Getting Out of Iraq—in 1932: The League of Nations and the Road to Normative Statehood

SUSAN PEDERSEN

> Complete independence is what we ultimately wish to give.
>
> Gertrude Bell
>
> My lady, complete independence is never given—always taken.[1]
>
> Jaʿfar al-ʿAskari

On October 3, 1932, the thirteenth annual assembly of the League of Nations voted unanimously to admit the Kingdom of Iraq to membership. Part of the Ottoman territory occupied by the Allied powers during the First World War and then turned over to British administration under League of Nations oversight, Iraq was the first—and would, in fact, remain the only—mandated territory to shed its tutelary status and be granted independence through collective agreement. The significance of the moment was not lost on the assembled delegates, and British foreign secretary Sir John Simon, speaking "as representative of the country whose privilege it had been to guide the State of Iraq through the period of adolescence to the full status of manhood," insisted that it vindicated the mandates system itself. "When that regime was instituted there were not wanting critics and cynics who hinted that the whole Mandatory system had been devised merely as a cloak for colonization and annexation . . . The admission of Iraq to the League was a sufficiently emphatic answer."[2]

But behind the scenes, and even within the hall itself, many were not so sure. Neither the League Council nor its Permanent Mandates Commission (PMC), which oversaw the administration of the mandated territories, had welcomed Britain's plan. Indeed, as one Colonial Office official admitted privately in late 1931, practically all the members of the Commission "were wholly unconvinced that Iraq was fit to be released from the Mandate and were most reluctant to agree to her eman-

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[1] Conversation between Bell and al-ʿAskari, as described in Bell to Hugh Bell, November 1, 1920, quoted in Liora Lukitz, *A Quest in the Middle East: Gertrude Bell and the Making of Modern Iraq* (London, 2006), 139.

[2] "Iraq Admitted to League," *The Times*, October 4, 1932, 13.

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cipation."[3] Only with difficulty did Britain win the League's grudging consent to Iraqi independence, and even then that consent was conditional upon a set of pledges by Iraq negotiated at Geneva.

Several excellent studies exist of Britain's role in mandatory Iraq and in the era of informal empire that followed. Those works have laid out the reasons why a financially and militarily overstretched British government was determined formally to withdraw; they have also made clear just how limited that withdrawal was, for Faisal and his allies won independence only by granting Britain extensive military and economic rights.[4] What has received less attention, however, is the significant role played by international relations within, and the significance of international politics for, this process.[5] Precisely because Iraq was a mandated territory, its "emancipation" had to be internationally agreed—a fact that occasioned three years of consequential and sometimes bitter debate over when a territory under the effective control of an imperial power could be declared sovereign.

What might we learn from the history of those negotiations? They suggest a different narrative about the role played by international organizations in the ending of formal empire from the one, familiar after 1945, that stresses internationalist and nationalist pressure and imperial resistance. For in this case, the imperial power was determined to withdraw, and the international body that was ostensibly committed to self-determination was reluctant to consent.[6] And the reasons for that hesitation

[3] The National Archives, London [hereafter TNA], Colonial Office [CO] 730/169/8, minute by J. E. Hall, December 29, 1931.

[4] The best study of British policy during the mandate period, to which I am indebted, is Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq: Contriving King and Country*, 2nd ed. (New York, 2007). For Britain's role in Iraq following formal emancipation, see especially Daniel Silverfarb, *Britain's Informal Empire in the Middle East: A Case Study of Iraq, 1929–1941* (New York, 1986). For an account focused less on British policy and more on Iraqi politics, see Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, 2007), chaps. 2–3. Elie Kedourie's coruscating analysis of Iraq as an artificial construction sustained only by military force and British patronage remains worth reading; see Kedourie, "The Kingdom of Iraq: A Retrospect," in Kedourie, *The Chatham House Version and Other Middle-Eastern Studies* (New York, 1970), 236–285.

[5] Two important exceptions being Toby Dodge's studies of British officials' construction of the mandatory state, which he sees as constrained equally by new international norms about sovereignty, nationalist pressures, and changed domestic political realities, and Helmut Mejcher's account of Britain's handling of Iraq's efforts to control its own foreign relations. See Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied* (New York, 2003); Dodge, "International Obligation, Domestic Pressure and Colonial Nationalism: The Birth of the Iraqi State under the Mandate System," in Nadine Méouchy and Peter Sluglett, eds., *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspectives/Les mandats français et anglais dans une perspective comparative* (Leiden, 2004), 143–164; and Mejcher, "Iraq's External Relations, 1921–26" (1977), in Mejcher, *The Struggle for a New Middle East in the 20th Century* (Berlin, 2007), 71–91. Neither scholar closely examines internal debates within the League over emancipation, however. By contrast, while early historians of the League noted the PMC's ambivalence about Iraqi independence, they tended to treat the Commission as a single entity and failed to note the degree to which different League states sought to use it toward their own ends. See F. P. Walters, *A History of the League of Nations* (1952; repr., London, 1960), 562–563; C. A. Macartney, *National States and National Minorities* (Oxford, 1934), 266–268.

[6] Historians routinely and rightly point to the influence of the spread of support for the norm of self-determination, as well as to the significant role of the United Nations in articulating that norm, in the discrediting and dissolution of the European empires after 1945; for a good introduction to a vast literature, see John Darwin, "Decolonization and the End of Empire," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 5: *Historiography*, ed. Robin W. Winks (Oxford, 1999), 540–557. Yet the impact of the League of Nations on European empires was (in comparison with the United Nations) ambiguous and paradoxical, since the mandates system sought to reform and legitimate empire as much as to end it and promoted norms of "civilization" and "good government" more than—and as a condition for—"self-government." The system's corrosive impact on empire was thus a consequence more of its role as an engine for (often unwelcome) publicity about governing practices and of the open contestation among

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are revealing. Certainly, international officials and statesmen shared widespread European assumptions about non-Europeans' incapacity for self-rule and feared that the virus of independence might be catching, but arguments soon crystallized around two different objections. The problem was not, some argued, that Britain wished to emancipate Iraq, but that what was on offer was not independence anyway; pointing to the provisions for a continued British military presence and to the concession granted the British-dominated Iraq Petroleum Company, they charged that Britain was seeking to remove what was effectively a client state from even the minimal oversight exercised by the League. And that Iraq needed that oversight was, to a second group of critics, clear. Citing its turbulent borders and frightened minorities, they feared that the main victims of independence might be some segments of the Iraqi population itself.

Through diplomacy and pressure, British officials overcame those reservations, forcing approval of Iraqi independence through the tortuous process devised by the League. By doing so, however, did they strengthen an emerging norm about the right to national self-determination or win international agreement to a form of independence—what political scientists would term "quasi-statehood"—safe for empire?[7] What one might call decolonization's Faustian bargain is perceptible in Iraq—a bargain whereby (often unrepresentative) national elites are ceded significant internal authority (including the right to enrich their followers and repress their perceived enemies) through collaboration with, and at the price of ceding a measure of economic and military control to, the former colonial power. Yet this outcome was both fragile and contingent, for it depended not only on the defeat of Islamist and tribal forces with different national aims, but equally on the occlusion of other internationalist visions. A (largely German) image of an international order governed more by markets than by military treaties, and an ideal of national sovereignties made subject to humanitarian norms both appeared—briefly—on the horizon in these debates, only to recede in the face of imperialists' and nationalists' joint preference for the comforts of statehood.

To understand the genesis of British strategy in Iraq, we must recall the important place that unequal alliances and covert forms of rule had in sustaining British im-

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the great powers that it fostered than of open critique, as imperial powers calculated how to defend their interests in this new situation. This study of Britain's response in the case of Iraq is part of a broader project, to be published by Oxford University Press in 2012, aimed at specifying the impact of the mandates system on the global order. For a précis of my argument, see Pedersen, "The Meaning of the Mandates System: An Argument," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 32, no. 4 (October–December 2006): 560–582.

[7] For the concept of "quasi-statehood," see Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Third World* (Cambridge, 1990). Several international legal scholars and comparative political scientists have argued for the importance of the mandates system in legitimating the norm of state sovereignty, although some also insist that the form of sovereignty created was distinctly "damaged" and neo-imperial. For a more optimistic account of the system's impact, see Neta Crawford, *Argument and Change in World Politics: Ethics, Decolonization, and Humanitarian Intervention* (Cambridge, 2002); for more pessimistic readings, see Anthony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge, 2004), and Balakrishnan Rajagopal, *International Law from Below: Development, Social Movements and Third World Resistance* (Cambridge, 2003). Unfortunately, none of these works are based on archival research or attend to the recent historical scholarship on the subject.

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perial power. Imperial history often concentrates on direct rule, but protectorates and princely states, treaties and trade concessions were also used to secure imperial interests. Britain, indeed, had a long history of preferring such clientelist arrangements, nowhere more than in the Middle East. "The independence of Arabia has always been a fundamental of our eastern policy," Lord Milner, then colonial secretary, told Prime Minister David Lloyd George in 1919 when arguing against any territorial concessions to the Italians along the Red Sea—and then clarified that what he meant was "that Arabia while being independent herself should be kept out of the sphere of European political intrigue and within the British sphere of influence: in other words, that her independent native rulers should have no foreign treaties except with us."[8] When British occupying forces in Baghdad or Jerusalem proclaimed that they came as liberators, as when T. E. Lawrence and his Arab Bureau enthusiasts promised Sharif Hussein of Mecca and his son Faisal an Arab state, it was this kind of independence they sought to extend. These promises were not cynical ploys aimed at sugaring covert plans for annexation; they were part of a strategy of influence and hegemony that was always central to British imperial practice.

By 1920, that strategy lay in ruins. The conquest of Iraq in the face of Ottoman and Islamist resistance had cost Britain more than 90,000 casualties, and a concern to secure oil reserves and the air route to India led them to dig in.[9] French and British control of the Middle East, envisaged in the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreements, was confirmed at the Paris Peace Conference—although, under pressure from Woodrow Wilson and the tide of public sentiment, those powers agreed to govern under a League of Nations "mandate" and with the ostensible aim of bringing the Middle East (or "A") mandated territories swiftly to self-rule.[10] Meeting in San Remo in April 1920, the Allied powers confirmed Britain's mandates over Mesopotamia and Palestine and France's over Syria and Lebanon and hammered out a secret agree-

[8] Bodleian Library (Oxford), MSS Milner 389, Milner to Lloyd George, May 16, 1919.

[9] For a subtle analysis of the Shiʿi *jihad* against the British occupation, see especially Pierre-Jean Luizard, *La formation de l'Irak contemporaine: Le rôle des ulémas chiites à la fin de la domination ottomane et au moment de la création de l'État irakien* (Paris, 1991), 319–344.

