turkey for the purpose of supporting the American missionaries in the region. He established friendly relations

³⁸⁵ Kent, *Oil and Empire*, p.5.

³⁸⁶ Kent, *Moguls and Mandarins: Oil, Imperialism and the Middle East in British Foreign Policy 1900-1940*, Routledge, New York, 2011, p.1.

³⁸⁷ Mejcher, *Imperial Quest for Oil*, p.7

³⁸⁸ Earle, *Turkey, The Great Powers*, p. 5.

with certain Ottoman natives. Then in 1908 he was granted the railroad concessions by Sultan Abdul Hamid. Henry Woodhouse indicated that the Sultan granted these concessions to Admiral Chester because the latter had undertaken to establish cordial relations between the American and the Ottoman government.³⁸⁹ The concessions included the right to explore the oilfields and mines for a number of years. The Young Turks, however, postponed the concessions.

Then in 1910 Chester applied the plan to grant mineral concessions extending from Alexandretta to the oilfields in the Mosul, Mesopotamia, Kirkuk, Chemchamal and Sulaymania regions. The concession also granted the building of railroads from the Mediterranean to and along the River Euphrates, Bitlis and Van, with the privilege to extend along the River Tigris to Diarbekir, to Mosul, to the oilfields of AltunKupri, Kirkuk, Sulaymania, and to the Persian border; and then from these oilfields to Baghdad to include exclusive rights to exploit all mineral resources including oil within twenty Kilometres on each side of the railway.³⁹⁰ Clearly, the Chester group concessions mainly concerned the Kurdish territories in both Southern and Northern portions.

The project was signed by the Grand Vizier in May 1911; however, the Ottoman Parliament decided to postpone considering it until the new session, but it was not ratified due to the outbreak of the Turko-Italian war in 1911. In addition, the Chester concession faced opposition from the Anatolian Railway Company as well as the German and British Ambassadors who protested to the Turkish government that the concession was against their respective interests.³⁹¹ Consequently the group decided to withdraw its financial deposit. Kent states that by that time the scheme was 'virtually dead'.³⁹² Then in 1914 the proposal was renewed to ratification but the outbreak of the First World War prevented this process.³⁹³ Nevertheless, the Chester concessions marked significant steps in the evolution of the American policy in the region. In particular one of the important parts of the railway concessions included many Kurdish

³⁸⁹ American Oil Claims, p. 955.

³⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 956; Earle, Turkey, *The Great Powers*, p341; Benjamin Shwadran, *the Middle East, Oil and the Great Powers*, Wiley: Halsted Press, New York, 1973.p. 195.

³⁹¹ Ibid, p.198.

³⁹² Kent, *Oil and Empire*, p.27.

³⁹³ Shwadran, *the Middle East, Oil and the Great Powers*, p.198.

territories as mentioned above. This influenced the Kurdistan situation in the post-war settlement, which I shall discuss in the latter part of this chapter.

Besides this, there was strong rivalry between Britain and Germany regarding the Middle East oil concessions. Through the Deutsche Bank in Berlin, Germany obtained permission to carry out a survey of the Mesopotamian oilfields. In addition, the Baghdad Railway concessions gave Germany the right to exploit all minerals and oil resources within twenty kilometres on either side of the railway line. The British were also interested in these oil resources which resulted in rivalry between the two countries. Therefore, oil became an important issue in the context of the large and complex Anglo-German imperial game in the Middle East.

It is important to note that the Anglo-German struggle over oil was closely linked with the question of their naval rivalry at that time. In particular, the Germans appeared to offer an alarming challenge to British Navy supremacy since German sea power was growing rapidly and increased Britain's fear,³⁹⁴ hence, British decision makers wanted to remove Germany's naval threat to their security.³⁹⁵ It was considered that Germany's control of the oilfields would increase the potential threat to Britain's strategy. Therefore, it was vital that the British create obstacles to German control and to obtain the oil concessions in the Ottoman Empire, in particular, when oil appeared to be an important element in military power especially to the navies in the decade before the First World War. On this, Helmut Mejcher commented, 'As Whitehall was soon to show, where oil was concerned it would not tolerate their holding even nominal power.'³⁹⁶ Therefore, the British attempted to secure the important oil fields in the Mosul and Baghdad vilayets which they wished to bring under their influence.

In 1908 the D'Arcy group sent a dispatch to Istanbul for the purpose of obtaining the Baghdad and Mosul Vilayets' oil concessions. However, Germany's opposition prevented Istanbul from granting it. Anglo-German rivalry continued until they were convinced that they needed to work closely together to bring about a satisfactory

³⁹⁴ Colin Davies, *British Oil Policy in the Middle East, 1919-1932*, thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1973, p.5.

³⁹⁵ For this question see: John H. Maurer, Arms Control and the Anglo-German Naval Race before World War I: Lessons for Today?, *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 112, No. 2 (Summer, 1997), pp. 285-306.

³⁹⁶ Mejcher, *Imperial Quest for Oil*, p.14.

solution to the oil question. The British government endeavoured to use its influence in order to prevent the oil concessions obtaining by any other groups except British. Hence the British government for several years urged the Turkish side to give the oil concessions of Mosul and Baghdad areas to D'Arcy.³⁹⁷ In July 1913 and March 1914 Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary, sent strong warnings to Istanbul in a protest against plans to establish its own oil company in Mosul, Baghdad and in the Basra Vilayets, and he threatened to radically change Britain's policy with respect to the Ottoman Empire. Grey stressed that any company established in the Vilayet had to give at least a 50 per cent stake to the D'Arcy group.³⁹⁸

Ultimately, in 1914 the British and Germans came to an understanding regarding the setting up of the Turkey Petroleum Company for the purposes of acquisition and exploitation. About three quarters of the oilfields were acquired by the British in Mosul and the Baghdad Vilayets. The final negotiations were with the Turkish Oil Company through the British and German Ambassadors in Constantinople and the Turkish government and they reached agreement over the oil concessions in June 1914.³⁹⁹ Probably, one of the reasons for a convergence between Britain and German was in order to keep other rival parties out of the disputed oil regions especially the Americans and the French. Benjamin Shwadran notes that 'The Europeans were determined to keep the Americans out'.⁴⁰⁰ During the post-war period the legality of the pre-war concessions of the T.P.C soon came under heavy attack and they became a controversial point later on between the Americans and the British regarding the validity of the company's rights.

Taken together, it can be concluded that in the pre-war period the Great powers and the private companies were involved in the Middle Eastern Oil concessions by the Ottoman Empire, particularly the Mosul Vilayet. Nevertheless, on the outbreak of the war the different parties questioned the validity of these concessions and this became a controversial dispute between them. Kurdistan became the central point of these concessions, and therefore the issue increased its importance to the Allied powers,

³⁹⁷ Oil concessions in Mesopotamia, 14 April 1914, File 3877/1912 Pt 3, IOR/L/PS/10/302/1

³⁹⁸ Helmut Mejcher, Oil and British Policy towards Mesopotamia, 1914-1918, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Oct., 1972), p.377.

³⁹⁹ For detail see: Earle, *Turkey, Great power*, pp.260-266.

⁴⁰⁰ Shwadran, *the Middle East, Oil and the Great Powers*, P.195.

especially Britain. In other words, the pre-war oil concessions internationalized Kurdistan which had, in the post war settlement, a significant impact on its political future.

The War Period

During the development of the war, the strategic importance of oil increased especially for the purposes of the British Empire's navy, military, and industry. Indeed, the British government was obliged to secure its supplies because most of the oil came from America, and it became an 'imperial question'. Therefore, the Board of Trade prepared a memorandum on 'The Future of Oil supplies' which emphasised the importance of the oil situation for the Empire. It also noted that, 'the war has made clear that it is imperatively necessary for His Majesty's Government to take immediate and effective action to safeguard the future of oil supplies of the British empire, hence the supply issue was no longer merely a commercial question but it was an Imperial question 'of the first magnitude'. The document also made clear that the Government should take two immediate actions, first 'to bring the British sources of supply under British control, so that their development may not be restricted by foreign concerns in the interest of their oil fields outside the Empire'. Secondly, it needed to 'obtain control as large foreign sources of supply as possible'.⁴⁰¹

It seems evident that private companies and oil lobbies played a fundamental role in involving the British government in the question of oil and the development of Britain's oil policy. In this respect the Anglo-Persian Oil Company had played a crucial role in persuading the British government to purchase its majority shareholding.⁴⁰² In particular, Middle East oil became involved in questions of military strategy and post-war territorial ambitions for the British. Marian Kent argues that the 'wartime interdependence of strategy and supply thus meant that Middle East oil concessions played an important part in the evolution in the British Government oil policy'.⁴⁰³ The

⁴⁰¹ Ferrier, *The History of the British Petroleum Company*, p.243.

⁴⁰² V. H. Rothwell, Mesopotamia in British War aims 1914-1918, *Historical Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 2(June. 1970).

⁴⁰³ Kent, *Oil and Empire*, p.18.

basis of this policy had already been established through the government's shareholding in the Anglo-Persian oil company in the years before the war.

As already mentioned the war forced the British to identify their war aims and therefore, the de Bunsen Committee was established to determine the situation in Asiatic Turkey. There were different views and ideas within British circles with regard to the question which were mainly dominated by the Empire's security concerns in the region; oil was also one important consideration that the Committee stressed for controlling Mosul. Within the British government departments, the Admiralty was most concerned about oil supplies, and therefore demanded that Britain should have its own oil-bearing areas. The First Sea Lord, Sir Henry Jackson, suggested to the De Bunsen committee that because of its valuable oil fields, Mosul should become under the British sphere.⁴⁰⁴ The role of private companies and oil lobbyist groups played crucial role in the involvement of the British Government in the question of oil and the development of its oil policy. The Anglo-Persian Company had an influence on the British Imperial policy, in particular, Admiral Slade's views were influential in considering the protection of its oil resources and the Anglo-Persian concessions as well.⁴⁰⁵ Kurdistan was at the centre of this policy since most of the oil fields in both Persian and Ottoman Empires were located in Kurdish areas.

The most important aspect of the considerations concerning oil in the course of these discussions was the northern boundary of the British sphere which comprised most of the British economic interests in the Middle East especially the oilfields of Mosul and Kirkuk.⁴⁰⁶ Hirtzel stressed the economic importance of the Kurdish areas in Mosul Vilayet and he concluded that the only alternative was to leave Kurdistan to Russia, as previously discussed.⁴⁰⁷ Then he remarked that if this option should be considered it would be necessary to give up the Southern Kurdistan to Russia, in order that the whole of Kurdistan became under one control and administration. However, he stressed that Southern Kurdistan should become under the British sphere because it 'is extremely fertile as well as petroliferous, and includes the important frontier, district

404 British Desiderata in Turkey in Asia: Report, Proceedings and Appendices of the Committee Appointed by the Prime Minister, 1915. CAB 21/1.CAB 27/1. T.N.A

405 Ibid.

406 Nevakivi, *Britain, France*, p. 22.

407 See Chapter Two p.

of Khanikin. It also includes the Anglo-Persian Oil Company's lands at Chiah-Surkh, as to which, unless they are retroceded to Persia'.⁴⁰⁸ To protect this part of Kurdistan under the British sphere, Hirtzel emphasised the necessity of making a special arrangement with Russia, as has been discussed earlier.

From the above it seems clear that Southern Kurdistan, including its oil fields and the Anglo-Persian Oil Company's concessions in the region, were very important to the British. According to a Turko-Persian boundary agreement in 1914, a number of territories were transferred to the Ottoman Empire including certain oil bearings. However, the company obtained all the previous rights and privileges in the transferred territories under the terms of the protocol in respect of the Turko-Persian frontier, signed in Constantinople in November 1913.⁴⁰⁹ This meant the involvement of the company's interests in Kurdistan oil, as Hirtzel had emphasised, contrary to Marian Kent's suggestion that Hirtzel did not mention the oil areas such as Kirkuk and TuzKhurmatli. Kent notes that Hirtzel 'examined every aspect of Mesopotamia's economic potential except oil'.⁴¹⁰ This was because oil was considered in the context of the future of Kurdistan when he emphasised that Southern Kurdistan should be under British control for both strategic and valuable oil asset reasons.

The de Bunsen committee approved Hirtzel's suggestions, with a further extension from Acre in the West, to Zakho and Rawanduz in the North-east because of the importance of oil, 'Oil again makes it commercially desirable for us to carry our control to Mosul, in the vicinity of which place there are valuable wells, possession of which by another power would be prejudicial to our interests'.⁴¹¹ Thus, it can be argued that the oil factor had a bearing on Kurdistan's entry into Britain's war aims in the first formal British report. In this connection, Kent mentions that 'oil, together with many other equally important factors, led the committee to define a British area of interest that included Mosul province'.⁴¹² Despite these recommendations the Mosul Vilayet was

⁴⁰⁸ The Future Settlement of Eastern Turkey in Asia and Arabia, Note by Secretary of India Office, 14 March 1915, CAB/24/1. T.N.A

⁴⁰⁹ Memorandum: The oilfields of Persia and Mesopotamia, Naval Intelligence, March 15, 1919, F.O 608/273.T.N. A

⁴¹⁰ Kent, *Oil and Empire*, p.121.

⁴¹¹ Ibid, p.122.

⁴¹² Ibid.

assigned to the French zone according to the Sykes-Picot agreement 1916. I shall analyse this in terms of the oil question in this accord.

In a meeting held in Whitehall regarding the Middle East and the Arab Question, Sykes presented his views and advised the settlement with France as soon as possible in order to obtain a definite understanding about Syria, the Arab Question and the policy lines which would be adopted in the Middle East. In the meeting, Balfour asked Sykes about the exact lines that would come under the British zone. Sykes suggested that 'I should like to draw a line from the " e" in Acre to the last " K" in Kerkuk.'⁴¹³ In addition, the importance of Mosul's oil (Kirkuk's specifically) in the wartime negotiations could readily be perceived from the French perspective since France realized that by supporting the Arabs Britain aimed to minimize France's leverage in Syria. Picot was instructed by his government to demand an extension in the Mosul vilayet to include the oilfields of Kirkuk.⁴¹⁴ Even the French Prime Minister Aristide Briand indicated that France would accept a lesser influence in Syria in the exchange of Kirkuk Oil "*l'attribution du bassin pétrolifère de Kerkouk*".⁴¹⁵ However, the British did not want to bargain for Kirkuk's oil fields. Picot indicated how Sykes was ready to compromise on any area in the Mosul vilayet, but when asked about Kirkuk, he always responded that such a concession was out of the question: '*qu'une telle concession était hors de question*'.⁴¹⁶

It is important to examine the precise reasons behind Sykes's choice of Kirkuk. It is clear that this line was vital strategically for securing the routes to India and its connection with Persia and Egypt. Also, the valuable oil fields of the Kirkuk district was considered to be a line for the transfer from Kirkuk and the nearby regions to the Mediterranean.⁴¹⁷ Further, Kirkuk had become an important economic and strategic

⁴¹³ Memorandum, The Arab Question. Evidence of Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Mark Sykes, Bart., M.P. Meeting held at 10, Downing Street, December 16, 1915, CAB 24/1/51.T.N.A

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.

⁴¹⁵ Briand to Cambon, 14 December 1915, AE A-Paix/178. From: Luigi Scazzieri (2015) Britain, France, and Mesopotamian Oil, 1916–1920, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 26:1, p 28.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid

⁴¹⁷ On 1897, F. R. Maunsell had presented similar views of Sykes, in the Geographical Journal. Maunsell highlighted that a railway line from Baghdad through Kifri, TuzKhurmatli, and Kirkuk to Mosul could bring produce to the river. If such a line were extended from Mosul to the Mediterranean, communication between both seas would be complete. Maunsell thought that one possible reason for the political difficulties in Turkey may be the need for 'obtaining concessions to develop some of the

area for the British. It seems clear that in the British post war discussions concerning the future of Kurdistan, the province of Kirkuk was dealt with separately with no connection to the Kurdish question. For instance, one British Memorandum, of 21 November, 1918 indicated the importance of the oilfields in the region and noted that 'Kurdistan -this country is purely tribal in the mountains and settled in the lowlands towards the south-west. The Kerkuk (Kirkuk) district has a great industrial future on account of its oil-fields, and certainly cannot be treated tribally'.⁴¹⁸

Therefore, it can be assumed that the oil question had impacted on Britain's perspective regarding Kurdistan. Discussing the Sykes-Picot map, David McDowall argues that Kurdistan was not of interest to Britain at all but its fate was brought into the situation because of its strategic position in Mesopotamia.⁴¹⁹ This assessment is right but the question was wider than McDowell argues. Different British institutional departments had varied opinions regarding the importance of Kurdistan. However, I would argue that British interest in Kurdistan's oil dated back to the pre-war period, particularly after they were awarded the Mosul oil concession in 1914.

According to the Sykes-Picot agreement Britain considered the importance of oil in the region and they had taken various steps to secure the oil fields. First, they had drawn the Kirkuk district which included the most valuable oil fields in the region into the British zone. Secondly, they obtained a guarantee of their previous commercial rights and interests in the French zone. Thirdly, their pledge of the Mosul Vilayet to the Arabs was probably to use them as a potential instrumental counter to French ambitions in the area.

Evidence can be found in Sykes's 23 May 1917 letter to Cox: 'it's true the King could not give us much physical help, but when we are successful he helps to give moral

remarkable mineral riches on modern lines, and, if properly explored, there is no doubt that the Mesopotamian petroleum field might be made to yield a product of the greatest commercial importance'. F. R. Maunsell, The Mesopotamian Petroleum Field, *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 5. (May, 1897), p.532

⁴¹⁸ Maps Illustrating: Memorandum respecting the Settlement of Turkey and the Arabian Peninsula, Political Intelligence Department, Foreign Office, 21 November, 1918, CAB 24/72/7.

⁴¹⁹ McDowall, *A Modern History of Kurds*, p.117.

sanction to our control and to those who take our side.⁴²⁰ Further, on 5 May 1915, in the eleventh meeting of the Bunsen Committee, regarding the future settlement of Turkey and Arabia, Sykes pointed out that 'If we divorce the Arabs from the Turks we should have the Arabs' support against French concession hunters.'⁴²¹ Hirtzel, who represented the opinion of the India Office, stated that it was unfortunate that Mosul was assigned to the France, according to the Sykes-Picot agreement, and argued that a strong attempt should be made 'to get France out' of the area, he stressed that Britain should not defend the interests of the Arabs against the French, and argued that 'we must not allow ourselves to be used by the Arabs to secure their interests in Syria at the expense of the French.'⁴²²

Besides these proceedings, however, the agreement faced extensive criticism in British circles, in particular concerning the Mosul region and its oil bearings. Britain had not been satisfied with the French pledges and asserted that the region should come under British control entirely in order to avoid any potential disputes in the future. Hirtzel argued that the 'loss of Mosul Vilayet is a serious sacrifice for us', and he specifically described France's desire to work the oil deposits.⁴²³ In the same way, the India Office suggested that the D'Arcy group claimed that, 'all oil deposit in the Vilayet of Mosul and Baghdad...whether or not it may be possible to maintain this claim against the French in its entirety, it would seem advisable to keep in our hands, if possible, material for bargaining'.⁴²⁴

⁴²⁰ Sykes to Cox, 23 May 1917. DDSY(2)/12/7, The Papers of Sir Mark Sykes, Hull University Archives.

⁴²¹ Eleventh Meeting held in Foreign Office, 5 May 1915, The Future Settlement of Eastern Turkey in Asia and Arabia, p.69. CAB/.

⁴²² Policy in Arabia. Note by India Office, 20 November 1918, IOR/L/PS/18/B297

⁴²³ Note by Hirtzel to the FO, 10 January, enclosing a letter from Sir Thomas Holderness to Nicolson, 13 January 1916, FO 371/2767, no 8117. Cited from Kent, *Oil and Empire*, p.123.

⁴²⁴ Letter from Hirtzel to FO, 1 April, and notes to Oliphant, 20 April, And to Clerk, 14 May 1916, FO 371/2768. Cited from *ibid*, p 124.

Following the Sykes-Picot agreement certain key British officials such as Sykes, Hirtzel, and Greenway, stressed the strategic importance of Mesopotamian oil fields. With regard to this, in a Cabinet memorandum, 31 October 1916, Admiral Slade highlighted the importance of Mesopotamian oil to the Admiralty and of securing the control of the oil fields in the region.⁴²⁵ Slade noted that 'Conventions and Treaties only papers and can be torn up and are not sufficient safeguard'.⁴²⁶ Therefore, he advised the British government to control the Mosul vilayet. Similar concerns were raised by Earl Richard, British official deligation at Paris peace conference, with regard to the irrigation scheme in the British sphere that would depend on the rivers which flow within the French zone. Therefore, he emphasised the importance of controlling these areas in terms of an irrigation scheme in the future, 'it's true that there is a provision in the agreement for the supply of a given quantity of water to lower lands in the British sphere, but arrangement of that kind must inevitably lead to disputes in practice. The control of irrigation of the whole area must be in the same hands if the ferity of the country is to be effectively restored. These are strong reasons for asking for a reconsideration of the French agreement'.⁴²⁷

Despite the Sykes-Picot agreement between the Allied parties, the approach to the physical control of the Mosul Vilayet was a target for the powers, especially Russia and Britain. According to Vladimir Minorsky, the Russian Charged Affaires in Tehran during wartime, Russia had a plan to control the Vilayet of Mosul. It was suggested that it would be useful to gain the support of the Kurds with a promise to guarantee their national rights.⁴²⁸

The final phases of the war marked a significant development in Britain's oil policy especially regarding Persian and Mesopotamian oil resources. This was due to fundamental developments during the war. The absence of Russia in the theatre was one of the important factors which shifted British strategy in the region including its oil policy. Until late 1917 the strategic factors, specifically the traditional concept of

⁴²⁵ See Kent, *Oil and Empire*, p 124.

⁴²⁶ Slade memorandum, Petroleum Situation in the British Empire.1918, CAB/24/59. T.N.A

⁴²⁷ Earl Richard, Memorandum respecting Mesopotamia, Peace Conference, 24 January, 1919. F.O 608/96. T.N.A.

⁴²⁸ Kamal Mazhar, *Kurdistan during First War World*, p 100.

securing the route to India against the threat of the Russian expansion, dominated British policy makers' minds. At this stage, therefore, strategic concerns were balanced against economic interests, including oil concessions since without accomplishing this aim, the British could not safeguard their economic interests including the oil fields; and this was clearly indicated in the policies and ambitions in the region. In the Sykes-Picot agreement British and Russian territory was regarded as being more important than British control of all the oil. However, following the Russian withdrawal from the war British policy in the Middle East shifted dramatically. Berthelot has explained why northern Mosul was allocated to France, 'As for Mosul, it was the British in 1916 who pushed us with all their might to take it into our zone. At that moment, Imperial Russia still existed and they [the British], following a buffer-state policy, wanted to position us between themselves and the Russians in order to avoid any friction'.⁴²⁹ In addition, the wartime petroleum shortages in 1917 and 1918 created a crisis in oil supplies for the British Empire. In particular, there was anxiety among certain American experts who forecasted that 'the United States would exhaust its oil resources within a decade or two'.⁴³⁰ This had a notable impact on the dominant Great Powers' oil policy, especially the way in which Britain reacted to American predictions. Probably, one reason for the comparative neglect of oil was that Britain was able to obtain most of her supplies during the war from the United States.⁴³¹ Moreover, the British were concerned about American economic motives especially through private companies, specifically, The Standard Oil Company to monopolise the oilfields globally. The open door policy was an American slogan the main objective being to gain access to the new sources of supply especially in the British and Dutch spheres.⁴³² This American policy presented a potential threat to Great Britain's interests in Middle Eastern oil. By July 1917 Wilson wrote: 'England and France have not the same view with regard to peace that we have by any means. When the war is over we can force

⁴²⁹ Berthelot to "Cher ami," March 11, 1920, MAE, ser. E3, Relations commerciales, 1919-1940, B -Petroles, file 49. Cited from: Fitzgerald, *Frances' Middle Eastern ambition*.

⁴³⁰ Donald Ewalt, The Fight for Oil: Britain in Persia, 1919, *History Today*, Volume: 31 Issue: 9 1981.

⁴³¹ Rothwell, *Mesopotamia in British War Aims*, p.288.

⁴³² Stephen J. Randall, *United States Foreign Oil Policy Since World War I: For Profits and Security*, p. 8.

them to our way of thinking, because by that time they will, among other things, (be) financially in our hands.’⁴³³

These developments influenced the British policy-makers, especially the American monopoly of oil resources. Therefore, in the discussion of the British War Aims in the Middle East, the oil question was considered to be an important factor by certain British officials. In this regard, Admiral Slade’s document can be seen as one of the most influential view of the British policy-makers.

Regarding the question of the importance of the Mosul and Mesopotamian oilfields, a British traveller, Canon J. T. Parfit published a book in 1917 entitled *Mesopotamia: The Key to the Future*. He mentioned that ‘Mesopotamia contains many underground rivers of valuable petroleum which here and there finds its way to the surface’.⁴³⁴ He added that, ‘The vast undeveloped oilfields are of priceless value at a time when our needs for this essential commodity have so enormously increased, when nearly every engine and all the most modern ships are being constructed to be run by oil fuel.’⁴³⁵

On 29 July 1918, Admiral Slade reported on the petroleum situation in the British Empire. He emphasised the extreme importance of oil for the future of the Empire as a question of national security, and stressed that the life of empire largely depended on the control of bunker fuel. The document clearly indicated the undeveloped potential of Persian and Mesopotamian oilfields and concluded that the power that controls the Persian and Mesopotamian oil fields ‘will control the source of supply of the majority of liquid of the future...and will be in a position to dictate its own terms to all shipping in case of war..., we must therefore at all costs to retain our hold on the Persian and Mesopotamian oilfields and any other fields which may exist in the British Empire and we must not allow intrusion in any form of any foreign interests, however much disguised they may be’. Then he added that Britain must secure control over as much as possible of the oil resources, but there must be no involvement of the foreign

⁴³³ Wilson to House, 21 July, 1917, House papers, Box 121. Cited from: D. Cameron Watt, *Succeeding John Bull: America in Britain's Place, 1900-1975*, Cambridge University Press, 1984, p.32.

⁴³⁴ Canon J. T. Parfit, *Mesopotamia: The Key to the Future*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1917, p.17

⁴³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 27.

interests in any form, 'otherwise we shall find those interests using every means at their disposal, ..., to hamper the development of British interests...., if we admit foreign interests at all even apparently in a small and unimportant proportion now, will always be working against us and will in the future.'⁴³⁶

Slade succeeded in influencing the Secretary for the Imperial War Cabinet, Sir Maurice Hankey, and to gain the advocacy this key figure had an important influence over British strategy.⁴³⁷ Therefore, Hankey acted widely in transferring these ideas into a top-level discussion of the British war aims. He wrote to Sir Eric Geddes: 'I have been told privately by people with knowledge of oil production that the oil situation of the future is rather uncertain...It was...suggested that the largest potential oilfields at present known are in Persia and Mesopotamia...there are some as far up as Mosul...if this information is correct, the retention of the oil-bearing regions in Mesopotamia and Persia...would appear to be a first class British war aim. I do not remember, however, that it has appeared as such'.⁴³⁸

On 30 July, Eric Geddes forwarded the paper to the war cabinet. Then the question was endorsed by the First Sea Lord and Eric Geddes, and they regarded the oil bearing in the Persian and Mesopotamian as of 'great national importance' to the British.⁴³⁹ Likewise, Slade's argument was supported by Major-General F.H. Sykes, the Chief of Air Staff. Sykes considered that the strength of the empire primarily depended upon aerial supremacy. Then he noted that Slade's document indicated the valuable oil bearing in Persia and Mesopotamia, and Sykes emphasised the importance of the oil to the Air Force and the Navy, 'it is essential that steps shall be taken to monopolise all possible supplies of petroleum and kindred oils. Further, the areas in which it is contained must be safeguarded by a very wide belt of territory between it and potential enemies'.⁴⁴⁰

In the first meeting, Hankey requested Slade to supply further evidence regarding the oilfields especially the Mosul Vilayet, by submitting the map which was

⁴³⁶ The Petroleum situation in the British Empire and the Mesopotamia and Persian oilfields, 1918, CAB 21/119

⁴³⁷ Gibson, *British strategy and Oil*, p.115.

⁴³⁸ Cited from *ibid*, p.115

⁴³⁹ Cabinet Memorandum: A Note in Reference to Admiralty Memorandum on the "Petroleum Situation in the British Empire", 17, 09, 1918. (Paper G.T. 5267). CAB 24/64.

⁴⁴⁰ Notes by Chief of the Air Staff on Admiralty memorandum GT 5267, 9 August 1918, CAB/24/60.

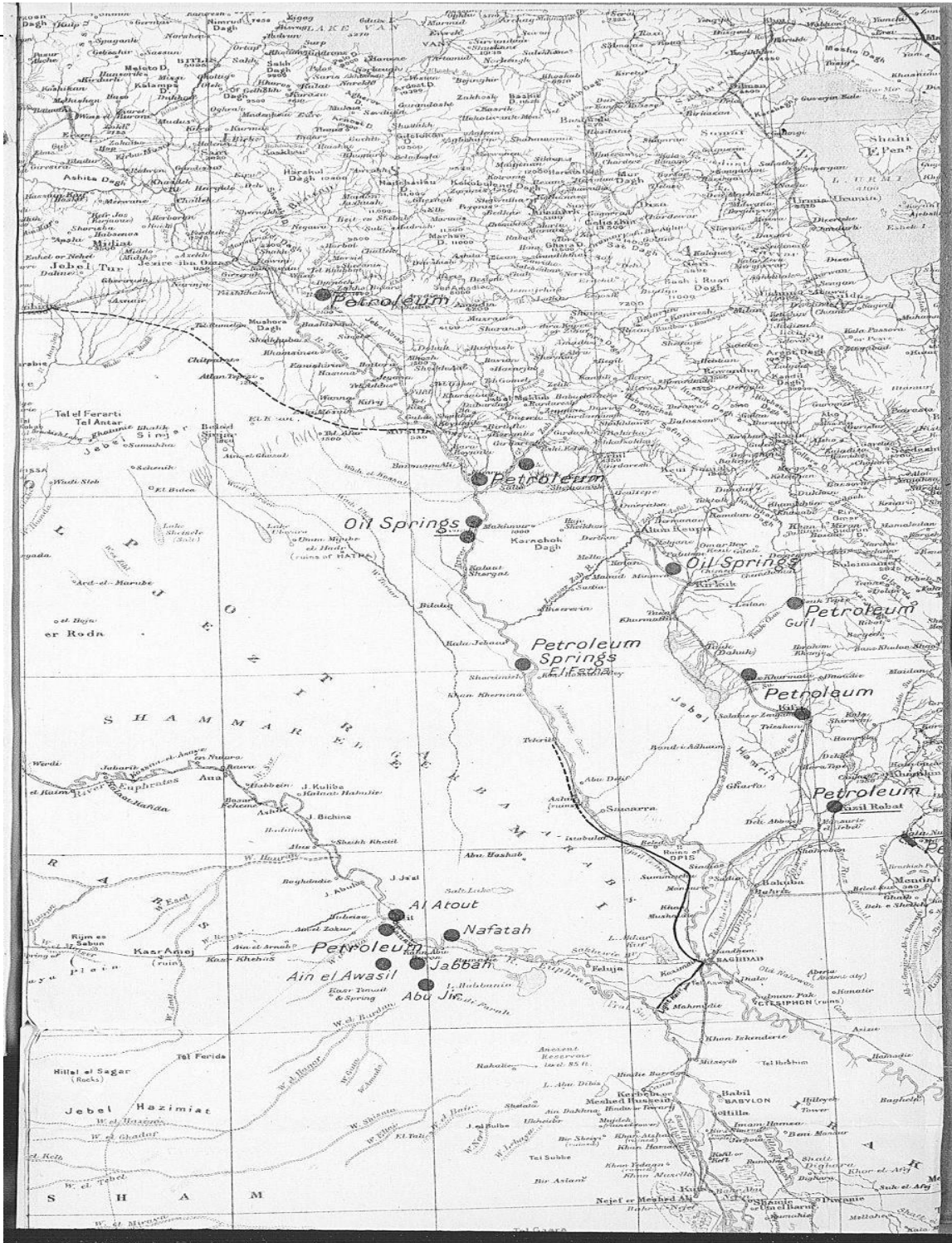
shown to him. Therefore, in his next report entitled 'Oil fields of Mesopotamia and part of Persia', Slade provided significant evidence and much more detail of the oilfields in those regions especially the Mosul Vilayet with a map attached which was based on the pre-war German reports and the recent geologist reports of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company on behalf of the British military. The paper demarcated the Mesopotamian petroleum zone which 'extends over a distance of about 650 miles North and South with a minimum width of 80 miles, giving an area of about 50,000 square miles. Over this vast region oil is worked in a large number of hand dug pits and there are countless seepages and other signs of the presence of Petroleum.'

Most of these petroleum zones indicated in the report were situated in the Kurdish regions. Slade pointed out, 'The most northern indication of oil with which this paper deals is that at ZaKha (Zakho), about 60 miles N.N.W. of Mossul(Mosul), It is an important seepage worked by natives and there are said to be 30 hand dug pits from which an oil of good quality of about .9 specific gravity is obtained.' The document stated that in the Southern Kurdish regions of Mosul there was a strong indication of numerous and valuable oil bearings in Kirkuk, TizKermatie (TuzKhurmatu, and Kifri. Further, Slade showed that 'The group in the Mendali-Khanikin district is extremely important and promises to give several very prolific oilfields. They are mostly within the existing concession of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company Ltd. and have been examined more or less in detail by their geologists'.⁴⁴¹ (See map 6).

Map 6 (showing the importance of oil in Mesopotamia and part of Persia)⁴⁴²

441 Memorandum on the reported oil fields of Mesopotamia and part of Persia, Admiralty, G. T.5313, 2 August 1918.CAB/24/60.

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Hankey who was an influential official regarded himself as 'an ideas man, someone who could feed Lloyd George concepts on crucial policy matters'.⁴⁴³ Hankey did not wait for Slade's paper. On 1 August, a day before the opening of the second Imperial War Cabinet for discussing the war aims, Hankey wrote to Balfour, and Lloyd George, emphasising the significance of the oil bearing in the region, referring to Slade's information, and urging them to share the view that it was essential to bring it under British control. He wrote to Balfour, 'I am writing to invite your very particular attention to the memorandum by Admiral Slade on the petroleum situation in the British Empire with a covering note by the First Sea Lord (G.T. 5267). I do hope you will be able to read it as it is a most vitally important paper. As I understand the matter, oil in the next war will occupy the place of coal in the present war, or at least a parallel place to coal. The only big potential supply that we can get under British control is the Persian and Mesopotamian supply. The point where you come in is that the control over these oil supplies becomes a first-class British war aim. I write to urge that in your statement to the Imperial War Cabinet you should rub this in. You will do it much better than the Admiral will and as an ex-First Lord you have a greater interest in it than most. Admiral Slade tells me that there are important oil deposits in Mesopotamia north of our present line. I have asked him to let the War Cabinet have any evidence as to the real importance of these deposits as they might have an important influence on future military operations but this is another side of the question'.⁴⁴⁴

In the meantime, Hankey wrote to Lloyd George prompting him to put pressure on the War Office to take military advance towards Mosul and control the valuable oilfields. Hankey argued that: 'there is no military advantage in pushing forward in Mesopotamia...there may be reasons other than purely military for pushing on. Would it not be an advantage before the end of the war, to secure the valuable oil wells in Mesopotamia?'

Balfour stated that although he 'entirely agreed' with Hankey, he regarded Slade's recommendation as a 'purely Imperial War Aim'. Therefore, Hankey made a last attempt to convince Balfour, and on 11 August he wrote again, arguing that apparently the question would shock President Wilson and other British allies.

⁴⁴³ Paul W. Doerr, *British foreign policy, 1919-1939*, Manchester University Press, 1988, p 29.

⁴⁴⁴ Hankey to Balfour, 1 August, 1918. F.O. 800/204. Cited from: Rothwell, *Mesopotamia in British War Aims*, p. 289.

However, this time he presented the question somewhat differently, merging the issues of oil and water. He argued that Britain would be justified in pushing further into northern Mesopotamia 'to secure a proper supply of water. Incidentally this would give us most of the oil-bearing regions.'⁴⁴⁵

Hankey's attempts succeeded in changing Balfour's perspective vis-à-vis Mesopotamia. On 13 August 1918, Balfour presented his views to the Dominion Prime Ministers in which he noted that at the beginning of the war he thought the annexation of the region into the Empire would be unfortunate for the British because of the threat of a possible attack by Russia and Turkey. However, he now considered that Britain must be the 'guiding spirit' there. The oil factor was the central point in his argument because it would supply Britain the oil resources that were essential, 'I do not care under what system we keep the oil, whether it is by a perpetual lease or whatever it may be, but I am quite clear it is all-important for us that this oil should be available'.⁴⁴⁶ In the same context, before the war had ended, Lloyd George endorsed the military advance to Mosul.⁴⁴⁷

Eventually, through Hankey's activities Slade's views raised the oil question into the British war aims' agenda and convinced the ministers such as Lloyd George and Balfour to advocate the military advance to the Mosul vilayet in order to bring its oil resources under Britain's physical control. Hence, the Imperial War Cabinet, impressed by the importance of the Petroleum question and the Committee's report, considered a further advance into Mesopotamia to bring the oilfields within the occupied territory zone, 'The chief of the Imperial General Staff should consider the desirability of employing our superiority of force in Mesopotamia for an exploitation of the military situation so as to include the principal oil bearing regions within the sphere of occupied territory, provided that this can be effected Without imposing any excessive military burden'.⁴⁴⁸

This conclusion and the guidance of the British policy towards the Mosul Vilayet became the basis of Britain's war aims. Subsequently, the war cabinet concluded that

⁴⁴⁵ Hankey to Balfour, 12 August, 1918, personal and secret. CAB 21/119. T.N.A

⁴⁴⁶ Imperial War Cabinet minutes, 13 Aug. 1918. CAB 23/43. T.N.A

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ Cabinet Conclusion: Minutes and Papers, IWC 32B, 16/08/1918. CAB 23/44A.

the Director of Military Intelligence should send a telegram to General Marshall instructing him to despatch a force to Mosul without delay in order to accept the surrender of the Turkish garrison there.⁴⁴⁹

Apparently, oil had provided the important motivation for the British military advance on Kurdistan in the latter part of the War and its oil field areas maintained their considerable importance in long-term British strategy. For instance, Britain's treatment of Kirkuk was significantly different than in other Kurdish areas, and Kirkuk became its forces' centre in the region. In other words, the British always excluded Kirkuk from any potential Kurdish entity and this was probably one reason why Britain declined to adopt the ethnographic scheme regarding the future of Kurdistan, especially the Southern part. Referring to these events, Helmut asserts that the motivation behind the capture of the Mosul was symbolic of British imperialistic ambitions to obtain the oil resources in the region. Additionally, these events were either described in a vague manner, or completely ignored in British archives and personal accounts.⁴⁵⁰

The Post War Period

The post war period witnessed a struggle over Middle Eastern oil particularly with regard to Mosul's oilfields. The great powers' ambitions to take control of oil production influenced international relationships and contributed intensely to their imperialistic ambitions in the Middle East. As a consequence, the relationship between the allies deteriorated regarding the post-war settlements, and in particular, those of the Middle East. In this context, Mosul and its oil became the core for the rivalry between the Great Powers present in the region. In 1923 Edmond Slade referred to the issue in an article under the title *The Influence of Oil on International Politics*: 'If one looks round the world today, there is hardly a country where there is not an oil

⁴⁴⁹ Cabinet Conclusion: Minutes and Papers, WC 494A, 31/10/1918. CAB 23/14.

⁴⁵⁰ Oil and British policy towards Mesopotamia, 1914-1918, p.382.

question, latent or active. In those territories which are under the control of the great Powers, the rivalry is mainly commercial, but in the smaller States international rivalries have free rein. In the troubled waters of international politics, particularly in the Middle and Near East, oil is very far from having that calming effect which the proverb claims for it'. He therefore concluded that, 'both consciously and unconsciously', international relations were very profoundly influenced by oil question.⁴⁵¹ A British official in the Board of Trade and an expert on the world's oil situation went far further when he stressed 'If there is another war in our time, between great powers it will be fought for oil'.⁴⁵²

Indeed, the question of oil became an important dynamic that would affect the nature of the future Imperial powers' relations. As far as Britain was concerned, the issue was critical, though most of the oilfields in the region were now under their physical control, there was still much uncertainty and trouble. Generally, the British faced various complications and difficulties which can be summarised as follows:

- 1- The lack and insecurity of oil supply due to British dependency on US oil production.
- 2- Political uncertainty regarding the future of the political position of the oil bearing territories, particularly in the Mosul Vilayet.
- 3- The matter of the legacy of the pre-war concessions.
- 4- The ambitions and rivalry of the other powers especially the U.S. and France who demanded an equal share of the oil concessions and the application of the open door principle.

It is essential to examine the interaction between the above points in the evolution of British oil policy and in its reaction to the other rival powers' interests. The experience of the war increased Britain's concern over the petroleum question. The military apparatus, in particular the British Navy needed to maintain the Empire so this became

⁴⁵¹ Edmond J. W. Slade, 'The Influence of Oil on International Politics,' *Journal of the British Institute of International Affairs*, Vol. 2, No. 6 (Nov., 1923), p.258.