[10] Wilson and Lloyd George overcame resistance to League oversight from South Africa and Australia in particular by agreeing to distinguish between three types of mandate. The ex–Ottoman territories in the Middle East were allocated to Britain and France as "A" mandates, with the pledge (honored in the breach) that their populations' claim to self-government would be "provisionally recognized" and the mandatory powers would provide advice and assistance only until the populations were able to "stand alone." Germany's East and West African colonies were designated as "B" mandates and were allocated under various economic and humanitarian conditions to Britain, France, and Belgium. South-West Africa and the German territories in the Pacific were handed over to the British dominions and to Japan as "C" mandates, and could be administered as "integral parts" of the mandatory powers' own territory—a solution that South Africa's Jan Smuts described happily as "annexation in all but name." Works written about the system before the opening of the League, national, and local archives could not adequately address the diplomacy around the system or its impact "on the ground," but Quincy Wright's magisterial *Mandates under the League of Nations* (1932; repr., New York, 1968) remains an authoritative study of its implications for international law, while H. Duncan Hall's *Mandates, Dependencies, and Trusteeship* (New York, 1948) provides an early synthetic study of its operation and significance. Among archivally based work, Roger Louis's articles from the 1960s, now gathered in his *Ends of British Imperialism: The Scramble for Empire, Suez, and Decolonization* (London, 2006), remain the best study of the system's inauguration, and Michael D. Callahan provides a comprehensive account of the impact of mandatory oversight on the French and British African "B" mandates in *Mandates and Empire: The League of Nations and Africa, 1914–1931* (Brighton, 1999) and *A Sacred Trust: The League of Nations and Africa, 1929–1946* (Brighton, 2004). The literature on individual mandates is too vast to summarize here. Recent accounts by political scientists and international lawyers are cited in fn. 7 above.

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ment on the distribution of Iraqi oil. The British then withdrew their troops from Syria, standing by as the French picked a fight with, and then ousted, Faisal's fragile regime there. They had troubles enough of their own, for that summer Shiʿi religious leaders and the rural tribes of the Euphrates allied with urban (often Sunni) nationalists in a major rising against British rule.[11]

Yet as costs mounted and battles raged, British interest in Arab "independence" revived. Several of Faisal's close collaborators, including Nuri al-Saʿid and his brother-in-law Jaʿfar al-ʿAskari, hailed from Iraq, and when the Syrian regime was crushed, they turned their attention homeward. Some members of the British establishment in Baghdad (notably the influential Oriental secretary, Gertrude Bell), not to mention T. E. Lawrence, Kinahan Cornwallis, and other members of the wartime Arab Bureau, also viewed civil commissioner Sir Arnold Wilson's "Indian" style of direct rule as outdated and inappropriate. They found a British government more than willing to listen to them. Already struggling to find money and men for campaigns in Ireland, India, and Egypt, ministers—and still more a restive British public—viewed Britain's Mesopotamian commitments as a costly extravagance. A feeling of compunction toward Faisal also influenced Lloyd George, who informed the new French premier, Alexandre Millerand, only weeks after Faisal's expulsion from Damascus that the British were contemplating placing him on the throne of Iraq. Millerand was predictably horrified, but the plans went forward anyway.[12] Over the next year, Wilson was replaced, an Arab government was formed in Baghdad, the Middle East Department of the Colonial Office was brought into being, and secret instructions were issued to British political officers in Iraq to organize declarations in support of Faisal (no easy business in the Kurdish north, one sourly recalled).[13] The Cairo conference of March 1921, attended by Churchill (now colonial secretary), Britain's officials in Iraq, and an Iraqi contingent led by Defense Minister Jaʿfar al-ʿAskari, clinched the deal. Britain would support an Arab government in Iraq, the Royal Air Force (RAF) would be entrusted with defense (a decision that would bring costs down substantially), a treaty would be negotiated to regulate the two states' relations, and Faisal would be offered the throne.[14]

Yet Iraq was still—unacceptably to Faisal, not to mention its population—under international law a territory governed under mandate, not an independent state able to control its own foreign affairs. Britain tried to live with this ambiguity, telling the League Council in late 1921 that while it had been "unable to resist the overwhelming

[11] Pierre-Jean Luizard and Amal Vinogradov argue persuasively that the 1920 revolt, viewed by the British as the work of outside agitators (whether Bolshevik, Iranian, or Hashemite), was significant as both the last Shiʿi *jihad* and the first truly nationalist rising. See Luizard, *La formation de l'Irak contemporaine*, 383–402; Vinogradov, "The 1920 Revolt in Iraq Reconsidered: The Role of Tribes in National Politics," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 3, no. 2 (April 1972): 123–139.

[12] For the Anglo-French argument over Faisal, see "British Secretary's Notes of an Anglo-French Conference, Held at Lympne on Sunday August 8, 1920," in *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919–1939* [*DBFP*] (London, 1946–), 1st ser.: 1919–1930, vol. 8, 718–719.

[13] D. K. Fieldhouse, ed., *Kurds, Arabs and Britons: The Memoir of Wallace Lyon in Iraq, 1918–44* (London, 2002), 94–95.

[14] The innovative role of the RAF in Iraq had a significant impact not only on practices of colonial control but also on the status and mystique of the RAF. For this symbiotic relationship between "air policing" and covert strategies of imperial control, see David E. Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force, 1919–1939* (Manchester, 1990); and more recently Priya Satia, *Spies in Arabia: The Great War and the Cultural Foundations of Britain's Covert Empire in the Middle East* (Oxford, 2008).

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desire of the people of Iraq for the formation of a national Government under an Arab ruler," and hence wished to replace the original mandate text with a bilateral treaty, it remained accountable to the League for Iraq's administration.[15] The Anglo-Iraq Treaty that Britain negotiated thus recognized Iraqi "national sovereignty" but bound the king to accept British advice "on all important matters"; supplementary agreements kept foreign relations, the defense of the country, and key judicial, financial, and advisory posts in British hands.[16] Negotiations over the treaty were anything but easy: it was agreed in October of 1922 only after High Commissioner Percy Cox shut down nationalist newspapers, proscribed opposition parties, and deported key Shiʿi leaders, and not until 1924 was it finally forced through the Constituent Assembly. Yet however restrictive its provisions, it was less humiliating to Iraq than the mandate, and in 1924 Britain persuaded the League Council to accept it as a replacement for that still-unratified text.[17] Moreover, during negotiations, Britain made several key concessions, adding a supplementary protocol that reduced the treaty's duration from twenty years to a mere four, and promising first to try to secure the Mosul region, also claimed by Turkey, for Iraq, and then to consider Iraq's candidacy for League entry at four-year intervals, beginning in 1928.[18] In 1925, albeit with difficulty, British officials in Iraq persuaded a skeptical League visiting commission to award Mosul to Iraq—although the commissioners, well aware of Kurdish hostility to rule from Baghdad, also recommended that Britain guarantee Kurdish autonomy and retain the mandate for at least a generation.[19]

In the eyes of Faisal and his ministers, the way was now clear for Britain to make good on its promise to support Iraq's admission to the League. A serious campaign

[15] League of Nations Archives, Geneva [hereafter LNA], Box R58, File 1/17516/17502, H. A. L. Fisher to the Council, November 17, 1921. Britain had submitted draft mandates to the Council, but asked it to postpone consideration of the Iraq text, which was never ratified. For the original texts, see "Draft Mandates for Mesopotamia and Palestine as Submitted for the Approval of the League of Nations," *Parliamentary Papers* [hereafter *PP*] 1921, Cmd. 1176. The first British member on the PMC, William Ormsby-Gore, also explored the possibility of Britain's simply asking the League Council to terminate the mandate but was warned that such action would be "very strongly resented" by the French for its effect on Syria, and possibly by other Council members who hoped to profit from the requirement that all League states be granted equal economic rights in "A" and "B" mandated territories. See LNA, S284 (1) (9), Rappard to Ormsby-Gore, May 29, 1922.

[16] "Iraq. Treaty with King Faisal," *PP* 1922, Cmd. 1757, here at Article IV, and for the numerous subsidiary agreements, see "Protocol . . . and Subsidiary Agreements," *PP* 1924, Cmd. 2120.

[17] The discussion at the Council on September 20, 1924, and the Council resolution accepting the Anglo-Iraq Treaty as giving effect to the mandate were published by Britain as "Papers Relating to the Application to ʿIraq of the Principles of Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations," *PP* 1924–1925, Cmd. 2317.

[18] It is worth noting that many British officers in Iraq thought the promised four-year period simply "a concession to extremist opinion" and fully expected the treaty to be renewed. See C. J. Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks and Arabs: Politics, Travel and Research in North-Eastern Iraq, 1919–1925* (London, 1957), 414–415.

[19] Those recommendations, which were supported by the Council, were published by the League as CPM Document 483, "Iraq. Administration of the Kurdish Districts. Note by the Head of the Mandates Section" (November 2, 1926). In response to the Mosul award, the British government and Faisal signed a treaty extending the mandate for twenty-five years, but with the proviso that it would of course end if Iraq was admitted to the League. See "ʿIraq. Treaty with King Faisal signed at Baghdad, 13th January, 1926," *PP* 1926, Cmd. 2587. For Britain's decision to turn to the League to solve the Mosul dispute, see Peter J. Beck, "'A Tedious and Perilous Controversy': Britain and the Settlement of the Mosul Dispute, 1918–1926," *Middle Eastern Studies* 17, no. 2 (April 1981): 256. Wallace Lyons's memoir provides a revealing account of the British effort to manage the League Commission on the ground; see Fieldhouse, *Kurds, Arabs and Britons*, 146–152.

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for League entry was certainly in the offing, High Commissioner Henry Dobbs warned the Colonial Office in late 1926; if Britain offered support, it could negotiate concessions protecting its strategic interests and retain the friendship of the Iraqi political elite.[20] Neither the Colonial Office nor Stanley Baldwin's new Conservative government thought that Iraq—a "mere geographical expression," in one official's words—was ready. Privately, officials imagined a scenario in which Britain would publicly propose Iraq's entry and then maneuver some other power—ideally the French—into turning the case down, but concluded that such a course of action "would, in order to be successful, demand on the part of the British representatives concerned, a skill in dissimulation and deceit which is happily foreign to our national character, and on the part of other members of the League a degree of benevolent discretion for which it would be extremely unwise to look."[21] Colonial Secretary Leo Amery thus took refuge behind the Mosul Commission's stipulations. "I cannot conceive that anyone at Geneva eighteen months ago imagined that we should propose Iraq for membership of the League so soon as 1928," he wrote; to do so "might lay us open to the suspicion of having secured a favourable frontier award by undertaking further obligations which we had no real intention of discharging."[22] Sir Hugh Trenchard, the air marshal who had found Iraq such a wonderful arena in which to try out his ideas about "air policing" (that is, bombing local tribes into submission), also frankly thought that Britain should never withdraw from Iraq as long as it was possible to hold it, and that "it was time this play-acting [about Iraqi independence] ceased."[23] The cabinet did not go this far, agreeing to support Iraq's entry in 1932. Amery, transmitting the decision to Baghdad, added blithely that Britain would not mind the League's sending its own commission to Iraq to decide whether independence was justified.[24]

Amery was probably right to think that the League would have been astounded by a British proposal for Iraqi independence as early as 1928, although he was also clearly looking for an excuse not to go forward. (He was rarely so solicitous of Geneva.) For Faisal and the Iraqi nationalists, however, Britain's decision came as a betrayal. Abortive efforts at reconciliation and then two years of stalemate followed, with disagreement, predictably, crystallizing around military questions.[25] Yet both Dobbs and his successor, Gilbert Clayton (another old Arab Bureau hand), believed that compromise was possible: Iraq's nationalist politicians, they thought, although eager to build up their army, did not really want to do without the RAF. When a new Labour government committed to the ideals of imperial trusteeship and dev-

[20] Dobbs's views are mentioned in TNA, CO 730/107/73, memo by Hall, December 29, 1926, and are spelled out more fully in TNA, CO 730/119/10, C.P. 173 (27), June 8, 1927; circulating Dobbs to Amery, March 24, 1927; and TNA, CO 730/119/10, Dobbs to Amery, March 31, 1927.

[21] TNA, CO 730/107/73, memo by Hall, December 29, 1926. Horace Wilson also thought it would be nice to orchestrate French obstruction; see TNA, CO 730/119/10, minute by Wilson, March 11, 1927.

[22] TNA, CO 730/119/10, minute by Amery, March 15, 1927; and C.P. 178 (27), "Entry of Iraq into the League of Nations. Memorandum circulated by the Secretary of State for the Colonies," June 9, 1927.

[23] TNA, CO 730/119/10, minute by Hall, June 29, 1927; and TNA, CO 730/120/1, Trenchard, "Personal Note," June 28, 1927.

[24] TNA, CO 730/120/1, Cabinet 38 (27), July 4, 1927; and Amery to Dobbs, July 6, 1927.

[25] Another treaty removing some of the more humiliating conditions was agreed in December 1927, but since it modified the promise to support Iraq's entry with the words "if all goes well," Iraqi nationalists refused to ratify it. See "ʿIraq. Treaty between the United Kingdom and Iraq signed at London, December 14, 1927," *PP* 1927, Cmd. 2998.

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olution came into office, the stalemate was finally broken. In September 1929, Britain told Baghdad that it would unconditionally support Iraq's entry into the League in 1932 and negotiate a new treaty resolving all outstanding questions. On November 4, the League's secretary-general, Sir Eric Drummond, was informed of Britain's decision.[26] It was now the job of the Colonial Office to bring the League around.

The Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations was just convening in Geneva for one of its regular sessions when the British made their announcement. Its members, as quickly became clear, were taken aback and even irritated by Britain's unilateral action.[27] Envisaged in the League Covenant and finally set up in 1921, the PMC was an advisory body that met twice yearly to review (with representatives of each mandatory power in turn) the annual reports those powers were required to submit and any petitions the League had received about alleged abuses in the mandated territories. It then reported to the League Council about any concerns. With Britain, France, and Japan (mandatory powers all) permanently represented on the Council, the Commission was kept on a tight leash: it was allowed neither to conduct fact-finding missions within the mandated territories nor to examine petitioners in person. Yet for several reasons—because the Council had more pressing concerns, because PMC members served without term and hence developed real expertise, because several were strong personalities, and (not least) because the states from which they came were often at loggerheads on imperial policy anyway—the Commission proved more independent and harder to manage than anyone could have predicted.[28]

Of the PMC's eleven members in 1929, four were nationals of the main mandatory powers (Britain, France, Belgium, and Japan), three were nationals of other European imperial powers (the Netherlands, Italy, and Portugal), all but the Japanese member were white Europeans, and all but the Scandinavian member were men. In theory, all members were appointed by the Council for their expertise and not as government representatives; in practice, most were former colonial governors or diplomats with close ties to their state's foreign policy establishment. Yet, of the members from the mandatory powers, only the former French colonial governor, Martial Merlin, acted unabashedly as his government's mouthpiece; both the British member, the famous architect of indirect rule Sir Frederick Lugard, and Belgium's Pierre Orts (who had negotiated the East African boundaries with Milner in 1919) were more independent. The legalistic Dutch member, D. F. W. Van Rees, also tended to say whatever he liked (often at length), and the PMC's mercurial Italian chairman, the Marquis Theodoli, delighted in causing difficulties for the French and

[26] For this correspondence, see "Policy in ʿIraq: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies," *PP* 1929–1930, Cmd. 3440.

[27] PMC, *Minutes*, 16th sess., November 6–26, 1929, 17–20.

[28] Too little has been written from League archives on the internal workings of the Permanent Mandates Committee and the Mandates Section, but see Véronique Dimier, " 'L'internationalisation' du débat colonial: Rivalités franco-britanniques autour de la Commission permanente des mandats," *Outre-mers: Revue d'histoire* 89, no. 336–337 (2002): 333–360; Dimier, *Le gouvernement des colonies, regards croisés franco-britanniques* (Brussels, 2004); and Annique H. M. Van Ginneken, "Volkenbondsvoogdij: Het Toezicht van de Volkenbond op het Bestuur in Mandaatgebieden, 1919–1940" (diss., University of Utrecht, 1992).

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British officials who appeared before him. Staunch imperialists these men may have been, but they did not speak with a single voice.

For varying reasons, four members were consistently critical of the mandatory powers. Only one, the Spanish social reformer and political economy professor Leopoldo Palacios, supported self-determination on principle, but he often found a pragmatic ally in the member appointed following Germany's entry into the League, the financial expert Ludwig Kastl (and after 1930 his replacement, Julius Ruppel).[29] Yet it was the Swiss member, professor and political scientist William Rappard, who became the Commission's chief strategist and moral lodestar. As director of the Mandates Section from 1921 through 1924, Rappard had fought hard, sometimes even against Secretary-General Drummond, to bolster the Commission's authority, and when he left the Secretariat, the PMC insisted that he be appointed an extraordinary member.[30] Intelligent, hard-working, based in Geneva, and possessing an insider's knowledge of the League, for twenty years Rappard caused more trouble for the mandatory powers than any of his fellows. The Commission's sole woman member, the Norwegian school director Valentine Dannevig, often followed his lead.

This was the group that the Colonial Office would have to convince of Iraq's fitness for independence within three years. But when Sir Bernard Bourdillon, acting high commissioner after Gilbert Clayton's sudden death, met with them at that November 1929 session, they expressed "a good deal of well-bred surprise, and even incredulity" at this claim.[31] Why did Britain think that Iraq could govern itself? If it was making progress, how much was due to the British advisers present in every ministry? The PMC had seen little evidence of the Iraqi government's ability to function on its own, but enough to question its probity and character. Remember, Orts and Rappard pointed out, the petition the previous year from Baghdad's Bahai community over the wrongful seizure of a house sacred to them, which bordered on a Shiʿi site and which the British authorities had been unable to persuade an Iraqi government anxious about Shiʿi loyalties to restore. "In a country . . . where religious fanaticism pursues minorities and controls power," Orts told Bourdillon, "a state of affairs prevails which is not calculated to ensure the development and well-being of the inhabitants."[32]

Bourdillon handled the Commission well, pointing out that whatever Iraq's de-

[29] Records of the complex negotiations over Germany's seat on the PMC are found in the archives of the Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin [henceforth AA], R29434 and R96513. The episode is covered from the standpoint of the British and the French in Callahan, *Mandates and Empire*, especially 129–131.

[30] For Rappard's disagreements with Drummond, see in particular Ania Peter, *William E. Rappard und der Völkerbund: Ein Schweizer Pionier der internationalen Verständigung* (Frankfurt, 1973), especially 88–90; also LNA, R20bis, 1/13140/3800, Rappard to Drummond, December 20, 1921, and R58, 1/17517/17502, Rappard, "The Iraq Treaty," October 27, 1922; and Van Hamel, "The Iraq Treaty," November 9, 1922.

[31] TNA, CO 730/150/3, note by Clauson, received December 28, 1929.

[32] PMC, *Minutes*, 16th sess., November 6–26, 1929, 33. For the discussion and report on the Bahai petition the previous year, see PMC, *Minutes*, 14th sess., October 26–November 13, 1928, 189–190, 275–276. PMC consideration of the Bahai appeal turned into a hardy perennial. Given Shiʿi feeling, the Iraqi government demurred at restoring the property to the Bahai, but under British pressure eventually agreed to expropriate it for a public purpose. The Bahai and the Mandates Commission accepted this compromise; each year, however, the PMC learned that it had not yet been implemented. The Iraqi government no doubt found such procrastination prudent, but the Commission read it as evidence of the "fanaticism" of Iraq's Muslim majority and the Iraqi government's pusillanimity. The mandate ended with the issue still unresolved. For the records of the Bahai petition, including petitions from sympa-

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fects, it was already as independent as some other member states of the League. Yet the PMC's report to the Council that session was—despite objections from Palacios and Kastl—grudging at best, stating that the Commission would welcome Iraq's entry only "if and when" it became clear that the territory was able to "stand alone" and effective safeguards had been worked out for its religious and racial minorities and for League member states.[33] One year later, with petitions arriving from minority populations apprehensive at the prospect of independence, the PMC again gave the British representative, by his own admission, "a pretty stiff time."[34] The minutes of the session made "very disturbing reading," one official minuted: it was clear the Commission was "distinctly hostile to the position of His Majesty's Government."[35]

That hostility did not prompt any reconsideration of British policy, but nor did it lead Britain to flout the PMC. Deeply invested in the League and aware of the institution's strong public backing, British officials never suggested going forward without its consent, instead crafting a finely calibrated strategy for managing the Commission. Officials thus fought to restrict the PMC's independent access to information, successfully opposing the proposal that the League send a fact-finding mission to judge Iraq's readiness for independence. (Such a prospect, cheerfully contemplated by Amery when the aim had been to slow independence down, was now considered out of the question.)[36] Second, they inundated the Commission with their own information, providing detailed observations on all petitions and writing a highly selective survey of the expanding capacity of the Iraqi government under their eleven-year tutelage.[37] Third, they dispatched the imposing new high commissioner, Sir Francis Humphrys, to Geneva to make their case at the June 1931 and November 1931 PMC sessions. There, Humphrys stayed relentlessly on message, lobbying members individually and hosting luncheon parties to introduce them to Iraqi ministers Nuri al-Saʿid and Jaʿfar al-ʿAskari.[38]

What made this strategy necessary was the undiminished level of anxiety, unrest, and dissent that the prospect of Iraqi independence aroused, not only among members of the Mandates Commission but also among Iraq's minorities, other European

thizers outside Iraq, see LNA, R2314, 6A/7886/655, jacket 1; expressions of thanks from Bahai congregations for the PMC's support are in jacket 2.

[33] "Report to the Council of the League of Nations on the Work of the Session," in PMC, *Minutes*, 16th sess., November 6–26, 1929, 203.