⁴⁵² John Lloyd Balderston, Great Britain Must Have Oil to exist, *El Paso herald*. (El Paso, Tex.), 12 June 1920. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib.of Congress.

the main reason for increasing the consumption of oil. In May 1917, Lloyd George brought the oil question under the authority of Walter Long, the Colonial Secretary, and the latter established the Petroleum Executive department to deal with the oil issue.⁴⁵³ In a memorandum dated December 1918, the petroleum department of the Foreign Office emphasized: 'The vital necessity of an unlimited supply of oil for naval, military and aviation requirements has been abundantly, even menacingly, demonstrated during the war'.⁴⁵⁴ Also, a memorandum from the Foreign Office dated March 1918 stressed the importance of the oil question which 'cannot be treated as a purely commercial virtue' but must consider as 'a national responsibility, which admits of no half-measure or ill-considered action'.⁴⁵⁵

Therefore, the lack of oil and the insecurity of the oil supply to the British Empire became one of the dominant matters that they had to deal with. Despite the fact that Britain controlled only about four percent of the current global production of oil, it had to rely mainly on oil supplies from the United States; a dependency which was regarded 'as dangerous' from the British point of view. It was therefore, a matter of great urgency to secure permanent control over other oil fields. Although, as discussed above, by the end of the war most of these oilfields were under their control, the British had to face American and French rivalry.

At this point, it is worth examining the contradictory British policy adopted towards their principal allies, America and France in the Middle East; a policy that can be analysed in two different dimensions: political and economic.

From a political point of view, Britain regarded France as its number one rival in the Middle East. Hence, it attempted to turn America against France in order to curb French ambitions in the region. Since the U.S. did not have territorial claims in the area, particularly in Syria, Britain used Wilsonian principles which supported Arab claims in the region against the French presence, as discussed in the previous chapter. On the other hand, the British also viewed America as a real threat against their oil interests in the Middle East. In particular, the British feared the American oil policy and

⁴⁵³ Rothwell, *Mesopotamia in British War Aims*, p. 287

⁴⁵⁴ G. H. Bennett, *British Foreign Policy during the Curzon Period, 1919-24*, Macmillan, (London-1995), pp. 97-98.

⁴⁵⁵ Foreign Office Memorandum, 14 March 1918, LP& S 10 249/ 1915/1918/996. Cited from: Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, p. 69.

monopoly of the global oil supplies and the U.S.'s strong motive for controlling new existing oil fields since it insisted on applying an open door policy and equal rights regarding oil concessions. In addition, the U.S. were challenging the concession on the Turkish Petroleum Company claimed by the British in the pre-war agreements.

With the aim of reducing these American threats, Britain had to take action. In this regard, many discussions took place and different views and proposals presented, principally regarding the scheme for arranging a common policy with the French Government over the question of oil, in particular in Mesopotamia. With regard to French participation different views were expressed especially by the Foreign Office and the Petroleum Executive. The Petroleum Executive suggested that the British government should cooperate and reach an agreement with France rather than raising the matter at the peace conference or that they should make a common cause with the U.S. particularly, after they understood that France and America were discussing future oil concessions in view of the fact that the U.S. through the Standard Oil Company offered France technical and financial support in the Mesopotamian oilfields. Further, the arrangement with the French was essential for securing the oil pipe-line from Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean through Syria which was in the French sphere of influence according to their wartime arrangements. These recommendations were supported by the Foreign Office, the India Office, the Admiralty, the Treasury, and the Board of Trade. The Memorandum concluded that 'this is the only certain means now in sight of lessening our present dangerous dependence on the United States for supplies of fuel oil.'⁴⁵⁶

Additionally, as the Turkish Petroleum Company's concession was open to question, it was advisable to include the French in the concessions. Walter Long, First Lord of the Admiralty, argued that if French participation would not be admitted 'it is certain that we shall encounter their opposition to its confirmation'. Particularly, the French had already stated that the whole question of oil concessions had to be discussed in the Paris Peace Conference as this was regarded as the 'nature of threat'. By approving the French Government to participate in the company, H.M.G. would

⁴⁵⁶ Memorandum for the War Cabinet: Acquisition of British control over the Royal Dutch-Shell group and establishment of common policy with French government in regard to Petroleum question, 22 February 1919, FO 608/231. T.N.A

secure their support for the validity of the TPC concessions which was considered an important and upheld against the claims of the Standard Oil Company.⁴⁵⁷ The Admiralty, in particular, desired the arrangement which would thwart an 'aggressive state encouraged American oil interests in the Middle East and elsewhere'.⁴⁵⁸ In addition, it would eliminate the reason for the French claim to the Mosul Vilayet.⁴⁵⁹

It was clear that the French challenge mostly referred to the dispute over the Sykes-Picot agreement in which they demanded a share of Mesopotamia oil concessions in exchange for their retreat from Mosul. This was not welcomed by the Foreign Office, though they thought that it was not advisable to discuss in detail the question of oil with the French until the fate of Mesopotamia and Syria had been decided upon in the peace conference.⁴⁶⁰ Considering that the negotiation with the French, as proposed by the Petroleum Executive, meant that they would admit the terms of the Sykes-Picot agreement, an agreement that the British thought was out of date, but the implementation of which the French insisted on.⁴⁶¹

The oil pipelines were a crucial issue in Post-war Britain's oil strategy with respect to the Middle East settlement. The question was specifically relevant to the Foreign Office's discussions. On February 4, Curzon informed Balfour that he had an urgent request from Lord Harcourt, Chairman of the Petroleum Executive, to meet H.L. Smith and John Cadman to discuss the important question of the oil pipe-lines from Mesopotamia through Syria to Alexandretta.⁴⁶² However, the Foreign Office considered discussing the question of the pipe-lines with the French would consolidate the provisions of the Sykes-Picot agreement that the British wanted to eliminate.⁴⁶³ Britain's view was that it would have to abandon one quarter share of their "best asset" for the sake of "no concrete advantage". A war time communication between Lloyd George and his Cabinet clearly indicated a plan to use Britain's occupation of Syria to

⁴⁵⁷ Sir L. Mallet, French Participation in Mesopotamian oil-fields, 22 February 1919, FO 608/231. T.N.A

⁴⁵⁸ G. H. Bennett, *British Foreign Policy during the Curzon Period, 1919-24*, Macmillan, (London-1995), p. 102.

⁴⁵⁹ British delegation in Paris, 17th March 1919, FO 608/231. T.N.A

⁴⁶⁰ French Participation in the Development of Oil-fields in Various Countries Especially Mesopotamia, 22 February 1919, FO 608/231. T.N.A

⁴⁶¹ Statement on the French proposal for the participation in oil concessions in Mesopotamia and Persia, 20 February 1919, FO 608/231. T.N.A

⁴⁶² Telegram from Lord Curzon to Mr. Balfour, NO. 112, 4 February 1919. F.O 608/231. T.N.A

⁴⁶³ Curzon to Belfour, 2nd April, 1919, FO 608/231. T.N.A

renegotiate the provisional French control of the Mosul region under the terms of the Sykes-Picot agreement.⁴⁶⁴

Nevertheless, the Foreign Office's alternative plan was to eliminate French influence by different means. It aimed to secure the pipe line by connecting it from Mosul to the Mediterranean directly. In this framework, on 15 February 1919, a meeting was held concerning the future of the Baghdad Railway, chaired by Lord Hardinge of Penshurst, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, which suggested pushing the northern British boundary further north in order to provide a direct link between Mosul and the Mediterranean for transferring its oil fuel within the British sphere of influence. It concluded that: 'The British interests cannot be adequately safeguarded on the left flank of India the entire frontier of the territory under British control pushed northward considerably beyond anything contemplated in the Sykes-Picot agreement, in order to afford adequate cover for the pipe line and latter railway communication from Baghdad to Mediterranean coast to connect Egypt...Such a communication will be strategically necessary and should be commercially profitable'.⁴⁶⁵

Evidently, the commercial and strategic factors were deeply interconnected. From the perspective of the Imperial Game the British would never feel secure if the oil pipelines supply came under the dominance of another power, that is, France. In fact France could use this factor at any time in the future against Britain's interests. In addition, this arrangement was to have been made in exchange for giving a share of oil to the French. Therefore, the above suggestion supported by Lloyd George ultimately led to the fall of the Long-Beranger agreement because as he argued, the agreement placed Britain at the mercy of France until direct access to the Mediterranean was gained and Clemenceau agreed to cede more territory.⁴⁶⁶

It seems likely that both Lloyd George's and Curzon's opposition to French participation in Mesopotamian oil was a consequences of the considerations mentioned above. They preferred to play other cards especially in promoting Arab nationalism in Syria and encouraging the US in this direction rather than bargaining

⁴⁶⁴ Mejcher, *Oil and British Policy towards Mesopotamia*, p. 382.

⁴⁶⁵ Memorandum: The Future of Baghdad Railway, 15 February 1919. F.O 608/231. TNA

⁴⁶⁶ Stivers, *Oil and Supremacy*, pp. 27-28

over the oil question in exchange for other considerations. They first wanted to use the territorial disputes - on which they had different interpretations. Lloyd George argued that the regions in dispute were not in France but were entirely Arab according to the Sykes-Picot agreement. The same applied to Damascus and Aleppo, and Homs which were to be entirely Arab and excluded from Syria, while France only had the littoral.⁴⁶⁷

But the British did not succeed since France reacted violently to the suggestion. That is, France resorted to military intervention which led to the overthrow of the Arab government in Damascus. This forced Britain to accept France's claims in Syria and to renegotiate the terms of the Middle East settlement in order to meet both parties' interests. France's claim to participate in Mosul's oil was agreed, and the French were promised 25 percent of the Turkish Petroleum Company concessions according to the San Remo agreement which they signed in April 1920.

From the San Remo Agreement to Lausanne

During the course of the Paris Peace Conference the oil question had a significant influence on the analysis of the situation in the Middle East. It caused tensions between the major powers who were trying to establish their influence in the region. Besides, the major powers' need of oil reinforced the imperialistic means in the Middle East rather than considering the wishes of people and the principles of nationality and self-determination which favoured, as discussed above, the influence of the Anglo-French relations.

It seems that Britain's plan to control future oil resources had a distinct influence on the formation of its Middle Eastern policy; it also marked a significant aspect in the post-war Anglo-American diplomatic tensions. Although, America did not have a specific territorial interest in the Middle East, its policy was mainly driven by commercial and economic interests, particular oil concessions. For America, the open-door policy was an instrument for fulfilling these aims. However, the British obstructed America

⁴⁶⁷ The Council of Four: minutes of meetings March 20 to May 24, 1919, p 809. United States Department of State / Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, The Paris Peace Conference, 1919.

from participating in the concessions. For example, the British military authorities prevented the Standard Oil Company from working in the occupied territories in which the company claimed concessions.⁴⁶⁸ On September 1919, London instructed Arnold Wilson, the civil commissioner in Baghdad, to forbid the Standard Oil geologists from working; they would have to “sit on their hands” biding time in Baghdad.⁴⁶⁹

It is obvious, however, that the peace settlement would not be reached in the Middle East without considering a compromise between the Great Powers, in particular with regard to the economic and commercial issues. The Americans insisted on applying their open door policy and equal opportunities for all nations that participated in the oil concessions in the territories under mandate and not only for members of the Nation of League as Britain wanted. It is possible that one critical reason behind its withdrawal from the Middle East political participation was that America was dissatisfied with the unprofitable mandates offered to them in the Middle East.

Lloyd George offered Wilson the mandate of Armenia; however this was not approved by Washington. Presumably, economic considerations were an important reason behind this American objection because they thought that the mandates offered to them were not advantageous. Regarding this point, on 29 April Sir Auckland Geddes, British Ambassador to the United States, reported that the offer of the Armenian mandate had met unfavourable reception in the United States. He said that the general opinion was that this mandate involved greater political difficulties and less economic advantages than those taken by Great Britain'.⁴⁷⁰ On 8 May 1920, an American newspaper *El Paso Herald* commented on the subject saying that, ‘Oil has not yet been struck in Armenia, so Britain and France both refuse to take a mandate, and both call heaven to witness that the United States is selfish and dollar ridden not to sacrifice paltry lucre to perform a great service to mankind. Has not England assumed mandates over Mesopotamia, practically annexed Persia and bitten off a

⁴⁶⁸ The Secretary of State (by W. J. Carr) to Consul General in London (Skinner), Mar. 30, 1920, DS 841.6363/30A; Consul in Charge, London (Stanley Hollis) to the Secretary of State, Apr. 15, 1920, DS 841.6363/40. Cited from: John A. DeNovo, The Movement for an Aggressive American Oil Policy Abroad, 1918-1920, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 61, No. 4 (Jul., 1956), p.861.

⁴⁶⁹ Civil commissioner (Baghdad) to India office, 29 September 1919, FO 371/ 4209. In Stivers, *Oil and Supremacy*, p. 112.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

great deal more than she can chew In the east, and ought not America to be ashamed, when so much altruism is displayed here, to refuse her contribution to the settlement?⁴⁷¹ This American criticism was acknowledged by an observer in the Foreign office when he noted that ‘the comparison between the supposedly lucrative mandate for Mesopotamia and the thankless and difficult mandate for Armenia cannot fail to cause unfavourable criticism in the US.⁴⁷²

In this connection, Paul C Helmreich indicates that the British and French imperialist interests in assigning the profitable territories for themselves: ‘When a territory provided economic opportunities or was needed because of strategic considerations, a settlement along imperialistic lines was forthcoming. Britain and France never questioned that the men and materiel to control such areas could be found. Yet, when no national, commercial, or imperial interest could be served, solemn promises suddenly became worthless.’⁴⁷³ This is certainly true in the case of the industrial area of Upper Silesia. Despite the fact that the majority of Germans and French claimed that the bulk of Upper Silesia, including the industrial area, should become Polish, the British and Italians, however, opposed French claims contending that it should remain German in accordance with the vote of the inhabitants. The matter, therefore, was referred to the Conference of experts in Paris.

R. W. Clarke, a delegate at the Conference, indicated how the wishes of the inhabitants were dismissed for French and British imperialistic desires. However, many proposals and maps were provided in favour of the French and British claims but it was clear that coal was France’s main concern. Large areas of territory were included in the various maps with only the slightest reference to the wishes of the inhabitants whose wishes were supposed to be the deciding factor. The decision of the League of Nations gave to Poland almost more than the French had claimed for them. How the League arrived at this decision will probably never be known. However, the Wilsonian principle of self-determination which was supposed to determine the borders were

⁴⁷¹ *El Paso herald*. (El Paso, Tex.), 08 May 1920. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers Lib. of Congress. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88084272/1920-05-08/ed-1/seq-21>.

⁴⁷² DBFP, 1st ser, 13: 66; Minute by Harding, n.d; Minute by obsorn, 30April 1920; both in FO 371/5107.Cited from Stivers, *Oil and supremacy*, p. 45.

⁴⁷³ Helmreich, *From Paris to Sevres*, p. 323.

disregarded 'in the cession to Poland of Vilna, Eastern Galicia and Upper Silesia.'⁴⁷⁴ Likewise, the post war Middle East political maps were not drawn according to the wishes of the inhabitants and the principles of nationalities, but were made following the great powers' imperialistic interests. This was very true, in particular in the case of Southern Kurdistan in which the Kurds were being obliged to integrate into the Iraqi Kingdom.

It seems reasonable therefore to suggest that the British oil monopoly policy was one of the most important issues that had an influence on America's decision to withdraw from the Middle East settlement since it led to the rise of anti-British sentiment in the American Congress and press. Then, on 19 November the Senate rejected the treaty of Versailles and the League covenant. Subsequently, America's disappearance from the scene of the Middle East settlement dramatically affected the political situation in the region, particularly the issue of the future of Kurdistan. In particular, during the peace conference in October 1919 General Sharif Pasha in conversation with Forbes Adam, the British delegate in Paris, suggested that papers be submitted to the Peace conference calling for a British mandate for Kurdistan, and he urged the British Government to accept the proposal. Although, the proposal regarding the Kurdish state was discussed by certain British officials, the issue was mainly perceived in relation to the Armenian question and whether or not the United States would accept the Armenian state mandate if it was established and that it should exclude the predominantly Kurdish districts on the southern frontier of the latter state. The India Office proposed an extension of the form of mandate of these portions of Kurdistan but the French objected to this option. In any case, the discussions concluded that the British were ready to take control of Kurdistan separately or together with Mesopotamia as mandataries, or with the French division.⁴⁷⁵ But America's refusal to take a mandate of Armenia had altered the plan because as Montagu expressed in August 1919 the solution to the Kurdish question was largely dependent on the undetermined character and extent of the Armenian state proposal.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷⁴ R. W. Clarke, The Influence of Fuel on International Politics , *Journal of the British Institute of International Affairs*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (May, 1923), pp117-118.

⁴⁷⁵ E.G.F. Adam, 10 October 1919, British delegation, Paris, No 1939, 12 October 1919. F.O/ 608/95.

⁴⁷⁶ From political Department, India Office to the Secretary of State, Foreign Office, 1 August 1919, F.O/ 608/95.

These outcomes had negative consequences for the interests and aspirations of the region's people since after that, Britain and France had to rule the region in a manner that affected American interests. Their exclusion from the oil concessions in the San Remo agreement on April 1920 marked a significant turning point for the British in the control of oil concessions in the area. It is probable that the fact that the Americans were discriminated against had led to their support of anti-colonialist movements in the area, in particular the Turkish nationalists.⁴⁷⁷

The era of aggressive oil policy

As have established above that the Great Powers' struggle for oil and their adoption of an aggressive policy in the Middle East had a negative effect on their relationships. Despite endless negotiations with the French over the Middle East, by January 1920 the British Cabinet suggested that the direct ownership and exploitation of Mesopotamian's oil fields should be at the privilege of His Majesty's Government and should exclude any private interest. To this purpose, it was decided that the War Office should proceed with the investigation of the Mesopotamian oilfields but 'it should be undertaken in such a way as to attract as little attention as possible'. The main object of the proposal was to reject the Standard Oil Company's claims. It was suggested that because Mesopotamia was under British occupation and at the expense of the British Government, the Standard Oil Company had no '*locus standi* and no reason for complaint'.⁴⁷⁸

W. H. Long, however, strongly urged the government to ratify the previous agreements made with Royal Dutch-Shell (RDS) and the French. Otherwise, he thought the RDS would come to an arrangement with the U.S. or the French oil companies.⁴⁷⁹ Long's view was supported by Frederick Kellaway, Minister in Charge of Petroleum, who insisted on British pre-war claims in Mesopotamia.⁴⁸⁰ Eventually,

⁴⁷⁷ Stivers, *Oil and Supremacy*, p. 57.

⁴⁷⁸ Conclusion of a Conference of Ministers, January 23rd, 1920, CAB 23/37/19.

⁴⁷⁹ Memorandum, W. H. Long, 'Oil Supplies', 18 March 1920. CAB 24/101

⁴⁸⁰ Mesopotamian Oilfields', F. Kellaway, 22 April 1920. CAB/24/104.

the British government agreed to give 25 percent of the Mesopotamian oil concessions to the French, according to the San Remo agreement of April 1920.

The result of that agreement was that the Americans were excluded from the Mesopotamian oil concessions. Therefore, America rejected the San Remo agreement and strongly opposed Britain's monopoly in oil policy; and they demanded equal rights in participating in the oil concessions according to the open door policy.⁴⁸¹ On the other hand, the British asserted that the agreement did not contradict the open door principle, arguing that under the provision of the League of Nations the open-door policy applied to its members, which meant that it was not discrimination since America was not a member.⁴⁸² However, America protested against the agreement on the grounds that its participation in the war was a determining factor in the final victory.⁴⁸³ On 20 November 1920, the Secretary of State, Bainbridge Colby, in a note to Curzon strongly protested against the exclusion of the U.S. from the Mesopotamian oil concessions and claimed equality for all nations. Colby noted that their country urged that: 'it is of the utmost importance to the future peace of the world that alien territory transferred as a result of the war with the central powers should be held and administration in such a way as to assure equal treatment to the commerce and to the citizen of all nations.'⁴⁸⁴ This was an explicit signal from the Secretary of State that there could be no expectation of a stable and peaceful settlement without an American share in the oil concessions.

Hence, the state of instability in the region was mostly due to the clash between the allies' interests and divergence of diplomacy; and oil played a powerful part in this conflict. With reference to this, Ellis Barker on November 1921, in commenting on Anglo-American relations, wrote that 'their harmony and union will give peace to the world. Their disagreement and strife would fill the world with unhappiness and war'.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸¹ Mr. Davis to Earl Curzon, May 12 1920 and 28 July 1920, Correspondence between His Majesty's government and the United States Ambassador respecting economic rights in Mandated Territories, His Majesty's Stationary Office, London 1921.

⁴⁸² Earl Curzon to Mr. Davis, August 9, 1920, Correspondence between His Majesty's government and the United States Ambassador respecting economic rights in Mandated Territories, His Majesty's Stationary Office, London 1921.

⁴⁸³ The Struggle for Oil, *The Albuquerque Evening Herald*, Albuquerque, New Mexico, April 15 1921.

⁴⁸⁴ Owen Street, Peril to the Open Door, *The New York Times Current History*, Vol. XV, No 2, November 1921, p. 203.

⁴⁸⁵ J. Ellis Barker, The British Empire and the United States, *The New York Times Current History*,

In the same framework, in November 1921, Lord Curzon, when condemning the French arrangement with Angora stated that Peace would never be achieved 'if one tries to steal a march on another and concludes arrangements on its own account'.⁴⁸⁶ Britain thought that the French-Kemalist agreement was undermining its monopoly over the oil in Mesopotamia established with the blessing of the French.⁴⁸⁷

With regard to the United States, their policy in the Middle East was mainly based on commercial and economic interests. American private companies, in particular the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey, had a significant influence in the development of the U.S. oil policy in the Middle East. To counter the British monopoly of oil resources and the discrimination against America for acquiring oil concessions, the Company strongly urged the State Department to support the open door policy. An immediate response came from the Department, and therefore, in the summer of 1919 the State Department instructed American counsellors and diplomatic officials to assist and 'give special attention to helping American interests in obtaining oil properties abroad'.⁴⁸⁸ Accordingly, during 1920, American foreign policy underwent a great change where policy-makers adopted a completely different approach - which President Wilson had called for, at the end of the war, aiming to foster the principles of 'collective security and political commitments' for securing world peace. These principles were rejected by Republican leaders in favour of 'economic diplomacy and voluntary agreements'.⁴⁸⁹ These leaders believed that future peace depended upon 'worldwide economic growth, international business cooperation and material progress.' Secretary of State Charles E. Hughes (1921-25) emphasized this view when he said 'there will be no permanent peace unless economic satisfactions are enjoyed'.⁴⁹⁰ Therefore, he was called the "secretary of oil" by *The Missouri Herald* Newspaper: 'Show Mr. Hughes an oil well and he will show you a policy. Mr. Hughes' performance at Lausanne, where he suddenly re-entered world politics makes clear much that was obscure...The administration is not in the least afraid of European

Vol. XV, No 2, November 1921, p. 262.

⁴⁸⁶ Henry Woodhouse, *Anglo-French Discord in Turkey*, p. 653.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 659.

⁴⁸⁸ Donald Ewalt, *The Fight for Oil: Britain in Persia, 1919*, *History Today*, Volume: 31 Issue: 9 1981.

⁴⁸⁹ David F. Trask, *Woodrow Wilson and World War 1*. the forum Series of American history: American Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century, edited by: Warren F. Kimball, Forum press, 1981, Missouri. p. 2.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 3.

complications, for there is nothing more complicated under heaven than the economic struggle for Turkey. No, the administration is not afraid of the complications arising out of the League reparations or the political stabilization of Europe. It is merely uninterested, because there is no oil involved. If only oil would begin to gush in Geneva, how quickly Mr. Hughes would go there! If only there was an oil field on the Rhine, how prophetically Mr. Hughes would see the peril of the civilization'.⁴⁹¹ So contrary to Wilson's aims, Harding's Middle Eastern policy was primarily to protect American interests specifically the oil concessions.⁴⁹²

Indeed, the question of oil had a profound effect on Anglo-American relationships, especially in terms of their disagreements on the legacy of TPC concessions and the application of the open door doctrine. The British thought that Turkish nationalists were being supported by Americans; and this suspicion was the result of the tensions between the two governments. Regarding Britain's claims, William Stivers questions whether U.S. policy-makers had been faced with a clear choice between principle and tactics. That is to say, the United States had to decide whether they should seek to secure its interests by allying itself with nationalist, anti-imperialist forces in Iraq or to operate within the framework of British Imperial control.⁴⁹³ William Stivers states that America never considered opening political and economic doors by playing on anti-colonial sentiment. America did not challenge the British influence but they wished to establish a common interests with them.⁴⁹⁴

In the light of previous discussions, it can be concluded that the oil question played a powerful role in determining British policy decisions regarding the future of the Middle East particularly regarding the Mosul region and it is essential to examine the consequences of the whole situation for Kurdistan. The first aspect that needs to be examined is the impact of the oil question on the whole of Kurdistan in terms of its contribution to the emergence of the 'United Kurdistan'. The second dimension is the influence of the oil factor in the inclusion of Southern Kurdistan into the Iraqi state.

⁴⁹¹ The Missouri herald. (Hayti, Mo.), 08 Dec. 1922. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn89066652/1922-12-08/ed-1/seq-6/>.

⁴⁹² Fromkin, *A Peace End All Peace*, p. 547.

⁴⁹³ Stivers, *Oil and Supremacy*, p. 8.

⁴⁹⁴ *Supremacy and Oil*, p131.

Indeed, the oil factor contributed largely to bringing Kurdistan (in particular Southern Kurdistan, the Mosul Vilayet) into the framework of the Middle East discussions which in fact compromised its fate. It could be argued that the question of oil was one of the significant factors that jeopardized the settlement of the Kurdish question which could not be treated separately from the political turmoil in Syria, Mesopotamia and Turkey, for example. This is because oil contributed to the complexity of the political situation of the region complicating an already fractured and unstable political framework in Mesopotamia, Syria, Turkey and Armenia.

1- The Mesopotamia aspect:

The oil factor significantly influenced the British policy decision regarding the inclusion of the southern portion of Kurdistan into the Iraqi state since the British considered Mosul's oil resources to be the basic economic and crucial element in its development. In late 1918, at an Indian Office Conference, A.T. Wilson spelled out that 'oil is the only immediately available asset of the occupied territories, the only real security the Iraq administration are in a position to offer for the loan which they will undoubtedly require in the near future from the British Treasury'.⁴⁹⁵ Such considerations as well as the strategic importance of the region constituted the most important factor behind Wilson's argument against the question of the possible abandonment of the Mosul, Arbil and Sulaymania divisions, considering that this would have serious consequences for Britain's position in the region, in Baghdad and Basra Vilayets in particular, claiming that these three Vilayets 'form an indivisible whole'.⁴⁹⁶ Moreover, the British view of this issue was that once they left the region it would be taken over by other powers. In this case, the British were unlikely to be able to retake the region nor would they be allowed back by their own Allies.⁴⁹⁷ At this point, the General staff of Mesopotamia predicted that Oil would be the driving force in the future world, hence, they stressed if only on account of oil resources, the British should retain

⁴⁹⁵ *Mesopotamia: Oil Policy*, Indian Office, 10 April 1919. IOR/L/PS/18/B322

⁴⁹⁶ Appendix: from the Civil Commissioner Baghdad, 13 February 1920 (Repeated to Government of India and Tehran), CAB 24/106/21.

⁴⁹⁷ Mejcher, *Imperial quest for oil*, p. 84.

the Mosul.⁴⁹⁸ Accordingly, the protection of Mosul oilfields was considered as a strategic and military question for Empire.⁴⁹⁹

Since Britain's policy was mainly based upon saving money, the inclusion of South Kurdistan and its valuable oilfields had become a vital economic necessity for the successful development of the Iraqi state because the British wanted to make it self-sufficient without relying on British financial support.⁵⁰⁰ The War Office's proposed scheme was to reduce the garrison of Mesopotamia to about one division, replacing it with Arab troops maintained entirely 'at the expense of Mesopotamia revenue'.⁵⁰¹ Hence, the financial crisis and the policy reduction of the garrison in Mesopotamia was closely connected with the question of Mosul oil and its inclusion into Mesopotamia. On 20 February 1920, Churchill, when discussing plans to reduce expenditure on the Army, noted that 'Looking to the future, the possibility of Mesopotamia paying its way within a reasonable time depends greatly on whether the Vilayet of Mosul is included or not. The economic potentialities of this district are immense and it would be an act of extremely short-sighted policy to throw away the best chance, we have of recouping ourselves for the outlay already incurred'.⁵⁰² The Middle East department also argued that the exclusion of Mosul would be a 'serious economic loss' by the Iraqi state since it contained practically all of the most fertile area for the cultivation of wheat in the country. Most importantly it contained 'essential oil-bearing regions of the general development of the oil fields of Iraq, upon which the future prosperity of the country depends to a large extent'.⁵⁰³ Similarly, on February 26 1919, a memorandum of the Intelligence Department of Naval staff emphasised that the security of Mesopotamia and the British Empire was dependent on oil. It concluded that for both commercial and strategic reasons all the oilfields in the region should be brought under exclusive British control.⁵⁰⁴ In this regard, Peter Sluglett states that the three questions relating to

⁴⁹⁸ Memorandum: The Situation in Mesopotamia with notes as to Expenditure, Winston S Churchill, Appendix1, Memorandum by the General staff of Mesopotamia, 12 November 1919. CAB 24/93/21.

⁴⁹⁹ Memorandum: South Persian Oilfields, Walter H Long, 24 December 1920. CAB 24/117/77. T.N.A

⁵⁰⁰ See Eskander, *Britain's Policy*, p. 312-13.

⁵⁰¹ Possibility of Reduction of the Garrison of Mesopotamia, the War Office, 20th February, 1920. CAB/24/99.

⁵⁰² Ibid.

⁵⁰³ Memorandum: The Question of Mosul, Middle East Department, Colonial Office, 10 November 1922, CAB 24/140/3.

⁵⁰⁴ Memorandum: the oilfields of Persia and Mesopotamia, Intelligence Department, Naval Staff, Feb 26, 1919. F.O 608/273.

Mosul's oil, the northern frontier, and the Iraqi government's financial problems and difficulties were very close interconnected. The investment in Mosul's oil by any allied power required that the Vilayet should be included into the Iraqi state.⁵⁰⁵

Based on the above considerations the Cairo Conference in March 1921 formulated Britain's policy with regard to the future of the Mosul region. Indeed, the question of oil was fully considered in the future of this state. Churchill wrote to Hankey: 'I have very carefully considered the whole question of Mesopotamia oil in its relations to the draft mandate which is shortly to be discussed by the Council of the League of Nations'.⁵⁰⁶

With regard to the discussions concerning the future of Kurdistan, the British always viewed the question in the context of the security of the 'British-protected Arab state'. This meant the immediate need to include the northern border of Iraq with the Turkish borders, since it is necessary to take into consideration the question of the security of British -protected Arab state.⁵⁰⁷ Following the reports from officials on the ground dealing with the Kurdish claim for an independent state, Wilson indicated 'I am well aware that the foregoing proposals constitute a considerable extension of proposals in previous telegraphic correspondence in that they involve a recognition of a principle of a Kurdish state within the British sphere of guidance by British agent, with alternative of a re-constituted Turkish Empire'.⁵⁰⁸ However, these views were ignored in favour of wider British thinking that Southern Kurdistan should be attached to an Arab state in Mesopotamia for both strategic and economic reasons. In his notes on Wilson's proposal with regard to Kurdistan, Noel argued that since the proposal was paradoxical it would cause trouble. In particular he criticised the point of inclusion of the predominantly Kurdish areas into Iraq which were 'extraordinarily fertile and productive...on the other hand poor areas such as Tur Abdin with a considerable non Kurdish population (i.e. Syrian Jacobites and Chaldeans) it is proposed to leave to

⁵⁰⁵ Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq: contriving King and country*, 2007, p. 65

⁵⁰⁶ Letter from Mr. Churchill to Hankey, 20th June 1921, CAB 24/125/79 Memorandum CP 3077, Mesopotamian Oil., M P A Hankey Date: 27 June 1921 CAB 24/125/79

⁵⁰⁷ E.J.R, *Precis of Affairs*, p. 19.

⁵⁰⁸ From political Baghdad to High commissioner for Egypt, NO. 666, 13 June 1919, FO 609/365.TNA.

Kurdistan'.⁵⁰⁹ Noel suggested that instead the adoption of an ethnographic approach should be taken as much as possible when marking the boundary between Kurds and Arabs. The Secretary of State considered the concept of leaving the Kurds to themselves but was concerned as to the effect this would have on the security of Mesopotamia.⁵¹⁰

Noel demonstrated the effect of these conditions on peace and security in the region. He thought that under these circumstances pro-British feeling would be increased among Kurds, and the consequence would be that it would lead to a decline in the Turkish influence in Kurdistan. He warned that the partition of Kurdistan would create anti-British activities and spread insecurity in the arena. It is likely that Noel's suggestions persuaded the Government to a large extent but they preferred to take Wilson's view whether to precede this policy or not.⁵¹¹ In his response, Wilson argued against Noel's views and proposed the opposed plan which focused on the economic and strategic factors in the selection of the northern frontier of Mesopotamia including territories in Southern Kurdistan: 'I do not regard ethnological frontiers as being (?necessarily) good ones. Economic and geographic considerations in practice tend to outweigh those of race.'⁵¹²

It seems clear that the existence of oil in Southern Kurdistan, as well its strategic position, significantly influenced British policy thinking about the future of the political situation of this part of Kurdistan, in particular the prevention of implementing Article 64 of the Treaty of Sèvres which provided for the right of Southern Kurdistan to join the Northern part.⁵¹³

Another significant aspect of the British calculations with regard to Southern Kurdistan was related to their fear of other foreign interest in its oil fields. British reports stressed the close connection between the oil question and the prevailing instability and the anxiety in Mesopotamia. That is, the British, the 'men on spot' in particular, were very anxious about American and French policies regarding their position in the

⁵⁰⁹ Note by Major E.W.C Noel on Baghdad telegram of June 18th 1919, NO. 6666 on the Kurdish state affairs, 24th June 1919. AIR 20/714. TNA

⁵¹⁰ Ibid

⁵¹¹ Ibid

⁵¹² From civil commissioner Baghdad to India and Tehran, 27th November 1919.FO 371/ 4193.TNA

⁵¹³ Treaty of Peace with Turkey, 1920 Aug. 10, FO 93/110/81. T.N.A

region, and in particular in the Mosul Vilayet. They thought that the difficulties they faced in Mesopotamia was because of the Allies' hostile policy regarding their interests and the adoption of anti-British propaganda. British reports emphasised that the French and the Americans were inciting the Turks to attack Iraq and they thought that they were encouraging and funding Turkish nationalists to control the Mosul region in order to get hold of its oil concessions. From their viewpoint the French, specifically, were trying to weaken British control of the country by fomenting the hostility against Faisal and by hindering his policy in the Middle East. In addition, the British accused the French of funding anti-British propaganda through the local press.⁵¹⁴

On December 13, in a memorandum entitled 'Foreign Incitement of the Turks to Attack Iraq', Churchill warned the Cabinet that pro-Turkish and anti-Feisal propaganda had taken place, especially, after Turkish activities in Kurdistan had increased and Rawanduz in Southern Kurdistan had been captured by the Turkish incursion. This Turkish military advance led the British to fear losing Mosul which would endanger Britain's whole position in Mesopotamia by the Turks' use of Southern Kurdistan, as a base to attack Baghdad and take control of the oilfields. In this way, they could obtain much needed revenue by offering the concessions to France and the USA. The memorandum suggested that both the Americans and the French would favour and support a Turkish attempt to reconquer of Iraq.⁵¹⁵ Furthermore, there were fears that the Standard Oil Company was inciting the Turkish nationalists to occupy Iraq, and were accused of inducing the Mesopotamian rebellions in 1920, in the hope of winning the oil concession. This was because the American Company saw the British government as a major obstacle in the way of their interests. The British supported the TPC's pre-war claims but should the region return to the Turks, they would announce the invalidity of the TPC's claim which would mean the U.S. Company would get a stake in Mesopotamian oil.⁵¹⁶

In the absence of any definite British policy regarding Kurdish affairs and the lack of military to enforce their influence in the region, it was suggested that they

⁵¹⁴ Memorandum: French Negotiation with Angora, Winston Churchill, Colonial Office, 29 October 1921, CAB 24/129/48; Appendix: The Residency, Baghdad, 12 September 1921, CAB 24/124.

⁵¹⁵ Memorandum, Foreign Incitement of the Turks to Attack Iraq, Secretary of State for Colonies, December 13 1921, CAB 24/ 131/167.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid

withdraw from Southern Kurdistan and leave the Kurds to themselves. However, this idea, was rejected for various reasons: security problems, especially concerning the frontier, the concern for an external intervention in the region; and the fact that this decision would spur anti-British propaganda and the adoption of an hostile policy towards Britain in the region⁵¹⁷ in particular by Bolsheviks, and the Turks and their Allies. The British emphasised that oil was the motivation behind their support of the Turkish nationalists to control the Mosul region. In a cabinet paper, Churchill noted: 'There is some reason to believe that neither the United States nor France would be sorry to see the Turks back in Mosul in a position to give to their nationals the oil concessions which are at present claimed by H.M. government for the Turkish Petroleum Company'.⁵¹⁸ According to Churchill, difficulties with the Americans prevented the development of the oil industry in Iraq. After the Turkish victories on the Greek front and the Chanak crisis, the British faced a very difficult situation in Iraq. Since the Turks had advanced further into the Sulaymania and Kirkuk Churchill was deeply concerned about the situation and tended to suggest to Lloyd George that they evacuated the whole country or remained on the Basra Vilayet.⁵¹⁹ Lloyd George replied to Churchill that, 'If we leave, we may find a year or two after we have departed that we have handed over to the French and the Americans some of the richest oilfields in the world- just to purchase on derisive shout from our enemies. On general principles, I am against a policy of scuttle, in Iraq as elsewhere, and should like you to put all the alternatives, as you see them, before the Cabinet on Thursday.'⁵²⁰ During discussions regarding future of the Ottoman Empire, the Government of India stressed that British policy should not be based what they need but to prevent what the others want to obtain.

The Persian dimension

⁵¹⁷ Memorandum by Secretary of State for Colonies, the War Office, 12 June 1920, CAB

⁵¹⁸ Cabinet paper C. P 3832, Iraq Oil, circulated by the secretary of State for the Colonies, 13 March 1922, CO 730/28/7703. Cited from Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, p. 70.

⁵¹⁹ Winston S. Churchill to David Lloyd George, 1 September 1922, Martin Gilbert, *The Churchill Documents*. VOL 10, 17/27. pp. 1974-75

⁵²⁰ David Lloyd George to Winston S. Churchill, 5 September 1922, Martin Gilbert, *The Churchill Documents*. VOL 10, 17/27. pp. 1977-78.

In addition to the strategic and security importance of Persia to India and Mesopotamia, the oil question also played an important role in shaping British policy concerning Persia, particularly due to the increase in the navy's dependence on its oil resources. Hence, the necessity to protect the Persian oil fields became essential to the navy and was the main reason behind the British campaign in Mesopotamia at the beginning of the war.⁵²¹ The memorandum issued by the Cabinet dated May 1920, considered that the loss of Persia would be a serious blow for the British because their 'economic interests in Persia are considerable, in one important respect almost vital'. Therefore, the memorandum suggested that the British support for the Persian Government and for the protection of its integrity was vital for securing British interests in the region, especially in preventing Persia falling into the hands of Russia or coming under their influence which would endanger the British Empire's position in the East.⁵²² Therefore, Britain's post-war policy concerning Persia aimed to be the 'permanent maintenance of British influence', a stance emphasised by both Balfour and Curzon.⁵²³ In the light of these considerations the Anglo-British agreement of 9th August 1919 had designed, what Donald Ewalt described as a 'product of Great Britain's diplomatic preoccupation with the control of future oil supplies'.⁵²⁴ That is, the British pledged to protect the independent and integrity of Persia. In the framework of the situation of the Northern country the Anglo-Persian Company aided the Persian Government with 35000 pounds.⁵²⁵ In this context, on 26 February a Memorandum Intelligence Department of Naval Staff, concluded that the prosperity in both Persia and Mesopotamia was equally bound up with the stability and political conditions in Mesopotamia, hence, it stressed that it was essential to set up government in Mesopotamia to serve this aim. The document Concluded that: 'It is therefore of the

⁵²¹ Possibility of Reduction of the Garrison of Mesopotamia, the War Office, 20th February, 1920, CAB/24/99.

⁵²² Cabinet Memorandum: Situation in North Persia, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 24 May 1920, CAB 24/106.

⁵²³ For this see: Houshang Sabahi, *British Policy in Persia, 1918-1925*, Frank Cass, London, 1990, pp. 1-4.

⁵²⁴ Donald Ewalt, The Fight for Oil: Britain in Persia, 1919, *History Today*, Volume: 31 Issue: 9 1981.