[34] TNA, CO 730/152/7, Young to Hall, November 11, 1930.

[35] TNA, CO 730/152/7, minute by Hall, November 21, 1930; see also minutes by Shuckburgh, November 25, 1930, and Drummond Shiels, December 2, 1930.

[36] TNA, CO 730/152/7, minute by Hall, October 25, 1930; see also the interoffice meeting held to work out a strategy for Humphrys to oppose such a demand in late 1931 in TNA, CO 730/179/3, "Memorandum: Attitude to be adopted by the British Accredited Representative at the forthcoming meeting of the Permanent Mandates Commission" (n.d. [October 1931]). In 1945, Bernard Bourdillon recalled how easy it was for the mandatory powers to "hoodwink" the PMC given that it could not check their comments by personal inspection. Quoted in Robert D. Pearce, *Sir Bernard Bourdillon: The Biography of a Twentieth-Century Colonialist* (Oxford, 1987), 99.

[37] *Special Report by His Majesty's Government . . . on the Progress of Iraq during the Period 1920–1931* (London, 1931). As the Colonial Office's J. E. Hall put it, material that was "true" but might "make a bad impression at Geneva" could be "toned down," since the purpose of the report was to persuade the League that the Iraqi government was "sufficiently enlightened" to be granted independence. See TNA, CO 730/167/14, note by Hall, March 30, 1931. (It is impossible not to recall how some seventy years later, another government dossier on Iraq would be "sexed up" in order to deliver a very different verdict.)

[38] TNA, CO 730/166/7, note by Hall, June 26, 1931.

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powers, much of the British political establishment, and even some senior British officials in Baghdad and London. "Your statement . . . that it is beyond question that progress in general has been maintained is one to which, I think, few people would subscribe," Sir Kinahan Cornwallis, adviser to the interior minister and in Iraq continuously since 1920, wrote in March 1931 when reviewing the British report; he himself thought that British withdrawal would lead to a period of near-anarchy followed by either British reoccupation or the emergence of a dictator.[39] "We are very doubtful of the truth of our own opinion that Iraq is fit for admission," J. E. W. Flood at the Colonial Office likewise admitted.[40] In reading the blunt comments in the Colonial Office files, Elie Kedourie's old charge—that British officials supported Iraqi independence out of an excess of liberal idealism and self-delusion—falls to the ground. Pragmatic calculations drove them. If Britain wished to retain control of its airfields and oilfields in Iraq but was not willing to spend money and lives reoccupying the country (and it was not), there was no other choice. "His Majesty's Government are committed lock stock and barrel to the opinion that Iraq will be fit for admission to the League by 1932," Flood concluded, "and whatever happens we must stand by that."[41]

This strategy was successful, enabling Britain to retain a low-cost hegemonic position in Iraq for another dozen years. Yet the campaign for Iraq's admission to the League also fostered an important and consequential debate, one that spilled beyond the Mandates Commission, about the nature of independence and sovereignty in a post-Wilsonian but not yet post-imperial world. The PMC and other participants in that debate could not force the British to stay in Iraq; they could, however, criticize the nature of the independence on offer and articulate other visions or norms. By doing so, they not only exposed the shifting relations between internationalism and imperialism in this period but also to a degree affected those relations. Two issues—whether that independence was a kind of imperialism in disguise and whether Iraqi nation-building would threaten non-Arab populations—dominated. The historical record would give an affirmative answer to both questions, yet this definition of independence prevailed anyway, in a pragmatic bargain that gave both the imperial powers and Arab nationalists some part of what they needed.

THE FIRST CONTROVERSIAL QUESTION the PMC was forced to consider was whether Iraq could, indeed, be considered a "state." The British, understandably anxious on this score, tried to prevent the Commission from even discussing the question. Adjudicating a state's readiness for admission to the League was not the PMC's job, Foreign Secretary Arthur Henderson insisted in a Council meeting in January 1930; if anything, that was the prerogative of the League Assembly, a heterodox body dominated by small (and in some cases scarcely "sovereign") states certain to welcome Iraq's entry. It is a sign of how anxiously the imperial powers on the Council viewed the prospect of Iraqi independence that they disagreed, insisting that the Mandates Commission be asked for its views about when a territory administered

[39] TNA, CO 730/167/14, Cornwallis to Young, March 22, 1931.
[40] TNA, CO 730/152/7, minute by Flood, October 27, 1930.
[41] Ibid.

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under League mandate might be considered ripe for emancipation.[42] In memoranda and discussions between late 1930 and June 1931, the Commission pondered this question.[43]

That a mandate *could* end was clearly implied by the League Covenant, members agreed, for if the mandates system had been constructed to protect peoples "not yet able to stand alone" (in the words of Article 22), the implication must be that they might one day do so. But it was not for the inhabitants to decide when that day had come, the Dutchman Van Rees characteristically insisted, and "in the case of the African and South Pacific territories, this goal is beyond dispute still so remote that it would be safe to say that it is really no more than of theoretical interest."[44] Instead, whether the stage had been reached was a question of fact, of the empirical and observable condition of the territory's institutions. At a minimum, the PMC members agreed in their final report on the subject in June 1931, it should have a settled administration, the capacity to maintain its territorial integrity, the ability to keep internal order, adequate financial resources, and a judicial apparatus that would afford equal justice to all.[45] It need not be able to repel any possible attack entirely on its own, Lugard added, for that was a standard that few small states could meet; internally, however, it had to have the rudimentary capacities of the modern bureaucratic state.[46]

This was a list of conditions that many European political theorists of the day would have endorsed. Interestingly, however, the Commission did not stop there. For the state in question was not being freed in order to act like an unbound captive in a war of all against all. Rather, it would be admitted into a community of states, one bound by norms and practices to which it should conform. The mandates system had been set up as part of a peace settlement, Portugal's Count de Penha Garcia pointed out, and it was reasonable to insist that emancipation not disrupt that peace.[47] The new state should therefore agree to honor commitments made under the mandate regime and specific League covenants. By accepting this argument, the Commission on the one hand virtually invited the League to impose conditions that would protect European interests, but on the other hand implied that sovereignty could be legitimately constrained by the obligation to adhere to what they would have termed "standards of civilization" and we would term "the protection of human rights."

The Commission's report went on to propose a list of appropriate specific guarantees. At this moment, however, any illusion that they were discussing an abstract

[42] Minutes of the Council, 58th sess., January 13, 1930, *League of Nations Official Journal* [hereafter *OJ*], February 1930, 77.

[43] A preliminary report drafted by the Portuguese member, Count de Penha Garcia, "General Conditions that must be fulfilled before the mandate regime can be brought to an end in respect of a country placed under that regime," was published in PMC, *Minutes*, 19th sess., November 4–19, 1930, annex 8. The committee then discussed the issue at their 20th session in June 1931, and a final report, also titled "General Conditions that must be fulfilled . . . ," was published in PMC, "Report to the Council on the Work of the 20th Session," *Minutes*, 20th sess., June 9–27, 1931, 228–230.

[44] PMC, *Minutes*, 20th sess., June 9–27, 1931, 152; LNA, R2346, 6A/16601/16601, CPM 1183, "Contribution to the examination of the question of the general conditions required for the termination of the mandate regime . . . Note by M. Van Rees" (June 13, 1931).

[45] PMC, "General Conditions that must be fulfilled" (1931), 228–229.

[46] LNA, R2346, 6A/16601/16601, jacket 1, CPM 11997, "General Question. Termination of a Mandate. Note by Lord Lugard" (June 20, 1931).

[47] De Penha Garcia, "General Conditions that must be fulfilled" (1930).

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question vanished, with debate focusing on the sticking points that had arisen over Iraq. The list was thus an odd mix of protections for existing European privileges (such as the obligation to maintain the legal immunities granted foreigners) and genuine humanitarian norms (such as freedom of conscience). The PMC also suggested—in a sign of things to come—that if the mandated territory had been required to grant equal economic access to all League states (as Iraq had been), it should grant those states most-favored-nation status at least for a time.[48]

This motley list bore the traces of the Iraq debates, but it bore something else, too—the fingerprints of the foreign ministries of the major European powers. Certainly the PMC was the bearer of a genuine, if paternalistic, humanitarian sensibility that transcended nationality, but on issues of real importance to European powers, it could also serve as an arena in which to negotiate their interests. Iraqi independence—involving as it did global security and the disposition of large supplies of oil—was just such an issue. It thus not only divided the PMC but also spilled beyond its bounds, with key discussions taking place in the League Council or among diplomats behind the scenes. Albeit for rather different reasons, Germany and Italy became heavily involved in those discussions. The German position was the most subtle, and is worth recovering.

Germany's approach to colonial questions at the League was shaped by its unusual position as not only the most powerful state on the Council without a colonial empire, but also the former sovereign of many of the territories that the Mandates Commission now oversaw. Since Germany had been stripped of those territories amid charges that it was too brutal to be trusted with colonies (charges that very much still rankled), the mandatory powers expected Germany to use its position within the League to lobby relentlessly for their return. Yet it did not do so. The German Foreign Ministry had given considerable thought to colonial policy before Germany's entry in 1926 and had come to the conclusion that any early restitution of those colonies was outside the realm of practical politics. As a result, and paradoxically, upholding League authority became an imperative: Germany could simultaneously assert its humanitarian and internationalist credentials, rebuild its economic interests in its former territories, keep alive hopes of their eventual return, and placate a vociferous domestic colonial lobby, by insisting on the sovereignty of the League (and not the individual mandatory power) over the mandated territories and by defending the rights of all League states to equal access to their markets.[49] If for its own instrumental reasons, Germany thus acted as the most staunchly internationalist member of the Council during its brief period of League membership.

The German position on Iraq flowed from this analysis. That position was worked out by Fritz Grobba, the talented Arabist, former consul in Kabul, and later ambassador to Baghdad during the Nazi era, who headed the Foreign Ministry's Middle

[48] PMC, "General Conditions that must be fulfilled" (1931), 229.

[49] German policy began to be worked out through correspondence with former governor of German Togo Edmund Brückner and former governor of German South-West Africa (and now president of the principal colonial lobby, the Kolonial Reichsgesellschaft) Theodor Seitz even before Germany's entry into the League. For Brückner's interventions and the emphasis on economic rebuilding, see Dirk van Laak, *Imperiale Infrastruktur: Deutsche Planungen für eine Erschließung Afrikas 1880 bis 1960* (Paderborn, 2004), especially 204–205; for Seitz's important views, see AA, R29433, memos of May 16, 1925, and May 23, 1925; for a cogent later statement of German policy, see AA, R76851, De Haas, Abschrift, III.K.1, 1661/28 (March 22, 1928).