⁵²⁵ Cabinet Memorandum: Foreign Countries Report No. 28, 20th October 1920, CAB 24/154.

first importance that the whole field should now be brought under an exclusive British control'.⁵²⁶

This British oil policy was the main reason behind America's opposition to the Anglo-Persian Agreement. The American Ambassador in London, John W. Davis, informed Curzon that 'there was a growing feeling, particularly among American oil interests that there was some design to discriminate against them in the Near East'.⁵²⁷ Regarding the same question, Admiral Bristol, Senior United States Naval officer in Turkey, stated that American Government would not recognise the British control over the Persian and Mesopotamian oil production.⁵²⁸

It was in this context that the British had to deal with the Kurdish question. They continually declared their opposition to any idea of including Persian Kurdistan within any Kurdish settlement since any Kurdish independent or separate autonomous state would violate the unity of the country. On December 1918, some representatives from Persian Kurdistan attended a meeting held in Sulaymania and expressed the wish to join the tribal confederation in Southern Kurdistan. However, their request was rejected by Wilson who explained that Britain's previous arrangements with the Persian government 'precluded our acceptance of their inclusion in the south Kurdish confederacy under British protection'.⁵²⁹ In the same way, on the Kurdish question in Persia, Cox noted: 'As to assurances, it is difficult in view of our agreement with Persia to give him anything definite which would not be construed as favouring his aspirations to independence'.⁵³⁰ This stance was shared by the British delegation at the Paris conference who stated that the establishment of an independent Kurdistan could not happen without violating the integrity of Persia. When Sharif Pasha insisted on the Kurdish claim for independence, his intervention was rejected by the British delegation. Sir L. Mallet pointed out that it would be impossible to include Persian Kurdistan.⁵³¹ For

⁵²⁶ Memorandum: 'the oilfields of Persia and Mesopotamia, Intelligence Department, Naval Staff', Feb 26, 1919. F.O 608/273.

⁵²⁷ Donald Ewalt, *The Fight for Oil*.

⁵²⁸ Confidential: Admiral Calthorpe, Constantinople, 31st May 1919, NO. 1170. F.O 608/273. T.N.A

⁵²⁹ Peace conference, Turkey and Middle East, March 1919, F.O. 608/95.T.N.A

⁵³⁰ From Percy Cox to Consul, Tabriz, No. 311, 6th September 1919, Air 20/741. T.N.A

⁵³¹ Peace Conference delegation Minute, Sir L. Mallet, Proposals for Independent Kurdish State, NO. 7996, 21 April 1919, FO 608/365; Peace Conference delegation Minute, Sir L. Mallet, Future of Kurdistan, May 24th 1919, FO 608/365.T.N.A

the same reason Saied Taha's project for a united Kurdistan under British supervision, was rejected during his visiting to Baghdad, in May 1919, where it was explained to him that he could expect no help from the British 'in realising this project as far as the Persian Kurdistan were concerned'.⁵³²

On the Kurdish Committee's request to H.M. Government to consider Kurdish claims, Calthorpe noted 'it is geographically impossible to create a state containing all Kurds; it would have to include all Kurdish populations... and would violate the integrity of Persia'.⁵³³ In commenting on the impact of the Anglo-Persia agreement on the Future of Kurdistan, the political department, the India Office noted that 'this undertaking renders it impossible for His Majesty's Government to support the proposal for a "United Kurdistan" necessarily including that part of Kurdistan which lies in Persian territory to which political opinion in Mesopotamia at one time inclined'.⁵³⁴

This British policy therefore prevented them from entering into negotiation with the Kurdish leader Simko. Even after the Raza Shah Coup d'état on 21 February 1921, the Persian Government's change of attitude towards the British did not alter Britain's position regarding a Kurdish policy in Persia. Following the developments in both Turkey and Persia, the High Commissioner of Baghdad in his report dated 26 August 1921, suggested the idea of breaking up the Kurdish districts in both countries and for this purpose they had already contacted Simko who demanded the separation of Kurdistan from Persia with British assistance.⁵³⁵ However, Churchill instructed Percy Cox to avoid any arrangements with Simko, except the question of returning the Christians.⁵³⁶

It seems evident that British interests in Persia, including its oil resources, had a significant impact on the British policy decision to support the integrity of Persia. This policy reflected negatively on the future of Kurdistan, and can be considered to be one important factor in obstructing the establishment of an independent Kurdish state. In

⁵³² Bell, *Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia*, p. 69.

⁵³³ *Aspiration of Kurds*, 27 January 1919, F.O 608/95.T.N.A

⁵³⁴ *Mesopotamia: British Relation with Kurdistan*, political department, Indian Office, 27th August 1919. F.O 608/95.

⁵³⁵ *Foreign Countries Report*, NO. 51, 7 September 1921, CAB 24/155.

⁵³⁶ Eskander, *British policy towards the Kurdish question*, pp. 356-57.

addition, the question of Persia's security took into consideration any British policy discussion regarding the future of Ottoman Kurdistan. This was because they supposed that the formation of any political Kurdish entity from any part of Kurdistan would affect the situation of the other parts of the country, including the Persian part. Therefore, the Iranian factor was always on the British policy makers' minds and played a part in any discussions concerning the future of Kurdistan and this led to the complexity of the Kurdish question. The agreement overshadowed the Kurdish dream and the hope of uniting the Ottoman and Iranian Kurdistan in this crucial political phase.

Britain's denial of an Oil Motivation

Despite the above discussion, the British official view denied the influence of oil in their policy particularly with regard to the question of Mosul. Immediately after the war, Lord Curzon pointed out that 'The Allies floated to victory on a sea of oil'.⁵³⁷ During the Lausanne Conference, however, Curzon declared that 'The question of the oil of Mosul Vilayet has nothing to do with my argument...I do not know how much oil there may be in the neighbourhood of Mosul or whether it can be worked at a profit or whether it may be turn out, after all, to be a fraud.'⁵³⁸ T. E. Lawrence also claimed that the oil had little or no influence in British policy decision towards Mesopotamia.⁵³⁹ Toynbee and Kirkwood argued that oil was not an important factor in determining the British policy towards the fate of Mosul; they asked why, if it was so important, did the British government insist on incorporating Mosul within Iraq rather than under Turkish-British control, 'the Mosul oil might equally well be secured by Anglo-Turkish political understanding based on British approval in Turkey's territorial claim'.⁵⁴⁰

Noël Spencer and David McDowall who support the previous notion argue that oil was not an important factor in the Mosul question; neither side had an interest in it but they utilized it as an instrument to gain their political aims.⁵⁴¹ Spencer argues that the British rejected the Turkish offer during the Lausanne negotiations because without

⁵³⁷ Keith Jeffery, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire, 1918-22*, p. 36.

⁵³⁸ Lord Curzon: "Oil Not A Factor", *The Manchester Guardian*, January 24, 1923, p. 7; *The Failure at Lausanne, Advocate of Peace through Justice*, vol. 85, no. 2, 1923, pp. 71-72.

⁵³⁹ Noël Walter, Spencer, *The diplomatic history of Iraq, 1920-1932*. University Microfilms, 1981, p.205

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid, p205; McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, p. 143.

control over the mountains of Southern Kurdistan Mesopotamia could not be secured.⁵⁴² Peter J. Beck argues 'even without oil, the British government would have been reluctant to make concessions on Mosul'.⁵⁴³

In spite of the above assertions, I would argue that without having these valuable oil resources the British would never have advanced further forward into the Mosul Vilayet at the final stage of the war and as I have argued earlier, oil had a huge influence on the policy-makers. Without oil the Mosul question would not have become so crucial, not only from Britain's perspective but in the international context as well. Thus, oil not only had a huge impact on the British military advance towards Mosul but was also an important factor in the Britain's decision to include the region within the Iraqi State. Some argue that the reason why the British overlooked the influence of oil and emphasised strategic motives was to hide their monopolistic purposes for oil and to avoid any foreign and regional agitation.⁵⁴⁴ In addition, it could be assumed that British control of Mosul's oilfields could not be obtained through Turkey's offer since the concept of physical control became the core of the British Middle Eastern policy particularly regarding the Mosul region in order to secure oil there. Therefore, having a political as well as a territorial control was more important than the possession of oil deposits, particularly in cases of emergency. This was one of the significant factors behind the Admiralty's demand to keep control of Iraq. On 7 December the Middle East Department noted on Curzon's telegram respecting the issue: 'the admission of Turkish interests on our oil projects would be extremely inconvenient'.⁵⁴⁵

Indeed, it seemed clear from the Admiralty and Middle East Department's standpoint that this Turkish offer would not secure the British oil strategy especially in the case of emergency. Since the British had long experience of the imperial game in international rivalry, especially in their long diplomatic dispute with the French over the provisions of the Sykes-Picot agreement and the dispute over the pre-war oil

⁵⁴² Spencer, *The diplomatic history of Iraq*, p. 205

⁵⁴³ Peter J. Beck, 'A Tedious and Perilous Controversy': Britain and the Settlement of the Mosul Dispute, 1918-1926, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Apr., 1981), p. 258.

⁵⁴⁴ Elizabeth Monroe, *Britain's Moment in the Middle East, 1914-1956*, London, 1963, 103; Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, p70; Mejcher, *Oil and British Policy towards Mesopotamia, 1914-1918*; Mejcher, *Imperial Quest for Oil*, pp131-144; Rutledge, *Enemy on the Euphrates*, p. 31.

⁵⁴⁵ Note on Curzon's telegram of 5 December 1922 by the Middle East Department, London 7th December 1922, CO 730/29/60539. In: Mejcher, *Imperial Quest for Oil*, p 134.

concessions in the territories under the French zone. Likewise, American demands for sharing oil and their insistence on the principle of open-door would make a real potential challenge to the British oil interests. The Turkish offer, therefore, did not convince British policy-makers because the de facto situation probably had the power to compromise the provision agreements. As Admiral Slade commented on that point 'Conventions and Treaties only papers and can be torn up and are not sufficient safeguard'. In fact this was what happened in the case of Sykes-Picot and Sevres treaty whereby the most recent obvious examples for them. Therefore, it is not reasonable to compare this Turkish offer equally with the oilfields be under permanent British control. Eventually, the British had to compromise with the USA as long as the latter would not approve the Mandate territories division according the San Remo agreement 1920. Finally, the British agreed to give 23.75 percent of the share of Mosul oil concessions. This was according to the famous Red Line agreement which provided a 23.75 percent share in the holdings of the newly established Iraq Petroleum Company for American firms and pledged a similar minimal portion for the participants in concessions gained by the others within the boundaries of the former Ottoman Empire In the course of the frontier dispute between Iraq and Turkey, the question of oil continued to influence the political situation of Iraq and the position of Mosul. The concessions of the Turkish Petroleum company posed an important question concerning the British, King Feisal and the Iraqi Prime Minister, and the League of Nations' Mosul Committee. The objection to the TPC's granting oil concessions by certain Cabinet Ministers was a complicated issue that would affect the position of Mosul Vilayet, since it was realised that the concessions should be granted to the TPC. The correspondence between the High Commissioner of Baghdad and the Colonial Secretary indicates this belief. The British applied utmost pressure on the Iraqi government to accept the TPC concessions without delays.⁵⁴⁶ The British High Commissioner of Baghdad informed Iraqi Prime Minister that if Iraq refused the concessions, the British government would lose its interests in Iraq, and would not give Iraq "any generous assistance".⁵⁴⁷ Colonel Paulis, a Belgian who was a member of the League of Nations Commission for Inquiry Mosul question, declared to the Iraqi Finance Minister that 'the first of the two parties, Turkey and Iraq, who grant the TPC

⁵⁴⁶ Secretary State for the Colonies to the High Commissioner for Iraq, 7 March 1925. Air 5/556. T.N.A

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid

oil concession, would get Mosul Vilayet.⁵⁴⁸ Feisal also was under pressure, he was prepared to dismiss the whole cabinet and appoint one that would be ready to accept the concessions.⁵⁴⁹ In addition, the TPC representative was negotiating with Iraqi government under the presidency of the High Commissioner. In London the negotiations between British Government and the TPC continued regarding the matter.⁵⁵⁰ The granting of concessions signed by the Iraqi Cabinet 14 March 1925.

The grant of a concession to the Turkish Petroleum Company was regarded by His Majesty's Government as a clear international obligation of Iraq, since the Company constituted 'the most powerful financial Corporation in the world.' The international position of the Company would result in several countries having a direct interest in the "peace, order and good government" of Iraq. In the Secretary of State's view, the granting was linked with the question of order and peace in Iraq.⁵⁵¹ Likewise, in the view of the Mosul commission the Turkish Oil Company would ensure stability in Iraq as 'a number of powers [are] interested and represented by it'. The TPC was concerned about the Turkish attitude that if any part of the Mosul returned to Turkey, the concessions of the TPC was considered void. Therefore, the exploitation of Iraqi oil by any or all the allied powers required that Mosul should remain part of Iraq.⁵⁵²

In fact, the international matters regarding the Mosul question mainly related to the oil concessions. Churchill thought the British difficulties would be eased if the British could satisfy the American participation in oil concessions.⁵⁵³ The Foreign Office and the Colonial Office agreed that the best solution to the difficulty was to be found in allowing American participation in the TPC concessions. This view was shared both by the Petroleum Department and by the Anglo Persian Oil Company.⁵⁵⁴

Indeed, the cooperation between Great Powers fundamentally contributed to the settlement of the Mosul question. America and France were satisfied with promises of a share of the oil of Mosul. Also, this cooperation of the Great Powers affected

⁵⁴⁸ High Commissioner for Iraq to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 17 February 1925, Air 5/556. T.N.A

⁵⁴⁹ The Secretary of State for the Colonies to the High Commissioner for Iraq, 25 February 1925, Air 5/556. T.N.A

⁵⁵⁰ The Secretary of State for the Colonies to the High Commissioner for Iraq, 27 February and 7 March 1925,

⁵⁵¹ Cabinet Memorandum: Iraq: Turkish Petroleum Company, L S Amery, 23 February 1925 CAB/24/172.

⁵⁵² Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, p. 65.

⁵⁵³ Cabinet Memorandum: Iraq Oil, Winston Churchill, 13 March 1922. CAB/24/134.

⁵⁵⁴ Cabinet Memorandum: Iraq Oil, Winston Churchill, 13 March 1922. CAB/24/134.

Turkey's to accept, reluctantly, the Commission's decision to integrate Mosul into Iraq. The Turks had abandoned their territorial claims for their participation in Iraqi oil.⁵⁵⁵

The League of Nations became an instrument of the British to consider the British views. The Commission disregarded the principle of conducting a plebiscite on Mosul's future, which was demanded by the Turkish Government, and made a decision in favour of the British. The Commission came to the conclusion that, owing to the backward state of education among the inhabitants of Mosul, the primitive nature of the social organisation and the impossibility of establishing a provisional neutral administration, the practical difficulties would have been insurmountable, and there would have been serious reasons for doubting the validity of the vote. The Commission therefore considered that 'the procedure proposed by the British Government was the one most appropriate for furnishing the Council with the information it required for the settlement of the dispute.'⁵⁵⁶

The oil question played a powerful role in determining British policy decisions regarding the Mosul region, and crucially affected the situation of Kurdistan. It contributed to the dismemberment of Ottoman Kurdistan and was especially influential in the inclusion of southern Kurdistan into the Iraqi state. It could be argued that the question of oil was one of the significant factors that jeopardized the settlement of the Kurdish question. This is because oil contributed to the complexity of the political situation of Kurdistan.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that during the time period in question, the issue of oil had an important impact on the international rivalry and it complicated the post-war Middle East situation including the future of Kurdistan. The Great Powers' struggle over Kurdistan's oil began in the pre-war period, and brought the region into the conflict

⁵⁵⁵ Cabinet Meeting, 28 April 1926, CAB/23/52 ; Stivers, *Supremacy and Oil*, p. 171.

⁵⁵⁶ Report to the Seventh Assembly of the League on the Work of the Council, on the Work of the Secretariat and on the Measures taken to execute the Decisions of the Assembly. League of Nations, Geneva, June 1st, 1926. Publications of the League of Nations: General Questions, 1926.

zone of international competition that significantly contributed to the obstruction of the settlement of the Kurdish question. I maintained that the existence of the valuable oil resources in Southern Kurdistan was an important reason behind the British interest in taking control of this region and integrating it into the Iraqi state; otherwise, initially the British would not have been interested in returning it or even to control the region at the end of the war. I argued that if the oil had not existed in the southern part of Kurdistan, probably Ottoman Kurdistan would never have fragmented into three parts; that is oil was an important factor that impacted on the future of the country. Since the pre-war period, Kurdistan had been subjected to the struggle between the Imperial powers and the Companies. There was a connection between oil and the partitioning of Kurdistan.

In terms of the regional perspective, the question of oil had a profound impact on the future of Kurdistan. The British government did not have the desire to bring the whole of Kurdistan under their protection for many different reasons. First, they considered that a Persian Kurdistan was out of question because this was against their traditional policy in the region, in particular the concept of protecting the integrity of the country. The establishment of any Kurdish entity would affect the Persian situation since it would encourage them to take the same step. With regard to the Turkish nationalists, the British abandoned the idea of a Kurdish separate state whether in Southern Kurdistan or a central one by encouraging Turkish nationalists to obtain Mosul and its oil for the Iraqi State. In particular, the Turkish nationalists used the oil card to force the British to consider their concerns about the Kurdish question. The project of a Kurdish state, whether under the United Kurdistan or as a separate state, did not fit with British interests in the complicated clash generated by the diplomatic disagreements within the Great Powers and the regional powers. From the British perspective, the Kurdish question appeared to be of little concern in this clash of interests; therefore the Kurds' national aspirations were curtailed due to the division of their country among different states.

Also, American and French interests and claims in the region were an important factor that influenced British policy with regard to the Mosul Vilayet. According to the British intelligence reports the Bolshevik Government planned to 'break the backbone of the British Empire' by provoking internal disorders in India in order to force the British

to withdraw from Mesopotamia and Persia. The chief driver of this 'Imperialist Government' plan was to control the oilfields in the region.⁵⁵⁷

Chapter Five

The 'Sharifian Solution' and British Kurdish Policy, 1919 – 1923

'The history of the Orient is made by individuals and small groups, who with or without the consent of their governments, succeed in bringing to pass events, circumstances and situations, which the statesmen of Europe have to deal and frequently

557 "'Situation in Middle East" (Note by Major Bray, Political Intelligence Officer, attached to India Office)' 18 Nov 1920, [3r] (5/30), British Library: India Office Records and Private papers, IOR/L/PS/18/B358, *Qatar Digital Library*.

disentangle'.⁵⁵⁸ William Yale, a special agent of the States Department of the United States of America in the Near East, 1917-1919.

'I've suggested to Sir Percy that it would be a pleasant change for me to set up as uncrowned Queen of Kurdistan. I don't want to stand in his way if he has a fancy for the job - we might perhaps toss for it'.⁵⁵⁹

The 'Sharifian Solution'⁵⁶⁰ adopted by the British and advocated by certain officials on the ground, had a considerable effect on the future of Kurdistan; and the absence of Kurdistan from the Middle Eastern political map was one of the greatest problems that the solution generated. This study offers a critical analysis and a new perspective on the impact of the Sharifian Solution with regard to the Kurdish Question. It argues that pro-Sharifian British officials had two conflicting visions with respect to the future of Kurdistan. One was that of the pro-separation group, presented by Major Young and supported by others particularly T.E. Lawrence; and on the other hand, there was the pro-integration party which was manifested by the High Commissioner of Baghdad under Bell's mastery. Moreover, this chapter shows that it was actually the conflict first and foremost between the Secretaries behind the scene that influenced the policy decisions regarding the future of Southern Kurdistan. Bell, who was Britain's Oriental Secretary in Baghdad, was the architect of the political views that Baghdad presented and on the other side, Young was behind the drafting of the key instructions that the Colonial Office sent to Baghdad. Bell and Cox, on the ground officials, were key in preventing the establishment of an independent Kurdistan and obstructing the implementation of the ethnographic approach which the Cairo Conference supported. While others are well known, Bell was the critical instigator and proponent of Arab rule over the Kurdish regions in present-day Iraq. The imposition of Iraqi national identity through the King and the Sunni elite was supposed to build the nation-state of Iraq and undermine the sectarian and ethnic division of the three Ottoman vilayets. This policy

⁵⁵⁸ Yale's report of November 9, 1918. From Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, p. 132.

⁵⁵⁹ Gertrude Bell, Letters, [24 October 1921].

⁵⁶⁰ This term used by Churchill during his speech in Parliament on 14 June 1921: 'We are leaning strongly to what I may call the Sherifian solution, both in Mesopotamia, to which the Emir Feisal is proceeding, and in Trans-Jordania, where the Emir Abdulla is now in charge.' Middle Eastern Service.HC Deb 14 June 1921 vol 143 cc265-334.

failed and to this day, it has not succeeded in forming a homogeneous and united nation. Instead, it has produced long-term violence and instability.

Introduction

In the post-war period the British faced many crises throughout the Empire but, the most serious were due to the nationalist movements in countries such as Ireland, Egypt, India, and Mesopotamia. These brought the British government under considerable pressure (especially the financial crisis) and a lack of troops prevented the government from supporting the massive expansion of empire especially in the Middle East. At the same time, the British position was complicated by conflicting commitments to the French, Arabs and Zionists in the Middle East. With regard to their relations with France, as Susan Pedersen states, the mandate system contributed significantly to decreasing Anglo-French rivalry 'to promulgate a paternalistic definition of 'trusteeship', and to push claims to 'self-determination' off the table'.⁵⁶¹ On the other hand, the mandate system was resisted by those placed under, it especially in Mesopotamia and Syria. In the summer of 1920 both the Mesopotamian uprising and the collapse of Feisal's government in Damascus hugely influenced Britain's position in the Middle East. It had become clear to London that holding Iraq militarily was costing more in men and money, and therefore it became essential to either find a cheaper way of controlling the country or to abandon it.⁵⁶²

This situation required the British government to construct a new form of policy in the region. However, there were significant disagreements between the British policy-makers about what kind of policy to adopt towards the Middle East situation, and which department should take the responsibility for its affairs. At this point, personalities became a factor in British policy decisions concerning Mesopotamian affairs as well. Churchill's policy in dealing with Mesopotamia centred on financial and military perspectives and therefore he asked for a reduction in British forces in the

⁵⁶¹ Pedersen, *The Guardians*, p. 12.

⁵⁶² The Development of Air Control in Iraq, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Air, Note by Chief of the Air Staff. October 1922. AIR 19/109

Middle East and argued for withdrawal from Mesopotamia especially the Mosul Vilayet. On the other hand, Curzon's approach which dominated British policy in the post-war period, aimed at destroying Turkey as a pan-Islamic centre, an idea which Lloyd George shared.⁵⁶³ Curzon and Montague appeared to act against Churchill's desires; in particular they strongly endeavoured to wreck the policy of withdrawing from Iraq.⁵⁶⁴ This divergence of perspectives reflected on London's overall vision concerning the matter. The government wished to minimise costs, but at the same time did not desire to abandon any part of Mesopotamia.⁵⁶⁵ To overcome these conflicts within the British Empire therefore, the cabinet decided to establish the Middle East department under Winston Churchill's administration in order to deal with the situation.

It seems the financial crisis was the most significant factor in the British Government's formulation of a new policy, as Hankey noted at the beginning of 1921: 'Finance dominates everything'.⁵⁶⁶ In November 1921, Churchill said to his secretary, John Shuckburgh, 'Do please realise that everything else that happens in the Middle East is secondary to the reductions in expense'.⁵⁶⁷ Hence, a substantial reduction of military expenditure in Mesopotamia was necessary. But this would create a vacuum behind. One of Churchill's alternative solutions for saving money was to provide modern weapons and technological advance by applying the air policy in the Middle East.⁵⁶⁸ Most significantly, 'the Hashemite solution' became the slogan for the British strategy in dealing with Middle Eastern affairs, as was concluded in the Cairo conference. In 14 March 1921, Churchill wrote to Lloyd George: 'I have no doubt personally Feisal offers far away the best chance of saving our money'.⁵⁶⁹ Six years later, Fiesal told Churchill that British object in sending him to Iraq 'was to secure a

⁵⁶³ Keith Jeffery, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire, 1918-22*, Manchester University Press, 1984, pp. 40-41.

⁵⁶⁴ Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs*, p 458.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 448.

⁵⁶⁶ Jeffery, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire*, p. 21.

⁵⁶⁷ Winston Churchill to John Shuckburgh, 12 November 1921, Churchill Papers: 17/15. Martin Gilbert, *The Churchill Documents*, Vol 10, Hillsdale College Press, Michigan-2008, p.1669.

⁵⁶⁸ Jeffery, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire*, p. 18.

⁵⁶⁹ Telegram from Mr. Churchill to the Prime Minister, 14 March 1921, CAB 24/121.

reduction in expense' which was remarkably achieved 'in the six years that had passed.'⁵⁷⁰

So, the Empire's economic and strategic considerations were of prime importance in making the Iraqi State. The geographical and ethnical factors were subordinate to the broader Imperial interests. People were brought together against their wishes; it was not a logical decision to put various people of different backgrounds and from the three different pre-Ottoman Vilayets. It was "a powder keg", in one single central state. By imposing the European model of a centralised state, the British created a dilemma for the people and identities were put under the new state.⁵⁷¹

This chapter examines the British policy in the Middle East, in particular the one advocated by the pro-Sharifian British officials in Mesopotamia, which had a considerable effect on the future of Kurdistan. It emphasises the policy of 'the Sharifian Solution' in the Middle East, especially in Mesopotamia. It argues the successful establishment of Iraq, an Arab state, obstructed the evolution of an autonomous entity in Southern Kurdistan and later contributed to its incorporation into the Iraqi Arab state. Previous literary discussions about the question mainly reflected the role of Cox, leaving the role of Bell little considered.⁵⁷² This chapter, however, look at the subject in Bell's perspective; it argues that Bell was at the core of British imperial policy-making about the Iraqi State and as an individual, contributed significantly to its establishment, to include Kurdistan. I would argue, however, that Cox was largely influenced by Bell's views with regard to the political situation in the country. She was behind most of the reports which Cox sent to London especially to the Colonial Office with respect to the future of Southern Kurdistan and Mosul Vilayet. She wrote to her

⁵⁷⁰ Memorandum: Iraq. Negotiations for Revision of the Treaty, Winston S Churchill, 29 November 1927 CAB 24/189.

⁵⁷¹ Gareth Stansfield, *Iraq: People History, Politics*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2007, pp. 27 & 28; See also: Toby Dodge, Iraq: the contradictions of exogenous state-building in historical perspective. *Third World Quarterly*, 27 (1), 2006, pp. 187-200.

⁵⁷² The most significant literature written on the subject: Robert Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism*; Eskander, Southern Kurdistan under Britain's Mesopotamian Mandate: From Separation to Incorporation, 1920-23, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Apr., 2001).

Father: 'I've been ceaselessly engaged in writing memorandums on the Kurdish question for the High Commissioner'.⁵⁷³ In December 1921, Bell wrote: 'I think I managed to put an end to my logic'.⁵⁷⁴ Also, in an extremely confidential letter to her father she indicated that her knowledge of the country gave her the right to reshape it.⁵⁷⁵ Further, she impressed British Officials in Basrah while she worked there: 'This lady, whose great knowledge of Arabia is most valuable, and who is practically doing the work of a G. S. O. ought to be officially recognised'.⁵⁷⁶ During wartime, Bell was able to impress the key policy makers in the Middle East and London, such as Balfour and McMahon. She received special appreciation from the British government of the valuable work which she had accomplished.⁵⁷⁷ She stood behind the public figures as their opinion-maker, convincing them that an Arab-governed Kurdistan was preferable to independent nations divided along ethnographic lines. The map that Bell builds and the map that is – the map that Bell follows to get the political map the way she wanted it – these are all maps. As David Fromkin states: 'It was an era in which Middle Eastern countries and frontiers were fabricated in Europe. Iraq and what we now call Jordan, for example, were British inventions, lines drawn on an empty map by British politicians after the First World War, while the boundaries of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iraq were established by a British civil servant in 1922'.⁵⁷⁸ Bell existed as a subterranean force – unseen by many, she made the landscape what it was. Larger, more public figures are often credited with the formation of the Middle East as it is today, but Bell was the mover, especially in the case of Iraq. It is not an exaggeration to say that Bell was more Sharifian than the Sharifian family. She was 'an Arab nationalist' and thought that: 'the only place for Arab nationalism to spring up from was Iraq'.⁵⁷⁹

It could be argued, perhaps, that Gertrude Bell built up her own role and exaggerated her own importance, in policy-making in Mesopotamia and Kurdistan. However, we can see references to her role other testimonies of the time such as those

⁵⁷³ Letters, 15/8/1922. Newcastle Archive.

⁵⁷⁴ Winstone, *Bell: A Queen of Desert*, p. 12

⁵⁷⁵ Lukitz, *A Quest in the Middle East*, p.142.

⁵⁷⁶ Memorandum on the Intelligence service in Mesopotamia. DDSY(2)/4/101. The Papers of Sir Mark Sykes, 1879-1919, Hull University Archives.

⁵⁷⁷ The under Secretary of State, Foreign Office, London, January 1917, File 4744/1915 Pt 1 'German War - Arabia. The Arab Bureau at Cairo'. IOR/L/PS/10/576/1

⁵⁷⁸ David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace*, p. 9.

⁵⁷⁹ Letters, /8/1922. Newcastle Archive.

from Major Soan, Lees, Lyon and Noel, and conclusions of other historians. It seems, indeed, that to a great degree her own account can be considered trustworthy.⁵⁸⁰ Cox confirmed this when he wrote, 'Miss Bell acted as the strainer through which the individuals filtered through to me, accompanied by a brief note as to what their tribe was, where they came from and what they wanted'.⁵⁸¹ Additionally, their powerful intellectual and spiritual relationship may have contributed to her influence on Cox's pro-Arab views.⁵⁸² In their study, Olson and Eskander have emphasised the role of Cox in directing the British policy towards the future of Kurdistan. Eskander admits that 'Gertrude Bell must have considerably influenced Cox's pro-Arab opinions.'⁵⁸³

All of the studies reviewed here support the hypothesis that Bell was an influential factor in determining British policy in Baghdad, especially in relation to the integration of Kurdistan into the Iraqi state.

In the post war era the two different approaches, strategic-economic, and ethnographic dominated in British policy discussions guarding the future of Kurdistan especially in connection with the position of Mesopotamia. Though Bell advocated a strategic and economic approach, the ethnographic plan proposed by the Colonial Office and supported by Winston Churchill would have been a far better way to tackle the Kurdish question. In the course of the post-war period these two schemes were in conflict in British political discussions about the future of Southern Kurdistan. In late 1918 Noel was the first to propose an ethnographic perspective on the Kurdish question. He constantly defended this view as the most logical and reasonable policy Britain could adopt toward the region. Then, in early 1921, the idea advocated by Major

⁵⁸⁰ For instance, see: South Kurdistan: Memorandum by Winston S Churchill, Colonial Office, February 26, 1921. CAB 24/120/58.T.N.A; Kurds, Arabs and Britons: The Memoir of Wallace Lyon in Iraq 1918-44, edited with an introduction by D.K Fieldhouse, I.B. Tauris, London, 2002; Lees, G. M. "Two years in South Kurdistan." Journal of the Central Asian Society 15, no. 3 (1928); Liora Lukitz, A Quest in the Middle East: Gertrude Bell and the Making of Modern Iraq; Georgina Howell, Gertrude Bell: Queen of the Desert, Shaper of Nations, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York, 2008; Janet Wallach, Desert Queen: The Extraordinary Life of Gertrude Bell, Adventurer, Adviser to Kings, Ally of Lawrence of Arabia, Anchor Books, 2005; Fromkin, A Peace to End All Peace, p. 496; H.V.F. Winstone, Gertrude Bell: A Biography, Barzan Publishing Limited, 1978.; Eskander, Southern Kurdistan under Britain's Mesopotamian Mandate, p.157.

⁵⁸¹ See: John Townsend, Proconsul to the Middle East: Sir Percy Cox and the End of Empire, pp. 100-102

⁵⁸² Ibid, p.101.

⁵⁸³ Eskander, Southern Kurdistan under Britain's Mesopotamian Mandate, p.157.

Young and supported by Churchill and Lawrence in the Cairo Conference was one that the conference concluded would be a policy Britain should adopt towards Southern Kurdistan. However, the policy faced opposition from the Baghdad Circle, Cox and Bell, and was prevented from being implemented. The Baghdad Circle managed to attain Bell's scheme of systematically extending Arab rule over Southern Kurdistan. Consequently, the question of Kurdistan was sacrificed in favour of the Arab Kingdom of Iraq, for economic, strategic, and sectarian reasons.

Arab Nationalist Claims on Kurdistan:

The Arab Nationalist claim on areas of Ottoman Kurdistan, especially in the south and west, is one key factor in the way that the Kurdish question was subordinated in the British perspective. As noted in the previous chapter, Mark Sykes and the Arab Bureau played a significant role in outlining British policy in Arab regions and harmonizing British interests in the Arab question especially with the Hashemite family.

The McMahon-Hussain correspondence of 1915 became the basis of the Sharifians' claims in the post-war Middle East settlement. In this correspondence, the British promised Hussain they would support the establishment of an independent Arab state, which would include the Mosul Vilayet. Therefore, under various pretexts, Arab nationalists and Sharifians maintained their claim on southern Kurdistan as part of the Arab state and opposed Kurdish independence and autonomy. These Arab claims were supported by certain crucial British officials who influenced British policy decisions towards the future of Kurdistan.

T. E. Lawrence for one convinced London to support Feisal in representing Arabs at the Paris Conference although he faced French opposition.⁵⁸⁴ The Kurds did

⁵⁸⁴ T. E. Lawrence, who was called Lawrence of Arabia, reports that: 'Mr. Balfour completely forgot the Hejaz representatives at the first sitting. I got Mallet, Tyrrell, and Cecil to go and protest. Then I went to see Eric Drummond, and explained myself vigorously. He tried first to persuade me that we had no standing, but later came round and promised to do his best. I dined with Mr. Balfour, and got his promise to the same effect, and loaded him full of ammunition. Philip Kerr did the same for Lloyd George on Lionel Curtis' advice. Meanwhile I told Feisal that his question was not prejudiced, only postponed a day for production of necessary papers. Next day Balfour proposed the Hejaz. Pichon protested.

not have such lobbying power to advocate for them in British circles. Certain officials such as Noel had little influence in the policy making decisions, especially when compared with actors such as Cox, Bell, Lawrence, and T.A. Wilson.

In his memorandum of 29 January, 1919 at the Paris Peace Conference Feisal asked for Arab independence in the Alexandretta-Diyarbakir territories. Feisal's claim went much further than the wartime promises made to his father by the British. He wrongly claimed that all the inhabitants of those territories spoke one language - Arabic.⁵⁸⁵ Contrary to his claim, geographically and ethnographically Kurdistan was quite different from the Arab regions surrounding it. The majority of the inhabitants were Kurds, who spoke Kurdish as their mother-tongue, as Noel noted: 'Ninety-nine percent of the population (Kurdish people) only speak Kurdish, wear an exclusively Kurdish dress'.⁵⁸⁶

This indicates how the lack of Kurdish representation in the British Empire negatively affected Kurds during the Paris Peace Conference discussions about the Middle East settlement. Mesopotamia, Armenia, and to some extent Assyria were prioritized in the policy discussions. The Kurdish question, bounded on all sides by these entities, could not be resolved. Hence, the future of Kurdistan was affected by the counter lobbies of those nations which pressed their ambitions at the expense of Kurdish interests. Regarding this question Busch writes: 'The future of Kurdistan progressed very little in Paris. The conference could produce no solution for Turkey, Iraq and Armenia and therefore not one for Kurdistan either. Conference delay aggravated the situation, especially the unrest and instability of the situation, in the region made the situation worst'.⁵⁸⁷

In the post-war period the Sharifian movement actively worked in Mesopotamia with the aim of inducing the public to accept Sharifian rule. Sharif Hussain himself

Clemenceau accepted one delegate, and Pichon said they could have no more since they were an embryo nationality, not an independent state. Balfour and Lloyd George countered sharply with the statement that they and France had recognised its independence, and the point - two delegates - was carried'. T. E. Lawrence, *Diary of the Peace Conference*, January 1919 DG pp. 273-4. T. E. Lawrence Studies. http://www.telstudies.org/writings/contents_lists/years/1919_1920.shtml

⁵⁸⁵ McNamara, *The Hashemites*, p. 96.

⁵⁸⁶ 'Mesopotamia: Future Constitution' [4r] (7/12), British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/L/PS/18/B317, Qatar Digital Library.

⁵⁸⁷ Busch, *Mudras to Lausanne*, p. 185

contacted tribes in Mesopotamia and encouraged them to reject British rule and demand a Sharifian government. As well, Sharifian propaganda in Mesopotamia was well-organised, especially through the secret society of al-'Ahd, controlled as it was by Mesopotamian officers. Baghdadi Officers, who served Feisal's government in Syria, used that country as a base of operations, and dominated the Sharifian campaign. Sharif himself was clearly interested in Kurdish affairs.⁵⁸⁸

On the other hand, Wilson opposed the Sharifian solution and their claims in Mesopotamia. Aggravated by their activities, he claimed that the movement was tantamount to agitation from outside, especially the incursion from Syria. Wilson stated that Sharifians were quite unknown in Mesopotamia, and he expressed alarm at the policy urged by the London government to impose Sharifian rule upon all Mesopotamian people, which he believed would have severe consequences. To demonstrate his claims, Wilson conducted a plebiscite to ascertain the will of the Mesopotamian people towards the Sharifian family. The result was that: 'the majority desired no change of regime, a large minority favoured an Arab Amir under British guidance and control'.⁵⁸⁹

Wilson also opposed the creation of the Arab government proposed by Yassin Hashimi and Naji Bey, arguing that the Kurds in Mesopotamia 'will never accept an Arab ruler, and they are potentially a powerful disruptive force'.⁵⁹⁰ In the same way, the Shias would not accept an Arab government dominated by Sunni. Wilson indicated that there was not one member of the Shia community included amongst the Baghdadi party in Syria. 'If we raise members of the Sharifian family to pre-eminence in the Arab countries we shall have before long to support them by force of arms against a formidable group of dissentients. Bin Saud, Bin Rashid, The Imam, The Idris, and other Arabian potentates will never recognise their supremacy and within a few years will be in active opposition; nor can the Sharifian family reckon on popular or a democratic support'. Wilson further indicated that if this outlined policy were adopted, the potentiality of Turkish pan-Islamic doctrine against the British would succeed, in

⁵⁸⁸ G.R. Driver, Reports on Kurdistan and the Kurds, Jerusalem, 1919, p. 98. In Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, p. 183'

⁵⁸⁹ Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917-1920: A Clash of Loyalties*, p. 114.

⁵⁹⁰ Despatch from Civil Commissioner, Mesopotamia, to Secretary of State for India, 15 November 1919, Ref: IOR/L/PS/18/B337.

particular among the Kurds. This could problematize the creation of the autonomous Kurdish state which had already been authorized. Consequently, this would deepen the need for British financial and military commitments to maintain stability in the region.⁵⁹¹ Hence, Wilson suggested the alternative of establishing five provinces from Baghdad, Basra, Euphrates, an Arab province of Mosul, and an autonomous Southern Kurdistan.⁵⁹²

Wilson knew that certain British officials, especially Lawrence, were sympathetic toward the Iraqi officers of the al-'Ahd organization and were 'turning a blind eye' to their efforts to thwart Wilson's 'Indian regime'.⁵⁹³ Likewise, the India Office regarded Lawrence as a problem. Arthur Hirtzel, criticising Lawrence's Sharifian propaganda, wrote to Curzon on 24 June, 1919: 'There will be no peace in the Middle East until Lawrence's malign influence is withdrawn'.⁵⁹⁴

Indeed, Lawrence supported the Sharifian party in the extreme. He persistently attempted to get the government to give up Mesopotamian administration to the Sharifian party. In particular, the Baghdadi officers, leading personalities in the Arab government in Syria, dominated the army by holding all important military posts. Lawrence and the Sharifians continuously thwarted Wilson's policy in Mesopotamia.

Given his biases, Lawrence strongly criticised London's policy in Mesopotamia, writing: 'Our Government is worse than the old Turkish system'. Lawrence further attacked Wilson's policy in Mesopotamia: 'Cromer controlled Egypt's six million people with five thousand British troops; Colonel Wilson fails to control Mesopotamia's three million people with ninety thousand troops'.⁵⁹⁵

The pressure increased on Wilson to consider the Baghdadi officials in the Mesopotamian administration. Therefore, in June 1920, Wilson held a meeting with Sunni nationalists in Baghdad, with the purpose of persuading them not to take violent action. In the meeting, Wilson mentioned the Kurds and Shia, however, they replied

⁵⁹¹ Despatch from Civil Commissioner, Mesopotamia, to Secretary of State for India, 15 November 1919, Ref: IOR/L/PS/18/B337.

⁵⁹² Lukitz, *A Quest in the Middle East*, p. 126.

⁵⁹³ Rutledge, *Enemy on the Euphrates*, pp. 341-42.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 342

⁵⁹⁵ T. E. Lawrence, 'Mesopotamia', *Sunday Times*, 22 August 1920. <http://www.telstudies.org>.

that, 'both groups were ignorant peasants who could easily be kept in their place, the former by the mutual jealousies of their leaders, the latter by the same agency'.⁵⁹⁶ According to Sunni writers the Sharifian bases in Syria funded Mesopotamians by sending, £100, 000 from Syria to Mesopotamia.⁵⁹⁷

Likewise, in Baghdad, Bell converted to the pro-Sharifian party since she changed her mind in favour of the Sharifian family and became their strong supporter in Mesopotamia. Bell was crucial in the foundation of the Iraqi state especially through her distinctive knowledge gained through her travels and her relations with tribal elders in the Middle East region had helped in this position. Lukitz writes: 'her brilliantly worded analyses of particular situations, infused with complex historical meanings, offered a broad and unique view of the way in which her deep understanding of the area helped her to fulfil her political mission; her vision of the country emerged from the knowledge of its past, its origin, its historical roots and their different ways of the answers, of searching underneath, in the darkness of hidden layers, for some of the answers to its entangled present.'⁵⁹⁸

Before converting to the project of Sharifian rule, Bell was against British wartime commitments to Sharif Hussain. In December 1915 she thought that 'Arabs can't govern themselves' and that the recognition accorded to Sharif of 'the most tenuous kind'. Up to late 1919, she was opposed to the idea of Arab Amir and wished that the British would drop it. She had the same attitude as Wilson with regard to effective British direct rule through which Arabs could be trained for the development of the administrative talent to govern their own affairs.⁵⁹⁹ But after her journey to Syria in October 1919, under the influence of Sharifian and Baghdadi officers, she became a supporter of the Sharifian cause. In particular, influenced by Yaseen Hashimi, Bell wrote that he was 'the most forcible personality I encountered'. In conversation with Bell, Hashimi said that 'an Amir must be set up as head of state'. Soon, Bell was inclined to appoint an Arab Amir considering that Amir Zaid was suitable because 'Zaid

⁵⁹⁶ Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917-1920: A Clash of Loyalties*, p. 269.

⁵⁹⁷ Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, p. 191.

⁵⁹⁸ Lukitz, *A Quest in the Middle East*, pp. 4&7.

⁵⁹⁹ Lyon, *Kurds, Arabs and Briton*, pp. 10-11.

had a fair of knowledge of English...Faisal knows no language but Turkish and Arabic'.⁶⁰⁰

Wilson, however, warned against the establishment of the Arab government in Mesopotamia based on the Baghdadies and Sharifians in Syria. He thought that: 'Many years will not elapse before the people of this country will be at least as well equipped as the people of Egypt or India now are for Western forms of Government, but for the present the population is so deeply divided by racial and religious cleavages, and the Shia majority after 200 years of Sunni domination are so little accustomed to hold high office, that any attempt to introduce institutions on the lines desired by the advanced Sunni politicians of Syria would involve the concentration of power in the hands of few persons whose ambitions and methods would rapidly bring about the collapse of organized Government'.⁶⁰¹

Bell urged the British government to adopt the Sharifian policy in Mesopotamia, arguing that 'because Sharifian rule has been set up by English action in Syria, Sharifian rule had to be set up by English action in Mesopotamia'.⁶⁰² But she went further, saying that the selection of the Son of Sharif was the only solution to Mesopotamia's fate.⁶⁰³ In December 1920, Bell felt that the only reasonable solution to Mesopotamia was 'a son of the Sharif and for choice Feisal: very very much the first choice'.⁶⁰⁴ Lyon stated that Miss Bell had become 'a worshiper of Feisal and his cause... and went to Baghdad to prepare the way and make his path straight'.⁶⁰⁵

Accordingly, Bell asked for the return of the Mesopotamian Officers, who served with Feisal in Syria, who had: 'the real spirit of Arab nationalism in them'. Although, the majority of these officers involved in the revolt against the British in Mesopotamia, Bell believed that his government should allow them to come back to the country, since they would be 'of value to native institutions here'.⁶⁰⁶ This question of the repatriation

⁶⁰⁰ G. L. B: Syria in October 1919, 15 November 1919, Ref: IOR/L/PS/18/B337

⁶⁰¹ Despatch from Civil Commissioner, Mesopotamia, to Secretary of State for India, 15 November, 1919, IOR/L/PS/18/B337.

⁶⁰² Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, p. 202.

⁶⁰³ Gertrude Bell, *The Letters of Gertrude Bell*, Volume II, London-1927, p. 574.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p. 581.

⁶⁰⁵ Lyon, *Kurds, Arabs and Briton*, p. 94

⁶⁰⁶ Gertrude Bell Letters, 14/11/1920, Archive, Newcastle University.

of the Iraqi officers was approved by Percy Cox, who asked his government's permission to facilitate their return to Mesopotamia, and listed 240 names.⁶⁰⁷ In Kedourie's words: 'Cox came to Baghdad prepared to concede what the Sharifians had demanded'.⁶⁰⁸

It is worth noting that during the years 1918 to 1920, the Hashemite family was not significant in British Middle Eastern policy particularly after Feisal's failure in Syria and the decline of Sharif Hussain's influence but it came to the fore after the rebellion of 1920 in Mesopotamia and the financial crisis of the British Empire.⁶⁰⁹ In this connection, Lloyd George thought that France's violent action under General Gouraud against Feisal increased the Arabs' hostility towards Britain in Mesopotamia and Palestine.⁶¹⁰ Meanwhile, after 1920 a new British strategy emerged, advocated by Churchill, to lessen Britain's costs in the Middle East especially in Mesopotamia by reducing British troops. Therefore, the system of direct rule was no longer viable by both the London and the Indian governments. Instead, the strategy of establishing a native Arab government in Mesopotamia became urgent. In particular, the Sharifian solution became the core of British policy in connection with the establishment of the peace in the Middle East.⁶¹¹ Eventually, the Pro-Arab British officials succeeded in convincing London's government of 'the Sharifian solution'. Accordingly, the new forward policy was that the Britain should preserve her interests by satisfying the ambitions of the Sharifians, and this was concluded in the Cairo Conference of 1921.

On the other hand, the British that were pro-Sharifian worked actively on elevating Feisal as the King of Iraq and they sought to overcome any serious difficulties that would undermine the scheme. To do this they thwarted all other possible candidates who might rival Feisal. As Feisal was unknown in Iraq, he had few supporters, and these were mostly the ex-Ottoman officials who had worked with him in Syria and returned to Baghdad after the collapse of his rule there.⁶¹² For instance,

⁶⁰⁷ Ireland, *Iraq: A study in Political Development*, London-1937, p. 289.

⁶⁰⁸ Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, p. 198.

⁶⁰⁹ Eskander, *Britain's Policy towards the Kurdish question*, p. 136

⁶¹⁰ Aaron S. Klieman, *Foundations of British policy in the Arab World: The Cairo Conference of 1921*, The Johns Hopkins Press, London, 1979, p. 58.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 97.

⁶¹² See Lyon: *Kurds, Arabs and Britons*, pp 22, 24 &25.

the Naqib of Baghdad, Head of the Iraqi Council of Ministers, opposed the appointment of Feisal as King of Iraq. He told Gertrude Bell that: 'I would never consent to the appointment of the Sharif or of his son as Amir. The Hejaz is one and Iraq is one; there is no connection but that of the faith... I would rather a thousand times have the Turks back in Iraq than see the Sharif or his sons installed here.'⁶¹³ Apparently, there were few Iraqi candidates available for the administration of the country: the Naqib of Baghdad, Sheikh of Muhammarah, and Sayyid Talib. Both the Naqib and the Sheikh of Muhammarah did not have great hopes of success because of their lack of influence in Mesopotamia. Also, Naqib was old and had no influence in Basra and Mosul. Therefore, the real challenge would come from Sayyid Talib who was appointed as Minister of Interior in the Provisional Government.⁶¹⁴

It seems that Talib had the strongest chance of success because he had a powerful, native character who called for liberation of the country, 'Iraq for Iraqis'. According to the British intelligence report he had received 'a magnificent reception everywhere'⁶¹⁵ and was 'too capable, energetic'. Sayyid Talib was especially supported by his adviser Philby for ruling the country. But under the influence of the Sharifian Lobby: Lawrence and his friends in London, and Miss Bell in Baghdad, the British government were strongly inclined to 'the Sharifian solution'. So the presence of Iraq could eliminate the chance of Feisal's success in therefore it was decided to remove him from the scene.⁶¹⁶ In April 1921, Talib, as Interior Minister, invited the most important people from Iraq and Britain, including the *Times* correspondent, to a dinner party and asked their support for his candidate as the king of the country. Lyon indicated that soon after Miss Bell heard about the meeting she rushed round to Sir Percy Cox, with the result that the afternoon {17 April 1921} Saiyid Talib Pasha was arrested when leaving Miss Bell's house after a cup of tea and friendly chat'.⁶¹⁷ Philby then indicated that after the fate of Sayyid Talib not one of the Sheikhs were so foolish

⁶¹³ Ibid, p. 17.

⁶¹⁴ Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, p. 42

⁶¹⁵ See Klieman, *Foundations of British policy*, pp. 145-46.

⁶¹⁶ Abdul Razak Al Hassani, *Tareekh Al wazarat Aliraqia*, V 1, Irfan, Saida, 1953, p. 23; Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, pp. 204-205.

⁶¹⁷ Lyon, *Kurds, Arabs and Briton*, p. 94.

as to reject Feisal as King.⁶¹⁸ Eventually, Philby himself also lost his post because he presented a different political opinion.⁶¹⁹ Percy Cox perceived that 'there isn't enough room in this country for both of us'.⁶²⁰ The following year, when Philby visited Karbala from Amman, Cox obliged him to leave Iraq since he regarded his coming as 'extremely inopportune'.⁶²¹

Thus, the pro-Sharifian lobby paved the way for Feisal to be the King of Mesopotamia by, on the one hand influencing London to advocate the Sharifian Solution and on the other, by eliminating any domestic obstacles, notably the local Mesopotamian opposition. Subsequently, the installation of Feisal to Mesopotamia became a significant factor in complicating the possibility of forming a Kurdish entity. Instead, the integration of Southern Kurdistan into the Iraqi state became essential for maintaining it, in the Baghdad Colonial Service's perspective. They adopted a similar policy in the case of Kurdistan, when opposition to their plan was eliminated.

Reflection on the Sharifian-Solution regarding the Kurdish question

Much had been debated within British circles regarding the question of an independent Kurdistan or integrating it within a Mesopotamian Arab state. The British authority had endeavoured to include southern Kurdistan into Mesopotamia and they worked actively in urging London to adopt this idea for strategic and economic reasons which I shall discuss this later in the chapter.

In the context of Britain's need to reduce its troops in the region, the idea of forming a Kurdish entity whether this meant the whole of Ottoman Kurdistan or only a portion of Southern Kurdistan, was on the British policy discussions table. In particular, the establishment of a Kurdish buffer state between the Arabs and Turks became essential in Churchill's Middle Eastern strategy, especially the potential evacuation of

⁶¹⁸ *Times*, December 1921. from Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, p. 205; Abdul Razak Al Hassani, *Tareekh Al wazarat Aliraqia*, V 1, p. 26.

⁶¹⁹ John Strom Patton, *The Historical Background of the Iraqi Revolution: International and Internal problems, 1918-1945*, Doctoral Dissertation, The American University, 1963, p. 34.

⁶²⁰ Lyon, *Kurds, Arabs and Briton*, p. 95

⁶²¹ From High Commissioner Iraq, to S.S of colonies, 12 June 1922, CHAR 17/26.

Mosul Vilayet. This idea however, faced opposition from Baghdad on strategic and economic grounds. In January 1921, Churchill asked Major Hubert Young about his remarks on certain of Percy Cox's telegrams in respect of the political situation in Mesopotamia and southern Kurdistan. Young served the Eastern Department of the Foreign Office (1919–21), before he was transferred to the new department of the Middle East as an assistant secretary where he made his observations on Cox's ideas. Young's proposal in respect of the future of Kurdistan was very important and it influenced the British policy-makers in London before the Cairo Conference.

In his notes, Young examined the political position of Kurdistan in the light of the revision of the Treaty of Sevres and the Mesopotamian mandate emphasizing the possible threat that might come from the Bolsheviks and Turks. Young questioned Cox's approach to the future of southern Kurdistan. In contrast to Cox's strategic and economic argument Young believed that the most practical alternative plan that should be implemented respecting Kurdistan and Mesopotamia was an ethnographic approach by drawing the 'natural line' between Kurds and Arabs on one side and the Turks on the other side. Reasoning that the formation of a Kurdish entity 'buffer state' would serve as the best way to deal with potential external threats from Kemalists and Bolsheviks, Young not only thought that it was necessary to enhance the undertaking of the Sevres treaty's terms with regard to the future of Kurdistan but he also proposed an alternative plan to the provisions of the Treaty. He argued whether southern Kurdistan should be joined with the northern part of Kurdistan, either as an independent Kurdish state or an autonomous Kurdish one under Turkish suzerainty, or that it should be decided based on the provisions of the treaty of Sevres. He rather favoured a Kurdistan unity, Ottoman Kurdistan, and urged that 'the northern Kurdish state should be allowed to opt within a year for complete independence from Turkey should now be retained for the whole Kurdish area and the people of Southern Kurdistan should be encouraged 'to look forward to future existence as a homogenous and completely independent Kurdish State'. The provision of the Treaty of Sevres was that only half of Kurdistan should be kept under Turkish suzerainty for one year of the transitional period. However, Young suggested that the revised treaty should provide that 'the whole of Kurdistan should remain under Turkish suzerainty for this period'.⁶²² With

⁶²² Note on the present position in Mesopotamia and possible revision of the Treaty of Sevres, Churchill Archive 17/14.

regard to the Kurdish part under French control, Young suggested that the French should consent to apply the same scheme in the Kurdish areas under their control.

Thus, Young concluded that 'A strong Kurdish state, even under Turkish suzerainty, would form an invaluable buffer between the Arab people and hostile elements from the North. A satisfactory revision of the Turkish Treaty would remove any risk of future hostility on the part of Turks themselves, and would form an additional safeguard against Bolshevik penetration'.⁶²³ Young's plan was quite logical and significant in terms of the Kurdish question. The views presented by Young were quite compatible with views of certain Kurdish nationalist leaders such as Said Abdul Qadir and Sharif Pasha since they had previously demanded that Britain adopt the same strategy regarding Kurdistan's future.

Clearly, Young's views had a considerable influence on Churchill and hence on the British Government. This was evident in the conclusion of a Conference of Ministers on 13 February 1921, when the British Government advocated the idea of a Kurdistan buffer state, whether completely independent or under the suzerainty of Turkish, if they could reach an agreement with the Turkish.⁶²⁴ Most importantly Young's idea became the basis of the Cairo Conference which was supported by the majority of the committee.

The Cairo Conference and the Kurdish question

As discussed earlier, the British government, in order to resolve the conflicting British policies in the Middle had established the Middle East Department, under the authority of the Colonial Office Secretary Winston Churchill with the aim of framing a more cohesive British policy in the region. For that reason, on 12 March 1921 a Conference was held in Cairo which was attended by forty British experts from London and the Middle East. The conference mainly discussed the question of Mesopotamia

⁶²³ Ibid.

⁶²⁴ Conclusion of a Conference of Ministers, 13 February, 1921, CAB 23/38.

and Palestine and Churchill's first consideration was the reduction of expenditure. On March 15th, the Cairo conference dedicated its fourth meeting of the political Committee to the Kurdish question. The meeting was attended by Winston Churchill (Chairman), Sir Percy Cox, Miss Gertrude Bell, Colonel T. E. Lawrence. Major H. W. Young, Major Noel (Consultative Member), and Major R. D. Badcock, M.C. (Secretary).

At the meeting two contradictory views were presented with regard to the future of Southern Kurdistan. Supported by Miss Bell and reflecting the views of the Mesopotamians, Cox claimed that the Kurdish areas would constitute a well-integrated part of Mesopotamia arguing that economically they should undoubtedly belong to that country. Major Young countered Cox's opinion, arguing against integrating Kurdistan under Mesopotamian administration. Young pointed out that it was necessary to set up a Kurdish State directly under the control of the High Commissioner, not a part of, or responsible to, the Iraqi Government. Churchill, Lawrence and Noel supported Young's view that Kurds should not be ruled by Arabs. Noel stated that Kurds had demanded 'Home Rule' and would therefore not accept Arab rule, 'especially if Turkish propaganda were used to intensify their objections to being placed under an Arab State'.⁶²⁵

Then, he proposed the arrangement of holding a separate election in Kurdistan and expressed the belief that there was no need to send Arab or British troops to this region, since the security of the Kurdish areas could be retained through establishing special Kurdish forces.⁶²⁶ This proposition chimed with Churchill's strategic and economic agendas which is why it was not surprising that Churchill would advocate Major Young's suggestions. Churchill stated that 'it might be possible to subsidise a Kurdish chief and his more influential subordinates and to grant provisional trading facilities in consideration of an agreement that they would prevent the Turks from carrying out a policy in that area adverse to British interests in Iraq'. With regard to the idea that Kurds would participate in the election, which was stressed by the pro-integration party, Churchill thought that although they might desire to take part in the elections, it would cause trouble if they were to be included in Iraq because he believed

⁶²⁵ Report on Middle East Conference in Cairo and Jerusalem, March 12 to 30, 1921. Memorandum by the Secretary of State of Colonies, July 11th 1921, Appendix 10-Kurdistan. CAB/24/126.

⁶²⁶ Ibid.

that Feisal with the Arab military behind him 'would ignore Kurdish sentiment and oppress the Kurdish minority'. Therefore, Churchill concluded that the British policy would be well protected by 'a friendly buffer State between Iraq and the Turks'.⁶²⁷ The benefit of this policy, Churchill wrote to Lloyd George, would be 'to enable us to recruit Kurdish units under British officers, and thus to accelerate reduction of Imperial forces in certain areas', and it also reduced the 'endeavours of Turks to seduce Kurds in our territory'.⁶²⁸

Thus, the Conference decided that Kurdistan should be dealt with directly by the High Commissioner, and kept separate from Iraq itself since they realized that any attempt to force the Kurds to be ruled by the Arab government would inevitably face resistance and it would lead to the British withdrawal in the region.⁶²⁹ Then Churchill informed Lloyd George about the recommendations of the Cairo conference for establishing the Kurdish buffer state which was approved by the Prime Minister.⁶³⁰ Therefore, the idea of establishing a Kurdish buffer state became the general British policy line concerning Kurdistan's future in the post-Cairo Conference. Contrary to what Reeva S. Simon believes, they drew the new lines at the Cairo Conference and that created the country of Iraq out of the former Ottoman provinces of Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul.⁶³¹

Pro-Sharifian arguments against the Separation of Kurdistan

Despite the Cairo Conference's decision in favour of the separation of Kurdistan, the High Commissioner of Baghdad did not follow its recommendations. On the contrary, Cox misinterpreted the conclusion of the Cairo conference in favour of his approach concerning the Kurdish question, claiming that the Colonial Office had advocated his suggestion to incorporate Southern Kurdistan into Iraq.⁶³² On 21 June,

⁶²⁷ Ibid.

⁶²⁸ Telegram from Mr. Churchill, Cairo to the Prime Minister. Winston S Churchill, 16 March 1921, CAB 24/121/43.

⁶²⁹ Ibid.

⁶³⁰ See Eskander, *Britain's Policy*, p. 166.

⁶³¹ Reeva S. Simon, "The Imposition of Nationalism on a Non-Nation State: The Case of Iraq During the Interwar Period, 1921-1941," in *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*, ed. James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 87.

⁶³² High Commissioner for Mesopotamia to S/S for the Colonies, 21 June 1921, F0371/6346, PRO. From Eskander, *Britain's Policy towards the Kurdish question*, p. 170.

1921, he wrote to Churchill that the balance of opinion at the Cairo conference was in favour of an alternative to integrating Southern Kurdistan into the Iraqi state on the separation option. This claim was regarded by Young and Lawrence as a faulty claim.⁶³³ Three days later, Churchill replied to Cox, stating that 'I carried away from Cairo rather a different impression of the balance of opinion there with regard to our Kurdish policy'.⁶³⁴ As he had already indicated at the Cairo Conference, Churchill wrote to Lloyd George that 'political conditions involve a Feisal solution for Iraq with a separate Home Rule arranged under the High Commissioner for mandatory of Kurdistan'.⁶³⁵ Churchill also said that he 'had in mind the picture of a buffer state ethnologically composed of non-Arab elements and interposed between Iraq and Turkey'. Therefore, he insisted on getting to work on drawing the ethnographic boundary between Kurdish and Arab areas for which he relied on two experts, Soane and Longrigg.⁶³⁶ However, following the Cairo Conference contradictory British perspectives persisted concerning the position of Southern Kurdistan and the correspondence between the High Commissioner and the Colonial office indicate these ongoing disagreements.⁶³⁷ McDowall, based on Cox's telegram of 21 June, wrongly interpreted the outcome of the Cairo Conference when he claimed that the idea of the separation of Kurdistan was dismissed in favour of its integration into the Iraqi state.⁶³⁸

It seems that initially, the proposed Mesopotamian Kingdom did not include Southern Kurdistan. A Cabinet Memorandum regarding this proposal reviewed the possible objections and difficulties that would face Feisal, from for example, Nejd, Ibn Saud, Asir (The Idrisi), Yemen (The Imam), Shannar, whereas, the document did not mention Kurdish objections or difficulties.⁶³⁹ This was because Southern Kurdistan was not included within Feisal's Kingdom in Mesopotamia. As Major Young stated, even Feisal did not claim Southern Kurdistan when he was offered the throne of Iraq. From

⁶³³ See Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism*, pp 61-62.

⁶³⁴ Ibid.

⁶³⁵ Paraphrase of a telegram from Mr. Churchill, Cairo, to the Prime Minister, March 16, 1921, CAB 24/121.

⁶³⁶ Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism*, p 66.

⁶³⁷ For detail see Ibid, pp. 58-90.

⁶³⁸ McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, p. 166.

⁶³⁹ The proposed Kingdom of Mesopotamia, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War, Colonial Office, 19th February, 1921.CAB/24/120.

the beginning of his reign, Feisal was not keen to extend his rule to Kurdistan since he did not want to become entangled with the Kurdish situation. Instead, Feisal suggested that Kurdistan should be made independent by finding a Kurdish king or precedence. In a discussion on the arrangements of the Mesopotamian orders between Feisal and Miss Bell, which extended to the long talk about the future of Kurdistan, Feisal pointed out that it wouldn't be in his interest or that of the British to burn their fingers in a Kurdish adventure. Feisal suggested that the first thing, 'the Kurds should be asked to produce was an individual whom they could run for the job of King or president and form a nucleus for the movement - a Kurdish Feisal in fact'.⁶⁴⁰

Perhaps, Feisal was influenced by Arab nationalist, and Bell's encouragement, he demanded the inclusion of Southern Kurdistan into Iraq. Young did not support his demand and told Feisal that 'we promised to encourage Arab nationalism not Arab imperialism'.⁶⁴¹ While under the pressure of the Arab nationalists with the support of certain pro-Arab British officials, namely, Miss Bell, the inclusion of Southern Kurdistan became the policy that would be broached by the High Commissioner of Baghdad, and therefore, in the Cairo Conference Cox argued against the separation of Southern Kurdistan. Then, as discussed earlier, they acted entirely against the Cairo Conference recommendations respecting the question of Southern Kurdistan.

It seems probable as well that Cox was not so enthusiastic about the Sharifian case although whilst under Miss Bell's influence, he was a supporter of the Sharifian solution in Iraq, which was reflected in his attitude towards Kurdistan. In this connection, Philip Willard Ireland comments on the attitudes of the Baghdad circle on the political future of Mesopotamia that 'the High Commissioner is neutral, the Khatun (Bell) and Mr. Garbett want Feisal and Mr. Philby wants republic'.⁶⁴² Before they became supporters of the Sharifian family, both Bell and Cox were against British commitments to Sharif Hussain in times of war. In December 1915 Bell thought that 'Arabs can't govern themselves'. Then, in her view that the recognition accorded to Sharif 'is of the most tenuous kind'.⁶⁴³ Up to late 1919, she was opposed to the idea of an Arab Amir and

⁶⁴⁰ Letters of Bell, 24 October 1921, New Castle Archive.

⁶⁴¹ Ali, *British policy and Kurdish Question*, p. 228.

⁶⁴² Ireland, *Iraq*, p. 332.

⁶⁴³ Policy in Arabia. Note by India Office, 20 November, 1918, British Library, IOR/L/PS/18/B297.

wished that the British would drop it. Percy Cox already considered that 'the Naqib of Baghdad and his family possess the necessary qualifications', whereas 'King Husein and his family carry no weight in Iraq'.⁶⁴⁴ Nevertheless, in late 1919, the turning point began when Bell converted to the pro-Sharifian solution in Mesopotamia. Indeed, she dominated the political position in the Baghdad circle. She managed to influence British policy in the region in order to serve the Sharifian solution and in particular, she influenced Cox in this direction. The project progressed to the forefront in the British Middle Eastern plan after the Mesopotamian rebellion 1920 and the destruction of Feisal's government in Syria on 1920 by the French forces. These new developments were crucial in determining the political future of Kurdistan.

By advocating the Arab nationalist policy, Bell was key in preventing the separation of Kurdistan based on the ethnographic factor, by advocating the Arab nationalist policy. In particular during the years 1920-1923 Bell, with certain pro-Sharifian British officials in the Middle East, played a central role in British policy making regarding Mesopotamia and its effect on the Kurdish question as well. Bell was behind the scenes of most of the political decisions in the country including the question of Southern Kurdistan. Cox confirmed this when he wrote, 'Miss Bell acted as the strainer through which the individuals filtered through to me, accompanied by a brief note as to what their tribe was, where they came from and what they wanted'.⁶⁴⁵

In this regard, in a private letter to Churchill from Major Soane, a political officer of Sulaymania, he clearly explained the High Commissioner's attitude towards Southern Kurdistan which Churchill described as a "cheerful picture". In the letter, Soane heavily criticised the High Commissioner's policy in Baghdad especially towards Southern Kurdistan, and indicated Bell's domination of the situation in favour of Arab nationalism: 'We are to erect a mock Arab Government, which Percy Cox and everybody else knows will be a failure and cannot live... it will then collapse, and the country will fall into such a state of anarchy as has never been seen before. It is quite the most disgraceful thing a civilised country has ever done. It is not as if they had asked for it, their only cry is, "you have delivered us from the Turk, you are surely not going to hand

⁶⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁴⁵ See: John Townsend, *Proconsul to the Middle East: Sir Percy Cox and the End of Empire*, pp. 100-102.

us over to the Arab". Then he concluded that 'Baghdad is now being run by a woman and an arriviste, Miss Bell and Philby. Sir Percy Cox has no illusions on the subject. Home Government are at sea, and know nothing about this part of the world'.⁶⁴⁶

It is reasonable to believe that Bell was behind most of the High Commission's reports, especially Cox's arguments about Kurdish affairs and the Mosul question. For instance, on October 24th, 1922 she wrote to her father 'I found Sir Percy champing for a draft of a telegram he wanted to send home, pointing out the disastrous effect that would result from the re-cession of Mosul to the Turks. So I proceeded to write it for him while he was at breakfast. I've no doubt he'll improve it in detail but the general lines were, if I may say, masterly. Having got that done I had to write the report for the Secretary of State...our successes against the Turks on the Kurdish frontier, the reception of the treaty and the King's plans'.⁶⁴⁷

Lawrence saw Bell as mostly, 'driven by emotions than by depth of mind' and she was very opinionated.⁶⁴⁸ Therefore, she did what she believed regardless of other considerations and facts. She opposed any policy and instructions that she did not want. By 1921, it was under her influence that the Indian government aligned with the Cairo approach protector rather than direct rule.⁶⁴⁹ On 10th January 1921, she wrote to her father 'I could not serve a Govt in whose policy I did not believe.'⁶⁵⁰ Faisal's arrival in Basra in June 1921, had been preceded by petitions signed by the Town's notables asking for Basra's autonomy. Bell rejected the idea and wrote to her father, 'Until HMG gives its decision on the matter, I must exercise my private opinion.'⁶⁵¹

This was her attitude towards the question of Kurdistan and her desire to include the country under an Iraqi Arab state. Working on her plan for a unified Iraq, she was cautioned by an American missionary that she was ignoring rooted historical realities; 'You are flying in the face in four millenium of history if you try to draw a line around Iraq and call it a political entity! Assyrians are always looking to the west and east and

⁶⁴⁶ South Kurdistan: Memorandum by Winston S Churchill, Colonial Office, February 26, 1921. CAB 24/120/58.

⁶⁴⁷ Bell to H.B. Baghdad, October 24th, 1922. Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University.

⁶⁴⁸ Lukitz, *A Quest in the Middle East*, p. 3.

⁶⁴⁹ Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace*, p. 496

⁶⁵⁰ Letters of Bell, New Castle Archive.

⁶⁵¹ Bell to HB, 13 June 1921. From: Lukitz, *A Quest in the Middle East*, pp. 148-49.

north, and Babylonians to the south. They have never been an independent unit. You've got to take time to get them integrated, it must be done gradually. They have no conception of nationhood yet'.⁶⁵²

Even in public places people talked about Bell's pro-Arab policy. Bell wrote to her father that she was always being quoted 'in the coffee shop talk as the upholder of the rights of the Arabs. I have invariably replied that the talk is incorrect; it is H.M.G. which upholds the rights of the Arabs and we are all of us the servants of H.M.G'.⁶⁵³

As has been noted there were two visions of the Sharifian solution in relation to the future of Kurdistan. Colonial Office advisors such as Lawrence and Young supported by Churchill were in favour of the separation of Kurdistan. On the other hand, Bell and Cox strongly stood against the Colonial Office scheme. Lawrence was one of the most pro-Sharifian amongst British officials but there is no evidence to suggest that he ever proposed the inclusion of Kurdistan within the Arab state under the Sharifian family. A new discovery of a map which he submitted to the Cabinet government in 1918 further illustrates our claim regarding his perspective of the political shape of the Middle East based along the Ethno-sectarian lines (See Map 7). According to some analysis, the map indicates that Lawrence included the separation of a Kurdish state in Southern Kurdistan.⁶⁵⁴ However, the idea was rejected by British authorities in Baghdad at that time. In contrast, Sara Pursley in her recent article *Lines Drawn on an Empty Map: Iraq's Borders and the Legend of the Artificial State*, questions the latter interpretation: 'It is not explained why we should read the two vertically aligned question marks north of Iraq as saying "a Kurdish state." The claim is puzzling not only because Lawrence presumably knew how to spell, but also because the northern border of Iraq on his map—which is the Sykes-Picot boundary between the A and B territories—cuts right through the middle of Iraqi Kurdistan, incorporating Sulaymania within the Iraqi state. The empty area with the two question marks on Lawrence's map is not Kurdistan but the region around and including the city of

⁶⁵² H.V.F. Winstone, *Gertrude Bell*, 1978, p. 220.

⁶⁵³ Bell to H.B. Baghdad, September 19th, 1920, Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University.

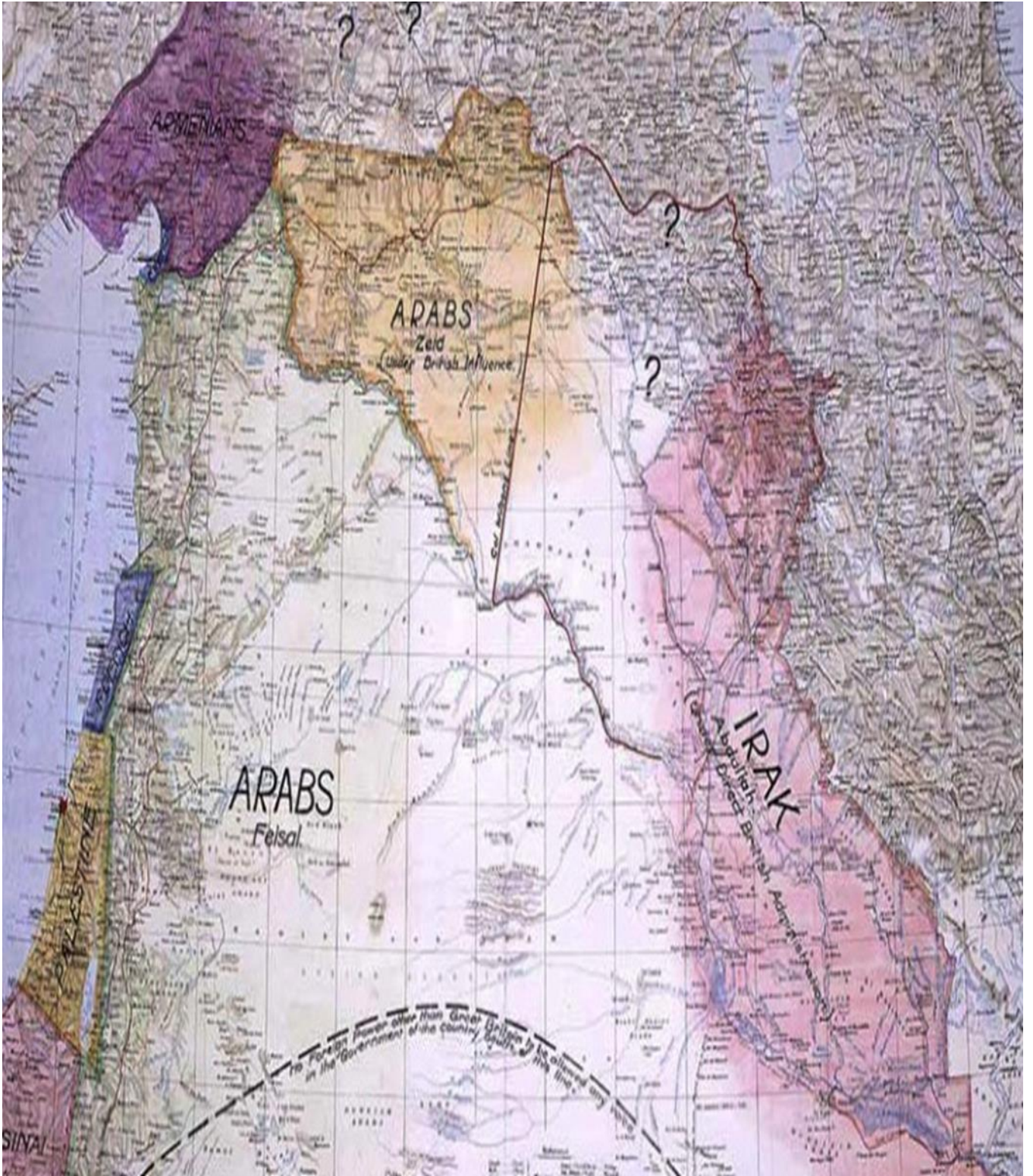
⁶⁵⁴ Lawrence's Mid-East map on show, 11 October 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4332702.stm>; Imperial War Museum Reveals Lawrence of Arabia's Middle East Plan by Graham Spicer | 12 October 2005, Culture14.

Mosul'.⁶⁵⁵ Although, there is no certainty whether Lawrence meant by these marks the Kurdish state or not, it demonstrates that predominantly Kurdish areas were not included in the Mesopotamian State. Lawrence's attitude with regard to the future of Kurdistan in the Cairo conference further supports our interpretation. However, the role of Bell and certain other pro-Arab officials on the ground were crucial in extending the Sharifian solution to include Southern Kurdistan.

(Map 7)⁶⁵⁶

⁶⁵⁵ Sara Pursley, '*Lines Drawn on an Empty Map: Iraq's Borders and the Legend of the Artificial State (Part 1)*', June 2015, Jadaliyya, <http://www.jadaliyya.com>.

⁶⁵⁶ Lawrence's Map, 1918. "Lawrence of Arabia, The Life, The Legend," Imperial War Museum, London, 2005/UK National Archives. From the BBC.



The Pro-Sharifian lobby arguments supporting the Sharifian were based on various grounds and exercised different means in forcing their plan:

1- The Nationalist Arab threat

One central argument which Cox and Bell emphasized was that the separation of southern Kurdistan would face strong nationalist Arab opposition against the British position in Mesopotamia and would lead to a potential alliance between Arab and Turkish nationalists. The consequence of this would be an increase in the Turkish and Bolshevik threat to the security of Mesopotamia. This assumption influenced British calculations when considering the Arab nationalist ambitions with regard to the political situation of Mesopotamia, and in particular, the inclusion of Southern Kurdistan into the new Iraqi state. The anti-British propaganda increased in Mesopotamia and the pro-Turkish and many of the anti-British Arab notables had connections with Turkish nationalists. For instance, in September 1919 numbers of these Arab notables attended the Sivas conference which was held by Turkish nationalists, between the 4th and 11th of September 1919.⁶⁵⁷ During 1920 the movement flourished especially the two organisations Al-Ahd and Haras al-Istiqlal who were actively engaged in campaigning against the British and rejected the British mandate.⁶⁵⁸

Cox and Bell worked against the recommendations of the Cairo Conference, and Bell actively endeavoured, as Liora Lukitz states, 'tried to find a best way to incorporate Kurdistan into Iraqi state'.⁶⁵⁹ She used her considerable influence with tribal sheikhs and the authorities pressed hard on the notables in Baghdad, Mosul and Basra.

The fear of growing Bolshevik ideology in the Middle East, including Mesopotamia, was another important factor which influenced the British to consider the Arab nationalists' view. Early in 1920 the British reports indicated the Bolshevik movement in Mesopotamia and that 'Bolshevik talk' was increasing in the cafes and mosques of Baghdad and the booklet entitled "Bolshevism and Islam", aimed to

⁶⁵⁷ Rutledge, *Enemy in Euphrates*, p. 289.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 291.

⁶⁵⁹ Lukitz, *A Quest in the Middle East*, p. 174

generate a positive outlook among Muslims towards the Bolshevik revolution.⁶⁶⁰ Bell noted that there was some evidence to suggest that 'a league of conspiracy, organised by the Bolsheviks in cooperation with the Turkish Nationalists (has) long been in touch with the extremist Arab societies'.⁶⁶¹ Early in 1921 the Bolshevik influence increased in Iran after its military advance towards Tehran and Isfahan. In particular, the coup of 1921 by Reza Shah further threatened the British position in the region after Reza rejected the Anglo-Iranian agreement. Indeed this new development influenced the British position in Mesopotamia.

Therefore, the British authorities in Baghdad encouraged the Arab nationalists to combat the Bolshevik-Turkish menace. In 21st June Cox wrote to Churchill that the only essential method that the British had to prevent the potential Turco-Bolshevism threat to Mesopotamia in the region would be 'a solid block of Arab nationalism and our policy must be to foster that to the utmost and give it all material support we can'.⁶⁶²

It can be assumed that the question might have been associated with the Zionist project too. Perhaps Faisal used the question of Palestine to put pressure on the British about the future of Mosul, commenting, 'Palestine would be threatened if Mosul went to Turkey'.⁶⁶³ This can explain why the British tried to avoid an Arab nationalist movement against the Zionist project in Palestine. In other words, the British would compromise with the Hashemite Family and Arab nationalists by integrating the Mosul Vilayet into Iraq on condition that the Arabs would not obstruct the Zionist project.

⁶⁶⁰ Rutledge, *Enemy in Euphrates*, p 293

⁶⁶¹ *Ibid*, p 294

⁶⁶² Telegram from the High Commissioner for Mesopotamia to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 21 June 1921. CAB/24/125

⁶⁶³ Spencer, *Mosul question*, p 150

2- Balancing Shia - Sunni:

The Kurdish question was sacrificed in order to construct the Arab State in Iraq and to balance the Sunnis and Shias, as represented by Feisal. That is to say, sectarianism played a significant role in shaping the Iraqi state. In particular, it played an important part in the pro-integration arguments against the separation of Kurdistan. Kurds were used as a tool to balance numbers of Shias and Sunnis in favour of the latter since the Arab Sunni were a minority in Mesopotamia and Feisal represented a Sunni community as far as the Shia were concerned. Hence, a strong Shi'i majority would create a great challenge to Feisal's rule in Iraq. The British were also very concerned about the Shia clerics and perceived them to pose a threat to their interests in the region especially as at the time, the Shi'i were under the influence of their anti-British religious leadership, therefore they exiled many Shia to Persia.⁶⁶⁴ Gertrude Bell stressed that the Mosul Vilayet should be retained and annexed to Iraq' in order to adjust the demographic balance between Shia and Sunnis.⁶⁶⁵ She also opposed Churchill's idea of withdrawing from Mosul, explaining: 'As soon as we withdraw from Mosul, the Turks will take over'.⁶⁶⁶

Bell thought that the problem surrounding the creation of a State was nationality. Early in November 1920, Bell wrote, 'One of the difficulties {in forming an Iraqi state} is that all or nearly all the leading men of the Shia towns are Persian subjects and must be made to adopt Mesopotamian nationality before they can take official positions in a Mesopotamian State'.⁶⁶⁷ Liora Lukitz states that Gertrude Bell, was in favour of preventing the Shia from taking up critical positions of new Iraq; and politicians criticised the Arab Council of State because there were no Shia members.⁶⁶⁸

In reporting Feisal's views, Cox, who shared the idea that sectarian politics was vital to British political interests, urged Churchill to look into the political implications of any Kurdish participation in the future Iraqi National Assembly, which he considered to

⁶⁶⁴ Stansfield, *Iraq*, p. 48

⁶⁶⁵ Lukitz, *A Quest in the Middle East*, p. 140.

⁶⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 142

⁶⁶⁷ Bell, *Letters*, VII, p. 571.