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East and South Asia Section in the late 1920s. Grobba followed debates over Iraq within the PMC and the Council closely and developed a sophisticated understanding of just what the British were doing. In a series of memos written between 1928 and 1932, he analyzed British policy and outlined Germany's response. Britain, he wrote, wished to retain its military and economic advantages in Iraq, but at a low cost, with Arab collaboration, and free from international oversight. As a power without an empire, Germany, too, had every interest in moving the Middle East mandates rapidly to independence; unlike Britain, however, it wished to maximize Iraq's (and thus its own) room to maneuver. Thus, while Britain would make independence conditional on special military rights, and other imperial powers would likely demand economic concessions, Germany should not acquiesce: having had its own economic sovereignty constrained by the Versailles Treaty, "we must reject the imposition of such economic restrictions on another land on moral grounds."[50] Yet if morally right, this policy was also reassuringly pragmatic, for it would win the new state's friendship, on which basis Germany could build strong economic ties.[51] Against the backdrop of grumbling on the PMC and anxiety among the great powers, German state secretary Carl von Schubert therefore declared in the League Council in January 1930—immediately after the British declaration—that Germany supported Iraqi independence free from harassing conditions. Von Schubert's statement, Grobba noted, had made a great impression in Iraq.[52]

Ludwig Kastl, the experienced economic negotiator and lobbyist whom German foreign minister Gustav Stresemann had succeeded in placing on the PMC in 1927, kept in close touch with Grobba and faithfully represented the Foreign Ministry's views. That is, he welcomed the prospect of Iraqi independence while raising questions about British companies' monopoly over oil concessions and about the degree of military and political control that Britain proposed to exercise over the new state.[53] "I hold the view," he wrote to the director of the Mandates Section, Vito Catastini, as early as December of 1928, "that the A-mandates should become independent as soon as possible," but clarified that such independence "cannot consist in the mandatory relationship being abandoned in favour of a single power, with which the former mandated territory enters into a new and indeed uncontrollable relation of dependence."[54] Admittedly, British policy over the next few years did much to justify Kastl's fears. Britain did recognize Iraqi sovereignty in the Anglo-Iraq Treaty of 1930, but at a considerable price—including the right to move troops over Iraqi soil, the continued presence of the RAF, British ownership of two airbases, the right to train and supply the Iraqi army, the continued employment of some British judges,

[50] AA, R96537, Grobba, "Zu Punkt I der Tagesordnung der 58 Tagung des Völkerbundesrates" (December 23, 1929).

[51] AA, R96543, Grobba, "Zu Punkt 2 der Tagesordnung der 62. Tagung des Völkerbundsrates" (December 23, 1930).

[52] AA, R96540, Grobba, "XI Bundesversammlung. Punkt 2 Ziffer 8 II Mandats" (August 23, 1930).

[53] Kastl objected to the Anglo-Persian oil concession as early as 1927 (see LNA, R59, 1/62947/17502, CPM 674, "Anglo-Persian Oil Concession. Report by M. Kastl" [November 7, 1927]) and kept a vigilant eye out for any monopolistic practices in the mandated territories that might limit Germany's access to their markets.

[54] AA, R96535, Kastl to Catastini, December 8, 1928, enclosed in Grobba, "Zu Punkt 2 der Tagesordnung der 54. Tagung des Völkerbundsrates. Mandate. Irak" (February 28, 1929); copy in LNA, S 284 1 (4), "Kastl."

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and a phased diminution of other British staff.[55] In 1931, moreover, the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) successfully negotiated a twenty-five-year extension of its exclusive rights over oil exploration in the north, as well as a contract to build a pipeline.

Over three sessions in 1930 and 1931, the PMC raked over the Anglo-Iraq Treaty and the IPC concession in painstaking if inconclusive detail. Soon the German argument that Britain was effectively constructing a "protectorate in disguise" came to be echoed by other members, especially the Spaniard Palacios, who was committed on principle to the ideal of self-determination, and the Swiss Rappard, who was prone to follow up every critical argument. The question, Palacios told one British official, was whether a new and genuinely international institution—the mandates system, under supervision of the League—was being done away with in favor of a bilateral system of protection, outside international control, by the former mandatory power.[56] And yet the PMC found it impossible to condemn the British plan outright, not only because those who most objected to continued British control (Palacios and Kastl) genuinely supported Iraqi independence and were therefore unwilling (unlike Rappard or Orts) to say that Iraq was not ready for emancipation anyway. The problem was also that the German argument was appropriated by a state with different interests and goals—that is, Italy.

The Colonial Office became seriously concerned about the possibility of Italian obstruction in the summer of 1931, when the Italian ambassador informed Foreign Secretary Arthur Henderson that his government felt the question of Iraq's readiness for self-government should be turned over to a League commission, "as representative of all the allied Powers who share an equal right of Sovereignty on the territories under Mandate."[57] But the Italians had no interests in Iraq, the Colonial Office insisted. What on earth were they after? In late July, Humphrys met the ambassador and got an answer: the Italian government indeed did not care about the principle but wanted to set a price on their consent—ideally, a share of Iraqi oil.[58] "It is unpleasant to have to submit to blackmail," Hall at the Colonial Office minuted, but the British Oil Development Company (BOD)—an undercapitalized multinational venture with a significant Italian stake whose protests against the IPC's monopoly had (despite German and even Iraqi support) hitherto been unavailing—should probably be given a concession.[59] Faisal clearly thought so as well, and by

[55] *Treaty of Alliance between the United Kingdom and ʿIraq*, *PP* 1929–1930, Cmd. 3627.

[56] PMC, *Minutes*, 19th sess., November 4–19, 1930, 87.

[57] TNA, CO 730/164/5, Bordonaro to Henderson, July 6, 1931.

[58] TNA, CO 730/164/5, Hall minute, July 30, 1931.

[59] TNA, CO 730/169/7, Hall minute, September 9, 1931. Both Kastl and Ruppel supported the BOD's petition to the League against the IPC's monopoly, although the British successfully claimed that the matter fell outside the PMC's jurisdiction. See PMC, *Minutes*, 16th sess., November 6–26, 1929, 42; PMC, *Minutes*, 19th sess., November 4–19, 1930, 181–184; and TNA, CO 730/168/12. The Iraqi government, feeling that the IPC was too slow to drill new wells, supported the BOD's efforts behind the scenes; indeed, Grobba claimed in his memoir that on a visit to Germany in 1930, Faisal himself solicited German support. See Fritz Grobba, "Deutsche Erdölinteressen in Arabien," in Grobba, *Männer und Mächte im Orient: 25 Jahre diplomatischer Tätigkeit im Orient* (Göttingen, 1967), 85–94. The complex diplomacy around Iraqi oil cannot be discussed here, but see Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 135–140; and for the BOD and German attempts to support its claims, see Helmut Mejcher, *Die Politik und das Öl im Nahen Osten*, 2 vols., vol. 1: *Der Kampf der Mächte und Konzerne vor dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart, 1980), 37–42; and Mejcher, "The International Petroleum Cartel (1928), Arab and Turkish Oil Aspirations and German Oil Policy towards the Middle East on the Eve of the Second World War," in Klaus

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January 1932, negotiations were under way in Baghdad for a concession to the BOD, which was granted in May.[60]

Italy was also concerned that the Iraq proposals not be seen as a precedent, Foreign Minister Dino Grandi added, for while Italy did not object to Britain's plan "to transform a mandate into a protectorate" (as he bluntly put it), it would not accept a similar French proposal for Syria.[61] The mandates system, Grandi told the League Council in September 1931, had not been devised to create "a system of permanent and special relations between the mandatory Power and the territory under mandate"; to the contrary, the clauses prohibiting fortifications and requiring an economic "open door" had been written expressly to prevent such an outcome.[62] Largely to deter the French from following the British lead, Grandi then ordered Theodoli to cause as much trouble as possible for Britain at the November 1931 PMC session. His position, Theodoli did not mind telling High Commissioner Humphrys privately, would "be greatly eased" if the British could find some argument that would justify their treaty with Iraq but "could not be used to defend a similar Treaty between France and Syria." This took a little ingenuity, but Humphrys obliged.[63]

Germany and Italy thus objected to Britain's bid to preserve its military and economic hegemony in Iraq after independence, but for different reasons and toward different ends. Both states' arguments were based on a strict calculation of their own national interest, but while the Germans intervened to limit British constraints on Iraq's resources and sovereignty, the Italians did so to force Britain to share the spoils. One might say that the two states were articulating, if only partially and in embryonic form, two different international visions—the Germans of a world of formally equal sovereign states regulated largely through market competition, the Italians of a world in which the great powers (among whom Italy liked to count itself) would negotiate their spheres of influence and extract privileges from the more vulnerable. Germany, unsurprisingly, recognized the use to which its arguments were being put and carefully sought to differentiate its position from Italy's. Although Kastl's successor on the PMC, Julius Ruppel, joined Theodoli, Rappard, and Orts in criticizing the IPC's grip on Iraqi oil, he did not support the proposal, dear to the Italians, that Iraq grant all League states most-favored-nation status for twenty-five years.[64] Likewise, German foreign minister Julius Curtius declined to make common

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Jürgen Gantzel and Helmut Mejcher, eds., *Oil, the Middle East, North Africa and the Industrial States* (Paderborn, 1984), 29–59.

[60] Foreign Office, Eastern Department, "Iraq: Proposed Release from Mandatory Regime: Memorandum for British Representative on the Council of the League" (January 21, 1932), in *British Documents on Foreign Affairs* [hereafter *BDFA*], pt. II: From the First to the Second World War, ser. B: Turkey, Iran, and the Middle East, 1918–1939, vol. 7: *Eastern Affairs, June 1930–June 1932*, 376–377. By 1935 the Italians were the majority shareholders in the BOD, but the company proved unable to meet its schedule of royalty payments to the Iraqi government, and by 1938 all oil concessions were back in IPC hands. For this, see Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 140.

[61] TNA, CO 730/169/7, "Record of interview between Lord Cecil and Signor Grandi," September 2, 1931.

[62] The Italian statement was agreed with the French and British beforehand in order to prevent public disagreements but was still quite hard-hitting. See Minutes of the Council, 64th sess., September 4, 1931, in *OJ*, November 1931, 2049.

[63] TNA, CO 730/1704, memo by Hall, November 10, 1931.

[64] Grobba's analysis of Germany's interest in opposing attempts to force Iraq to grant most-favored-

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cause with Grandi at that September 1931 Council meeting, stating that Iraq's independence should not be hampered by excessive conditions.[65]

By the PMC's November 1931 session, all the cards were on the table. The majority of its members, the Colonial Office knew, remained highly skeptical of Iraq's readiness for independence, and the few that favored it were far from certain that it was on offer anyway. Even Palacios, who thought it normal and desirable for mandated territories to move toward statehood, worried that the Anglo-Iraq Treaty might be a "step backwards" from the mandate, which at least placed Britain under international scrutiny.[66] Yet partly because members could not decide whether Iraq's continued tie to Britain was a scandal or a safeguard, partly because the Council was so interested in this question, and especially because they were absorbed by the problem of Iraq's minorities, the PMC moved off center stage. To the relief of the British Foreign and Colonial offices, the Commission would be asked to report merely on whether Iraq had met the conditions it had outlined in June, and not to conduct the negotiations over any special guarantees. This task would fall to the Council, an unsentimental body that British officials could influence. True, they would probably face problems from the Italians, but thought they need go no further to meet them.[67] They had, after all, and to their surprise, French support.