⁶⁶⁸ Ireland, *Iraq: A Study in Political Development*, pp. 297-298.

be crucial, 'It would be a reasonable course to work for the inclusion of the Kurdish districts [i.e. in Mosul, Kirkuk and Sulaymania division] and their participation in [the] National Assembly on conditions of local assent and special supervision by [the] British officers and, if necessary, by [the] High Commissioner'.⁶⁶⁹

Emphasising the sectarian factor, on 2 June 1921, Cox wrote to Churchill arguing that if Kurdistan were to separate, 'Basrah and other communities would want to follow suit and it would be difficult to argue with them'.⁶⁷⁰ Churchill replied 'we still adhere to the principle of not putting the Arabs over the Kurds but we have no wish to hamper Feisal's candidature at this juncture. Cannot therefore the question of Kurdistan areas be left for the final decision of the new assembly? Similarly I should be quite ready to meet the wish of Basra province for autonomy'.⁶⁷¹

3- The Economic factor:

The economic aspect was one important argument the Baghdad circle emphasised in order to justify the inclusion of Southern Kurdistan into the Iraqi state. They indicated that the withdrawal from Mosul would be detrimental to British interests, in particular, in safeguarding the oil fields.⁶⁷² Meanwhile, linking the Mosul Vilayet with Mesopotamia they argued that the separation from Baghdad option would create difficulties for Mosul. Curzon also made this argument in the Lausanne Negotiations against Turkish claims.

However, against this claim, Colonel Paulis, the commission member for the Mosul question, suggested that a solution to the difficulties in the country would be to establish two administrative systems, one for Kurds and one for Arabs. The commission members were in fact convinced that the Mosul Vilayet could easily find markets other than Baghdad for its wheat, rice and tobacco.⁶⁷³ Aleppo would become

⁶⁶⁹ High Commissioner of Iraq to S/S for the Colonies, 23 September 1921, F0371/6347, PRO. In Eskander, *Britain's Policy*, p. 204.

⁶⁷⁰ Cox to Churchill, 2 June 1921, CO730/2.

⁶⁷¹ From S. of S. to Percy Cox, 9/7/1921, Churchill Archive 17/16.

⁶⁷² Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, p. 54. This question discussed in detail in the previous chapter.

⁶⁷³ Liora Lukitz, *Iraq: The Search for National Identity*, Taylor & Francis, London- 1995, p 44.

a suitable market for Mosul's products; whereas Baghdad would have trouble finding supply sources. As one of the commissioners explained, 'If a state had been created that could not support itself economically- tant pis pour l'Irak.'⁶⁷⁴

With regard to this, Peter Sluglett points out that in terms of trade and other considerations the Mosul Vilayet was more linked with northern Syria and south west Turkey than Baghdad. Sluglett points out that 'a more natural geopolitical unit might have been one in which Mosul had been part of what is now Syria. p1 fn. Mosul looked to Aleppo and south western Turkey rather than Baghdad.'⁶⁷⁵ Therefore, Mosul could easily find other markets for its products. Baghdad, however, was more in need of Mosul's wealth because it was difficult for Baghdad to 'survive economically without Mosul'.⁶⁷⁶

Taken together, the pro-integration arguments influenced British thinking regarding the position of Southern Kurdistan and underpinned the idea of extending the Feisal's rule into the Kurdish country by imposing the Arab rule.

Imposing an Arab ruler

Despite Churchill and the Colonial office's constant emphasis that Kurds should not be obliged to accept Arab rule, the pro-Sharifians maintained their project, and used every effort to bring Southern Kurdistan under Feisal's kingdom, imposing Arab governance "by hook or by crook".

The first step to implementing the pro-Sharifian policy was to remove any British officials who opposed their scheme. Major Soane had become a supporter of an independent Kurdistan. Immediately after the Cairo Conference he was removed from his post to be replaced by Captain Goldsmith. It is not known whether this personnel change was linked to pro-Sharifian moves, but similar moves were made in

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁵ Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, p. 5.

⁶⁷⁶ Dating the past: C. J. Edmonds and the Invention of Modern Iraq by Liora Lukitz, in *Political Thought and Political History: Studies in Memory of Elie Kedourie*, By M. Gammer, 2003, p. 90

Mesopotamia at the same time, as discussed earlier in the chapter. McDowall states that Soane's removal was because of 'his autonomist views' which clashed with 'Britain's growing integrationist policy'.⁶⁷⁷ Essentially, Soane strongly criticised the policy lines exercised in Baghdad towards Southern Kurdistan. In particular, he believed that Bell was behind the formulation of the British policy and she had dominated the position using her influence on the High Commissioner in the absence of London's clear strategy. He wrote to Churchill, 'Baghdad is now being run by a woman ...and Home Government are at sea, and know nothing about this part of the world'.⁶⁷⁸

Bell considered Soane to be a problem and desired his removal. Whether or not she secured his change in appointment is unclear, but her desire to do so is. She drew a map in her mind of how to get the political map she proposed. Her vision was far-reaching in time and geography and disastrous for the Kurds who, in her plans, were necessarily subservient to the Arab state. She even viewed her colleagues according to how they supported or detracted from her ideas. She described officials on the ground in terms of two groups: those who fell in line with her plan and those who did not. Longrigg, Edmonds and Col. Nalder, both received high praise, while Soane and Wilson, and Major Noel were ostracized.⁶⁷⁹ Bell was waiting for a moment to drop Soane out of his position, and this occurred when he left Kurdistan: 'Fortunately he is going on leave in a month or two'.⁶⁸⁰

In a lecture given in 1928 at a meeting of the Central Asian Society in London, Dr. G. M. Lees, who worked as the British political assistant in Kurdistan during that time, commented on the dismissal of Major Soane by the High Commissioner: 'It is a sad story. Major Soane left for England on leave in April, and while at home he was informed that his services would be no longer required. He had stubbornly resisted the attempt on the part of the Baghdad administration to bring Kurdistan directly under the Arab Government, and High Commissioner Sir Percy Cox decided that Kurdistan could

⁶⁷⁷ McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, p. 159.

⁶⁷⁸ South Kurdistan: Memorandum by Winston S Churchill, Colonial Office, February 26, 1921. CAB 24/120/58

⁶⁷⁹ Bell to H, 22/1/1921; Aug 10, 1922, Gertrude Bell Archive- Newcastle University.

⁶⁸⁰ Lees, *Two years in South Kurdistan*, p. 269.

be administered without and in spite of him'.⁶⁸¹ Then Lees himself resigned because of the policy lines carried on in Baghdad: 'I realized that the ideals for which we had struggled so long, and the welfare of Kurdistan which we had so much at heart, were doomed if this policy were persisted in, so I handed in my resignation'.⁶⁸² Both Major Noel and Lees believed that the imposition of Arab rule in Kurdistan could not bring a permanent peace and stability in the region because the Kurds 'never welcome rule from Baghdad'.⁶⁸³

Inducing Kurds to participate in Iraqi national elections was one important method the British authorities in Mesopotamia employed in order to nullify the question of an independent Kurdish state. Specifically, during the referendum of June 1921 and the Constitutional Assembly election of 1923 they made a great effort to receive Kurdish acceptance of Feisal as their King and joining the Iraqi state. They realized that it would be a significant justification for the integration of the Kurdish region into Iraq, and would eliminate any possible concern about the establishment of a Kurdish state in accordance with articles 62, 63 and 64 of the Sevres treaty and the outcome of the Cairo Conference. These desires were so strong, there was a real fear that both Kirkuk and Erbil would not participate in the election for the Constitutional Assembly of 1923 and that this would lead directly to the failure of Feisal and the High Commissioner to bring them into the Iraqi state. Another significant aspect of the question was to isolate the Kurdish nationalists, the Sulaymania in their attempts to extend their influence over other Kurdish districts in Southern Kurdistan, and in particular, Kirkuk.

Bell was very alarmed by the situation in Kurdistan and urged Percy Cox to 'let the King try his hand to keep Sulaimani straight since it's clear we have no more arrows in our quiver'. Seeing that was the only possible way to retain the region. Otherwise, 'if Sulaymania would get independent, Kirkuk would go immediately', and 'It's almost inconceivable that we should be so close to the edge of overwhelming disaster, but I think we are'.⁶⁸⁴

⁶⁸¹ Ibid.

⁶⁸² Ibid.

⁶⁸³ Ibid, pp 270, 274.

⁶⁸⁴ Letter 16/8/1922.

In the light of some British sources especially the memoirs of both Col. W.A. Lyon and C. J. Edmonds, we can examine and explain the situation much further. Lyon was a British political official in Iraq between 1918 and 1944, and he spent most of his career in Kurdistan. He was in Erbil during the plebiscite about Feisal. Lyon's memory provides great detail about the nature of British dealings with Kurds at that time: how they systematically tried to include Kurdistan in the Arab state. Judging by the memoirs of Edmonds and Lyon (as edited by D.K. Fieldhouse), British officials on the ground, 'were reluctantly aware that they were in effect in tricking the Kurds into subservience to what would be an Arab regime which would pay little or no attention to Kurdish interests. They did not have a choice but to obey the orders from London. 'Iraq was to be made safe for final transfer to King Feisal as soon as possible, and if this involved subduing Kurds and not making sure of the preservation of even minimal Kurdish rights thereafter, then that was their duty.' Also, they were mindful that the British authorities in Baghdad such as Cox, Dobbs, and Cornwallis⁶⁸⁵, were 'Arabists', who had a long-time background in the Arab world, and who perceived the Kurds as 'a nuisance'.⁶⁸⁶ Especially Bell had become, in Lyon's words, 'a worshiper of Feisal and his cause'.⁶⁸⁷ Indeed, 'the faithful ubiquitous Miss Bell' was the most important supporter of Feisal, 'though often behind the scene.'⁶⁸⁸

In his memoir, Lyon remembers the published announcement that Feisal was the British government's candidate for the election. He reveals that 'to all of us Political Officers there came a top secret coded telegram instructing us to use all our influence, personal and official, to persuade the people to elect Feisal'.⁶⁸⁹ He adds, 'For me this was a tough assignment, as the great majority of the people were Kurds who cared little for any Arab prince, and like all hill men despised the dwellers of the plains'.⁶⁹⁰ Equally, Rafiq Helmi, a popular translator and assistant among the British political officers of Lyon's time, an educated Kurd, and an affiliate of Sheikh Mahmud, believed

⁶⁸⁵ Colonel Kinhan Cornwallis, a pro-Arab British official, came from Egypt to Mesopotamia after the Cairo Conference at the request of Faisal to assist him negotiate with British and his position in the Country. Lukitz, *A Quest in the Middle East*, p 148.

⁶⁸⁶ Lyon, *Kurds, Arabs and Britons*, p. 48.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 94.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 96.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 95

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 95

that the British purpose in Feisal's election was to settle the Kurdish issue by bringing Southern Kurdistan under Arab rule.⁶⁹¹ In particular, the election process was mostly directed by the pro-Arab British officials, who utilized suspicious methods with the people to play off the false choice, the 'Hobson's choice',⁶⁹² of a one-candidate election. They 'had come [to] spy out the land'. As Lyon says, 'The tribal chiefs and elders were gathered and asked to sign the petition to Feisal... they were reluctant and asked about other candidates; and I was compelled to admit there was none, but that Feisal was Lloyd George's candidate, and who would know better than him?'⁶⁹³ This is a weak argument from a man who clearly did not believe in the candidate. How was he ambivalent about trying to sell this solution to the Kurds? He knew that this solution was a false one. He did not sell it well, but he was a British political officer and had to obey instructions.

For all that, with no articulated or natural motivation to support Feisal, it is not surprising that the majority of Kurds rejected him as their King. The voting was especially clear among the Kurds of Sulaymania, Erbil and Kirkuk, which together constituted two-thirds of the population of Southern Kurdistan.⁶⁹⁴ This resounding Kurdish rejection of Feisal led neither the Baghdad circle nor the Colonial Office to enforce the principle of Kurdish independence. Instead, it was announced that 96% of all Iraq voted in favour of Feisal. This outcome cannot be trusted. The situation on the ground and the attitudes of the majority of the Kurdish, Shia and Turkmen populations were not considered in the referendum. Whilst there was substantial opposition from the Shia rather than the majority of Kurds and Turkmen did not vote for Feisal. Further, the abstentions figure did not include the percentage of the population that abstained, in protest, from voting at all. Nevertheless, Churchill spelled out in Parliament: 'the people were perfectly free to choose (Feisal)...by a majority of 96 per cent, of the voters'.⁶⁹⁵ The model of the 96% or 99% in the first British referendum to elect Amir Feisal was adopted by following leaders in the Middle East. It was simply "a rigged

⁶⁹¹ In Eskander, *Britain's Policy towards the Kurdish Question*, p. 173.

⁶⁹² Hobson's choice is a choice of taking what is offered or nothing at all.

⁶⁹³ Lyon, *Kurds, Arabs and Britons*, p. 95.

⁶⁹⁴ Ali, *British policy*, p. 223.

⁶⁹⁵ Middle Eastern Service, HC Deb 09 March 1922 Vol 151 cc1535-604

referendum” as describe by Anderson and Stansfield.⁶⁹⁶ Because the plebiscite was not meant to result in the right to self-determination, at least for the Kurds, it operated to legitimize Feisal’s rule as King of Iraq through which the Imperial interests would be protected more efficiently.

Indeed, following the referendum, Kurdish nationalist sentiment surged in the Sulaymania division and expanded to other Kurdish areas such as Halabja, Kifri and Kirkuk and the demand for the return of Sheikh Mahmud increased.⁶⁹⁷ From the Kurdish perspective, especially the nationalist circle, the acceptance of Iraqi nationality meant that they would relinquish their own identity and be involuntarily involved in a process of cultural assimilation.⁶⁹⁸ Since the beginning, the British had pledged to the Kurds that there was no intention ‘of imposing upon them an administration foreign to their habits and desires’.⁶⁹⁹ Kurds were encouraged by the Wilsonian concept of self-determination, the Anglo-French declaration of November, 1918, and most importantly by the Treaty of Sevres. All these documents promised Kurds at least a strong possibility of an independent Kurdish state. Following the Cairo Conference, Captain Goldsmith, the Political Officer in Sulaymania, explained to the Kurdish chieftains that the British policy was to train Kurds to govern themselves progressively but until this progression, Kurdish affairs would be administered directly by the British officers.⁷⁰⁰

With all this built-up expectation, Kurds could only reject Cox's claim that disqualified the Kurds for self-rule. They asked Goldsmith: 'Why it is not possible for His Excellency the High Commissioner to meld the Kurdish districts of the mandatory territory into a separate Kurdish state, and, to give them the same help and guidance in the formation of a national and indigenous government as [is] being giv[en] to Iraq'.⁷⁰¹ In November 1921, certain Kurdish officials in Sulaymania, clearly told Bell that they wanted Kurdish independence and they did not want to have anything to do

⁶⁹⁶ Anderson and Stansfield, *The Future of Iraq*, p 15.

⁶⁹⁷ Mesopotamian Intelligence Report, No.23,15 October 1921, F0371/6353 & No.8,15 April 1922, F0371/7771.PR0. Eskander, *Britain's Policy towards the Kurdish question*, p.174.

⁶⁹⁹ Bell, *Review of Civil Administration of Mesopotamia*, London, H.M. Stationery Off. 1920, p. 60.

⁷⁰⁰ Peshkawtan, May 1921; Memo. P. 1954, Political Sulaymania to Cox, August 21, 1921, F O. 371/6387. From Ali, *British Policy*, p. 23.

⁷⁰¹ Administrative report Iraq, 1920-1922, p. 7. From Ibid, p. 232

with 'Iraq or Faisal'.⁷⁰² In December 1921, Goldsmith instituted an elective council in Sulaymania that included representatives from the districts of Halabja, Sharbazher, Chemchemal and Rania. The council was in charge of administrating the local affairs of the division.⁷⁰³ This council represented concrete steps the British took to appease Kurdish national sentiment.

In conversation with Bell, Riza Beg, the Qaimmaqam, pointed out that Kirkuk would like to join with Sulaymania, but Bell thwarted the idea, insisting that Kirkuk 'won't join up with anyone pour le bon motif [for a good reason]'.⁷⁰⁴ She saw Kirkuk in the heart of 'Iraq, as a city that couldn't 'be countenanced'.⁷⁰⁵ Similarly, during the Constituent Assembly election, Edmonds indicates that the instructions dispatched to the Mutasarrif of Kirkuk and the sub-Mutasarrif to move forward with arrangements for the election. Edmonds' instructions 'were to work steadily but unobtrusively to wean Kirkuk from its attitude of aloofness towards full adherence to the Iraqi State; the notables were not slow to see that participation in the elections must prejudice the very decision they were anxious to postpone'.⁷⁰⁶ British and Iraqi authorities took advantage of the Kurdish divisions against the Kurdish question by preventing the "Kurdification"⁷⁰⁷ of Kirkuk and the subsequent formation of a territorial unit that would impede the extension of Bagdad's writ over the Northern provinces.⁷⁰⁸ Eventually, the desires of the people of Kirkuk were compromised by the British officials serving in the region.

⁷⁰² Bell Letters, 9/11/1921, Gertrude Bell Archive - Newcastle University.

⁷⁰³ Eskander, *Britain's policy towards the Kurdish question*, p 176

⁷⁰⁴ Letter: 9/11/1921, Newcastle Archive.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid. to this day, the argument rages on – Kurds feel Kirkuk as the heart of Kurdistan, forcibly Arabized by Saddam – Bell's assertion, a hundred years old now, hasn't aged well. Kirkuk is often referred to by Kurds as "the Jerusalem" or "heart" of Kurdistan. the Arabization policy was began at that time.

⁷⁰⁶ C.J. Edmonds, *Kurds Turks and Arabs: Politics, Travel and Research in North-Eastern Iraq 1919-1925*, Oxford University Press, London-1957, p 303.

⁷⁰⁷ During these years, "Kurdification" was prevented, and in later years, there was active Arabization. The city had suffered from the policies implemented by the Iraqi government from the outset, especially the Baath regime, 1968-2003 which implemented systematic Arabisation of the province. Kirkuk still remains the heart of the disputed issues between Baghdad and Erbil.

⁷⁰⁸ Dating the past: C. J. Edmonds and the Invention of Modern Iraq by Liora Lukitz, *Political Thought and Political History: Studies in Memory of Elie Kedourie*, By M. Gammer, p. 90

British accounts show how the plan prepared for the decline and elimination of Sheikh Mahmud's influence and rule. According to Edmonds, Mahmud planned to stir up a revolt in the Kirkuk Liwa. Therefore, he intensified his efforts to drive other Kurdish tribes such as Talabani and Jaf against Mahmud. It seems the British waited for the end of the 'Sulaymaniyah problem' after turning out the Turks from Rawanduz: 'if we could evict the Turks from Rawandiz, the Sulaimani the problem would be half solved'.⁷⁰⁹

In Britain's perspective, Kirkuk was an important aspect of the Kurdish difficulty. The diversity and most importantly the oilfields of the division prevented the British from deciding about the future of Kurdistan. Because there was a majority of Kurds in the province with a large number of Turkmen especially in the centre of Kirkuk town, together with other Arab groups the authorities, in Baghdad in particular, stressed that procedures should be taken to prevent Kurdish nationalists from influencing Kirkuk's population.

This was important since preparations for the Constituent Assembly elections were underway as well as for the Lausanne Conference where disputes over the Mosul Vilayet posed one of the most difficult questions, to both the British and Turkish.⁷¹⁰ The Turkish party demanded a plebiscite to be conducted in the vilayet to determine territorial ownership. Therefore, the Kurds' participation in the election was crucial for the British position in the Lausanne negotiations. The referendum of 1921 had an impact on the boundary question.⁷¹¹ It clarified, internationally, that the majority of the inhabitants of the contested territory desired to join the Iraqi state. Apparently Edmonds considered the election as 'the culminating moment in a series of steps supposed to turn the amorphous idea of an Iraqi state into reality'.⁷¹² At Lausanne, Curzon also used the referendum in favour of British claim that the peoples of the Mosul wanted to join Iraq: 'the Arab King, who has been elected by the whole country, including Mosul,

⁷⁰⁹ Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks and Arabs*, p. 314.

⁷¹⁰ See for example: Sevtap Demirci, Turco-British Diplomatic Manoeuvres on the Mosul Question in the Lausanne Conference, 1922–1923, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, April 2010.

⁷¹¹ Telegram from the secretary of state for the colonies to the acting High commissioner of Iraq, 8 June 1923, FO 608/97.

⁷¹² Liora Lukitz, Dating the past: C. J. Edmonds and the Invention of Modern Iraq, *Political Thought and Political History: Studies in Memory of Elie Kedourie: Festschrift in Honour of Professor Elie Kedourie*, by Moshe Gammer (Editor), p. 91.

and with whom we have entered into obligations'.⁷¹³ At the time, Churchill was interested in the referendum in Southern Rhodesia, since the majority of the population was British and the minority, African, and he was hoping they would agree to join South Africa in order to 'operate as a counterweight to African influence within the Union'.⁷¹⁴

Churchill verbally stressed his previous injunction: 'We do not wish to force the people of Southern Kurdistan under the Government of King Feisal'. But he gave approval to the Baghdad Circle's suggestion that Kurds should participate in the election: a direct contradiction that Kurds should not be forced into governance from Baghdad. Contradicting himself, he said, 'They are free to take part or not in the elections which are about to take place, as they choose. We are most anxious to study their wishes and to develop any local variant of the self-government which has been given to Iraq that may commend itself to them'.⁷¹⁵ Commenting in Parliament on Churchill's statement, Lord Sydenham⁷¹⁶ indicated: 'To my mind the association of Kurds with a General Election suggests comic opera'.⁷¹⁷ Noel was frustrated by contradictions: I am up against the universal suspicion, in some cases almost amounting to a certainty, that we are determined to get the Kurds into Iraq by hook or by crook, and that the election business is all eyewash'.⁷¹⁸ Nomination in any Kurdish areas as part of an electoral college would have signified its inclusion in Iraq. Noel added: I would point out to the Kurdish mind that the assurance that no Kurds will be forced into Iraq cannot be squared with the principle of Kirkuk *liwa* as an electoral college.⁷¹⁹ What concerned the British authorities in Mesopotamia was Kirkuk, which was the crux of the Kurdish question.

⁷¹³ The Failure at Lausanne, *Advocate of Peace through Justice*, Vol. 85, No. 2, (February, 1923), World Affairs Institute, p. 71.

⁷¹⁴ Richard Toye, *Churchill's Empire: The World That Made Him and the World He Made*, Pan Macmillan, 2011, p. 143.

⁷¹⁵ Middle Eastern Services. HC Deb 11 July 1922 vol 156 cc1085-137.

<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons>

⁷¹⁶ George Sydenham Clarke (1848–1933), a British defence expert and colonial administrator, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. <http://www.oxford-dnb.com/view/article/32428>. He was also hostile to Churchill.

⁷¹⁷ Position in Mesopotamia. HL Deb 24 July 1922 vol 51 cc697-703 697.

<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1922/jul/24/position-in-mesopotamia>.

⁷¹⁸ E.Noel Sulaimaniya, to B. H. Bourdillion, Baghdad, 10 October 1922, Delhi, BHCF. ' Events in Kurdistan', 13/14/Vol.II. from Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, p. 81.

⁷¹⁹ Ibid.

Bell acknowledged that Kurds wanted no part of an Arab state,⁷²⁰ and was aware that imposing an Arab ruler over the Kurds would further problematize the Kurdish question. Even so, she asserted that the Mosul Vilayet should be included within the Iraqi state for its important oil fields and the demographic counterweight it offered against the Shia majority. Therefore, she argued against encouraging Kurdish independence, 'We must now be careful to make it absolutely clear that we haven't a penny to spend in furthering Kurdish independence ...if we encourage them, we shall only have to abandon them in their hour of need, which would be the worst thing possible'.⁷²¹

In the wake of the change of the British government on October 1922, Churchill also lost his Colonial Officer's position. This change had a negative impact on the Kurdish situation because it further strengthened the position of Colonial Officials in Baghdad to impose their agendas, especially with respect to Kurdistan. The new Colonial Secretary Victor Cavendish, Duke of Devonshire, though pressed that before approaching the idea of holding the election in the Kurdish districts the future solution of Assyrians and Kurds would be considered. He was also anxious about the non-Arab elements which the Baghdad Circle proposed to bring under Arab rule in Iraq. He wrote to Henry Dobbs, High Commissioner, 'I am anxious that you should be satisfied that local pressure is not deluding Feisal into thinking that any solution which may be accepted temporarily as result of the presence of British troops by non-Arab elements will necessarily stand when this support is withdrawn unless the people's own wishes is really the basis on which it stands. It is rather dangerous I still feel to court risk of refusal by non-Arab elements to cooperate the elections which would give handle to Turks to claim restoration to Turkey of southern Kurdistan'.⁷²² But these Colonial Secretary's concerns did not consider by Baghdad.

It seems clear that up to the summer of 1923 the idea of Kurdistan as a buffer state remained one option on the table in British dealings with the emerging Iraqi state, especially in the Colonial and War Offices. Nonetheless, on 12 July the High Commissioner considered the Kurdish buffer State would no longer be a practicable

⁷²⁰ GB to HB, 29 May and 14 August 1921. From Lukitz, *A Quest in the Middle East*, p.155.

⁷²¹ Ibid, p.164.

⁷²² Secretary of State for the Colonies to High commissioner of Iraq, 30 June 1923, Air 5/556. T.N.A

solution. In his view the Kurds would quietly settle down and the separation of Kurdistan would become a dead idea “separatism is dead”.⁷²³ In Dobbs’ telegram it appears that Devonshire wished to visit Iraq concerning the question, however Dobbs noted that it would not be helpful as it might only create further suspicions among the Arabs, of British interference against their interests.⁷²⁴ This illustrates how the Colonial authorities in Baghdad constantly deceived the Colonial Office with regard to the facts on the ground with regard to the future of the country, especially concerning the question of Kurdistan.

Indeed, these on-the-ground operators had formed opinions that they imposed, regardless of instructions from higher up; and these opinions were the antithesis of the ethnographic approach that the Colonial Office proposed. The Baghdad circle ignored the Colonial Office’s instructions concerning Kurdish demands and instead disseminated quite opposed orders to their sub-officials in Southern Kurdistan. Britain’s encouragement to the Kurds to participate in the development of the political body of the Iraqi state through both the July 1921 referendum and the 1923 election for the Constituent Assembly was a clear indication that the British had abandoned Kurdish aspirations. The Baghdad Circle’s intention in the election process was ‘purely eye wash’, and used in order to bring Southern Kurdistan and its resources into an Iraqi state. As a consequence, the policy produced instability and unrest in Southern Kurdistan, and was exploited by Turkish nationalists to extend their influence into the region through pan-Islamic propaganda. So, anti-British attitudes increased in Kurdistan especially among the ex-Ottoman officers who established a Kurdish secret society ((Komalay Neheni Kurd).⁷²⁵ This outcome materialized in direct conflict with the opinions of the Baghdad Circle and as specifically predicted by the British proponents of Kurdish independence.

⁷²³ High commissioner for Iraq to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 16 July 1923. Air 5/556.

T.N.A

⁷²⁴ From High commissioner of Iraq to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 12 July, 1923, Air 5/556.T.N.A

⁷²⁵ See: Ali, *British Policy*, p. 236

The Air Scheme Policy

After the British failed to effect a political solution in Southern Kurdistan, they adopted a military strategy based on air power which was aimed at demolishing any Kurdish attempts that would lead to the disintegration of the Arab state into a separate Kurdistan. Since the British Colonial Service did not have sufficient resources to impose its domination and order in Iraq, the financial crisis and lack of troops forced them to rely on '*hakumat al tayarra*' (government by aircraft).⁷²⁶

The air policy was crucial in extending Arab rule to Southern Kurdistan, an area Feisal himself admitted to Bell couldn't be held without British support: 'Feisal has said over and over again that he is powerless without our help, and he has acted up to his declarations'.⁷²⁷ Similarly, in 1925 Leo Amery, Secretary of State for the Colonies, stated that: 'If the writ of King Feisal runs effectively through his kingdom it is entirely due to the British aeroplanes. It would be idle to affect any doubt on that point. If the aeroplanes were removed tomorrow, the whole structure would inevitably fall to pieces'.⁷²⁸ All agreed that the air force scheme was instrumental in imposing Faisal's rule over the Kurdish people. It seems clear that Bell was in favour of using force to consolidate the Arab state. In fact, she openly believed that 'no Government in this country whether ours or Arab administration, can carry on without force behind it'.⁷²⁹ Driven by the Arab nationalists, Bell denied Kurdish rights and opposed the idea of an independent Kurdistan. Hence, the Arab nationalists pressurized the Pro-Sharifian British officials within the British government to include Southern Kurdistan into the Iraqi Arab state.

Indeed, the air force salvaged the Iraqi state and heavily damaged the bid for Kurdish independence. Edmonds writes that the appointment of the Air Force command in Kirkuk was 'like a breath of fresh air' that 'came only just in time to save

⁷²⁶ Toby Dodge, Iraq: the contradictions of exogenous state-building in historical perspective, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 2006, p. 187.

⁷²⁷ Letters, [24 October 1921]. Gertrude Bell Archive - Newcastle University

⁷²⁸ Leopold Amery, Secretary of State for the Colonies, summing up the situation in Iraq after returning from a month-long tour of inspection in 1925. Public Records Office (PRO), Colonial Office (CO) 730/82, Iraq 1925, vol. II, p. 12. In Dodge, Thesis, p. 251

⁷²⁹ Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, p 211

Iraq; we were on the run, and had the Vilayet of Mosul been lost, Baghdad and Basrah alone could hardly have made a viable state'.⁷³⁰ In 2015, looking back at the Mandate system, Susan Pedersen states that it was not better ruled than the colonial one but in some cases 'was governed more oppressively', and 'claims by population under League oversight for political rights were more often met with repression than conciliation'.⁷³¹ The RAF was the primary instrument used to control the Kurdish region and impose Feisal's rule over it. It was also a key factor in the failure to implement the treaty of Sevres provisions regarding the Kurds, since most of the RAF staff stood against articles 62, 63, and 64 of the Treaty of Sevres.⁷³² Although in hindsight it is easy to see the arrival of the RAF as the first step to the end of Sheikh Mahmud's rule, Edmonds saw it, too, even then: 'that when the Aircrafts arrived the step to adopt the elimination Mahmud's rule would begin.'⁷³³ The air force strategy was adopted and used brutally against civilians in order to impose this policy, and had very negative consequences for the Kurdish situation. That is to say, the Air Force scheme produced long-term violence in the country. Kedourie, a British historian writing on the Middle East, concluded that the '1921 settlement justified and sanctioned violent and arbitrary proceedings and built them into the structure of Iraqi politics. The men who came with Faisal believed that their success was due to the use of violence and that they had triumphed over the British, and compelled them to change their policy, by the use of violence. It was a lesson that would sustain them both in their relations with the British and in their conduct of public affairs. Now they were masters of a country the population of which was heterogeneous in the extreme, with ignorance, distrust and dislike the only bonds between the different class, religions and races. All these disparate groups were now to be ruled by successful men of violence, between whom and any of these groups disagreement would be solved by arbitrary and violent action.'⁷³⁴

So, the air force scheme was Churchill's plan to take control of the country to save the Empire's men and money, but it was catastrophic for the Kurds. The 'aircraft armed with gas bombs' was the efficient method meant to serve Churchill's strategy

⁷³⁰ Edmonds, *Kurds Turks and Arabs*, p. 297.

⁷³¹ Pedersen, *The Guardians*, p. 4

⁷³² See Olson, *The emergence of Kurdish nationalism*, pp. 56-57

⁷³³ See Edmonds, *Kurd, Turks, and Arabs*, p. 313.

⁷³⁴ Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, p 213.

for controlling the country as cheaply as possible.⁷³⁵ Churchill stated that 'I am strongly in favour of using poisoned gas against uncivilised tribes'.⁷³⁶

Although the airplanes policy succeeded in maintaining British control of Iraq by using both power and violence, it failed to establish a viable homogenised state. Instead it has generated long term unrest and instability. In the years since, Kurdistan has been subjected to mass killing and genocides by the regimes in Baghdad. As Anderson and Stansfield argue Britain's use of the chemical weapon against the Kurds during the 1920 'provided the model for the *Anfal* campaign'.⁷³⁷

Churchill's Failure regarding the Kurdish Question

As Secretary of the Colonial Office in charge of British policy in the Middle East, Churchill receives most of the criticism meted out by today's historians.⁷³⁸ Since it was absent from political maps of the Middle East, Kurdistan was one of the greatest problems generated by the "Sharifian Solution". Warren Dockter, an American expert on Churchill and Empire, points out that Churchill's failure was both great and 'peculiar'; the 'Sharifian Solution' only meant that 'Kurdistan was lost to a combination of departmental rivalries and realpolitik'.⁷³⁹ Dockter uses the word 'peculiar', because Churchill had, until the summer of 1921, been a staunch supporter of the Kurdish state. However, what appears to have been a change of principle was not. Churchill's main concern was always his strategy with respect to the British Empire. He had considered the Kurdish state as a strategic barrier against a potential Turku-Bolshevik threat to Mesopotamia. However, with the advent of autumn 1921, he realized he must achieve his ends by abandoning the idea of Kurdish independence.

⁷³⁵ D.E. Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: the Royal Air Force, 1919-1939*, (Manchester, 1990), p. 21

⁷³⁶ Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill, 1874–1965*, vol. 4 companion documents, "January 1917–June 1919" (London, 1977), pt. 1:649.

⁷³⁷ Anderson and Stansfield, *The Future of Iraq*, p. 23.

⁷³⁸ See Fromkin, *A Peace to End all Peace*, p. 25; Christopher Catherwood, *Winston's Folly*; Warren Dockter, *Churchill and the Islamic World: Orientalism, Empire and Diplomacy in the Middle East*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2015, p. 167.

⁷³⁹ *Ibid.*

Churchill considered the issues of the British Empire in a wide context seeing domestic and overseas systems as interconnected. Richard Toye, a British historian who has widely published on Churchill, states that Churchill viewed the Empire's system in general rather than in relation to specific.⁷⁴⁰ The Anglo-Russian Rivalry and financial issues were key to Churchill's interests in the Middle East; all other factors would be secondary and subordinated to the Empire's wider considerations. Within this context, Churchill looked at the British position in Mesopotamia and the Mosul Vilayet, and the question of retaining their troops in the region.

Russia, in particular, was always in Churchill's mind in any policy decisions in the Middle East as a main source of threat against the British position whether in India, Afghanistan, Persia or Mosul.⁷⁴¹ Lloyd George described him as "a dangerous man" because of "Bolshevism on the brain".⁷⁴² Churchill's major concern in the Middle East was to establish strong British relations with the Islamic world 'to neutralize the pan-Islamic movement' and counter Bolshevik expansion in the Middle East.⁷⁴³ His policy opposed Lloyd George's strategy,⁷⁴⁴ which Churchill regarded as "dangerously wrong" for the British position in the whole region.⁷⁴⁵

From this strategic perspective, Churchill initially saw Kurdistan as a buffer state and a cost-effective bulwark against the Kemalist and Bolshevik threats. Therefore, Churchill disagreed with extending Arab rule to Kurdistan, especially because he believed Kurds would not peaceably abide Arab rule: 'It would be disastrous if you tried to police the Kurdish districts with Arab levies'. He argued that they must have Kurds levies in Kurdistan, and that the country itself would provide a most valuable barrier against penetration from Kemalists and Bolsheviks.⁷⁴⁶ His strategic reasoning was strengthened by the principle of self-governance: 'I want to make it quite clear that we are developing, as it were, a principle of home rule for Southern Kurdistan within the general area of Mesopotamia at the same time that we are developing the general self-

⁷⁴⁰ Toye, *Churchill's Empire*, p. 163.

⁷⁴¹ From secretary of State to High Commissioner, Mesopotamia, 20th January 1921, Churchill Archive. CHAR 17/8.

⁷⁴² Toye, *Churchill's Empire*, p. 137.

⁷⁴³ Dockter, *Churchill and the Islamic world*, p. 128

⁷⁴⁴ The next chapter will discuss this question in detail.

⁷⁴⁵ Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace*, p. 529.

⁷⁴⁶ HC Deb 14 June 1921 Vol 143 cc265-334. <http://hansard>

government of Mesopotamia'.⁷⁴⁷ Four days later, in a telegram to Cox, Churchill again insisted that Kurdistan should be kept away from the emerging Arab country as Nepal was from India. He stressed that this principle 'must be adhered to in all other respects'.⁷⁴⁸

Since this potential Kurdish state needed a leader to rule and administer it, it is very likely that there should have been some discussions going on in the Colonial Office regarding the matter. Presumably, Sheikh Mahmud, although he was in prison, was considered above all else. As discussed earlier, British forces had already fought against Mahmud's first government and destroyed it in May 1919; and since they viewed him as a threat, they imprisoned him in India. However, in 1921 Mahmud was, in Churchill's opinion, a compelling Kurdish leader, that is, the ruler of the potential Kurdistan state. Furthermore, when the Kurds' insisted on his return to Kurdistan it might have occurred to Churchill that he could serve as a leader of the potential Kurdish buffer state. On 17 June 1921, Churchill telegraphed to India and asked for a detailed report of the Sheikh's conditions of confinement,⁷⁴⁹ and he even pressed for his liberty.⁷⁵⁰

But by failing to respond to Churchill's letter until after the election to install Feisal, Cox played for time.⁷⁵¹ Therefore, Churchill's plan was postponed or cancelled in favour of the election. After two months, on 26 August 1921, Cox replied to Churchill and expressed a negative perception on Mahmud, 'In contrast with [the] Iraqis, whose objects generally were patriotic and constitutional, Sheikh Mahmud was actuated mainly by personal and dynastic considerations. There is sufficient proof of this in the fact that in spite of his pan-Islamic preaching of Jihad, his supporters were only the few hirelings he could attract by pay... I think, it would be unwise to give Sheikh Mahmud his liberty until political future is more assured. It may not be fully realised that our policy is more truly in interest of Kurdish nationalism than Sheikh Mahmud's for,

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁸ Winston Churchill to Percy Cox, 18 June, 1921, Colonial Office papers: 730/2. Martin Gilbert, *The Churchill Documents*, Vol 10, Hillsdale College Press, Michigan-2008, p. 1517.

⁷⁴⁹ Churchill Archive, 17/6/1921.

⁷⁵⁰ Charles Townshend, *When God Made Hell: The British Invasion of Mesopotamia and the Creation of Iraq, 1914-1921*, Faber and Faber, London - 2011.

⁷⁵¹ Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism*, p. 61.

whereas we are working with some success for a constitution, which though oligarchical in its present stage, is developing towards democracy. Sheikh Mahmud is identified with a policy of absolutism and he himself is feared as a feudal baron of the worst type. Even if he were only set at large in India, I think, it would have an unsettling effect just now'.⁷⁵² 26 August 1921, High commissioner to Colonial Secretary. See Records of kurds V 6, pvii.

Cox knew how to play with Churchill's support of an independent Kurdistan by manipulating the Pan Islamic and Bolshevik threats. On 28 October 1921, in a "cunning bluff" Cox suggested to Churchill that if he planned to form an independent Kurdish state the British should support the Kurdish revolt in northern Kurdistan against nationalist Turks with the support of the Greeks.⁷⁵³ Cox and Bell successfully exploited the situation by implementing their scheme against the articulated priorities of the Colonial Office. By playing on the pan-Islamic and Kemalist threats Cox was able to convince Churchill to relinquish his support for the Kurdish state and to achieve this aim they did not avoid distorting the facts by showing a political picture of Kurdistan in a way that served their agenda.⁷⁵⁴ Eskender argues that 'it was not in Cox's interest to accurately report anything that might weaken the basis of his views on Kurdish affairs or to eagerly implement Churchill's recommendations'.⁷⁵⁵

It is possible that there were complaints made within the Colonial Office circle regarding Cox's reports, especially by Major Young, who, to a large extent, was behind the formulation and preparation of reports and responses to the High Commissioner of Baghdad; and also criticism of Bell who was responsible for Cox's reports. It could be argued that the real quarrel was between the Secretaries on both sides. One of Bell's letters to her father, strongly proves our claim.

Bell noted that the Secretary of State sent them 'a perfectly damnable despatch', no doubt written by Major Young, 'God curse him', which recommended that before the elections they should practically 'advise all the Kurdish districts within Iraq to stand out and form a Kurdish independent state'. Then Bell, in a request from Cox,

⁷⁵² High Commissioner of Iraq to S/S the Colonies, 26 August 1921, C0730/4. From Eskander, *Britain's Policy*, p. 178.

⁷⁵³ Dockter, *Churchill and the Islamic World*, p.169.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁵ Eskander, *Britain's Policy towards the Kurdish question*, p. 188.

put her remarks on the Colonial Offices' document, in no 'guarded manner'. 'I think and hope that he'll fight it to the death for if we adopted the proposals it contains, it would mean that not only Feisal but every Arab 'Iraqi would be convinced that we are separating the Kurdish Iraq provinces from Arab Iraq in order to hand them back to the Turks'.⁷⁵⁶

More clear evidence can be found regarding the issue in a letter that Churchill addressed to his Secretary, John Shuckburgh. The document shows that people came to Churchill and argued for the future of Kurdistan: this must be a kind of criticism, a subtle complaint against the nature of the High Commissioner's reports that did not reflect the facts on the ground and provided dishonest or incomplete reports about the situation of Mesopotamia, and Kurdistan in particular. Also, Churchill should have been informed that the High Commissioner did not consider the Colonial Office's views regarding the Kurdish quest but merely insisted on their own policy, ignoring the Colonial Office's views and instructions. Then again, Churchill himself admitted that the situation was so complicated that he suggested they should not bombard the High Commissioner with 'these elaborate instructions'. Churchill pointed out that 'it's quite true that I am responsible for approving all the telegrams you have sent'. However, regarding these telegrams he wrote, 'I was rather worried by all the lengthy details in telegrams going in my name and so many being sent. I am sure they must impair the effectiveness of the message which I send myself personally'. On the same day, Churchill sent a personal and secret telegram to Cox which said, 'I am very anxious not to burden you with rigid instructions but to support you in every way in difficult task you are discharging with increasing measure of success'.⁷⁵⁷

This clearly indicates that Churchill was simply not sufficiently concerned about the details of the Kurdish situation to make them a high priority. He was not willing to push his views on an independent Kurdistan ahead of other concerns he had at the time. Churchill's first priorities were the removal of British troops and the reduction of expenditure in Mesopotamia by the British taxpayer and, Feisal was the fastest route to achieve these ends.⁷⁵⁸ Although Churchill had said, 'we do not put Kurds under

⁷⁵⁶ Letters, 15/8/1922. Gertrude Bell Archive - Newcastle University.

⁷⁵⁷ Churchill to his Secretary, 9/7/1921, Churchill Archive 17/16.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid.

Arabs', this should not be hampered Feisal's candidature.⁷⁵⁹ In subordinating the Kurdish question to securing the early choice of Feisal, Churchill implicitly left the question of Kurdistan to the final decisions of the assembly. Churchill's decision at the point of crisis regarding his priorities had significant consequences to the political future of Kurdistan. Warren Dockter regards this exact moment as 'the death of an independent Kurdistan'.⁷⁶⁰

Not only did Churchill fail to take any practical steps to enforce the Kurdish buffer state, he weakened and undermined any possibility of it; and he did this by allowing the extension of the national Iraqi elections to Kurdish areas, and by becoming more open and flexible towards the Baghdad party line. His passive support critically strengthened Cox's approach which was separate from the policy of the Colonial Office. Olson argues that from the summer of 1921, the policy of the 'Officials on the ground' in Baghdad was beginning to emerge: 'Coxian persistence was beginning to dominate Churchillian persuasion: more was to come...the men on the spot in Baghdad were clearly outmanoeuvring those in London'.⁷⁶¹

Indeed, Churchill did not want to override Cox, but suggested that the matters should be left to him, because, Churchill supposed, 'Who alone knows the local situation and who has the greatest possible interest in bringing out a satisfactory result'.⁷⁶² As any distant official would, Churchill left many details to the men on the ground, the officials he considered to be experts because of their proximity to the issues. It would have been quite difficult for anyone in London to challenge Cox with Bell at his back, unless they had clear and strong motives concerning the future of Kurdistan, which they did not. Furthermore, in the summer of 1921, Churchill strongly supported the maintenance of British troops in Mesopotamia, and stood against the Prime Minister's and the War Office's approaches to withdrawing British troops from Mesopotamia. He asked Cox's assistance and wrote to him: 'I let you know about these matters, which are very secret, in order that you may understand the difficulties I have in resisting an excessive demand by the War Office on the one hand and excessive

⁷⁵⁹ S. Of S. to Percy Cox, Personal and Secret, 9/7/1921, Churchill Archive 17/16.

⁷⁶⁰ Dockter, *Churchill and the Islamic World*, p.170.

⁷⁶¹ Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism*, pp. 61, 69.

⁷⁶² Churchill to his Secretary, 9/7/1921, Churchill Archive 17/16.

demand for economy and reduction on the other. I shall succeed in doing that if I have your effective support'.⁷⁶³ Due to the developments in the Kurdish areas in 1922 the British contemplated evacuation from Southern Kurdistan. The General staff of the War Office refused to keep Imperial troops in the Mosul Vilayet, arguing that the War office only agreed to their retention reluctantly, on the express understanding that the condition outlined in the Cairo Conference came about. The War Office was dissatisfied with the policy lines adopted in Baghdad which indicated that none of the conditions outlined in the Cairo Conference had been fulfilled.⁷⁶⁴ Clearly, the only conclusion that was outlined regarding Kurdistan was to deal with the country separately from the Arab state. This was the main cause of the deterioration in Kurdistan's situation because the Kurds had never accepted Arab rule and had always demanded self-rule.

So, until the collapse of Lloyd George's government in October 1922, Churchill, on the surface, proclaimed a commitment to Kurdish autonomy but in reality he did not carry it out and did not take any practical step towards it. This was because he did not hold the Baghdad circle to implement the instructions of the Colonial Office or at least prevent them from imposing their agenda. The Colonial Office's ambivalence gave a unique opportunity to the Baghdad Circle to implement their plan of integrating Kurdistan into Iraq. In September 1921, the Colonial Office admitted the failure of their policy regarding this matter, 'we have never succeeded in really making up our minds on this very difficult question of policy in Kurdistan'.⁷⁶⁵ In the following year, Churchill stated that 'We are doing the best we can for Southern Kurdistan, but we are not committing ourselves in any serious way. I have given explicit directions which will prevent anything of that kind arising'.⁷⁶⁶

Thus, the Kurdish question was subordinated to the British realpolitik and imperial interests. The situation was left to the mercy of the men on the spot, especially Bell and Cox who were largely influenced by the implementation of the British policy in

⁷⁶³ From S. of S. to Sir Percy Cox, Personal and Secret, 2nd August 1921, CHAR 17/16.

⁷⁶⁴ The situation in Northern Kurdistan Iraq, Memorandum by the secretary of state, 5th October 1922, CAB/24/133

⁷⁶⁵ Townshend, *When God Made Hell*, p. 509.

⁷⁶⁶ Middle Eastern Service, HC Deb 11 July 1922 Vol 156 cc1085-137.
<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com>.

the region, in particular in respect of the decision to integrate Southern Kurdistan into the Iraqi state which was created by the British, as Charles Townshend describes, 'deliberately and unilaterally'.⁷⁶⁷ This was largely due to Churchill's indifference and failure to determine with the High Commissioner not to impose the policy which contradicted the principle of protecting Kurds from rule by Arabs. This failure wrecked the possibility of an independent Kurdistan.

Conclusion

This chapter argued that the British Empire experienced many difficulties in the post-war period. The continuing threat of rival powers, the anti-British national movements, the domestic issues gathered together forced the Government in London to reconsider its Middle Eastern policy. Mesopotamia was at the heart of this new shifting policy, as it carried the burden of a huge number of troops stationed in the region. The financial crisis and the pressure at home led the Government to decide on Military reductions in Mesopotamia. But the withdrawal was not a correct decision because it would create a vacuum and it was thought that once the British left the region other forces would come to occupy it. That would make a series strategic threat to Britain's position not only in Mesopotamia but in the entire East.

Hence, the British government decided to rely on two pillars to safeguard its position in the Middle East, the Sharifian solution with support of Air Power. The new imperial orders were underpinned by conducting plebiscites to clarify and legitimize internationally and to meet the League of Nations' requirement, notably the principle of self-determination. These new developments had profound impact on the Kurdish situation.

It could be argued that the inclusion of Southern Kurdistan into the Iraqi State and the abandonment of the establishment of an independent Kurdish state by Britain

⁷⁶⁷ Townshend, *When God Made Hell*, p. xxi.

was in its long term interests. First, it was to avoid the potential connection between Arab-Kemalists against the British position in the region. The two regional nationalists were much more powerful than the Kurdish if they tried to oppose the British position in the Middle East. If Southern Kurdistan was gained independence, it would encourage the Northern Kurds to take the same step. This would probably lead to instability in the region which would complicate the situation for the British. In terms of the other Great Powers such as the French and the United States, they might exploit the circumstances in their own interests at the expense of the British especially regarding oil concessions.

The Kurdish question settlement was suspended because it was implicated with the Mesopotamian political position. The 'men on the spot' masterminded the British policy decisions made with regard to the future of Kurdistan. In particular, Bell was the most influential actor in the Baghdad circle who spent more than a decade designing a policy that she believed in and she was able to influence Cox and the policy-makers in London to carry out her vision of the future of Mesopotamia and Kurdistan.

This chapter concludes that British foreign policy was not particularly institutional since it was driven by personalities and actors in the Baghdad Circle, the "men on the spot" and their views were key in influencing the policy-makers' thinking (decisions) in London. Bell, in particular, was an architect of the Iraqi state, and was key in obstructing the development of the British Kurdish policy, and contributed significantly to the nullification of Kurdish political rights granted based on the Sevres Treaty as well as the Cairo Conference.

Gertrude Bell was instrumental in shaping Iraq, and her vision of the future of the country largely featured the personalities involved, whether in London or Baghdad. Her pro-Sharifian vision was a decisive factor in destroying the idea of Kurdish separation and incorporating the region into the Iraqi Arab state. The Baghdad circle formed the policy regardless of the wishes of the people, the Colonial Office, and the articles of the Sevres treaty. Their opinions were created, and implemented from the outside by whatever means possible in order to impose Arab rule, de facto, on Kurdistan. Indeed, Percy Cox's reports, mainly drafted by Bell, convinced Churchill to adopt their scheme, in particular the question of holding an election in Southern Kurdistan. In contrast, Churchill's policy failed to deal with the future of Kurdistan since

the issue was subordinated to the wider strategic and economic imperial considerations. Eventually the implemented policy produced long-term instability and turmoil in southern Kurdistan which was exploited by nationalist Turks to expand their influence in the region by plying the Islamist propaganda. Turkish nationalists perceived the idea of a Kurdish state as a British project. On the other hand, the British thought that independent Kurdistan would be under Turkish domination.

The chapter argued that Kurdish political rights had been neglected in favour of the establishment of a centralised Arab state in Baghdad. Under the logic of power and undemocratic elections Kurdistan had been integrated to Iraq and was the logic that the Officials in Baghdad adopted to implement their approach; and the British Officials in Baghdad stressed that including the Kurds into Iraq would curb the Turkish threat.

It was Baghdad's vision that ultimately, stability in Iraq could be achieved through the integration of Kurdistan into the country and not by other means. Their assumption was that they were in a much stronger position by making a central Arab state against the Turks rather than relying on the Kurdish element. In contrast, the pro-Independence lobby insisted that the Kurdish buffer would be more a viable barrier against potential Turkish attacks; on the contrary imposing Arab rule on the Kurds would increase the Turkish threat because Kurds did not want to be ruled by the Arabs. The separatists were proved right immediately. The situation deteriorated in Kurdistan and was exploited by the Turkish who succeeded in turning them against the British. The British then obliged them to bring back Sheikh Mahmud to sort out the issue. Mahmud was soon able to settle the problem. If the alternative scheme were implemented a year earlier the situation might have been quite different. As it was, the situation was confused and dangerous situation. The next chapter will discuss this issue in more detail.

The contemporary British officials from both sides, Bell, Soane, Edmonds, Lees, and Noel admitted the failure of the British policy in Kurdistan and that it was mainly due to the non-fulfilment of its promises to the Kurds rather than their inability.⁷⁶⁸ David Fromkin notes that British Policy-makers 'imposed a settlement upon the Middle East

⁷⁶⁸ Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks and Arabs*, p. 40; Lees, *Two years in Kurdistan*; Jwaideh, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement*, p 190; Lukitz, *A Quest in the Middle East*, p.174

in 1922 in which, for the most part, they themselves no longer believed'.⁷⁶⁹ Regarding the creation of Iraq specifically, Toby Dodge emphasises on the British failure to fulfil the League of Nation's terms' to form 'a stable, sustainable state in Iraq, that created the basis to the political instability and violence that has come to dominate Iraq'.⁷⁷⁰

⁷⁶⁹ Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace*, p. 563.

⁷⁷⁰ Toby Dodge, 'The British Mandate in Iraq, 1920-1932', *The Middle East online*, series 2: Iraq 1914-1974 (Reading: Thomson Learning EMEA Ltd, 2006).

Chapter Six

The Turku-Armenian Factor and its impact on the British view of the Kurdish question

This chapter examines the British policy in relation to the Kurdish question from the perspective of the Turku-Armenian factors. The chapter is divided into two closely interconnected sections. The first addresses Armenia's influence on the future of Kurdistan. The second discusses the rise of the Turkish nationalist movement and its influence on the British view of the Kurdish question.

Research has been carried out concerning this issue from a variety of angles. In his book *Kurdistan During the First World War*, Kamal Madhar discusses the Armenian Massacres and the role of the Kurds in the tragedy. However, he did not pay attention to the influence of the question of the Great Powers' attitude to Kurdistan's future. Both Janet Klein's recent book, *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone* (2011) and Hoger Taher's *Alaqaat al-Kurd wal Armen 1878-1920* (2011) emphasize Kurdish-Armenian relations. However, in his thesis, *Britain's Policy towards the Kurdish Question, 1915-1923* Eskander deals with the question in terms of the British perspective but nevertheless, the question needs deeper study. This chapter displays a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity of the Kurdish question due to the Turco-Armenian dimension. Kurdish-Armenian reconciliation became more difficult, and the chief factor was related to Turkish policies, which had always been prominent in the Kurdish-Armenians relations. This Turkish attitude reflected and derived fundamentally from the whole western imperial Game in general. This chapter adds a new dimension by showing the link between these factors, and the close connections between the Armenian, Turkish and Kurdish questions. In addition, it shows the influence of an extensive campaign regarding the Armenian

question, conducted by missionary groups, the press, and other Armenian lobby groups, which influenced both the public and policy makers. This consequently influenced the unfavourable British attitude towards the Kurds. This chapter shows how policy decisions on Kurdistan were inextricably linked to the way that information was conveyed to British policy makers. The biased reports from British officials, agents, missionary groups and the press, and their bias towards the interests of Armenians, created a negative image and perception among decision-makers about the Kurdish issue and obstructed their cause in the foreign policies of the Great powers.

Another important theme that this study has shown, is that the divergence of British agendas on the future of the Turkey settlement, especially the significant difference between Churchill's and Lloyd George's Middle Eastern strategies, was a decisive factor in determining the future of Kurdistan. Lloyd George's anti-Turk policy was fundamentally responsible for the deterioration of the Anatolian situation due to the Turco-Greek conflict, which had catastrophic consequences for the entire Middle East situation. This policy was the most important factor in triggering the Kemalist movement and the Allies' disagreement with the peace settlement with Turkey. By contrast, the Indian Government and the War Office disagreed with Prime Minister's policy. In particular, Churchill opposed Lloyd George's policy by advocating a pro-Turk, pro-Islamic and anti-Bolshevik policy in the Middle East. The Kurdish question was largely tied up with the Turco-Greek conflict, and the conflicting British attitudes prevented the settlement of the Kurdish question.

The most significant consequence was that it impeded the emergence of a definitive British policy towards the Kurdish question, which resulted in the perpetual postponement of a Kurdistan settlement. In the absence a coherent perception of Kurdistan's future from London, the British circles in Baghdad and Constantinople became the main factors determining the fate of the Kurds. The Baghdad centre viewed Kurdistan's situation from the Mesopotamian perspective, which was mainly influenced by the Arab nationalist sentiments, whilst the British High Commission in Constantinople dealt with the Kurdish question from the perspective of the Turkish settlement. For Baghdad and Constantinople respectively, the Arab and Turkish questions always had superiority over the Kurdish one; and London's attitude reflected, and was influenced by, these perspectives. Introduction

Both Turkey and Armenia were central factors in shaping Britain's policy in connection with the future of Kurdistan. I argue that the Kurdish situation was inextricably linked to the Turku-Armenian conflicts for an extended period, and the involvement of some sections of the Kurds in the Armenian massacres had a very detrimental effect on the Western powers' perception of the Kurdish question. In addition, the chapter argues that the conflicts between different parts of the British government had a direct impact on the failure of the Kurdish question. Furthermore, the chapter indicates that the Armenian machinery comping in west distorted Kurdish Image and made a bad impression from the west towards the Kurds that was transformed into the minds of the policy-makers as well.

The Armenian question emerged from the 'Eastern Question'⁷⁷¹ which had had a profound effect on the Kurdish situation. However, the Armenian question subordinated the Kurdish question in the long-term foreign policy of the Great Powers. The Western public greatly sympathized with the Armenians and the Western powers recognized their demands at the Berlin Conference of 1878. The result was that the Conference passed Article 61 which was designed to guarantee the security of the Armenians against Kurds and Circassians and the assurances the Conference offered to the Armenians lasted up until the post-war settlement.

The Christian nationalist movements in the Ottoman Empire were strongly supported by Western countries because of the perception that 'Christians should never be ruled by Muslims'.⁷⁷² Therefore, the West was ready to listen to the Armenians and to accept their privileged status since Armenia was Christian. Janet Klein points out that Armenians, including the six Eastern Vilayets, represented, 'the scene of biblical events and stories' and the 'cradle of mankind'.⁷⁷³ In her recent study of the European diplomatic sources Klein's analysis finds that the British and French had 'their own

⁷⁷¹ Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, p. 45.* The Eastern Question was a diplomatic problem raised in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by the Great Powers' rivalries for leverage in the Ottoman Empire.

⁷⁷² Justin McCarthy, *The Ottoman Peoples and the End of Empire*, 2001, p. 68.

⁷⁷³ Janet Klein, *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone*, Stanford University Press, 2011, p. 3.

agenda and prejudices that coloured their analyses of the events they described'.⁷⁷⁴ These official sources also 'revealed the distinctly Orientalist bias of their authors, many (but not all) of whom saw the protection of Armenians as a primary matter of interest, and whose reports on this region reflects this concern'.⁷⁷⁵ These early western studies in Kurdistan had a very important impact on the Great Powers perceptions of the Kurds which were often biased against them in favour of their Christian neighbours. This information significantly influenced Great Power policy towards the Kurds.⁷⁷⁶

The sympathy and recognition granted to the Armenians created significant obstacles in the way of the Kurdish question; from the perspective of the Great Powers, especially Britain, the Armenian question superseded the Kurdish question; and the Armenian tragedy hugely contributed to the distortion of the Kurdish image in the Western world. Although only a few Kurds had perpetrated the Armenian massacres according to the Western media and the missionary groups, they came to represent all Kurds, which dramatically affected the question of Kurdish independence in general. That is, the name 'Kurds' became inextricably linked with Armenian Massacres. The Western Press and missionary groups familiar with these events portrayed the Kurds as a 'wild, murderous, barbarous individuals'⁷⁷⁷ and Western policy-makers were influenced by these portrayals. This had also influenced British views in their dealings with respect to determining the future of Kurdistan, both during and after the war.

Prior to the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Armenians and Kurds lived amicably side-by-side. But later, their relations deteriorated, mainly due to external factors and the birth pangs of both nations and nationalism. The presence of missionary groups in the region, the rivalry between the Great Powers, and the influence of the emerging Turkish nationalist movement impacted negatively on relations between the two ethnic groups. These external forces contributed to the friction between them since at the time they were developing an awareness of their own national hopes. This friction erupted into violence between the 1890s and 1915;

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 17.

⁷⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 7.

⁷⁷⁶ Maria T O'Shea, The image from the outside: European travellers and Kurdistan before the great war, *Geopolitics and International Boundaries*, 2:3, 70-89, 1997, DOI.

⁷⁷⁷ Major Noel's Notes on the Kurdish Situation, 1919, F.O 608/116. T.N.A

and it was a kind of violence that was to define the Kurdish people on the global stage and would severely damage perceptions of the Kurdish question for years to come.

The next section continues the discussion by examining how the Turkish nationalists successfully exploited this situation in order to consolidate their influence in Kurdistan by playing on pan-Islamic propaganda and intimidating the Kurds by raising the possibility of Christian Armenian hegemony over them. This contributed significantly to the emergence of the Kemalist movement. I shall argue that the Turkish nationalists' success contributed significantly to the Kurdish question's decline in Britain's perception and dramatically shifted attitudes towards the Kurdish question. Eventually, as the Ottoman Empire dissolved, both Armenians⁷⁷⁸ and Kurds living in the six Eastern Vilayets lost their national bids to form a Turkish state. This was chiefly the result of a conflict of interests between the Great Powers, combined with the triumph of the Turkish nationalists.

From the Nineteenth Century up to the End of the First World War

Interventions into the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire created a long-term rivalry between the Great Powers which was called the 'Great Game'. The policy that ensued had a direct impact on both the Kurdish and the Armenian situation.

'The Great Game' was a geostrategic and economic rivalry between the Russians and the British, which, in the early nineteenth century, manifested as an acute conflict between the two powers. Russian expansion alarmed the British and threatened its Empire in the East. The British thought that Russia would attack their positions in India and induce the people of India to revolt. As Queen Victoria commented, 'The Great Game' was a question of 'Russian or British supremacy in the world'.⁷⁷⁹ Hence, protecting the integrity of the Ottoman Empire's territories dominated British strategy in order to curb Russian expansions; and British foreign policy was concerned with the global balance of power between its empire and others. The primary consideration was

⁷⁷⁸ Though Armenians did get a Republic of Armenia state later on in the 20th century in the South Caucasus region of Eurasia, that Republic did not include any of the originally contested territory in Turkey. All Armenian lands claimed in Turkey remain separate from Armenia.

⁷⁷⁹ Fromkin, *Great Game*, p 951.

always British interests rather than moral principle. The British had to choose between the Russian and Ottoman Empires. As David Fromkin argues, it was a 'deplorable ally and deplorable adversary',⁷⁸⁰ and, historically, British policy had always been more anti-Russian than pro-Ottoman.⁷⁸¹

The Armenian question was a significant dynamic between the Great Powers and their involvement in the Ottoman Empire, especially in the late nineteenth century, heightened the diplomatic disagreement between them. Anglo-Russian rivalry was an important factor behind the Armenian massacres. During the discussions of the San Stephano and Berlin treaties, The Armenians became a pawn in the game of Anglo-Russian rivalry in the region⁷⁸² since both powers perceived that any understanding between Kurds and Armenians would jeopardize their interests in the region. For Britain, harmony between the two peoples would threaten the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. To the Russians, unity of the two peoples would nullify their destabilizing interventions in the region.⁷⁸³ Russian wanted to use the Armenians to their own interests, but they were against Armenian national ambitions.⁷⁸⁴

During the thirty years that followed the Russian-Turkish War of 1877 - 78, very tragic and destructive events occurred in the region that brought violence and instability to the people of the six Eastern Vilayets.⁷⁸⁵ The Berlin Congress of 1878 as well as the Russian-Turkish War of 1877-1878 brought the Armenian question to international attention, but failed to oblige Constantinople to commit to reforms in the six Eastern Vilayets. Consequently, the Armenian situation worsened;⁷⁸⁶ the Berlin Treaty complicated and increased the tension between Armenians and Kurds, as well as between residents of those Vilayets and Turks. The Armenians began to adopt revolutionary means to support and actualize their claims, induced by promises made by the European powers. To this end, they formed secret committees and armed

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid, p 942

⁷⁸¹ Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide*, p36

⁷⁸² Temperley, Harold William Vazeille, *A History of the Peace Conference of Paris, 1879-1939*, Volume 6, London Oxford University Press, Hodder & Stoughton, p. 80.

⁷⁸³ O'Shea, *Trapped-Between-Map-Reality-Geography and Perceptions of Kurdistan*, p. 90.

⁷⁸⁴ Temperley, *A History of the Peace Conference*, p. 82.

⁷⁸⁵ Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism*, p. 5.

⁷⁸⁶ Michael M. Gunter, *Armenian History and the Question of Genocide*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York- 2011, pp. 3&4.

groups to stand against the Turkish government.⁷⁸⁷ These developments led to the tragic events of the mid-1890s in which thousands of Armenians were killed by the Turkish government aided by Kurdish forces. Kaiser Wilhelm II accused the British of being culpable for the violence: 'the underlying cause of this calamity lies entirely with Britain and the loathsome campaign of Westminster, Argyll and Gladstone to try to favour the Armenians. Their blood lies in the hands of the leaders of England'.⁷⁸⁸ On the other hand, in a speech at the Mansion House in London, both Mark Sykes and Mr. Touch, MP, condemned the German Emperor for giving countenance to the crime committed against the Armenians in 1896 by visiting Constantinople in 1898 and to take the hand of the Sultan while it was still wet with the blood of the murdered Armenians.⁷⁸⁹

Considering these events in the light of the Kurdish dimension adds further complications. Kurds were alarmed by Article 61 of the Berlin Conference. This was because they feared Armenian dominance in Kurdish territory and this fear was a crucial factor behind Kurdish suspicions of the Western powers. Although the Western powers had not yet expressed their intention to form an independent Kurdistan, they had plans for an independent Armenia that would include many predominantly Kurdish areas. Wadie Jwaideh argues that this was the leading factor behind Sheikh Ubaydallah of Nehri's endeavor to unite the Kurds.⁷⁹⁰ The British documents show the connection between the rumours of Independent Armenia and the revolt of Sheikh Ubaydallah. Capt. Clayton, Vice-Consul at Van reported that Sheikh Ubaydallah stated: 'What is this I hear, that the Armenians are going to have an independent state in Van, and the Nestorians are going to hoist the British flag and declare themselves British subjects. I will never permit it, even if I have to arm the women'.⁷⁹¹ W.G. Abbott, the British Consul of Tabriz, Iran, who witnessed the Sheikh Ubaydallah revolt of 1881.

⁷⁸⁷ Garabed M. Missirian, Armenia in the Agonies of National Crucifixion, *The Journal of Race Development*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Jan., 1916).

⁷⁸⁸ Matthew P. Fitzpatrick, 'Ideal and Ornamental Endeavours': The Armenian Reforms and Germany's Response to Britain's Imperial Humanitarianism in the Ottoman Empire, 1878–83, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* Vol. 40, No. 2, June 2012, p 183.

⁷⁸⁹ Report of a meeting held at the Mansion House, London to initiate the repatriation of the Armenians. 7 June 1916, DDSY(2)/4/19.

⁷⁹⁰ Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement*, p 83

⁷⁹¹ Despatch, Capt. Clayton, Vice-Consul at Van to Major Henry Trotter, Consul for Kurdistan, Bashkala, 11 July 1880, No. 23, FO 195/1315. In *Records of the Kurds: Territory, Revolt and Nationalism, 1831–1979*, British Documentary Sources, Edited by Burdett, Anita L. P., Cambridge Archive Editions, 2015, p. 233.

In 1888, Abbott wrote to authorities in London: 'Still, I am far from thinking that Europe has heard the last of this Kurdish question. It will probably be asked hereafter, what is to be done with Kurdistan?'⁷⁹²

Russians and Turks pitted the Armenians and Kurds against each other, by harassing the Kurds, and failing to stop the brutal Armenian lawlessness towards them. Shakoviski argued that the fanatic, extreme, Armenians wanted to 'exterminate all Muslim residents of the areas we occupied'.⁷⁹³ Russia also tried to prevent any cooperation between Armenians and Kurds, by turning the Kurdish tribes against the Armenians and spreading anti-Armenian sentiments, saying that the Christians intended to destroy Islam.⁷⁹⁴ The creation of the Hamidiye Light Cavalry Regiments, was part of Sultan Abdul Hamid's pan-Islamic policy to prevent interventions by the Great powers into the Ottoman Empire.⁷⁹⁵ The Hamidiye, as it included Kurdish tribes, was formed in direct response to the Armenian activities in the latter part of 1891.⁷⁹⁶

Hamidiye played an important role in the Armenian massacres of 1894-1896. The incident began in the Sasson region in 1894 when the Armenians refused to pay a tax, and the Turkish forces and Hamidian regiments killed thousands of them. This Kurdish involvement in the Armenian massacres had a profound impact on the situation in Kurdistan because the Kurds had been linked with these massacres and in the long term, these events had deteriorated relations with the Armenians. The Kurdish people were aware of this Turkish agenda. For instance, thirty-nine Kurdish tribal chiefs of Bitlis, sent a letter to Queen Victoria, protesting against the Turkish policy, "which was blaming the Kurds entirely for the Armenian massacres' of the mid-1890s. The petition includes a list of tribes involved in a massacre in 1895. It includes the seal or mark and name of each chief who put their name to the petition.⁷⁹⁷

⁷⁹² Ibid, p. ix.

⁷⁹³ Madhar, *Kurdistan During the First World War*, p. 93

⁷⁹⁴ O'Shea, *Trapped-Between-Map-Reality-Geography*, p. 80

⁷⁹⁵ For detail about the Hamidiye see: Janet Klein, *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone*, Stanford University Press, California-2011.

⁷⁹⁶ Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism*, p. 8.

⁷⁹⁷ Despatch from R.W. Graves, HM Consul for Kurdistan, Erzeroum, to Sir P. Currie, HM Ambassador, Constantinople, 25 July 1895, No. 136 [FO 195/1892]. Records of the Kurds, Vol 1, P. xiv.

Sykes noted that the Hamidieh did not spare the Sunni Kurds, who did not serve in the regiments any more than the Armenians if, indeed, as much. A Kurdish man told him: we lived with the Armenians like brothers. Religion was the only difference. Now we are always quarrelling, about I know not what. Are we in fault? Are the Armenians in fault? I know not by God, I know not. All of us suffer, Kurd and Armenian alike. Soldiers come in every day, eat our chickens, beat our men, and demand taxes twenty-five years in arrear. How will it end?⁷⁹⁸ In the case of 1915 massacres also part of Kurds, who mainly former Hamidian forces, took part with Turkish military. On the other hand, part of Kurds who helped the Armenians and rescue them and escape them from the massacre. For instance, Ibrahim Pasha was saved 4000 Armenians from massacre and gave them shelter.⁷⁹⁹

However, although the Kurds were being used by the Turks against the Armenians, they themselves were intended to be the next target. The Young Turks openly threatened the Kurds for massacring, and called them "the second Armenians" and "another enemy within the house".⁸⁰⁰ According to a Memorandum, during the Armenian massacres of 1915, a Turkish gendarme said to a Danish Red Cross Nurse: 'First we kill the Armenians, then the Greeks, and then the Kurds'. According to the British report the gendarme was stating the logical consequences of his superiors' policy' as the CUP policy had been driven by the Pan-Turanian ideology in their treatment of the Armenians.⁸⁰¹

Inevitably, these interventions into Kurdish and Armenian affairs created tension between the two nations. The Nationalist Armenians demanded a greater and independent Armenia which included most territories claimed to have been ruled by ancient Armenians. For instance, Armenians called Diyarbakir 'the heart of Armenia'. However, these claims conflicted with Kurdish aspirations. For example, Kurds considered almost the whole of Western Armenia to be Kurdish land. Kurds feared that the Armenians, supported by the Great Powers, would come to dominate them and

⁷⁹⁸ Sykes, Mark, *The Caliphs' Last Heritage: a short history of the Turkish Empire*, the Macmillan Company, London, 1915, p. 406.

⁷⁹⁹ Report of a meeting held at the Mansion House, London to initiate the repatriation of the Armenians. 7 June 1916, DDSY(2)/4/19.

⁸⁰⁰ Records of the Kurds. Volume 5, p102.

⁸⁰¹ Appendix I. the Kurds, Cabinet Memorandum: Eastern Report, No. 44, CAB 24/144.

their ancestral lands. A Kurdish poet living at the time, the father of modernism, Haji Qadri Koya, pointed out: 'It is heart-breaking to see the lands of Jazeera and Butan, I mean the fatherland of the Kurds, being turned into a home for Armenia'.⁸⁰²

Nevertheless, as stated earlier, the tragic events of the 1890s aroused great sympathy for the Armenian question in Western countries.⁸⁰³ Numbers of organisations and communities were formed in support of the Armenian cause, such as 'Friends of Armenia' and the 'Anglo-Armenian Association'. Most importantly, the event of the First World War 'imprinted the Armenian issue on Western minds indelibly'.⁸⁰⁴ The Armenian propaganda against the Kurds intensified in Europe and they described Kurds as they were uncivilised and savage people.⁸⁰⁵

Furthermore, the missionary presence in Kurdistan caused anxiety among the Kurds and deteriorated relations between Kurds and Christians. Missionary groups were supported by Western powers which intensified the conflicts between Kurds and Christians.⁸⁰⁶ The missionary accounts often accentuate the differences between that which is civilized Christian culture in opposition to the barbaric and sedentary orient. The Armenian massacres had influenced most of the Western Press and writers to regard the Kurds as bloodthirsty, instinctive aggressors, and looters and plunderers.⁸⁰⁷

The Western Press and the activities of the missionaries played a leading role in calling the Western public's attention to the Armenian question. The press was especially dominant in directing the public and political opinion in West. The British Press such as *The Times*, *The London Standard*, *Pall Mall Gazette*, *Morning Post* and *London Daily News* published much news in favour of the Armenians. *The Times*, one of the most influential newspapers of the period, particularly affected public opinion,

⁸⁰² In: Madhar, *Kurdistan*, p.159.

⁸⁰³ Garabed M. Missirian, *Armenia in the Agonies of National Crucifixion*, *The Journal of Race Development*, Vol. 6, No. 3, Jan, 1916, p. 332

⁸⁰⁴ Martyn Housden (2012) *Imagining Armenia. Orientalism, Ambiguity and Intervention*, *The International History Review*, 34:3, p. 617.

⁸⁰⁵ Zinar Slopi, *Fi Sabeel Kurdistan*, T: R. Ali, Rabita Kawa Lil thaqafa alkurdia, Dar El - Kateb, Beirut, 1987, p. 30.

⁸⁰⁶ Denise Natali, *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran*, 2005, p. 19; Vahram Petrosyan, *Assyrians in Iraq, Iran & the Caucasus*, Vol. 10, No. 1, Brill, Leiden (2006), p. 119.

⁸⁰⁷ Madhar, *Kurdistan*, p. 149.

politicians and governments. When featured in the columns of *The Times*, the Armenian question was always related to the Congress. Armenian activities are closely monitored and supported in Britain. In his article in *The Times* James Bryce noted that it was the right time to bring the Armenian cause to the attention of the Congress and that the Armenians deserved much more attention. The British people felt that Europe should support the Armenians.⁸⁰⁸

Since there was an extensive campaign regarding the Armenian question, the Missionary groups, the Press and other Armenian lobby groups made a bid to influence both the public and policy-makers as well.⁸⁰⁹ However, the Western public and the Press's sympathy for the Armenians affected Britain's attitude to the Kurdish issue. The historical approach which was conducted by the Foreign Office to deal with the future of the Eastern Ottoman provinces was largely influenced by the pre-war and wartime oriental studies and missionary movements. Evidently, the Foreign Office was aware that any settlement of the Kurds would directly affect the Armenian situation. Since the Berlin Conference the Armenians enjoyed priority and recognition on an international level and also the support and sympathy of the public, press, and other organisations; any step in this direction would not be in favour of the British interests.

Assyriology was one important dimension of this historical approach, and many archaeological researches had been carried out during the nineteenth century by Rich, Rawlinson, Layard, Ker Porter, and Rassam. In their accounts, these archaeologists had discussed the Kurds. According to O'Shea, 'like the writers of other nationalities, they often viewed the Kurds unfavourably in relation to their Christian neighbours'.⁸¹⁰ This approach influenced the foreign policies of the Western powers who viewed the region, to a large extent, in this perspective. When they dealt with the six Eastern Vilayets and other Kurdish regions the Allies used this approach. The political ambitions of the Assyrians also impacted on the British attitude towards the future of Kurdistan. The Assyrians, who had their own claims in some areas in Kurdistan asked for British support in establishing an Assyrian state. Mark Sykes considered a Christian

⁸⁰⁸ Fikretin Yavuz, Armenian Question and Western Public Opinion (From the Congress of Berlin to the 1890s), *British Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, Vol.11 No.1, 2012, p62.

⁸⁰⁹ See: Akaby Nassinian, *Britain and the Armenian Question 1915-1923*, 33-44.

⁸¹⁰ Maria T O'Shea, The image from the outside: European travellers and Kurdistan before the great war, *Geopolitics and International Boundaries*, 2:3, 70-89, 1997, DOI.

state in territories from northern Kurdistan to the Turkish-Persian border to connect with the Urmia district which reflected the wartime and post war arrangements this will be explained later.

Lloyd George was the major advocate of this Orientalist approach in the Middle East. He instructed researchers to write about the glory of the ancient past of the Middle Eastern peoples. Following Lloyd George's instructions, writers narrated the glories of the ancient East, and the Turkish barbarism, 'the embodiment of ruthless action and inflexible tyranny'. The genocide of the Armenians in 1915 was a central focus of the narrative, that was manipulated by the British government.⁸¹¹

Several British writers such as Lord Bryce, H.F.B Lynch, and Sir Edwin Pears, Lady Frederick Cavendish, Noel Buxton, Emily John Robinson, and Arnold Toynbee, wrote about the Armenian question and were able to influence British public as well as politicians. In comparison to their work on the Armenians, they paid little attention to the Kurds and their history, and the little they did discuss was mainly in the light of the Armenian question and largely depicted a negative image of Kurds. One of the most important outcomes of the pro-Armenian activities, during wartime, was the publication of the Blue Book *The Treatment of Armenians in The Ottoman Empire, 1915-16*, by the Foreign Office in 1916 which had a significant influence on British politicians, both Cabinet members and MPs. The British government primarily based its information on these pro-Armenian accounts. This was simply influenced by the British official perspectives towards the Kurdish question. Indeed, the Blue Book became the main source of information for both MPs and the Press in Britain. In the parliamentary debate, Lord Bryce, the author of the Blue Book, stated that the Kurds were guilty of playing a leading role in the Armenian massacres.⁸¹²

Planning for the post-war peace process in 1917 the Foreign Office formed a section of the Historical Department to provide basic information about various questions to the British delegations in the forthcoming conference. The section produced more than 160 study series; one of which concerned Armenia and Kurdistan.

⁸¹¹ Renton, *Changing Languages of Empire*, p. 649.

⁸¹² British Parliamentary Debates on the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1918, edited by Ara Sarafian, Gomidas, London, 2003, p.1.

The volume, which mainly relied on the above mentioned writers,⁸¹³ perceived the six Eastern Vilayets as being within Armenia and described them as 'heavily populated by Armenians'. The study, which was mainly based on the historical approach, was to revive the region, based on the ancient past. Such an approach, to a large degree, reflected the Foreign Office's scheme concerning the Eastern Christians including the Armenians. The political maps which were drawn either during and post the war period reflected the historical approach which had been conducted by the Foreign Office.

Moreover, these pro-Armenian figures contributed to the establishment of certain lobby groups, such as the Friends of Armenia, founded in London in 1897, and the Anglo-Armenian association, established by Bryce in 1893. In addition, the Armenians in Britain had their own societies working for the Armenian cause by communicating with authorities and organizing activities. In May 1918, the Armenian Bureau of information was set up to provide information about the Armenian situation to the interested groups. The British Armenian Committee was the most important pressure group in Britain. The Committee was directed by certain MPs during and after the war, and was actively engaged in the political arena of the Cabinet and Parliament. The Committee communicated and interviewed key ministers and submitted papers and articles concerning the Armenian issue.⁸¹⁴

The Armenian massacre of 1915 provided an opportunity for the pro-Armenians to influence British policy decisions regarding the Armenian cause. The question negatively reflected the Kurdish situation in the British perspective. Lord Bryce wrote to Asquith, the British Prime Minister, saying that, 'The Turks and Kurds have been massacring the whole Christian population of these regions'.⁸¹⁵ In missionary perspectives the nations and peoples in the east divided according to religion, Christians were civilised people should be supported by west, others, were uncivilised; this category of missionaries influenced policy-makers in the Western countries including Britain. At the beginning of the war, in response to A. Tchobanian's letter,

⁸¹³ See: Armenia and Kurdistan, Historical Section of the Foreign Office, H.M Stationary Office, London-1920, pp. 83-84.

⁸¹⁴ Akaby Nassibian, *Britain and the Armenian question 1915-1923*, London-Croom Helm, 1984, pp.47,48.

⁸¹⁵ Ibid, p. 73.

Secretary of the Armenian Committee in Paris, Lloyd George stated: 'to serve Armenia is to serve civilisation'.⁸¹⁶

Thus, the information provided by earlier explorers and agents was key to drawing the Kurdish image which significantly influenced the policy decisions towards the future of Kurdistan during the war and post war periods. The war merely witnessed the passing of Orientalist assumptions from the world of scholarship to the imperial expert and administrator, the culmination of a process that had developed throughout the nineteenth century.⁸¹⁷ It is likely that the maps had been drawn during the war period and were based primarily on the data collected pre-war as part of the Foreign Office's project in reshaping the areas based on the historical approach of reviving the Christian dynasties in the region, the Armenians in particular. It was the Allied policy, 'to weaken the Ottoman territorial claims, especially in Eastern Anatolia'.⁸¹⁸

So, the Armenian question was one significant factor that had affected the British attitude concerning the future of Kurdistan. It was one reason behind the British lack of interest in taking on the administration of Kurdistan; they thought that they would be required to protect the Armenian minorities in the region against any possible Kurdish attack, as Hertzil had argued.⁸¹⁹ Based on Mark Sykes's scheme, the Sykes-Picot agreement provided two Armenian autonomous areas: Erzerum, Van and Betlis would be under the Russian sphere, and the other three Vilayets would be reunited with Cilicia under the France sphere of influence.⁸²⁰ It was indicated that a large part of Northern Kurdistan would be included in the Armenian autonomous. Sykes argued in favour of establishing a Christian state, under European supervision in the territories called 'Area A'. He claimed that the Kizilbash Kurds would accept Armenian rule and it was likely that they would adopt Christianity. The remaining elements of Turkish and Sunni Kurds would either migrate or accept the situation. Sykes also suggested that it would be possible to bring the Kurds from 'Area B' into the Armenian state. Sykes believed that 'Area D' would be suitable for an independent state under the native Amir,

⁸¹⁶ Tchobanian to Loyd George, 20 November, 1914, Loyd George Papers, C/11/2/72. In Ibid, p.109.