Nothing is more revealing of the nature of the independence granted Iraq in 1932 than the role played by France. The Colonial Office had expected that the French would cause the most trouble, given that France had expelled Faisal from Syria and remained very sensitive about Hashemite influence there.[68] The Colonial Office was thus quick to attribute the PMC's early obstinacy to malign French influences and feared that the French member, Merlin, would "hold out for all sorts of guarantees and undertakings."[69] But in Geneva, France proved to be the dog that did not bark. Indeed, as the Quai d'Orsay reflected on the expense, unpopularity, and international censure generated by French behavior in Syria, Britain's Iraq policy—that of creating a cheap client state outside the realm of international scrutiny—looked increasingly attractive. Journalists and statesmen in Geneva who had expected to hear France's Middle East expert Robert de Caix condemn Britain's policy thus found him surprisingly mild, and in June 1931 he announced to the PMC that France also planned to negotiate a treaty with Syria and then end the mandate.[70] "This is," J. E. Hall of the Colonial Office commented, for once speaking the whole truth, "the most striking compliment yet paid to our Iraq policy."[71]

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nation status to League states is in AA, R96543, Grobba, "Zu Punkt 2 der Tagesordnung der 62. Tagung des Völkerbundrates" (December 23, 1930).

[65] Minutes of the Council, 64th sess., September 4, 1931, in *OJ*, November 1931, 2052.

[66] PMC, *Minutes*, 21st sess., October 26–November 13, 1931, 77–78.

[67] TNA, CO 730/169/8, "Notes of a meeting held in Mr. Rendel's room on Dec. 14th at 8:30 pm to consider the Permanent Mandates Commission's report to the Council on the release of Iraq from the Mandatory Regime"; and more generally, Foreign Office, "Iraq: Proposed Release from Mandatory Regime," in *BDFA*, pt. II, ser. B, vol. 7, 372–384.

[68] For those rivalries, see Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914* (Berkeley, Calif., 2008).

[69] TNA, CO 730/152/7, note by Shuckburgh, November 25, 1930, and memo by Clauson, November 19, 1930.

[70] PMC, *Minutes*, 20th sess., June 9–27, 1931, 33–38.

[71] TNA, CO 730/166/7, note by Hall, September 1, 1931.

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If a first set of debates sparked by the Iraq proposals concerned the relationship between the new state and the international order into which it would be born, a second set dealt with its relationship to its own population. Wilsonian rhetoric saw that relationship as unproblematic. The state was, in an almost Hegelian way, the emanation of the "nation," the embodiment of a self-determining people united for freedom. But who, in the ex–Ottoman Middle East, made up that "people"? For those who had participated in the prewar Arab awakening or joined the wartime Arab revolt, that people was the Arab people, and the imagined state was a pan-Arab polity. Britain and France put paid to this vision, crafting, through the agency of the mandates system, a set of discrete "states"—Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Transjordan, Iraq—under their influence. Yet the creation of those states only made the problem of the nation more acute. For how could such states, carved out of largely Arab and Muslim provinces but marked by sectarian divisions and with minority populations of other faiths, become a united and self-determining nation? Decentralization, federalism, even cosmopolitanism—the tools with which empires often manage sectarian or ethnic differences—were discredited, but the national ideologies and institutions that might surmount them were only in formation.

The invention of Iraq posed these problems in an extreme form. Of the 3 million inhabitants of the former Ottoman provinces of Basra, Mosul, and Baghdad at the beginning of the mandate period, about half were Shiʿi Arabs. Sunni Arabs and Kurds (mostly in the north) each constituted about a further fifth, with significant groups of Jews, Christians, Turks, and Yezidis making up the rest.[72] Many of these groups had national dreams: the Shiʿi clerics and tribesmen who had been the backbone of the 1920 rising hoped to bring about an independent and devoutly Islamic Iraq; Kurds were striving for the autonomous Kurdistan envisaged in the abortive Treaty of Sèvres. British guns and the emergence of the Turkish Republic shattered those visions, their defeat making the marriage of convenience that was the Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq under British mandate possible. But if Faisal's rule rested on British support and the collaboration of much the same Sunni and urban elite that had been the backbone of the Ottoman state as well, he was aware of the tenuous nature of his legitimacy. His governments thus sought to disguise the extent of their dependence on the British, to build up an army and bureaucracy capable of uniting (and dominating) this disparate population, and to cultivate the loyalty of largely Shiʿi rural sheikhs by strengthening their near-feudal hold on their impoverished tenant-cultivators.[73]

Such strategies—along with the summary exile of key Shiʿi clerics in the early 1920s—to a degree neutralized Shiʿi resistance, and in the cities especially a fragile nationalist and cosmopolitan culture emerged.[74] Yet ethnic antagonisms still festered: indeed, Iraq's status as a League of Nations mandate made those divisions more intractable. For not only had Wilsonian rhetoric legitimized the assumption that ethnicities and nations should normally coincide, but the League also estab-

[72] Population figures are from Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 31.

[73] For that strategy of domination, see especially Pierre-Jean Luizard, "Le mandat britannique en Irak: Une rencontre entre plusieurs projets politiques," in Méouchy and Sluglett, *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspectives*, 361–384.

[74] For a sensitive account of the emergence of fragile but pluralistic institutions in Hashemite Iraq, see Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq* (Stanford, Calif., 2009).

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lished new processes and institutions—plebiscites and boundary commissions, minorities treaties and petition processes—through which such putative "nations" learned to state their claims and test their powers. The right of inhabitants of mandatory territories to petition the League was one such process and in mandatory Iraq played an unusual and particularly significant role. That right was itself controversial, for mandatory powers feared that petitions would be used to foment unrest and undermine their authority; thus, while petitions were (on the insistence of the League Assembly) allowed, they were "receivable" only if they met strict conditions, and were to address only possible violations of the mandate and not the legitimacy of the mandate itself. Emergent national movements (notably in Palestine, Syria, and Western Samoa) nonetheless tried to use petitions to protest mandatory status and call for self-determination, but such petitions were usually dismissed by the PMC as in conflict with the very system they were charged to uphold.[75] In Iraq, by contrast, since an Arab national government was already in place, petitions could become a vehicle for separatist claims by those ethnic and religious minorities who feared that government and sought to challenge its authority.[76] Since those petitions did not question the mandate, the PMC took them very seriously, and their impact was further heightened by the fact that the Iraqi government, having no standing in Geneva (yet), could not directly answer petitioners' charges. Only the mandatory power could do so; only Britain could persuade the League of minorities' safety in a unitary Iraqi state.

They faced an uphill battle, for when the provisions of the Anglo-Iraq Treaty of 1930 became public, the PMC found itself confronted by an avalanche of petitions from Iraq's Kurds and Assyrians. Both groups had good reason to feel betrayed.

[75] A right of petition for territories under mandate was not envisaged in Article 22 of the Covenant, but rather was crafted, with the support of the first British PMC member, William Ormsby-Gore, to respond to pressures from the Assembly and to deal with the flood of appeals and claims making their way to Geneva. In order to calm mandatory powers' fears that petitioning would incite unrest and diminish their authority, strict rules governed petitioning: to be "receivable," the petition could not stem from an anonymous source, could not call the terms of the mandate itself into question, could not ask for redress for a grievance justiciable through domestic courts, and—most importantly—if sent by a petitioner resident in the mandated territory itself, had to be sent to the League through the agency of the mandatory power, which had the right to append its comments on the petition before forwarding it to the PMC. The PMC examined the petition and comment, usually together with the representative of the mandatory power during its regular session, and then issued a report to the Council either recommending some action or (more usually) explaining why no action need be taken. Petitions rarely brought the plaintiff redress, yet—precisely as the mandatory powers had feared—they did offer aggrieved individuals and groups both training in international advocacy and a mechanism for publicizing their complaints. Petitioning under the mandates system is a subject ripe for study. Although some attention has been paid to its role in particular territories and conflicts, the only comprehensive account of the system as a whole is to be found in Van Ginneken, "Volkenbondsvoogdij." Callahan's *Mandates and Empire* provides a good account of debates within the League and within the French and British Foreign Offices over the establishment and workings of the system.

[76] Under the treaties agreed after the war, most East European and Balkan states pledged to guarantee minority populations specific linguistic and cultural rights; the League oversaw and acted as guarantor for those treaties. That minority rights regime also included a right of petition; because Iraq was a mandated territory, however, and not an independent state, petitions from its minorities were necessarily dealt with by the PMC, and not (as under the minorities regime) by a Council Committee-of-Three assisted by the League's Minorities Section. Upon independence, Iraq was brought under that minorities regime. For an early account of that minorities system and of Iraq's incorporation, see Macartney, *National States and National Minorities*; for the system's development and later breakdown in the 1930s, see Carole Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others: The Great Powers, the Jews, and International Minority Protection, 1878–1938* (New York, 2004).

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Given the Mosul Commission's recommendations, many Kurds had assumed they would be allowed to govern themselves following Iraq's emancipation; when they discovered that the Anglo-Iraq Treaty contained no such provisions, they immediately asked the League to ensure their autonomy.[77] British comments on those petitions were scathing. Rather overlooking their own earlier plans for an autonomous Kurdistan, British officials now dismissed the Kurds as "essentially tribal," "illiterate and untutored," and "entirely lacking in those characteristics of political cohesion which are essential to successful self-government." They nevertheless prudently pressed the Iraqi government to pass a law (first proposed in 1926) to protect Kurdish linguistic rights; once that had been done, Britain assured the PMC, the Kurds would have "no legitimate cause for complaint."[78] But Rappard, reviewing the petitions for the PMC, was not so sure, and even Humphrys privately admitted that Prime Minister Nuri al-Saʿid was stonewalling.[79] The Iraqi government had already decided that Kurdish autonomy might mean no more than requiring that local administrators have a knowledge of Kurdish; now it proposed to exempt key posts from even that obligation. A discomfited Humphrys told the Colonial Office that he would prefer not to give further assurances to the League until he was convinced that the Iraqi government honestly planned to implement the legislation.[80]

That day never came. The Iraqi government was trying to create a centralized state, not a federation of ethnic republics, and saw in British solicitude for the Kurds the specter of the old Sèvres policy of creating an autonomous Kurdistan. Persia and Turkey also found that prospect unacceptable, and in February 1931, Nuri privately assured Turkey that independent Iraq would never tolerate Kurdish separatism.[81] Humphrys and the Colonial Office thought this reckless and insubordinate, and warned Nuri that if news of his action got out, Iraq's Kurdish policy would be regarded as merely "a façade to impress foreign countries" and its prospects of admission to the League would be "wholly destroyed."[82] But while it was certainly true that Iraq's "Kurdish policy" was a façade, Britain's chastisement was (as Nuri surely realized) bluff. Throughout 1931, although the government's languages law was whittled down further and risings in the Kurdish areas were suppressed by the Iraqi army and the RAF, Humphrys and the Colonial Office steadfastly assured the PMC that Kurdish complaints of intimidation were exaggerated or fabricated. Rappard, trying to make sense of this "jungle of assertions, denials, and explanations" when reporting on the second batch of petitions in mid-1931, became deeply frustrated: "Never have

[77] LNA, R2316, 6A/22413/655, jacket 1, containing petitions of July 27, 1930, and August 5, 1930. Acting High Commissioner H. W. Young told the PMC that he found a widespread belief among the Kurds that the League Council would provide for an independent Kurdish state upon Iraqi independence, although he had done his best to discourage such ideas. See PMC, *Minutes*, 19th sess., November 4–19, 1930, 78–80.