⁸¹⁷ Changing the Languages of Empire, p. 646

⁸¹⁸ O'Shea, Trapped Between the Map and Reality, p. 42.

⁸¹⁹ The Future Settlement of Eastern Turkey in Asia and Arabia, Note by Secretary of India Office, 14 March 1915, CAB/24/1.

⁸²⁰ Nassibian, *Britain and the Armenian question*, p.110.

but in his view having Christian minorities in the region would complicate the question since he asked, 'could there be any guarantee that a Muslim could rule Christian or that a Christian would accept a Muslim dominion'.⁸²¹

After Russia withdrew the Allies stated that the post-war settlement would be based on the principles of nationality and self-determination and Turkey should be allocated to different regions: Arabia, Mesopotamia, Syria, Armenia and Palestine. There was no reference to Kurdistan at all but it was, again, decided to divide it between Armenia, Mesopotamia and Syria. In his statement of 5 January 1918, Lloyd George did not refer to Kurdistan as one of the nations that would be liberated from Turkish rule, 'Arabia, Armenia, Mesopotamia, Syria, and Palestine are in our judgment entitled to recognition of their national conditions'.⁸²² In the same way, Lord Robert Cecil, the parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, stated '[o]ur wish is that Arabian countries shall be for the Arabs, Armenia for the Armenians, and Judea for the Jews'.⁸²³ In the latter part of the war, the British reiterated their sympathy and assurance for Armenian liberty; in particular the Foreign Office staff wished to bring the six Vilayets under Allied protection.

On 11 July 1918, Balfour stated that: 'His Majesty's Government are following with earnest sympathy and admiration the gallant resistance of the Armenians in defence of their liberties and honour, and are doing everything they can to come to their assistance'.⁸²⁴ In November 1918, Arnold Toynbee indicated that with regard to Armenia, Britain was bound, 'juridically and certainly morally' by article 61 of the Berlin Treaty, through which Turkey was pledged to 'introduce ameliorations and reforms into the provinces inhabited by Armenians'.⁸²⁵ By contrast, with regard to the northern portion of Kurdistan, assigned to Russia according to the war arrangement, Toynbee stressed that 'We have a free hand in the parts of Kurdistan north of the Jeziret-Amadia line, since they were included in the Yellow Area assigned to Russia. These parts

⁸²¹ British Desiderata in Turkey in Asia, 1915. CAB 27/1

⁸²² Middle East Committee. Mesopotamia: British Engagements as to future Status'. IOR/L/PS/18/B273.

⁸²³ Renton, *Changing Languages of Empire*, p. 653.

⁸²⁴ Richard G. Hovannisian, The Allies and Armenia, 1915-18, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Jan., 1968), p. 168.

⁸²⁵ Memorandum: The settlement of Turkey and the Arabian Peninsula, political intelligence department, Foreign Office, 21 November 1918, CAB/24/72

contain the settlements of the Nestorian Christians (Assyrians) in the upper valley of the Greater Zab, and we are under a certain obligation to secure their future, since they were under the auspices of an Anglican Mission before the war, and have suffered atrocities during it at the hands of the Turks and Kurds'.⁸²⁶

The Kurds were perceived to be the main obstacle in the way of establishing the Armenian state in the six Vilayets, because of the numbers of Kurds. To that end, the Armenian agents established a campaign against Kurdish aspirations and portrayed them as an uncivilised and barbaric people. This propaganda, organized in the Western countries and sponsored by the missionary groups and other Armenian agents was aimed at influencing the public's and the politicians' attitudes to the Kurds. With reference to this, Major Noel wrote: 'unfortunately the Kurd is regarded in Europe as a wild and barbarous individual, whose chief business in life is to massacre Armenians. It is difficult to understand how this very false impression has become current, since every foreign traveller to Kurdistan has always come away with a very favourable impression of the Kurds. However owing to the activities of the missionary press and the very strong pro-Armenian party in England in general opinion in England unfavourable to the Kurds is current'.⁸²⁷

The Post-war Period

Against this background, it was not surprising that the Christian and Armenian questions would receive strong support among the Western powers in the Paris Peace Conference. In fact, the Armenian and Christian factors played a key part in the Great Powers' unfavourable attitude to the Kurdish question in the Peace Conference, and contributed significantly to delaying the settlement of the Kurdish question. The Armenians and other minority Christian groups had very strong lobbies in the Conference; and they pressed the policy-makers for the settlement in favour of the Christians in the Middle East. Woodrow Wilson's Middle Eastern policy was very much influenced by the Christian's questions and missionary activities.⁸²⁸ Therefore, in the

⁸²⁶ Ibid.

⁸²⁷ British High Commission in Constantinople to Lord Curzon, 23 July 1919, F.O 608/116.

⁸²⁸ War Cabinet Minute, 3 October 1918. CAB 23/14/35. T.N.A; Fromkin, *A Peace To End All Peace*, p. 547.

Conference many missionaries were invited to be unofficial advisers especially regarding the issues related to the Ottoman Empire. Some of the missionaries who were invited as official consultants to the government were friends of President Wilson including Charles Crane, who was sent with the King-Crane Commission to the Middle East.⁸²⁹ Justine McCarthy, an American historian writing on the Ottoman Empire, stated that President Wilson persistently declined to apply the principle of self-determination to Muslims. Wilson 'was in thrall to American missionaries and a firm believer in Christian triumphalism'. To Wilson, 'self-determination in the Middle East and the Balkans meant independent rule by Christian people, and only that'.⁸³⁰

Furthermore, Dr. Clarence Usher, an American missionary who spent more than two decades in Turkey, especially in Van, strongly advocated Armenian demands. According to Major Noel, Usher had a strong Armenian bias and his attitude was purely articulated from the religious standpoint. He considered the Armenians superior to the Kurds. Usher urged that 'the Armenian culture should be encouraged and all manifestations of Kurdish nationality discouraged'.⁸³¹ He even suggested that the Kurds would be converted to Christianity easily after the formation of the Armenian state. Noel pointed out that, 'it would be a very fatal mistake for His majesty's government to associate themselves in any way whatsoever with a policy of this nature'.⁸³² Noel warned his government of the danger of adopting the policy influenced by the American missionary interests.

It is important to note that to some extent the British reports on the situation of Kurdistan depended on the agents of Christians or Pro-Christians. The British reports make clear the influence of these agents in calculating these reports in favour of the Christian groups against the Kurdish case. According to Noel there were very few British officers who had knowledge of the local conditions and problems of the Eastern Vilayets and, the American missionaries were the only ones who had worked in the area before the war. Dr Usher from Van evolved a scheme to repartition Armenia,

⁸²⁹ Madhar, Kurdistan, p. 38.

⁸³⁰ Justine McCarthy, *The Ottoman Peoples and the End of Empire*, Oxford University Press, London-2001, p. 119.

⁸³¹ Major Noel's notes on the Kurdish situation, British H.C Constantinople, 23 July 1919, F.O 608/95. T.N.A

⁸³² Ibid.

visited Paris, and brought his ideas to the notice of the Paris Conference, apparently with some measure of success.⁸³³ Noel saw that the anti-Christian and anti-British attitudes in Kurdistan related to the pro-Christians British policy on the ground. He reported to the High Commissioner of Baghdad 'Our allowing ourselves to be used as a tool of Armenian religious fanaticism and vindictiveness is greatly responsible for the anti-Christian and anti-British movement in Kurdistan'.⁸³⁴ Meanwhile, in August 1919, Sharif Pasha warned against any further delay of the Middle East settlement because the C.U.P was 'making the violent campaign in Kurdistan'. He urged the Conference to dispatch the commission to Kurdistan to conduct an investigation into the Kurdish situation.⁸³⁵

The possibility of a Kurdish state largely depended on the settlement of the Armenian and other Christian minority questions since it was difficult to determine the areas and boundaries between the Kurds and the other Christian parties. As an official British document argued: 'While the limitation imposed on the boundaries of an autonomous Kurdish state by the future of the Armenian and the remnant Turkey are yet unknown, it is difficult to discuss concrete proposals for its foundation and constitution'.⁸³⁶ The British thought that it was difficult to deal with the question of conflicting claims and recriminations between Armenians and Kurds 'each having equal rights to live in the same tract of country, each opposed to the other by religion...and each suffering from recent wounds still sore, unhealed and inflamed by methods of the Turks during and previous to the war'.⁸³⁷ The Armenian representatives at the Peace Conference presented a Memorandum which included a map of Armenia which included most of Northern Kurdistan (Map 8).⁸³⁸ This was rejected by the Kurds and considered as "excessively Imperialistic claims".⁸³⁹ In contrast, Sharif Pasha presented a map of Kurdistan which included the territories claimed by the Armenians (See map 9). The Armenians thought that the Kurd was 'a brutal murderer' and Turkish instrument for

⁸³³ *ibid*

⁸³⁴ Telegram from Noel to political Baghdad, 2nd August, 1919, Air 20/714.T N A; From political, Baghdad to India, 3th August 1919, FO 608/95. T.N.A

⁸³⁵ The C.U.P. and Kurdistan, Cherif Pasha, Peace conference, 30 August 1919, FO 608/95. T.N.A

⁸³⁶ *Precise*, p. 19.

⁸³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 11.

⁸³⁸ http://www.armenews.com/IMG/The_Armenian_Question before the peace conference 1919.pdf

⁸³⁹ Şerif Paşa, *Memorandum on the claims of the Kurd people*. Paris, A.-G. L'Hoir, 1919.

their massacre. On the other hand, the Kurds viewed the Armenian as a 'double-faced liar of superior cunning'.⁸⁴⁰ To the Kurds, the Europeans had treated the Armenians' claims with much more sympathy than those of the Kurds', and their attitude was based on religious grounds.



Map (8)⁸⁴¹

⁸⁴⁰ Precise.

⁸⁴¹ A map presented by the Armenian National Delegation (representing Ottoman Armenians)[32] to the 1919 Paris Peace Conference.

KURDISTAN AND ITS NEIGHBOURS.



(3118)

Map (9)⁸⁴²

Indeed, the Armenian question involved so many problems that it affected the British attitude towards Kurdistan. As Arthur Hirtzel indicated, the practical difficulty for the British government was that the general feeling and attitude of the Western World demanded the establishment of an independent Armenian state. Accordingly, any British scheme regarding the future of Kurdistan had to be consistent with these Western convictions. But this Western tendency contradicted the actual facts on the ground and the principles of self-determination.⁸⁴³ Likewise, on November 1919, a special correspondent of *The Times* in the Middle East pointed out that, 'We must at least recognise that it is hopeless to give Kurdistan to an Armenian Republic. Our sympathies with Armenia sufferings must not blind us to reality'.⁸⁴⁴ As Armenians were claimed large predominantly Kurdish areas such as: Van, Diyarbakir, Bitlis and Kharput (see Map9). It was thought that without sufficient control over the Kurds a potential establishment of an Armenian state would not be viable. Considering this, the British thought that there were two ways to control the Kurds 'either by occupying the country..., or by obtaining by political means, such influence with them that they could finally be got to assent to repatriation of the Armenians and even to assist in it'.⁸⁴⁵ Eventually, Britain, discarded the military option and adopted the political solution of utilizing Kurdish national feeling: 'it was realized that the best means to that end was the exploiting of the perfectly legitimate feeling of Kurdish nationality which had been long making itself evident amongst the Southern Kurdistan tribes with whom we had so far been in contact'.⁸⁴⁶ For this reason, Britain sent Noel to campaign among Kurds in order to weaken the influence of pan- Islamic feeling and the Turks over the Kurds.

Therefore, the British intention to establish both Armenian and Assyrian states had a negative impact on the political future of Kurdistan. The Foreign Office in particular advocated schemes for establishing both Armenian and Assyrian states that would

⁸⁴² From Our Special Correspondent in the Middle East, "The Case of Kurdistan." *The Times*, 18 Nov. 1919, Issue 42260, p. 11. The Times Digital Archive.

⁸⁴³ Note by Sir Arthur Hirtzel, 17th August 1919, FO 608/95.

⁸⁴⁴ From Our Special Correspondent in the Middle East, "The Case of Kurdistan." *Times*, 18 Nov. 1919, p. 11. *The Times Digital Archive*.

⁸⁴⁵ *Precise*, pp. 8-9.

⁸⁴⁶ *Ibid*.

include a large part of the Kurdish territories. This plan was significantly influenced by the British attitude towards Kurdistan.

Meanwhile, France's claims to protect the Christian minorities in the region complicated the settlement of the Kurdish question and thwarted the Kurds' aspirations to gain independence. In January 1919, George Picot refused Mark Sykes's suggestion of establishing the Kurdish independent emirates which would include Mosul, considering that this scheme would sacrifice the Christian groups in the region who had been traditionally protected by the French. Picot's view was that, 'These people look only to us (French) to protection of which they have need'⁸⁴⁷. This French objection had an immediate impact on Britain's intentions regarding Kurdistan. Since Kurds were seen as a possible threat to Christian groups, this influenced British policy decisions not to support any Kurdish state or autonomy that would involve Christians. This was because following the French objection the British felt that the conditions attached to the Kurdish question had become too complicated. To avoid upsetting the French, in his observations to the Foreign Office on 5 February Arnold Toynbee suggested that the Kurdish areas between two Zabs must be administered by the same Mesopotamian mandatory, as he believed that it was bound economically and geographically with Mesopotamia. Subject to this condition, the Kurdish nationality could be given expression within this area, but, with two important reservations: '1-The Nestorians (they preferred to be called Assyrians)⁸⁴⁸ and other Christian enclaves and minorities must be protected by the mandatory. 2- There can be no creation of a pan-Kurdish State, which would involve, among other things, Christians of the integrity of Persia'.⁸⁴⁹ These complications would suggest the reasons behind the indefinite British policy concerning the future of Kurdistan in particular the objection to the extension of Sheikh Mahmud's government to the areas supposed to have been given to the Christians, which was suggested by Noel.⁸⁵⁰ As a result, the British conducted a policy of restriction rather than expansion of the Kurdish activities such as Mahmud's

⁸⁴⁷ Proposal to establish Independent Kurdish Emirates, Foreign office, No, 5th February, 1919. FO 608/95. T.N.A

⁸⁴⁸ Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia, India Office 3rd December 1920, H.M. Stationary Office, London, 1920, p. 58.

⁸⁴⁹ Proposal to establish Independent Kurdish Emirates, Foreign office, No, 5th February, 1919. FO 608/95. T.N.A

⁸⁵⁰ Private telegram to Political, Baghdad, 13th December 1918; Private telegram from Political, Baghdad, 15th December 1918, FO 608/116.TNA

government and other chieftains especially of those areas suggested to be incorporated into two potential states.

Simultaneously, the Assyrians demanded British protection in the areas of Mosul, Jazeera, Bash Kala and Uremia. They also asked for British assistance to form an Assyrian army to defend themselves from possible attacks by Kurds and Turks. Considering their aspirations, the Foreign Office proposed the formation of the Nestorian Principality in some areas of Kurdistan (Southern Diyarbakir) which was indicated in telegrams between the Foreign Office and A.T Wilson. However, the idea was not supported by Wilson. Instead, Wilson suggested bringing the areas of the northern Great Zab under British protection in Mesopotamia, with degree of autonomy. This would have had an influence on the British decision on the political future of Kurdistan.

Another important example of this question is when Khurshed Beg, a Kurdish Chief in Hakkary and formerly Colonel of the Alai Hamidies, offered his acceptance of British suzerainty and encouraged other surrounding Kurdish Chieftains. However, Noel told him to restrict his activities within his tribal area because he was 'strongly anti-Armenian and was afraid that his views and prejudice' would conflict with the British intention with regard to any future establishment of the Armenian state.⁸⁵¹

Furthermore, the attitude of the British officials on the ground played a key role in the endeavour to implement ideas to settle the Christians in the Kurdish regions. This policy created tension between the Kurds and Christians and increased the anti-British feeling among the Kurds in particular in the Bahdinan territories. Colonel Leachman, the Political Officer in Mosul, was known as a strong advocate of the idea of establishing the Christian enclave in the areas between Urmia to Mosul vilayet. Leachman intended to settle Christians in Kurdish areas in the northern of Great Zab. He was against British indirect rule in Kurdistan and opposed Noel's endeavours in favour of Kurdish aspirations. Leachman asked Noel to disassociate with the Kurdish

⁸⁵¹ Noel to Political Baghdad, 12 February 1919, Air 20/ 512.

tribal leaders under his authority.⁸⁵² Noel, however, believed that it would be impossible to envisage the Kurds voluntarily evacuating any areas for Christians.⁸⁵³

Such attitudes led Kurds to believe that the British had adopted a pro-Christian policy at the Kurds' expense.⁸⁵⁴ Wallace Lyon, who worked with Colonel Leachman in Mosul, characterized him as, "disastrous" with the Kurds.⁸⁵⁵ Similarly, Wilson noted that Leachman 'never seemed to understand the Kurds in the way that he understood Arabs'.⁸⁵⁶ Lyon writes, in his memories, that Leachman told him to go to Sheikh Nuri Brifkani, who lived in the Brifkan village in the Dohuk region, 'tell him that I have heard rumours of his recent activities, and say that if he makes any trouble I will hang him on his own verandah'.⁸⁵⁷ In the summer of 1919, Leachman himself led a military campaign, including two Assyrian Units to the Bamarni area and burned the town entirely including its Sheikh Bahdinan's Tekia and imprisoned the Sheikh as well.⁸⁵⁸ This event infuriated the Kurds and increased anti-British feeling in Kurdistan.

More importantly, the Allies' actions had strengthened Turkish influence in Kurdistan.⁸⁵⁹ In particular, the Pro-Greek policy approached by Lloyd George and Lord Curzon in their dealings with the Turks complicated the situation much more. After the Smyrna incident the Turks succeeded in influencing the Kurds by using the Pan-Islamic propaganda and the 'Armenian bogey'. A fortnight before the Greek occupation of Smyrna, Admiral Calthorpe, the High Commissioner of Constantinople, informed the Foreign Office that there was not any actual connection between the Kurds and Turks but the fear of Armenian dominance had driven the Kurds to the Turkish side. Admiral Colthorpe believed that the main cause of agitation amongst the Kurds was the fear of falling under Armenian rule.⁸⁶⁰

⁸⁵² Ali, *British Policy*, p. 175

⁸⁵³ Minute of a meeting held at the India Office to consider Col. Wilson's telegram as to the boundaries between Mesopotamia and Kurdistan, December 6, 1919, FO 371/4193.

⁸⁵⁴ Ali, *British policy*, p. 177.

⁸⁵⁵ Lyon, *Kurds, Arabs, and Britons*, p. 63.

⁸⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 70.

⁸⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 65.

⁸⁵⁸ Ali, *British Policy*, p. 178.

⁸⁵⁹ The Civil Commissioner, Baghdad, to the Secretary of State of India, 27 November 1919, F.O 608/95.

⁸⁶⁰ Unrest in Kurdistan, 17 May, 1919, FO 608/95; Inter-departmental Conference on Middle Eastern Affairs, Secretary's Note, situation in Kurdistan, 15th September 1919, FO 608/95

Both Major Noel and Captain Woolly examined the situation in Kurdistan and the Kurds' aspirations and their attitudes towards Turks and Armenians. In their journeys they found that the pro-Turk propaganda in Kurdistan almost vanished and had a very little effect. The vast majority of Kurds did not desire Turkish influence but they demanded independence of Kurdistan under a European powers mandate. With regard to their relations with the Armenians, Kurds told Woolley that they desired to live side by side with them peacefully. But they rejected any attempt to impose Armenia over them: 'any attempt to this would result to the further unrest and violence in the region'.⁸⁶¹ Likewise, Noel met with many Armenians in Diyarbakir and they clearly told him: 'if the baneful of Turkish influence were removed, there was no reason why a satisfactory modus vivendi between the two nations could not be found'.⁸⁶² Arthur Hirtzel agreed with Noel and Woolly that if the bloody hand of Turkey is removed there is a likelihood of the two peoples settling quietly side by side.⁸⁶³

Kurdish leaders were anxious about the Turkish propaganda in Kurdistan and they mainly attributed the intensity of the Turkish influence on the Great Powers' double standard policy with regards to Armenians and Kurds. Noel reported from Diyarbakir on the feeling of the Kurdish leaders: 'while Armenian national claims are receiving full publicity in Europe, the Kurd's case is comparatively a closed book'.⁸⁶⁴ Kurdish suspicions became very strong when they were alarmed by reports from the Paris Peace Conference that the proposed Armenian state would include Kurdish provinces in Anatolia. For example, in March Sir L. Mallet suggested forming seven parts of the Ottoman Empire without reference to Kurdistan. Kurdistan would be divided between Armenia and would include six Vilayets, Mesopotamia, Anatolia and Syria. In 22 October 1919, Sharif Pasha and Said Abdul Qadir submitted letters to the Peace Conference protesting against any attempt to divide Kurdistan into two zones. They also called for Allied support for Kurds and the prevention of Turkish oppression against them.⁸⁶⁵ So the mistakes of the Allies and their pro-Armenian policy at the

⁸⁶¹ The Kurdish national Movement, report by Captain C.L Woolley, General Head Quarters, Egyptian Expenditary forces, 6th June 1919, FO 608/95 T.N.A

⁸⁶² Noel's Notes on Kurdistan, FO 608/95. T.N.A

⁸⁶³ Arthur Hirtzel Notes' on Kurds. F.O 608/95. T.N.A

⁸⁶⁴ From Political Baghdad to Cairo, Constantinople, India, 17th June 1919. F.O 608/95. T.N.A

⁸⁶⁵ Peace Conference: Future of Kurdistan, 24 October 1919, FO 608/95. T.N.A

expense of the Kurds created a significant opportunity for the Turks to play on the Pan-Islamic movement.⁸⁶⁶

Ironically, while the Turkish activities in Kurdistan were effective, the British did not allow the Kurdish nationalist leaders to use their influence against the Turkish propaganda in Kurdistan. Said Abdul Qadir told the British High Commissioner in Constantinople that he would go to Kurdistan and use his influence to maintain order and would make a movement for an independent Kurdistan. But the British official told him that they were not supporting any kind of movement against the Turks. It must be noted that the failure of Kurdish nationalism and its leaders contributed largely to the strength of the Kemalist movement. In particular, Kurdish leaders did not take their own decision to act against Turkish Kemalists, rather, they waited for British permission, which was not forthcoming. In contrast to the Kurdish leaders, Mustafa Kamal disregarded British and Constantinople orders to give up his mission.

Likewise, Noel's mission faced opposition and insufficient political support from the British authorities in Constantinople and Baghdad. Admiral John De Robeck, the High Commissioner, alarmed lest Noel, accompanied by two Kurdish nationalists, make the Ottoman Government and the Kemalists suspicious that the British were turning the Kurdish nationalists against Turks.⁸⁶⁷ Similarly, a British Political Officer warned that Noel was "conducting a dangerous form of pro-Kurdish and anti-Turkish propaganda."⁸⁶⁸ From this point of view the Turks' agitation would endanger the British position in the Islamic world and would drive the Turks towards the Bolshevik bloc which would affect the internal and external security of the British Indian Empire. Edwin Montagu presented the Indian government's point of view that peace with Turkey was very vital to the British position in the Middle East. It would prevent Turks going to the Bolshevik side and making unrest in the British territories.⁸⁶⁹

Although the Noel's mission did not succeed, it did influence the British attitude regarding the future of the Kurdish question. Noel demonstrated that the Armenian

⁸⁶⁶ Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia, p. 58; Noel notes on Kurdistan.

⁸⁶⁷ High Commissioner, Constantinople, to General, Baghdad, 18 September 1919, F0371/4192, PRO. From Eskander, *Britain's Policy*, p. 98.

⁸⁶⁸ General Headquarter, Egypt, 27 September 1919, F0371/4192, PRO. From Eskander, p. 98.

⁸⁶⁹ The Turkish peace, Memorandum, Edwins Montagu, 18th December, 1919, CAB 24/ 95/ 27

state would not be viable without considering the Kurdish question through considering the two issues according to the facts on the ground rather than in the light of the *realpolitik*. This was reflected in the British perspective: 'Only by treating the Kurdish and Armenian questions in a bold and broad spirit can the eventual peace and prosperity of this region be assured.'⁸⁷⁰ Noel noted that one way of encountering 'the indignation of Lord Bryce and the Cocoa Press is to attempt to govern 10 Kurds with one Armenian'.⁸⁷¹

Consequently, the British realised that they should consider Kurdish aspirations in the Turkish settlement. The Kurdish-Armenian agreement of December 1919 was attributed to changing British attitudes towards the Kurdish question when Kurdish and Armenian nationalists presented a memorandum to the Peace Conference, signed by Boghos Nubar for Ottoman Armenia, Ohandjanian for the Armenia Republic and Sharif Pasha for the Kurds.⁸⁷² In December 1919, Berthelo's note to Lord Curzon emphasised the necessity of constructing an independent Armenian nation. But the difficulty in forming the Armenian state was that the Armenians were a minority in the region and had no political framework. In December 1919, during the third meeting of the British and French Conference about the future of Turkey, they agreed that 'the question of Kurdistan cannot be considered separately from that of an Armenian state agreed upon by the French and the British.'⁸⁷³ This perception of these two powers became the grounds for their understanding in the Sevres Treaty but, the question of Kurdistan was dealt with in the light of Armenian question. However, this agreement was never implemented due to the resistance of the Turkish nationalists and the diplomatic disagreements of Western powers as well as the divergence of British strategies which will be explained in the following section.

⁸⁷⁰ *Precis*, p. 20

⁸⁷¹ Noel's Notes on Kurdistan, FO 608/95. T.N.A

⁸⁷² Eskander, *Britain's Policy*, p.126.

⁸⁷³ French Note and Memoranda by the British Peace Delegation regarding Turkish Settlement: No1, Note communicated by M. Berthelot to Lord Curzon of Kedleston. December 1919, CAB/24/95. T.N.A

The Turkish Nationalist Movement and its impact on the British Kurdish Policy, 1919-1923

In the aftermath of the war, the Turkish Empire (the sick man of Europe) was on the brink of collapse, and Turkish leverage disappeared in the Arab and Kurdistan regions. There was a small group of armies created by the CUP in Anatolia, whose aim was mainly to resist the Armenian and Greek claims. However, there were various reasons behind the awakening of the Turkish nationalist movement. The Allies failed to address the political vacuum that emerged in the region due to frequent delays in the Turkey Peace settlement. The Western Powers were much busier with their conflicts and disputes than with searching for a reasonable settlement for the post-war issues in Europe and the Middle East. The delay in the settlement produced unrest and disorder in the regions of the Ottoman Empire.⁸⁷⁴ The situation was in favour of the Kemalist movement consolidating their influence in the region. In John D. Rose's words the movement 'flourished in the Allied disunity'.⁸⁷⁵

Most significantly, the Occupation of Smyrna by Greek forces altered the course of Middle Eastern history,⁸⁷⁶ and revived the Turkish nationalist movement. Before the invasion of Greek troops in Smyrna most of the inhabitants in the Anatolia was in favour of the western powers including the attitudes of Kurdish people where Turkish authority had disappeared,⁸⁷⁷ as discussed above. But Smyrna incident had given the Turkish nationalists 'a new lease of life'.⁸⁷⁸ Immediately the resistance developed rapidly after the arrival of Mustafa Kemal to the region on 19 May 1919. Kemal emerged as a

⁸⁷⁴ See: Busch, *Mudras to Lausanne*, pp. 3310-319.

⁸⁷⁵ John D. Rose, *British Policy and the Turkish question 1918-1923*, MA Thesis, McGill University-1973, p. 15

⁸⁷⁶ Busch, *Mudras to Lausanne*, p. 162.

⁸⁷⁷ Howard, *the Peace Conference*, p. 46.

⁸⁷⁸ The Armenian and Kurdish question, 19 September 1919, FO 608/98.

leading figure and was able to organise a Turkish nationalist movement under his leadership, called the Kemalist movement at the time.

Temperley argues that if the Smyrna incident had not broken out, a much more reasonable settlement could have been found which would have prevented the Turko-Greek war which impacted on the Western and Islamic World relations.⁸⁷⁹

Indeed, the situation had an immediate impact on Kurdish affairs. The incident created fear in all the parties. The Kurds were threatened by the rapid developments that impacted negatively on their pro-British attitudes especially after the violent actions committed by the Greek forces in Smyrna. Before the Greek occupation of Smyrna there was no particular anti-British preparation in Kharput and Diyarbakir Vilayets for instance but immediately after the event Turkish and Kurdish hostile activities started against all foreigners.⁸⁸⁰ Robert Vansittart notes that, 'the news reached Kurds and our former influence has vanished...they are (now) mainly hostile to British.'⁸⁸¹ So the Kurds were invited to apply the analogy of Smyrna to Diyarbakir: the English would come first and occupy the town, which would be but a prelude to the arrival of Armenian troops.⁸⁸² Consequently, due to these Allied policies and actions the Turkish nationalist influence increased over Kurdistan.⁸⁸³ Winston Churchill also emphasised that the indecisive policy towards the Turkish settlement was primarily responsible for the situation of unrest in Kurdistan, in that 'it gives an opportunity to the Turkish National Party to play upon the feelings of the Kurds by anti-British propaganda. To our ability in each case to strike swiftly and surely at the heart of the trouble may be attributed the fact that we have not had to face a united and hostile Kurdistan'.⁸⁸⁴

On the other hand, the failure of the Kurdish nationalist leaders, in Constantinople principally, to mobilize the Kurdish nationalist movement into the heart of Kurdistan contributed to the strengthening and empowering of the Kemalist movement. The Kurdish leaders did not make their own decision to act against the Turkish Kemalists but waited for British permission, which was not forthcoming, as mentioned earlier.

⁸⁷⁹ Temperley, *A History of Peace Conference*, p. 73.

⁸⁸⁰ Telegraph from the Director of Military Intelligence, Cairo to Dirmilint, London, 12th June 1919, FO 608/95.T.N.A

⁸⁸¹ The Armenian and Kurdish question, 19 September 1919, FO 608/98. T.N.A

⁸⁸² Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia, p. 67.

⁸⁸³ From civil commission, Baghdad to Indian office, 27th November 1919. F.O 608/95. T.N.A

⁸⁸⁴ Winston S. Churchill, the War Office, 20th February, 1920. CAB/24/99. T.N.A

Contrary to the Kurdish leaders, Mustafa Kemal disregarded the British and Constantinople orders to give up his mission.

Thus, the conflicting policies of the major powers and the weakness of the Kurdish nationalist movement increased the leverage of Turkish nationalists in Kurdistan by propagating a pan-Islamic and anti-Christian approach. The Kemalists perceived Kurdish nationalism as an imperialist project mainly employed by the British for their own agenda and Armenian interests. Mustafa Kemal persistently stressed the Armenian threat to win the support of the Kurdish tribal and religious leaders. In a letter to a Kurdish leader in Diyarbakir, Mustafa Kemal indicated: 'I will not allow the Kurds to establish an independent Kurdistan under British protection, because such theories are absolutely a British plan for the interests of Armenia'.⁸⁸⁵ Likewise, Kâzım Karabekir, the commander of the Ottoman Eastern Army then Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, warned: 'our enemies are trying to create a great Armenia. Here [in these regions] our Kurdish brothers constitute a majority. Those who strive for Kurdish independence are our enemies. Their intentions are to separate the Kurds from us and then make them [these regions] Armenia. They are going to destroy Kurds, therefore Turks and Kurds as brothers, should not yield to this disaster'.⁸⁸⁶

Hence, the Turkish nationalists stood against any Kurdish activities aimed at creating an independent Kurdistan. They warned Major Noel's mission and attempted to arrest his two Badr Khan companions. Under these circumstances Noel and his companions were recalled from Malatia by the Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Force. Then the Kemalists closed all Kurdish clubs in Kurdistan and took extreme measures against all who were known to favour Kurdish aspirations.⁸⁸⁷

Said Abdul Qadir was very concerned about the Kemalist movement in Kurdistan and the anti-British feeling among the Kurds. As Abdul Qadir relied on the British in the Kurdish state, he offered to destroy the Kemalists in Kurdistan. Kurdish nationalist members, represented by the members of the Kurdish Club, were threatened by the

⁸⁸⁵ A tatUrk: Ataffirk'fln Biitiin Eserleri, vol. 11, K aynak Yayinlari, istanbul, 1999, p.288. From Aslan, Suleyman Azad, Clashes of agencies: the formation and failure of early Kurdish nationalism 1918-1922, Thesis (Ph.D.), Royal Holloway, University of London, 2007, p. 200

⁸⁸⁶ K . Karabekir, Kiird Meselesi, Emre yayinlari, istanbul, 1994, p. 10. In Ibid, p. 199.

⁸⁸⁷ Bell, Review, p. 71.

Turkish nationalist government in Constantinople. Kurdish nationalists protested against this Turkish policy and asked the British to protect Kurdish nationalists.⁸⁸⁸ On the 5th of June, Noel telegraphed from Diyarbakir that the Kemalists broke up a Kurdish organisation and arrested its members.⁸⁸⁹ So the emergence of the Kemalist movement was inevitable due to the declining situation regarding the Kurdish question between 1919 and 1923. After the Treaty of Sevres, in particular, the Kurds were subjected to a fierce Kemalist policy: 'threats of invasion, clandestine correspondence with urban and tribal leaders, open incitements to rebellion, warnings to ('traitors,') and pervading all, the religious appeal for loyalty to the Sultan-Caliph (until the Caliphate was abolished in March 1924)'.⁸⁹⁰ Turkish nationalists submerged the Kurdish question within pan-Turkism by classifying the Kurds and Turks as one people under the slogan of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Kemalists rejected the separation of any region which consisted of a Muslim majority. This was specified in the Misaki Milli (the National Pact) at 20 January 1920, 'those parts of the Turkish Empire which are inhabited by an Ottoman Muslim majority, united in religion race and aim...and wholly respectful of each other's racial and social rights...form a whole which does not admit of division for any reason in truth or in ordinance'.⁸⁹¹

In Chapter Four the issue discussed was from the perspective of Anglo-French rivalry in the Middle East. However, here I discuss the subject from the perspective of the British interdepartmental and individual contentions. Indeed, the divergence of British approaches to the future of the Turkey settlement was a decisive factor in determining the Kurdish situation. It was clear, that the British post-war policy was based on the anti-Turks assumption and mainly presented by the Prime Minister Lloyd George. The Sevres Treaty reflected on this proposition. The Sevres Treaty was harsh in its partitioning of the Ottoman Empire, and it presented a 'death warrant' to the latter. Churchill called the Sevres Treaty the "World of illusions" that the signatures on it had

⁸⁸⁸ British Delegation at Paris, 12th October 1919, FO 608/98

⁸⁸⁹ From Political Baghdad, repeated to Cairo, Constantinople and Tehran) 9th June 1919, FO 608/95.

⁸⁹⁰ C. J. Edmonds, The Kurds of Iraq, *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Winter, 1957), p. 54.

⁸⁹¹ Quoted in Mosul Question, p. 90. Churchill instructed the British Officials in Mesopotamia to use Iraq instead of Mesopotamia, the one reasonable explanation behind this Churchill's instruction is that the British would might have wanted to use this term against the Kemalist claims in the Mosul vilayet according the National Pact. Since the term of Mesopotamia geographically means the country between the two rivers this would be an argument could be used by the Kemalists for claiming the region.

only been maintained it by 'the shield of Greece'.⁸⁹² Indeed, in order to impose their supremacy the British implemented a pro-Arab and pro-Greek policy which was adopted by the Prime Minister, Lloyd George. In contrast, the Indian Government and the War Office opposed it. They argued that any harsh treatment against the Turks by the British would have decisive consequences for Britain in the Muslim world. In the Indian Government's opinion 'the destruction of the Turkish Empire could push the Indian Muslims in arms against the British forces of Bolsheviks and Hindu nationalists'.⁸⁹³

The most important opposition to the Prime Minister's pro-Greek policy came from Winston Churchill since their different backgrounds contributed to their relations and political views including those regarding the post-war Turkey settlement.⁸⁹⁴ Churchill saw Lloyd George's Eastern policy far too anti-Turks and pro-Greek,⁸⁹⁵ while fluctuating towards Bolshevik Russia.⁸⁹⁶ He regarded this Prime Minister's policy as 'a personal policy',⁸⁹⁷ which he believed such a policy could escalate the problems in the region which would have dangerous consequences for the British position in the Islamic World and the Indian Empire. Therefore, he advocated a pro-Turk, pro-Islamic and anti-Bolshevik policy in the Middle East. Churchill stipulated, 'we seem to be becoming the most anti-Turk and the most pro-Bolshevik power in the world: whereas in my judgment we ought to be the exact opposite'.⁸⁹⁸ So Churchill attributed most of the problems in the Middle Eastern to the Prime Minister's approach: 'One of the main causes of the trouble throughout the Middle East is our quarrel with the remnants of Turkey'.⁸⁹⁹ Churchill's alternative strategy was to foster friendly British relations with the Muslim world in order to minimize the pan-Islamic movement and also, to create a bulwark against the Bolshevik threat.⁹⁰⁰

⁸⁹² Churchill, *The World Crisis: The Aftermath*, p. 419

⁸⁹³ Busch, *Mudras to Lausanne*, p. 78.

⁸⁹⁴ See: Richard Toye, *Lloyd George and Churchill: Rivals for Greatness*, Macmillan, 2007.

⁸⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 217.

⁸⁹⁶ Dockter, *Churchill and the Islamic World*, p. 89.

⁸⁹⁷ Churchill, *The World Crisis: The Aftermath*, p. 421.

⁸⁹⁸ Toye, *Lloyd George and Churchill*, p. 218.

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁰ Dockter, *Churchill and the Islamic World*, p. 128.

Justine McCarthy writes that Lloyd George: 'was a man of opinions, and in Middle East and Balkan affairs he made up his mind without personal knowledge of the area or recourse to his own expert...Lloyd George was precisely a wrong man of the times.'⁹⁰¹ Regarding Lloyd George's constant support to Greek claims, Arnold Toynbee argued: 'One must allow something for sentiment—uninformed religious sentiment on behalf of Christians in conflict with non-Christians, and romantic sentiment towards the successors of the Ancient Greeks. He is reported to have read something late in life about the Hellenic or 'Ancient Greek' civilisation, and to have been influenced by the identity of name. The words 'Christian' and 'Greek' possess a magical power of suggestion—the political bearings'.⁹⁰² The Greeks claimed some territories based on history according to which they were minorities. To solve this problem, the Venizelos had fabricated false statistics which were presented to the Peace Conference. Lloyd George refused the War Office as well as the Foreign Office statistics which showed the majority Muslim population in the areas claimed by the Greeks and instead, he used the Greek statistics to justify their demands.⁹⁰³ He ordered support for the Greeks' claims despite the opposition of the other British departments.⁹⁰⁴ Simply, because he believed that the Greeks were 'represent Christian civilization against Turkish barbarism'.⁹⁰⁵

Indeed, Lloyd George's anti-Turks policy was fundamentally responsible for the deterioration of the Anatolian situation due to the Turku-Greek conflict which had catastrophic consequences for the entire Middle East situation. This policy was the most important factor in triggering the Kemalist movement and the Allies' disagreement with the Turkey Peace settlement. As Arnold Toynbee indicated, 'the personal attitude of Mr. Lloyd George became one of the most important factors in the Graeco-Turkish conflict'.⁹⁰⁶

⁹⁰¹ McCarthy, *The ottoman peoples and the End of Empire*, p. 117.

⁹⁰² Toynbee, *Western Question*, p. 75.

⁹⁰³ See McCarthy, *The ottoman peoples*, pp 124-25.

⁹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 125.

⁹⁰⁵ Churchill, *The World Crisis: The Aftermath*, p. 391.

⁹⁰⁶ Toynbee, *Western Question*, p. 75.

As already mentioned, the Kurdish question was largely tied up with the Turku-Greek conflict since, the whole settlement depended on the outcome of the latter. In fact the conflict concerned the enforcement of the Sevres Treaty and the national pact.

It is important to analyse the effect of these contradictory British strategies on the future of the Kurdistan, that is to say, the conflicting British attitudes obstructed the emergence of its independence. The advocates of the anti-Turks and the pro-Turks approach treated Southern and Northern Kurdistan in very different ways. The separation of southern Kurdistan which was supported by the pro-Turk side was strongly opposed by the anti-Turkish or pro-Arabs. The latter proposed the Kurdish movement in northern Kurdistan against Kemalists, but the pro-Turks objected to this.

Hence, the Kurdish situation was dramatically affected by the conflicting agendas of the British Empire. The most significant consequence was that it impeded the emergence of a definitive British policy towards the Kurdish question which resulted in perpetual postponement of the Kurdistan settlement. So in the absence of London's coherent perception of Kurdistan's future the British circles in Baghdad and Constantinople became the main factors determining the fate of Kurds. The Baghdad Centre viewed Kurdistan's situation from the Mesopotamian perspective which was mainly influenced by the Arab nationalist sentiments, whilst the British High Commission in Constantinople dealt with the Kurdish question from the perspective of the Turkish settlement, particularly after the rise of the Kemalist movement in Anatolia. For Baghdad and Constantinople respectively, the Arab and Turkish questions had always had superiority over the Kurdish one; and London's attitude reflected, and was influenced by, these perspectives. The divergence of British strategies were important factors behind the success of the Baghdad circle in imposing their view on Churchill and convincing him to abandon his support of Kurdish independence. This was also related to the significant difference between Churchill's and Lloyd George's Middle Eastern strategy, in general.

In addition, the Kurds frequently asked Britain for support regarding their movements in Northern Kurdistan against Turkish nationalists. The Kurdish leaders argued that

having a Kurdish buffer state would act as a bulwark against the Turco- Bolshevik threats; and Sharif Pasha and Abdulqadir emphasised this argument. But this idea did not have the support of the British circles in Constantinople, the India Office and the War Office because in the British view the Turkish nationalists had a much wider influence in the Islamic world, order to use 'their powerful national personality against England'.⁹⁰⁷ When Abdul Qadir asked the British to use their influence in Kurdistan he had been warned to act out any movement against the Turks. Britain's aim was to establish order and stability, therefore they needed the Kurdish leaders to take no action that would lead to the Kurdish revolt against the Turkish nationalists. Thomas Hohler, a British official in Constantinople, who met Abdul Qadir reported: 'I made it as clear as words five times repeated can make things clear that we are not out for intrigue against the Turks, and that I could promise nothing whatsoever as regards the future of Kurdistan, but if they thought their influence would successful in maintaining order in those regions...so long we will employ all our good offices. But we could not do so if they were found preparing a movement against the Turks or anything of that kind.'⁹⁰⁸ Accordingly, these British contradictory approaches obstructed and prevented the progress of the Kurdish nationalist movement in the critical period of their history. Lloyd George's constant support for the Greek policy of enforcing the treaty of Sevres concerned the pro-Turkish party because it could result in British confrontation with the Kemalists. Instead of this hostile policy, the pro-Turkish advocates believed that the British should adopt a friendly policy towards Turkish nationalists in order to secure its interests in the Middle East. Churchill asserted that reconciliation with Kemalists was essential for the reduction of British administration costs in Mesopotamia and also to obstruct Russia's expansion in the Middle East.⁹⁰⁹ Therefore, reconciliation rather than confrontation was the line that Britain should adopt towards Kemalists.

In the light of this consideration, Churchill and Shuckburgh, the head of the Middle East department in the Colonial Office, opposed Cox's Scheme for supporting the Kurdish movement in Northern Kurdistan against the Turkish nationalists. In October 1921, Cox suggested that should diplomatic methods fail with Angora, the British

⁹⁰⁷ Turco-Bolshevik Activities: Note by political Intelligence Officer attached to India Office, India Office, December 1920, Colonial Office: Middle East: Various papers. The Churchill Papers (CHAR 17/14).

⁹⁰⁸ Hohler to Tilly, Constantinople 21 July 1919, FO 608/95. T.N.A

⁹⁰⁹ Othman Ali, *The Kurds and the Lausanne Peace Negotiations, 1922-23*, p. 523

should encourage the Kurdish nationalist movement against Turkish nationalists in Northern Kurdistan, and similarly with the Greeks.⁹¹⁰ Eskander suggests that Cox's policy was offensive in comparison with Churchill's defensive strategy.

Churchill's desire for peace with Turkey caused him to favour a Turkish victory over the Greeks. Henry Wilson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, recorded in his diary his long conversation with Churchill in the Colonial Office on 12th April 1921. Churchill was delighted that the Kemalists had beaten the Greeks, and hoped 'they may have further disasters'.⁹¹¹ Likewise, Churchill perceived the Kurdish movement in Northern Kurdistan in the same way. Therefore it is not surprising that Churchill and his subordinates rejected Cox's scheme of using Kurds against Kemalists; and because they thought that this plan would have negative strategic consequences to the British Empire in the region: 'the lessons of the last few years are overwhelmingly against employing weak friends against powerful enemies, when we are not in a position to give them adequate support'.⁹¹² So Churchill's fear of provoking the Kemalists against the British caused him to dismiss the idea of a Kurdish movement in Northern Kurdistan. That is to say, Churchill's desire for achieving peace with Turkey subordinated the Kurdish question.⁹¹³

In harmony with the Colonial Office, the Constantinople High Commissioner favoured the latter strategy. H. Rumbold, British Commissioner at Constantinople, and the British General Staff Intelligence in Constantinople were in agreement that in order to use the Kemalist forces as an instrument for containing the growing Bolshevik influence, Britain should be willing to adopt a conciliatory policy towards Turkey by radically modifying the terms of the Sevres Treaty.⁹¹⁴ This explains why the Greek solution as a method of ending the Turkish dilemma was never really an attractive solution to the Kurdish question.⁹¹⁵

The rejection of Cox's scheme together with the failure of the British policy in Southern Kurdistan, as explained in the previous Chapter, resulted in an increase of Kemalist

⁹¹⁰ Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism*, pp. 72-77.

⁹¹¹ Martin Gilbert, *The Churchill Documents*, Vol10, Hillsdale College Press, Michigan, 2008, p.1436.

⁹¹² See: Eskander, *Britain's Policy*, p. 224.

⁹¹³ Dockter, *Churchill and the Islamic world*, p. 169.

⁹¹⁴ Eskander, *Britain's Policy*, p. 224.

⁹¹⁵ Busch, *Mudras to Lausanne*, p. 192.

leverage in Kurdistan because they were able to exploit the situation in their own interests. In contrast to the British refusal of Kurdish nationalist requests, the Turkish nationalists considered a pro-Turkish appeal to mobilize the Kurds against the British in Southern Kurdistan. The Kurdish Secret Society (Kemel-v Nihen-Kurd-) which was a new pro-Turkish organization centred in Sulaymania and Rawanduz, included many pro-Turkish such as Karim Fattah Beg, Ahmad Taqi, Nuri Bawil Agha, and Abbas-i Mahmud Agha, and it had the support of Shaikh Ahmad of Barzan, Shaikh Amin Sundolan of Raniya, and Faris Agha of Zibar.⁹¹⁶ The secret society was instrumental in promoting the Kemalists to come to Southern Kurdistan. The Kemalists sent Colonel Ali Shafiq, nicknamed Özdemir "iron shoulders", with the title, 'Commandant of the National Rising' who played a leading role in the anti-British military campaigns in Southern Kurdistan.⁹¹⁷ Özdemir was publishing propaganda against the Kurdish nationalists and the idea of independence of Kurdistan as a British imperial project to divide the Turkish Kurdish brothers.⁹¹⁸

Subsequently, Angora adopted a forward policy by using the Kurdish scheme against the British position in Mosul Vilayet. After this Kurdish call, in June 1921, (according to Edmonds June 1922), Oz Demir succeeded in establishing an administration in Rawanduz, and in Pizhder areas. This started to intensify anti-British campaigns in other Kurdish areas and in May 1922 these Turkish intrigues resulted in widespread military successes and consolidated their influence among the Kurds and startled the British administration in Kurdistan. However, the Turkish success was primarily due to the unclear policy adopted by the British.⁹¹⁹ Immediately afterwards the British came to realise that their Kurdish policy should be revised and therefore they decided to foster the Kurdish nationalism vis-à-vis the anti-British movement.

Kemalist military victories over the Greeks caused a direct challenge to the British army in Chanak.⁹²⁰ The British were concerned about the potential of the Kemalists crossing to the 'Neutral zones of Straits' under British control.⁹²¹ Montagu advised Curzon to take a diplomatic action in order to prevent the confrontation with the

⁹¹⁶ Ali, *British Policy*, p. 236.

⁹¹⁷ Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks and Arabs*, p. 245.

⁹¹⁸ Hilmi, *Memoirs*, p. 377.

⁹¹⁹ Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement*, p.190; Hilmi, *Memoirs*, p. 377.

⁹²⁰ Toye, *Churchill's Empire*, p. 158.

⁹²¹ See: Gilbert, *The Churchill Documents*, Vol10, p.1974.

Kemalists. Curzon considered Montagu's suggestion but Constantinople objected to the idea because they supposed that the Kemalists did not intend to cross the British zone. The British were in a very difficult position as they were unable to defend Chanak against a potential Kemalist advance. Furthermore, France and Italy refused to cooperate with British which meant that the British were unable to hold Chanak as it would be a military risk. Under this real strategic threat, Churchill supported Lloyd George's policy 'for the sake of Empire'.⁹²²

Simultaneously, the Greek collapse complicated the British position in Iraq. The growing Turkish nationalist's influence in Southern Kurdistan alarmed the British in the Mosul Vilayet and the rest of Mesopotamia. British authorities in Mesopotamia perceived the situation 'as grave'.⁹²³ Churchill was also deeply concerned about the situation in Iraq and the collapse of the British policy in Kurdistan.⁹²⁴ Churchill perceived the Kemalists as Britain's "most dangerous" enemy and therefore he determined that Britain should act immediately to stop a further Kemalist advance in Kurdistan,⁹²⁵ as it was anticipated that the whole of Southern Kurdistan would come under the Kemalists which would constitute a direct threat to the entire British position in Mesopotamia, and Kirkuk specifically.⁹²⁶

Under such conditions, Britain had to revise its Kurdish policy in Southern Kurdistan. The British authorities in Iraq admitted the failure of their policy in Kurdistan and they perceived that the British Kurdish policy required revision: 'Our Kurdish policy needs revision... But we cannot hope for any permanent settlement till we have peace with the Kemalists - if ever'.⁹²⁷ In reply to Churchill's telegram of 1st July about the situation of unrest in Southern Kurdistan, the High Commissioner acknowledged that the Kurds were strongly against being included in Iraq and they demanded 'a national ruler'. But in the High Commissioner's opinion it would not be possible to select a national ruler to the country before concluding the agreement with the Turks.⁹²⁸ It is important to note

⁹²² See Dockter, *Churchill and the Islamic World*, pp. 187, 88.

⁹²³ Letters, 16/8/1922 and 18/8/1922. Gertrude Bell Archive-Newcastle Archive.

⁹²⁴ See: Gilbert, *The Churchill Documents*, Vol10, p. 1973.

⁹²⁵ Ali, *British Policy*, p. 244.

⁹²⁶ Iraq Administrative Report April 1922 to March 1923, p. 64.

⁹²⁷ Letters, 6/7/1922. Gertrude Bell Archive-Newcastle Archive.

⁹²⁸ High Commissioner Baghdad to Secretary of State for Colonies, London, 2nd July 1922, Air 20/741. T.N.A

that the new policy was not intended to settle the Kurdish question permanently rather it was purely aimed at counter-balancing the Turkish influence in the region. However, the settlement of the Kurdish question was bound up with the final peace agreement with the Kemalists. Peace with Turkey meant that the British should make concessions about the Kurdish question for the Kemalists since the latter did not accept any peace process that would result in the establishment of any Kurdish entity. They had already resisted the Sevres Treaty and challenged the Kurdish question at the London Conference.⁹²⁹

As long as peace with Angora was not affordable, fostering the Kurdish nationalist sentiment was to be the main instrument to counter this Turkish danger in Southern Kurdistan. Nevertheless, Cox and his subordinates opposed Sheikh Mahmud's alternative suggestion that Said Taha would govern Rawanduz and Sulaymania, which Bell depicted as 'a terrific leap in the dark'.⁹³⁰ But this plan did not succeed.

It would seem that Sheikh Mahmud's personal and national ambition to establish Kurdistan's independence was the most important reason behind the objection made by the British and the Baghdad Circle specifically, to his return to power in Sulaymania. Hence, the British Civil Service in Baghdad tried to portray the Kurds who demanded Mahmud's return as pro-Turks and Turkish agents.⁹³¹ In the British perspective the question of returning Sheikh Mahmud would pose the biggest threat to their interests in particular in the Kirkuk province. Since the issue of Kirkuk had always been at the heart of Britain's concern when dealing with the future of Kurdistan they anticipated that Mahmud would do all he could to bring the province into his government if he had the right opportunity. In September Bell wrote to her father: 'Sulaimani in itself doesn't matter much one way or the other. It was always a difficulty because it had steadfastly refused to become part of the 'Iraq - Kurds hate Arabs. The problem is the adjacent province of Kirkuk, which is half Turk by race, half Kurd, and has always refused to swear allegiance to Faisal. It is economically an integral part of Iraq and if the Turkish thrust were to dive in from Sulaimani to Kirkuk it would be a very serious business'.⁹³²

⁹²⁹ Busch, *Mudras to Lausanne*, p. 242

⁹³⁰ Letters, 16/7/1922. Gertrude Bell Archive-Newcastle University.

⁹³¹ High Commissioner Baghdad to Secretary of State for Colonies, London, 5nd July 1922, Air 20/741. T.N.A

⁹³² Letters, 8/9/1922. Gertrude Bell Archive-Newcastle University

Thus, it can be assumed that without having this large Kurdish population or oil in the Kirkuk province it was most likely that the future of Kurdistan would have shifted in a different direction, specifically, the question of the inclusion of Southern Kurdistan into the Iraqi state, as discussed in Chapter Four.

Nonetheless, after the British realized that they could not eliminate the Kemalist leverage in Southern Kurdistan through their own resources they decided to bring back Mahmud to use him as a 'barrier against the Turks'⁹³³ and to strengthen the Kurdish nationalist sentiment 'as the only way to do it'.⁹³⁴ The concept of a Kurdish buffer state reappeared again in order to use Southern Kurdistan as a bulwark against the dangerous Kemalists. Edmonds, a political officer in Kirkuk which had a significant influence on British policy decisions towards Kurdish question, indicated: 'We had despaired of keeping out the Turks with our own resources and had brought back Mahmud to consolidate Kurdish national feeling as the sole means of doing so; unless our policy was to stultify itself we must accept its logical consequences and concede all his demands, supported as they were by the Kurds of all three liwas.'⁹³⁵ But they warned Mahmud not to intervene in Kirkuk and the surrounding affairs.

In early September the British evacuated Sulaymania and handed over the responsibility to Shaikh Qadir, Shaikh Mahmud's brother. On the 13th of September Sheikh Mahmud arrived at Baghdad and stayed a week in order to discuss the situation, and on the 20th went back to Kurdistan. The second governorship of Shaikh Mahmud lasted from September 1922 to July 1923. This move was used as a pawn against Turkish influence and continued until they reached an agreement with the Kemalists in Lausanne in July 1923.

Nevertheless, immediately after Mahmud's return certain political developments occurred which impacted heavily on the British perspective of the Kurdish situation. Due to the collapse of the Coalition Government in October 1922, the Bonar Law Government replaced Lloyd George's and Devonshire replaced Churchill in the Colonial Office. The anti-separation Kurdistan party were in favour of the changes that were a direct consequence of Mahmud's administration. But Churchill's departure from

⁹³³ The Residency Baghdad, to Secretary of State for colonies, 10 January 1924, Records of Kurds, V6, p. 340.

⁹³⁴ Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks and Arabs*, p. 304.

⁹³⁵ Ibid

office had a negative impact on the Kurdish question although it benefitted the Baghdad Circle's strategy since it aimed to include Kurdistan in Iraq. After Churchill, the idea of a buffer state was no longer valid. So the new Government strategy returned to the traditional pre-war British policy of supporting Turkey as the British proxy in the region. The most important outcome was the opening of diplomatic negotiations with the Lausanne Conference which prevented any potential positive political developments in Kurdistan. Furthermore, the British-Iraqi treaty of 10th October was a further indication of the British intention to give up the support to the Kurdish government; in particular the treaty did not make any reference to the Kurds' rights at all.

Specifically, the Lausanne Conference changed Britain's attitude towards the idea of a Kurdish buffer state in Southern Kurdistan. Now the dispute over the Mosul question was between the Turkish and the British prevented the enforcement of the instructions in respect of the Kurds' right to establish a Kurdish Government.⁹³⁶ The Mosul Question became the most difficult issue in the Lausanne Conference.⁹³⁷ From the beginning, the Turkish side had privately told Curzon that they would be ready to break with Russia if they would give them the Mosul Vilayet.⁹³⁸ In December, Curzon's strategy was to bargain, that is, to give the Turks a share of Mosul's oil if they surrendered their claims to the territory but 'the Turks wanted both'.⁹³⁹ Seemingly, Bonar Law favoured the evacuation of the Mosul Vilayet in order to avoid facing a second Chanak crisis because of the dispute over it.⁹⁴⁰ On 8th January 1923, Bonar Law wrote to Curzon: 'There are two things which to me seem vital; the first is that we should not go to war for the sake of Mosul; and second that if the French, as we know to be the case, will not join us, we shall by ourselves fight the Turks to enforce what is left of the Treaty of Sevres'.⁹⁴¹

The Kurdish factor was central in the Mosul question. At the Lausanne Conference, both the Turks and the British used Kurds as a pawn in their arguments in order to

⁹³⁶ See Instruction in Edmonds, p 312.

⁹³⁷ British delegation, Lausanne, 25 January 1923. Records of Kurds, V6, p244.

⁹³⁸ Busch, *Mudras to Lausanne* p. 370.

⁹³⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁰ Busch, *Mudras to Lausanne*, p. 358.

⁹⁴¹ Harold Nicolson, *Curzon, The Last Phase 1919-1925: A Study in Post-War Diplomacy*, New York, Hascount Comp, 1939, p.488.

secure their position in Southern Kurdistan. Turkish nationalists used the same Turkish-Kurdish brotherhood argument for southern Kurdistan as had already been used for the Northern portion in the claim to protect them. Against the British and Arab nationalist claims for Southern Kurdistan, the Turkish delegation argued that the Arabs were only a small minority and Turks and Kurds were not racially separable and claimed that the inhabitants wanted to join Turkey⁹⁴². Therefore, they suggested that they held the Plebiscites in the Vilayet. In contrast, Curzon argued that originally the Kurdish race was from Indo-European groups, which are substantially distinct from the Ural-Altaiic Turks. He also argued that 'the frequent Kurdish revolts during the nineteenth century, the period prior to World War I, and the immediate post-War period demonstrated that the Kurds were unwilling to be part of Turkey'.⁹⁴³ So both the Turkish and British used a Kurdish argument for their interests at the expense of Kurdish rights and desires.

The Turks' persistence in claiming the Mosul Vilayet was a key factor behind the British hesitation to establish the Kurds. Nevertheless, the British perceived the Kurdish nationalists in Southern Kurdistan as a threat to their interests, particularly the prospect of losing the Mosul Vilayet, since they thought that to include Southern Kurdistan into Iraq rather than to separate it, would benefit British interests. The British also saw that supporting the separation option would increase Kemalist hostility towards them which would contradict the new British Government policy of befriending Turkey. From then on the British regarded the Kurdish nationalists under Sheikh Mahmud's leadership as a problem. Eskander states that the British authorities in Iraq were not happy with the new developments in Southern Kurdistan following Mahmud's return⁹⁴⁴ Hence they tried to undermine its influence, precisely to prevent Kurdish nationalist leverage in Kirkuk. As Edmonds noted: 'The High Commissioner continued to keep a close hand on everything that might affect the Kurdish political situation'.⁹⁴⁵

⁹⁴² Territorial and Military Commission, draft minutes of the twenty first meetings, January 23 1923. Records, V6, p

⁹⁴³ Territorial and Military Commission, draft minutes of the twenty first meetings, January 23 1923.

⁹⁴⁴ Eskander, *Britain's Policy*, p. 181.

⁹⁴⁵ Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks and Arabs*, p 281.

Specifically, the British considered Kirkuk to be at the core of the Turkish intrigue.⁹⁴⁶ According to the British officials in Mesopotamia, Sheikh Mahmud's contact with the Turkish and his plan to revolt in Kirkuk province were the major factors behind the deterioration of British relations with Mahmud. Both Edmonds and Bell stated that Mahmoud contacted the Turks and planned to instigate a revolt in the Kirkuk province.⁹⁴⁷ British accounts show how the plan prepared for the decline and the elimination of Mahmud's influence and rule. They intensified their efforts to turn other Kurdish tribes such as the Talabani and the Jaf against Mahmud. It seems that the British waited for the end of the 'Sulaymania problem'. As Edmonds remarked, 'if we could evict the Turks from Rawanduz the Sulaimani problem would be half solved'.⁹⁴⁸ On the other hand, the Turkish nationalists wanted to use the Kurdish movement under Mahmud's command as counter to the British strategy in Mosul Vilayet as they thought if the Sulaymania movement was stopped their future policy in the vilayet would be prejudiced.⁹⁴⁹

There were different views with regard to the date of, and reasons for, Sheikh Mahmud's communications with the Turks. Edmonds claimed that Mahmud acting as the Turkish agent contacted them in January 1923 via his brother-in-law, Fatah Beg, and received the Kemalists' promise of the Turks' support for independence.⁹⁵⁰ But Bell claimed that the communication happened only a month after Mahmud's return. According to Bell's letter this should have occurred in late October or early November. According to Rafiq Hilmi, however, Mahmud's decision to contact the Kemalists was made after he felt that the British did not intend to support an independent Southern Kurdistan.⁹⁵¹ Eskander supports Hilmi's explanation and argues that there is no evidence to confirm that he communicated with Turkish nationalists before the deterioration of relations between the Kurdish Government and the British authorities in Iraq.⁹⁵² Sheikh Mahmud persistently asked for British support and called Cox to hold the referendum in Kurdistan similar to the Faisal one but Cox rejected the request.

⁹⁴⁶ Spencer, *The Mosul Question*, p. 153.

⁹⁴⁷ Letters, 1/3/1923. Gertrude Bell Archive-Newcastle University.

⁹⁴⁸ Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks and Arabs*, p 314.

⁹⁴⁹ Ramzi to commanding National movements, Rawanduz, 9/4/1923. Air 23/350.

⁹⁵⁰ Ibid, pp. 312- 314.

⁹⁵¹ Hilmi, *Memoirs*.

⁹⁵² Eskander, *Britain's Policy*, p. 183.

Sheikh Mahmud then rejected Faisal's rule in Kurdistan by declaring himself the King of Kurdistan. Also, Rhozhi Kurdistan (Sun of Kurdistan) the Kurdish Government's local paper in Sulaymania, argued strongly against the idea that characterised Kurdistan as part of the Iraqi state.⁹⁵³

It is clear that the British authorities' attitude in Iraq had always been hostile towards Muhammad and the Kurdish nationalist movement. Their plan was to include Kurdistan in an Iraqi Arab state and therefore they acted against anything that opposed their policy. Bell clearly indicated in a letter to her father how she had succeeded in persuading the British authorities to extend Feisal's Kingdom to Southern Kurdistan. She wrote: 'It's a game I've been working at for the last year, so I'm pleased. And all this is deeply private and never to be revealed'.⁹⁵⁴

Since the War Office was dissatisfied with the policy lines adopted in Baghdad which indicated that none of the conditions outlined in the Cairo Conference had been fulfilled, the General staff refused to keep Imperial troops in the Mosul Vilayet.⁹⁵⁵ They argued that the War Office only agreed to their retention reluctantly on the express understanding that the condition outlined in the Cairo Conference came about. Clearly, the one conclusion outlined with regard to Kurdistan was to deal with the country separately from the Arab state as explained in the Chapter Four. It seems that the same issue caused the deterioration of relations between Sheikh Mahmud and the British in Iraq.

Eventually, the alliance reached with the Kemalists convinced the British to cease worrying about a buffer Kurdish state and the decision made to turn Mahmud out. A letter from Bell to her Father confirms this view, 'After all the British Turks seem to want peace and we've given out Shaikh Mahmud.' Therefore, on 16th July 1923, concurrent with the conclusion of the Lausanne Conference, the High Commissioner considered a Kurdish buffer state was no longer viable and the idea of separatism was dead.⁹⁵⁶

⁹⁵³ See Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks and Arabs*, p. 301.

⁹⁵⁴ Letters, 12/3/1923. Gertrude Bell Archive-Newcastle University.

⁹⁵⁵ The situation in Northern Kurdistan Iraq, Memorandum by the secretary of state, 5th October 1922, CAB/24/133

⁹⁵⁶ High commissioner for Iraq to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 16 July 1923. Air 5/556

Despite that the Kurdish resist continued against their inclusion into Iraqi Arab state...

The British post-Lausanne policy towards the Kurds was significantly influenced by their dispute with the Turkish state regarding the Mosul Vilayet. The British were concerned with maintaining order in the region, mainly to prevent Turkish intervention in southern Kurdistan, since Angora insisted on securing the Vilayet and attempted to use every means to this aim. The Turkish formed an intelligence bureau in Diyarbakir, aiming at spreading pro-Turkish activity in Mosul Vilayet, especially engaging with the Shaikh Mahmud and other Kurdish tribes to work against British strategy and on the return of the Vilayet to Turkey. Some Kurdish tribes signed a petition to the Turkish government stating that the Kurds wished the return of the Mosul region to Turkey.⁹⁵⁷

The real motive behind the Turkish claim on Mosul was their fear that the measure of encouragement given to Kurdish nationalism under Iraqi rule would pose a threat to the internal politics of Turkey. It could encourage the Kurds in Turkey to claim their right to have the same status as Iraqi Kurds, which could render the suppression of Kurdish nationalism in Turkish Kurdistan more difficult.⁹⁵⁸ Considering that Turkish concern, the British High Commissioner informed the Colonial Secretary that the Turkish insistence in securing south Kurdistan was based on the belief that the British intended to establish an autonomous Kurdish state which would lead the Kurds under Turkish control to also demand independence. He suggested that the negotiations process could be eased if the British made an official pledge to Angora that they aimed to integrate south Kurdistan into Iraq and did not intend to form any autonomous Kurdish entity,⁹⁵⁹ because granting any sort of autonomy to the Kurds would be detrimental to Anglo-Turkish relations.⁹⁶⁰ In fact, the Kurds in northern Kurdistan showed hostility against the Turkish Government. That was considered by the Turkish as a source of problem in relation to the Mosul Question.⁹⁶¹ Henry Dobbs received

⁹⁵⁷ Iraq: Turkish Activities, 16/02/1924. Records, V6, p356.

⁹⁵⁸ Cabinet Memorandum: Iraq and the Mosul Question, Secretary of State for Colonies, 10 November, 1925.CAB/24/175; Memoranda respecting the Iraq Frontier Dispute, Eastern Department, Foreign Office, 25 October 1925, CAB 24/175/50 . T.N.A

⁹⁵⁹ High Commissioner, Baghdad to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1 October 1923. Air 20/241. T.N.A

⁹⁶⁰ R C Lindsay to Austen Chamberlain, Constantinople, 11 November 1925. CAB 24/175/95. T.N.A

⁹⁶¹ Turkey-Politics, 6/02/1924. Records, p.355.

many letters from the Kurds in Turkey offering a revolt against the Kemalists in return for British aid, but the offers were refused.⁹⁶²

It was suggested if the British should give reassurance to Kemal that they did not intend on establishing any kind of Kurdish autonomy, the question of frontiers would be solved easily.⁹⁶³ This, however, would be seen as 'betraying the unquestionable rights of Kurds to national development and ultimate independence'.⁹⁶⁴

Indeed, the Turkish objection to the Kurdish national rights in Iraq was an important factor in influencing the British policy towards the Kurds, whereby it was necessary to the broader Empire's Middle Eastern strategy to subordinate the Kurdish question for the sake of British-Turkish relations.

⁹⁶² Appendix: Summary of evidence given by Henry Dobbs, the High Commissioner of Iraq, at a meeting of the chiefs of staff, 3 December 1925. Memorandum: Military Situation in Iraq, M P A Hankey, December 3rd, 1925. CAB 24/176/18

⁹⁶³ Memorandum: Irak Policy Committee. Report, Salisbury, 01 March 1926, CAB 24/178/90; Memorandum respecting the Iraq Frontier Dispute, Eastern Department, Foreign Office, 25 October 1925, CAB 24/175/50. T.N.A

⁹⁶⁴ Memoranda respecting the Iraq Frontier Dispute, Eastern Department, Foreign Office, 25 October 1925, CAB 24/175/50. T.N.A

Conclusion

The Turko-Armenian factor left a lasting negative impact on the Kurdish question. Kurds were in a dilemma because they found themselves between a rock and a hard place. The Armenian question became an obstacle to their case as the Western public and the Foreign policy of the Western Powers had had an advocacy and sympathy with the Armenian question since the late nineteenth century. Kurds had been seen guilty of the Armenian massacres which had distorted the image of the Kurds in the West's eyes. Kurds were also regarded as being an element of instability in the region especially as they were seen as a threat to Christians in both Armenia and Kurdistan. The pro-Armenian campaign caused British misconceptions of the Kurds. As Noel reported 'The average Armenian would like us to regard the Kurds as a massacre of Christians and as a wild freebooter'.⁹⁶⁵ Moreover, the Pro-Christian British officials induced the anti-Kurdish sentiments among the British authorities by showing that Christians feared massacre by Kurds. The Turks promoted the anti-Christian and anti-Western feeling among the Kurds by using the fear of Christian dominance over the Kurds. These issues together made the situation regarding Kurdistan complicated and caused unrest.

The clash of interests in the Great Powers had heavily impacted on the Middle Eastern situation by generating violence and instability in the region. The most significant outcome was the rise of the Kemalist movement which was a decisive factor in the destruction of Kurdish aspirations. The outcome of the Turkish-Greek conflict was the failure of the Western diplomacy to deal with the Middle East settlement, which had led to deepening differences between Britain and the allied countries on the one hand and the conflicting strategies within the British Empire on the other hand. The continued developments in the regional and international scenes heavily influenced the direction of Britain's attitude towards the future of Kurdistan.

⁹⁶⁵ Noel's Notes on Kurdistan.

The Kemalist military and diplomatic victories thwarted the Kurds' hopes of gaining their potential national state which had been granted to them in the Sèvres Treaty 1920 and also contributed to the destruction of the Sheikh Mahmud's second Government. Ultimately, after the agreement between the British and Angora at Lausanne 1923, the Kurdish strategic buffer could no longer be considered as a counter to the Turkish threat.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

This thesis examined Kurdistan's political situation between 1914 and 1923 in relation to Britain's Imperial policy, and demonstrated the complexity and difficulty of the Kurdish question from the British perspective. The central argument that emerges from the study is that the conflict of strategies and agendas within the British Empire system was crucial to the failure to establish an independent Kurdish state following the First World War. The thesis analysed all the dynamics and factors that both influenced and reflected Britain's contradictory policies regarding Kurdistan on three inter-related levels. To do this, it examined Kurdistan's internal social structure and geopolitical position in terms of the divergent inter-departmental and individual approaches within the British Empire system. It also explored Britain's external relations, for example with other Great Powers and regional nationalist movements, and their influence on the British view of Kurdistan.

Due to the complexities and conflicts witnessed in the region during the nineteenth century, events and developments especially in relation to the Imperial Game as well as the rise of nationalism and the missionary movements, were important factors in shaping the future of the Middle East. This study argues that Kurdish national aspirations during and after the nineteenth century did not fit with British imperial strategic and economic interests. For example, Kurdistan's destiny was heavily affected by Anglo-Russian imperial rivalry in the region which had always been pivotal to Britain's view of Kurdistan. That is, the British had always been concerned to keep the integrity of the Ottoman and Persian territories in order to curb Russia's project to expand southwards. Kurdistan was at the heart of this strategy as it had long been the theatre of the Imperial and regional conflict and the Kurds were perceived as a destabilised people who might threaten Britain's Imperial strategy. From the early sixteenth century up to the late nineteenth century the Ottoman-Persian intervention in

Kurdish regions had resulted in partition between the two empires. Then the involvement of the European Imperial powers influenced a deepening of the Kurdish situation; in particular it contributed to the collapse of the Kurdish Emirates in the first half of the nineteenth century. Throughout that period Britain, together with other European powers, contributed to the demarcation of Ottoman-Iranian boundaries, which were legitimized internationally. This established the partition of Kurdistan and had an important influence on the Kurdish question in the following years.⁹⁶⁶ Therefore, its geopolitical situation and social structure was an important obstacle to Kurdistan's ability to develop a cohesive and unitary political vision within its society which in turn, could have developed into a more cohesive political structure for the country as a whole.

The divisions within the Cabinet over the near and Middle Eastern settlement, fundamentally affected London's ambiguity towards Kurdistan and this confusing situation created the freedom for the men 'on the spot' to determine the future of the Kurds themselves. This study goes beyond the scope of previous literature by conducting a more in-depth examination of the views, ideas, and knowledge presented at the time that influenced British policy decisions regarding the future of Kurdistan. That is, the thesis has discussed the attitudes of people such as Mark Sykes, Gertrude Bell, Winston Churchill, A.T Wilson, Major Noel, Major Soan and Major Young all of whom played a most vital role in the orientation of British policy on Kurdistan.

The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that Mark Sykes and Gertrude Bell played a vital role in determining these British policy decisions. This is because their views were highly valued by the key British policy-makers in both London and the Middle East. Arguably, Sykes and Bell were most responsible for determining the Middle East's political map and for Kurdistan's absence from that map as well. The thesis has examined the attitudes of the two British officials deeply, and analysed the influence of their imperialistic, Orientalist and Pro-Sharifian sentiments concerning the situation of Kurdistan. It has found that the Arab (Sharifian) Policy, formed during the war under the guidance of Mark Sykes and then, following Sykes's death, was developed under people such as Lawrence and Bell and it has demonstrated that Sykes was to a large extent behind the fact that the Kurdish question was not

⁹⁶⁶ See map () Map of part of Turko-Persian Frontiers. Records of Kurds, V13, p. 13.

recognized in British Foreign policy. His wartime views were reflected in the policy decisions that were made by the de Bunsen Committee in 1915, and the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916 in which Kurdistan was divided within the new Middle Eastern political map. Sykes's proposed ideas were vital in determining the future of Kurdistan and they were largely implemented in the post-war period. Bell was particularly dominant in directing the British policy in Baghdad and she was able to influence the policy-makers to extend Feisal's kingdom into Southern Kurdistan rather than choosing the separation option. The study has argued that Bell was the most influential imperial official to obstruct the emergence of Kurdistan's independence which was supposed to have been established by the Cairo Conference.

Furthermore, the thesis argued that Britain's perception of the Kurds was very much influenced by the regional factors of concern to the Arabs, Turkish, Armenians and the Persians. The conflicting strategies and approaches between British departments and individuals were closely linked with the issues behind those questions and were a reflection of the British perspective of the Kurds. Specifically, it was this important factor that prevented a clear British policy regarding the Kurdish question.

Crucially, the Persian dimension was an important obstacle in the way of formulating any clear British vision towards the idea of an independent Kurdistan. An Iranian Kurdistan was out of the question because of the dominance of the nineteenth century's British traditional policy of keeping the integrity of Ottoman-Persia which dominated their post-war policy with respect to the Kurdish cause. This would have had a negative impact on the future of Ottoman Kurdistan as well.

Furthermore, ever since the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the British view of the Kurdish situation was very much tied in with Turko-Armenian factors. The recognition of the Armenian cause by the Western Powers was an important issue which influenced the British view respecting the future of Kurdistan. The British dealt with the Kurdish situation mainly in the light of the Armenian one and it was very biased in favour of the latter. This was mainly because the British were significantly influenced by the information presented in the West regarding the Kurds. This had mainly been influenced by missionary propaganda and the pro-Armenians who depicted the Kurds as uncivilized and wild and created a negative image in the West. This in turn influenced the foreign policies of the Great Powers. Henry Trotter, the British Consular

in Kurdistan highlights the issue that 'Europeans are too apt to judge the Armenians as a whole by the polished and well-educated specimens to be met in Constantinople, Smyrna and in the capitals of Europe but this gives a very incorrect idea...it will surprise many to learn that in many parts of the country it's extremely difficult to distinguish a Kurdish peasant from an Armenian, and until very lately I do not know that the Armenian peasant was much better off than the Kurd in the matter of education'.⁹⁶⁷ The British were also concerned about the potential Kurdish threat to Christian groups in the region which impacted on the negative British perspective regarding the Kurds and their cause. This was important because since the beginning up until the Lausanne Conference the British had not formulated a clear view of Kurdistan's future. This was also the reason why the Kurds were unclassified in the application for self-determination.

By the end of 1920, British Kurdish policy was chiefly shaped by Turkish and Arab factors. In particular, the British government had to reduce its troops in Mesopotamia due to the financial crisis. Alternatively, to preserve their interests the British adopted the Sharifian solution as an important pillar of their policy in the Middle East. The main British discussions with regard to the future of Southern Kurdistan was dealt with in the light of the security and viability of Mesopotamia; that is, whether the establishment of an independent state or the integration into Iraq would best serve Britain's wider interests in the region especially in terms of protecting the security of Mesopotamia from external threats, notably those by the Turkish nationalists and the Bolsheviks.

The study argued that the British policy in the Middle East was to rely on the strong elements of Nation and it suggests that the British manipulated the Kurds in line with their strategic and economic imperial interests. The formation of a Kurdish state would not have fitted in with Britain's wider strategy in the region especially with regard to their relations with the Arabs and Turks. In other words, the British eventually thought that through the subordination of Kurdish aspirations, rather than encouraging them, they could establish more viable stability and security in the region. Nevertheless, the post-Ottoman national-states had failed to create a stable and peaceful region. The unmaking of an independent Kurdistan was one of the most terrible mistakes that the

⁹⁶⁷ Memorandum by Major Trotter on the different races inhabiting the Consular District of Kurdistan considered chiefly with the reference to the question of Reforms, Constantinople, October 30, 1880, F.O 78/3132. The Records of Kurds, Volume 3, p 288

post-Ottoman system generated that has proven to have exacted a dreadful human cost in those destabilized countries.

The central theme that this study examined is that international dynamics strongly influenced the direction of British policy regarding the future of Kurdistan. The research has shown how the Imperial powers engaged and operated in the region through using native peoples, nationalist movements and democratic principles for the Imperial project. In this regard, Anglo-French competition, as well as cooperation, played a most important role in shaping the Middle East's political map and were mainly responsible for situation in the region, after the war. The British used the Arabs for the Empire's project mainly to reduce France's influence in Syria which had a catastrophic outcome there and in the whole of the Middle Eastern region. On the other hand, the French supported the Turkish nationalists vis-a-vis this British project. This conflict of interests was primarily responsible for the disorder and instability in the Middle East seen in the immediate post-war period such as: the Syrian crisis, the emergence of the Kemalist movement and the Turco-Greek war. In addition, the two European powers hampered any positive role that America could play in the Middle East peace settlement especially in terms of the enforcement of Wilsonian principles. In particular, British used America's efforts to enhance their imperial project against the France's leverage. The two powers' imperial ambitions were the main obstacle in the way of the Middle Eastern settlement especially the application of the self-determination principle that was supposed to be the core of the post-war settlement. Nevertheless, the British used the international organisations and the democratic principles for their Imperial agendas. The League of Nations became an organ for these purposes and the plebiscites were manipulated to legalize colonial rule in the mandate territories. The study found that Kurdistan's future was fundamentally affected by these imperial policies which were important factors behind the unsettlement of the Kurdish question in the Post-World War One period since the implications of the two powers' approaches and divergent policies subordinated the Kurdish question in favour of Turkish and Arab nationalists. In other words, the Great Powers' rivalry concerning the Eastern Question led to the first systematic division of Ottoman Kurdistan between Turkey, Iraq and Syria.

An important issue examined in the thesis was the impact of the oil question on the competition between the Great Powers in the Middle East and its contribution to the complications in the region. It argued that the discovery of oil in Kurdistan, in both the Ottoman and Persian Empires, brought the region into a zone of conflicting interests. Since the beginning of the twentieth century the Kurdish territories, in both the Persian and Ottoman empires, became the target of the imperial powers' bid to obtain oil concessions. Oil had an important role in influencing the policy decisions of the Great Powers, in particular the British, towards the future of Kurdistan before, during and after The First World War. The study argued that the existence of the valuable oil resources in Kurdistan complicated its political future and contributed to the partition of the country. Kirkuk in particular was central to the Kurdish question mainly because of its oil resources.

Another very important issue examined in the thesis was the American intervention in the Middle East settlement materialized through the Wilsonian principles of self-determination and the demand for open door policy regarding oil interests; the principle of self-determination was sacrificed for the economic interests - mainly oil concessions. Not only that, the Wilsonian concept of self-determination became an imperial project utilized for imperial agendas. In the case of Southern Kurdistan, the referendum was manipulated to legitimize Feisal's rule over the region. This was an important instrument which was used to bring Southern Kurdistan into Iraq and demolish the idea of an independent Kurdistan. After one century Kurds in Southern Kurdistan were willing to break with Iraq through conducting a referendum but has been failed.

The findings in the thesis may help us to better understand: the nature of imperialist international relations and the Super Powers' policy and diplomacy, the dynamic of the Oil question in the interconnection between private companies and their involvement in Middle Eastern nationalist movements and also in the shaping of the borders in the region, whether during the period in question or the present time. It also explains the complexities apparent in the region in the past and at present, in terms of: the dynamics and involvement of the Great Powers, the regional and local group actors, and the private companies which lie behind the complicated situation in particular in Syria and Iraq. The Western Powers' past experiences in the region offer lessons to present day policy-makers in how to deal with the Kurdish Question as well

as problems regarding the broader region in order to avoid mistakes. Yet, Iraq and Syria are at the heart of the problem of instability, violence, and perpetual conflict and therefore Kurdistan's future is inextricably linked with the whole region's situation. The biggest obstacle in the way of Kurdish aspirations is the continuation of the old system of international borders and nation-state sovereignty. If policy makers want to avoid a repetition of the past century's mistakes and wish to create more lasting and sustainable peace in the region, this study could be of value.

To conclude, this thesis suggests that considerably more work will need to be done to determine how and why the negative image of the Kurds has evolved. Further research needs to examine more closely the links between the literature and knowledge produced in the West about the Kurds and policy-decisions made with regard to the future of Kurdistan. In addition, it is worth studying the current situation for the Kurds in relation to the post World War One period.

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