[78] LNA, R2316, 6A/22413/655, jacket 1, "Observations, dated October 29th 1930, of the Mandatory Power"; see also Minutes of the Council, 62nd sess., January 22, 1931, in *OJ*, February 1931, 185.

[79] LNA, R2316, 6A/22413/655, jacket 1, CPM 1081, report by Rappard (November 13, 1930).

[80] TNA, CO 730/16/2, Humphrys to Passfield, February 10, 1931, and February 13, 1931; also K. Cornwallis, British Adviser, to the Minister of the Interior, February 4, 1931.

[81] For Turkish, Iraqi, and Persian collusion over the need to resist demands for Kurdish autonomy, see TNA, CO 730/161/4, Humphrys to Passfield, February 18, 1931; and TNA, CO 730/161/1, Nuri to Humphrys, February 25, 1931.

[82] TNA, CO 730/161/4, Passfield to Humphrys, March 3, 1931. Humphrys, however, had a good understanding of the symbiotic relationship between Kurdish unrest and Iraqi government repression. See TNA, CO 730/161/1, Humphrys to Williams, Editor of *The Near East*, March 28, 1931, private.

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I felt more keenly the weakness of the Mandates Commission's procedure in the matter of petitions." Barred from conducting their own investigation, the PMC could only note that Kurdish fears, even if groundless, were deeply felt, and urge the Council to establish meaningful protections at the moment of emancipation.[83]

Moreover, if the Commission members were, by 1931, deeply uneasy about the situation of the Kurds, they could hardly contain their worry about the Assyrians. Nor was this anxiety misplaced, for Iraq's tens of thousands of Assyrians were uniquely vulnerable.[84] They were, to begin with, Christian, with a young English-speaking patriarch—the Mar Shimun—who had been educated under the protection of the Archbishop of Canterbury. They were, second, Britain's wartime allies, having risen against the Ottomans at Russian instigation and having suffered terribly for their rebellion. Third, many were refugees and thus newcomers to Iraq, unable to return to their historic home in the Hakkiari Mountains (now in the Turkish Republic), but reluctant to identify themselves as Iraqis and on poor terms with the Muslim population among which they were dispersed. But the fact that caused particular heart-burning among the Commission was that they not only were seen to be, but actually were, the shock troops of the British occupation. Excellent soldiers, culturally and ethnically distinct, many had been recruited into the "Assyrian levies," special battalions under exclusively British command that had been used to guard airfields, defend Iraq's borders, and—ominously—put down rebellions among the Kurds.

Like so many imperial collaborators beloved by the commanders they served, the Assyrians found it hard to believe that the British would abandon them. When they too discovered that the 1930 treaty did not mention them, however, they too petitioned the League, first through one Arthur Rassam, a former British officer of Assyrian descent who organized a noisy public campaign in their support, and later through their patriarch.[85] They asked to be recognized as a distinct community and—again as the Mosul Commission had recommended—to be settled together somewhere in northern Iraq. Once again, it was left to the British to assure the PMC that these demands were impossible, and that if the Assyrians were told so firmly, they would surely calm down. Orts, reporting to the PMC on the petitions, thus gave no support to the demand for political autonomy, although he underscored—as Rappard had done with the Kurdish petitions—the need for minority protections after the mandate's end.[86] Yet, however discouraging the news from Geneva, the Assyrians—like the Kurds—manifestly declined to settle down. In October 1931, a representative meeting of Assyrians in Mosul concluded that they could no longer live in Iraq and asked that a new home be found for them; the following summer, most

[83] LNA, R2316, 6A/22413/655, CPM 1198, Rappard, "Report on the various petitions emanating from Kurdish sources" (June 22, 1931). David McDowall characterizes Britain's retreat from promises of Kurdish autonomy and its delivery of the Kurds into the hands of a unitary Iraqi state straightforwardly as a betrayal; see McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London, 1996), chap. 8.

[84] Silverfarb, *Britain's Informal Empire in the Middle East*, 45, gives the size of the Assyrian population in 1933 as 28,000, a low estimate.

[85] The very extensive petitions from Rassam, and later from the Mar Shimun, are to be found in LNA, R2317 and R2318, 6A/22528/655.

[86] LNA, R2317, 6A/22528/655, jacket 4, CPM 1208, "Petitions dated September 23rd 1930 and December 9, 1930 from Captain Rassam . . . Report by M. Orts" (June 26, 1931).

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Assyrian soldiers resigned from the levies en masse.[87] The mandate ended with a backlog of Assyrian petitions still awaiting consideration.

Nothing so perturbed the PMC as the situation of Iraq's beleaguered minorities. On this issue, official solidarity crumbled as well, with former Conservative air minister Sir Samuel Hoare and former Iraq commissioners Arnold Wilson and Henry Dobbs breaking ranks to remind the government of Britain's historic obligations to the Assyrians and the Kurds.[88] The liberal leadership of the League of Nations Union, although reluctant to criticize publicly a Labour government deeply committed to the League, also began writing jittery private letters to the Foreign Office and their contacts in Geneva.[89] But what, exactly, was to be done? One obvious solution—that the Assyrians be offered asylum in the land they had faithfully served (that is, Britain)—was never proposed, nor was a federal solution to meet Kurdish demands seriously discussed. Iraq was, after all, a state born under the sign of national self-determination, and both Sunni and Shiʿi elites could agree that that nation was essentially an Arab and Muslim one; Iraqi ministers were also convinced that administrative decentralization could easily, as Jaʿfar al-ʿAskari put it, "undermine the foundations on which a settled government have gradually been built."[90] British officials shared those fears of internal disorder, and although some admitted privately that they were worried about the minorities' likely fate and disliked the government's policy of "arabicization," they acquiesced. Indeed, having secured Britain's strategic interests through the Anglo-Iraq Treaty, ministers and officials showed themselves to be extraordinarily sensitive to any (further) infringement of Iraqi sovereignty, not only insisting that (as Foreign Secretary Arthur Henderson wrote Gilbert Murray of the League of Nations Union) Britain could not have included minority protections in that treaty, since to do so would have implied "a continuing right on our part to interfere with the administrative measures of the Iraq Government," but also exerting considerable pressure in Geneva to ensure that no international guarantees were asked of the Iraqis beyond those previously required of other states.[91]

Humphrys especially proved crucial to this effort. In his discussions with the Commission in June 1931, he dismissed the Mar Shimun as "an impressionable youth" and Rassam as little more than an adventurer, insisted that "he had never found such tolerance of other races and religions as in Iraq," stressed the importance

[87] LNA, R2318, 6A/22528/655, jacket 6, Mar Shimun to the League of Nations, October 23, 1931, and June 17, 1932.

[88] See especially Hoare's initiation of two Commons debates over Iraq policy and protection of minorities in *House of Commons Debates* [*HC Deb.*], vol. 242, July 31, 1930, cols. 800–817, and vol. 255, July 23, 1931, cols. 1784–1834; Dobbs letter to *The Times*, July 10, 1931; A. T. Wilson, "Peace in Iraq," *The Times*, May 22, 1931. These British critics worried particularly that the RAF squadrons left in Iraq after independence would be used to repress minorities (although they refrained from pointing out that this had also been the case under the mandate). Rappard expressed the same concern on the PMC; see *Minutes*, 20th sess., June 9–27, 1931, 130. Wilson, never convinced of Iraq's capacity for self-government, also tried to persuade the PMC (especially Lugard) to take a strong stand against independence, for which see the correspondence from October 1931 in Rhodes House (Oxford), Lugard Papers, 127/3.

[89] For which see LNA, Box S284, file 2, Gilbert Murray to Arthur Henderson, January 14, 1931, and "Confidential report of an interview by De Haller with Mr. Epstein of the League of Nations Union," February 6, 1931.

[90] LNA, Box R2316, 6A/22413/655, Jaʿfar al-ʿAskari to Major H. W. Young, August 19, 1930, appended to the observations of the Mandatory Power on Kurdish petitions, October 29, 1930.

[91] LNA, Box S264, file 2, Henderson to Murray, January 21, 1931.

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of making sure that all Iraq's inhabitants considered themselves normal citizens—and, when all else failed, shouldered the fate of Iraq's minorities himself.[92] "His Majesty's Government," he declared, "fully realized its responsibility in recommending that Iraq should be admitted to the League . . . Should Iraq prove herself unworthy of the confidence which had been placed in her, the moral responsibility must rest with His Majesty's Government."[93] Nothing so impressed and silenced the Mandates Commission as this declaration. Even Rappard and Orts professed themselves to be "completely satisfied"; if Britain assumed responsibility, Theodoli added, "there was very little left for the Mandates Commission to ask."[94] The Colonial Office was itself taken aback at the stress placed on Humphrys's words and concluded rather cruelly that "the Commission in their desire to avoid responsibility would clutch at almost any straw."[95] Although further petitions kept the minorities question to the fore during the PMC's November 1931 session, Humphrys and the Colonial Office successfully held out against a proposal to place a League commissioner responsible for minority protections in Iraq, agreeing only that Iraq might come under the League's existing minorities protection regime.[96] Obligations already submitted to by Poland, Albania, and other European states, it was thought, would not humiliate Iraq or derogate from its sovereignty.

The final stages of the Iraq drama, as played out in Geneva, were therefore surprisingly anodyne. At the end of its November 1931 session, the Commission gave Iraq what one official termed "a very grudging 'pass degree.' "[97] In an unconscious tribute to the Colonial Office's success in controlling information, the PMC's members stated not that Iraq had met all of the conditions for independence, but merely that they had "no information which would justify a contrary opinion" to Britain's claims. They specified that Iraq should promise to respect existing contracts, guarantee the rights of foreigners, and offer all League member states most-favored-nation status for a fixed period; unsurprisingly, however, they gave pride of place to the question of minorities, stipulating (as Humphrys had agreed) that Iraq make a declaration before the Council of its commitment to uphold minority rights and come under the League's minorities protection regime. Once again, they underscored Britain's "moral responsibility," stating that without Humphrys's declaration they would "have been unable to contemplate the termination of a regime which appeared some years ago to be necessary in the interests of all sections of the population."[98] The Colonial Office, pleased that it had successfully warded off the plan to place a League

[92] PMC, *Minutes*, 20th sess., June 9–27, 1931, 122. British representatives consistently tried to discredit Rassam; see, in addition to Humphrys's comments, Young's remarks in PMC, *Minutes*, 19th sess., November 4–19, 1930, 79; and TNA, CO 730/166/7, Hall minute, July 26, 1931. Rassam, stung, protested to the League, sending numerous letters about his character and good faith. See LNA, R2317, 6A/22528/655, jacket 4, Rassam to PMC Chairman, September 17, 1931, and jacket 5, Rassam to PMC Chairman, October 23, 1931.

[93] PMC, *Minutes*, 20th sess., June 9–27, 1931, 135.

[94] Ibid.

[95] For Hall's estimate of the importance of Humphrys's declaration, see TNA, CO 730/166/7, note by Hall, June 26, 1931; and TNA, CO 730/169/8, memo by Hall, November 28, 1931.

[96] TNA, CO 730/170/4, memo by Hall, November 10, 1931.

[97] TNA, CO 730/169/8, memo by Hall, November 28, 1931.

[98] PMC, *Minutes*, 21st sess., October 26–November 13, 1931, Annex 22, "Special Report of the Commission to the Council on the Proposal of the British Government with Regard to the Emancipation of Iraq," 222.

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commissioner on the ground, thought the PMC's report "as favourable as could have been hoped."[99]

The discussion in the Council in January 1932 also went much as expected. No Council member had much direct interest in Iraq's minorities, although most were concerned to protect the privileges of their own citizens and their access to Iraq's lucrative resources and contracts.[100] Nuri and Humphrys thus had little trouble persuading the Council committee appointed to draft the Iraqi guarantees to pare down the pledges to the Kurds (over the strenuous objections of the PMC's Orts), but utterly failed to prevent it from imposing on Iraq the obligation to grant most-favored-nation status to League members for ten years.[101] In exchange for economic concessions, in other words, Iraq was free to run its internal administration much as it liked. For all of the PMC's reservations, this form of "independence" won international approbation.

Crafted as it was to reconcile British imperial interests and the national ambitions of a group of Iraqi collaborators, formal independence in 1932 reinforced many characteristics of the mandatory state. Although Faisal died soon after independence, the Hashemite monarchy and the strategic alliance with Britain held. Humphrys, the last British high commissioner, stayed on as the first British ambassador; the ubiquitous Cornwallis remained as adviser until 1935 (returning as ambassador in 1941 to direct the British reoccupation of the country). Iraqi politicians of the mandate period (especially Nuri) also remained important, ensuring that government policies held to a familiar track. Much effort was put into building up the army, seen as a tool equally of social integration and domination, and if that work was carried on under British patronage, many Iraqis hoped that it would also make possible its eventual elimination—ambitions that Fritz Grobba, also in Baghdad from 1932 until 1939 as the German ambassador, did his best to cultivate. There was plenty of money for this project, for the IPC oil concession paid large royalties, enabling the government to secure its position by remitting taxes on key notables. Yet militarization and patrimonialism delivered neither legitimacy nor stability, and the regime remained factionalized and buffeted by coups. Jaʿfar al-ʿAskari and Nuri al-Saʿid would both die violently—Jaʿfar by assassination in 1936, and Nuri, many prime ministerial terms later, in the 1958 revolution that brought the Hashemite Kingdom down.

Repression of minority cultures and claims continued to play its part in that effort at state-building. The army and RAF were used to keep control in the Kurdish areas

99 TNA, CO 730/169/8, "Memorandum" (n.d. [December 1931]).

100 Minutes of the Council, 66th sess. (January 28, 1932), in *OJ*, March 1932, 471–479. The end of the Ottoman capitulations was made palatable through the introduction of a new judicial system with a statutory role for British judges. While the Council required Britain and Iraq to secure each state's consent to that regime, through this painstaking process the judicial immunities of foreigners in Iraq were finally abolished. For this work, see LNA, R2315, 6A/10243/655.

101 LNA, R2319, 6A/35197/655, jackets 1 and 2, containing the minutes of the committee appointed under the Council Resolution of January 28, 1932. The declaration on employment of Kurdish officials made "efficiency and knowledge of the language, rather than race" the qualification for appointment, and qualified the obligation to select officials from the population of the region with those fateful bureaucratic words "as far as possible."

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(as during the mandate period), but the Assyrian situation deteriorated immediately. Assyrian petitions were still before the League in 1932; when negotiations in Baghdad with the Mar Shimun broke down, the Iraqi government detained him. The crisis then escalated, with an armed group of Assyrian men leaving their villages for Syria and then returning to clash with Iraqi troops in the north. Local Kurds and Arabs took advantage of the situation to loot Assyrian homes and steal livestock and grain, but the real violence was unleashed by the army, especially in the town of Simmel, where an armored division hauled out and massacred hundreds of Assyrian men.[102] This was feted in Baghdad as a great victory over rebels possibly acting at Britain's behest, but League officials and PMC members could hardly contain their consternation. For the next decade, a League committee would search with limited success for a state willing to accept the remnants of the Assyrians.[103]

If formal independence and League entry marked a stage and not a break in Iraq's domestic history and the Anglo-Iraqi relationship alike, that moment nonetheless had global significance. Britain's campaign for Iraq's admission to the League of Nations aimed to win international legitimacy for a particular neo-imperial definition of independence, one that would help to reconcile its imperial interests with a global order composed of formally sovereign nation-states. That model had a long genealogy, drawing as it did on British practices in Egypt and a preference for monarchic alliances and indirect rule; it could be applied to Iraq, however, only if it gained formal international approbation. Britain's successful management of that international debate robbed "independence" of its terrors: *pace* the Mandates Commission, "independence" proved to be a matter less of the "de facto conditions" of the territory than of the interests and persuasive abilities of the withdrawing power. Indeed, such were the attractions of this model that in 1936 France would briefly seek to extend it to Syria, while in 1937 Egypt, too, would be declared "independent" and join the League. Client states would have little difficulty being accepted as sovereign members of the international order after 1945.

[102] Much has been written on the Assyrian tragedy of 1933. A good account is found in Silverfarb, *Britain's Informal Empire in the Middle East*, chap. 4. Fritz Grobba, then ambassador to Iraq and on confidential terms equally with the Mar Shimun and several Iraqi ministers, provides an eyewitness account of perceptions and politics in Baghdad during the crisis in "Die Assyrische Tragödie," in his *Männer und Mächte im Orient*, 75–85. Reports from Humphrys and other British officials in Iraq about their efforts to mediate the crisis and quiet the levies in the first half of 1933 are in *BDFA*, pt. II, ser. B, vol. 8: *Eastern Affairs, Dec. 1931–June 1933*, 368–410; reports of the August crisis, including administrative inspector R. S. Stafford's despatch from Simmel giving a full account of the massacre, continue in ibid., vol. 9: *Eastern Affairs, June 1933–May 1934*, 204–357, with Stafford's report at 223–224. Stafford later produced a comprehensive account, *The Tragedy of the Assyrians* (London, 1935). The Iraqi government produced a blue book on the run-up to the conflict that sought to shift responsibility from the Iraqi army to the French and the Assyrians themselves; this material is in LNA, R4064, telegrams from Nuri al-Saʿid, August 7, 1933, and August 22, 1933; and Government of Iraq, *Correspondence Relating to Assyrian Settlement from 13 July 1932 to 5 August 1933* (Baghdad, 1933). The Mar Shimun's desperate appeals in July and August are in LNA, S1633.

[103] At its 68th session on September 24, 1932, the Council appointed a committee to consider what action to take on the outstanding Assyrian petitions; the gripping records of that committee are in LNA, R2320, 6A/39025/655; and the discussions in the Council on December 5 and 15 about the plan are in *OJ*, December 1932, 1962–1966 and 1984–1985. For Lugard's guilt-ridden response to the massacres, and his efforts to aid their survivors, see Rhodes House (Oxford), Lugard Papers, 128/1; and Lugard, "Assyrians in Iraq," *The Times*, August 14, 1933. The records of the committee established by the Council to seek a new home for the Assyrians outside Iraq are, with much other material on the Assyrians, in LNA, S1630 and 1633.

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We can see this international order in formation in this history, but other visions can be detected as well, if only in a shadowy form. Shiʿi notions of some sort of Islamic polity were crushed by the British and repudiated by the Hashemites, but—as later history would show—retained much of their cultural power. The surprisingly prescient German vision of the world of sovereign states ordered as much through markets and trade as through military alliance was swept away by Hitler's crudely territorial conception of imperial power; after 1945, however, two defeated powers (Germany and Japan) would quickly rediscover this type of global influence. Yet there was another vision, too, most apparent during debates over the minorities question—a vision of a world in which national sovereignty was genuinely constrained by international norms. To the Permanent Mandates Commission fell the tricky task of reconciling those competing claims of self-determination and what we would now call human rights, but their interventions in the Iraq processes gave few grounds for optimism. Indeed, the experience left most of the Commission feeling distinctly sore about "self-determination"; in the future, mandatory powers would find them "suspicious and difficult" and with "a strong bias against the abandonment of mandatory control."[104] They could not forget the Assyrian massacres, and vowed that they would not entrust Syria's minorities to anything so ineffective as a "declaration."[105]

What undermined the Commission's authority, though, was its inability in the 1930s to present its humanitarian values as credibly universalist. Given the League's relative inaction over Abyssinia, the PMC's routine rejection of petitions when they came from (say) Syrian nationalists complaining of French behavior rather than Assyrians complaining of Arab behavior, Rappard and Orts's endorsement of strict repression of Arab aspirations in Palestine, and the fact that the European state most insistent on minority rights in the 1920s was now persecuting its own minorities, the Commission's desire to preserve European rule as a bulwark of human rights looked retrograde and racist, to say the least.[106] An emanation of the imperial order and in every way caught up in its logic, the mandates system could not escape those entanglements. And yet the international ideals it espoused, however imperfect and distorted by the imperatives of power, are still with us.

[104] NA, CO 733/326/6, Ormsby-Gore to Wauchope, August 24, 1937.
[105] LNA, R4137, 6A/24275/24275, note by De Haller, June 5, 1936.
[106] The role played by Germany in initially upholding, and then discrediting, the League's minorities protection regime is well explored in Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others*.

Susan Pedersen is Professor of History and James P. Shenton Professor of the Core Curriculum at Columbia University. She is the author of *Family, Dependence, and the Origins of the Welfare State: Britain and France, 1914–1945* (Cambridge University Press, 1993) and *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (Yale University Press, 2004), and editor, with Caroline Elkins, of *Settler Colonialism in the Twentieth Century* (Routledge, 2005). Her new history of the mandates system of the League of Nations will be published by Oxford University Press in 2012.

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