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The Communist Party of Iraq

Origins and Foundations

The introduction of Marxist thought in Iraq must be accredited to Ḥusain al-Raḥḥâl (1901–1981), who, though he never became a communist himself, was the first to introduce Marxist thought into intellectual circles in Baghdad. Al-Raḥḥâl was a high school student in Berlin in 1919 when the Spartacist uprising, an attempt by the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) to seize control of Berlin, took place; this event left a deep impression on him, and kindled his interest in socialism and Marxism.[1] Returning to Iraq a year later, and profoundly affected by the unstable conditions of the country, under British occupation, he gradually started to teach Marxist and socialist thought. However, in his last days he expressed deep disappointment:

> With the seeds I have sown and worked so hard to intellectually nurture . . . I wanted to create an intellectual environment where scientific socialism would be the base of inquiry to understand our backward conditions, but we ended up somewhere else. . . . The impoverishment of Marxist thought today [1973] is much more alarming because it is much more regressive than it was fifty years earlier.[2]

Iraq Before the First World War

The history of modern Iraq can be traced back to 1749 when the Ottoman Sultan appointed Sulimân Aghâ Abû-lailah, a Georgian Mamluk officer who was the governor of Basra (1749–1761), to the position of Wâlî (governor) of Baghdad. This appointment initiated the establishment of a semi-autonomous state in Iraq under Mamluk suzerainty. Although formally appointed by the Ottoman Sultan, a succession of Mamluks formed a dynasty that in effect ruled Iraq for the next eight decades. Even so, Mamluk control over Iraq was always incomplete because of overlapping jurisdictional rights in the

[1] For an overview of al-Raḥḥâl's life, see Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 389–404.
[2] Interview by author with Ḥusain al-Raḥḥâl, Baghdad (19 October 1973).

empire.[3] An Ottoman focus on potential Persian incursions into the territory forced Mamluk officials and the Sublime Porte[4] into grudging cooperation, so that despite their efforts, Mamluk rule over Iraq was "restricted to fluctuating success over an 80 year period . . . and the downfall of the Mamluk regime in 1831 meant the unwelcome restoration of alien rule in [the city of] Baghdad."[5] The city's population had grown from twenty thousand inhabitants in the seventeenth century to one hundred thousand by 1800, and had reached some hundred fifty thousand in 1831,[6] at the time Mamluk rule ended.

Dâûd Pasha, the last of the Mamluk rulers (1817–1831), instituted political and economic policies that successfully united what was to constitute modern Iraq. By steering the country even further away from Istanbul's control, he was also able to reduce the influence of C. J. Rich, the British resident in Baghdad, and of representatives of the British East India Company. In a move that gained him popular support, particularly among Iraq's merchants, Dâûd Pasha also forced the British to pay duties on all imported goods, taxes from which they had previously been exempt.

Dâûd Pasha modelled his rule on that of Muḥammad ʿAlî in Egypt. Like Muḥammad ʿAlî, he strove to create a modern centralized governmental infrastructure. He initiated governmental reforms, restored law and order, and created judicial and educational institutions. He also modernized the army, enlarging it to approximately one hundred thousand men; built factories; established a newspaper; and organized irrigation works.[7] As noted by the scholar Tom Nieuwenhuis, "The previous [Mamluk] period of local rule becomes significant, marking an era . . . for local progress . . . [in which] schools, baths, mosques, khans [inns] . . . and *suqs* (markets) [were built or expanded]."[8] One distinguished Iraqi economist, Muḥammad Salmân Ḥasan, considers Dâûd and his reign to be a first attempt at independent economic development – however embryonic – in the modern history of Iraq. In 1831, at the instigation of the British, the Ottoman army marched into Baghdad and arrested Dâûd Pasha. Dâûd was imprisoned for the rest of his life and the Mamluk elite was removed from power, thus ending Iraq's first experiment in autonomy.[9]

[3] Hala Fattah, *The Politics of Regional Trade in Iraq, Arabia and the Gulf: 1745–1900* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997); Thabit Abdullah, *A Short History of Iraq* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003); and Thabit Abdullah, *Merchants, Mamluks and Murder: The Political Economy of Commerce in Eighteenth Century Basra* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000).

[4] An administrative department directly related to Istanbul and not under the Mamluk Pasha.

[5] Tom Nieuwenhuis, *Politics and Society in Early Modern Iraq: Mamluk Pashas, Tribal Shayks and Local Rule Between 1802 and 1831* (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), p. 171.

[6] ʿAbd al-Aziz al-Duri, "Baghdad," *Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1960), p. 925.

[7] ʿUthmân Ibn Suʿûd al-Baṣrî al-Wâilî, *Khamsah wa Khamsûn ʿÂm min Târîkh al-ʿIrâq 1188–1242-Wa Mukhtaṣar Maṭâliʿ al-Suʿûd Biṭayyibî Akhbâr al-Wâlî Dâûd* (Cairo 1371H), p. 2; Zaki Saleh, *Mesopotamia (Iraq), 1600–1914* (Baghdad: al-Rabitah Press, 1957), p. 133; Sulaimân Fâʾiq, *Târîkh Baghdad*, trans. Mûsâ Kâdhim Nûras (Baghdad: al-Maʿârif Press, 1962), p. 61.

[8] Nieuwenhuis, *Politics and Society*, p. 173.

[9] Muḥammad Salmân Ḥasan, *Al-Taṭawwur al-Iqtiṣâdî fî al-ʿIrâq* (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-ʿAṣriyyah, 1965), pp. 30–33. See also Ḥalîm Aḥmad, *Mûjaz Târîkh al-ʿIrâq al-Ḥadîth* (Beirut:

The restoration of direct rule from Istanbul coincided with the "emergence of British influence in Iraq"; according to Nieuwenhuis, both the Turks and the British were largely responsible for the "retarded" development of Iraq.[10] Nevertheless, with its return to Ottoman control Iraq began to be feel the affects of the politics and enlightened reforms then taking place in Istanbul and which, in 1839, initiated the "Age of Tanzimat." In this environment, law, diplomacy, government administration, and education were all modernized, and secular ideas and democratic principles were introduced.

In 1868, Midḥat Pasha, a leading advocate of reform, became the first president of Council of State in Istanbul, one of the two most important institutions of the Tanzimat. The following year he was appointed Wâlî of Baghdad (1869–1872) and from this position put his reform ideas into practice. He centralized government rule, established law and order, surveyed the land, instituted land reforms that gave peasants some protection and reduced feudal control, reestablished modern education, and built factories, in essence reinstating the programme of Dâûd Pasha's government. He also established a newspaper, *Al-Zawrâ'*, importing a special press for the purpose; the paper survived him by half a century. Most government revenue was spent on public projects, and little was sent to the treasury in Istanbul. Partly as a result of his success in Iraq, court jealousies and intrigue led to Midḥat Pasha's recall three years later, though he soon took over the prime ministership of the empire. According to one Iraqi educator and literary figure, writing in 1930:

> As soon as Midḥat Pasha entered Baghdad . . . he began studying Iraqi conditions and its finances from the perspectives of security, administration, order, education, industry, agriculture, economics, and health, and [the creation of] a modern infrastructure. . . . he announced his intention of implementing his program, and soon worked to put this into action. Although he was gentle and respectful, he was serious about its implementation. In a few days, the signs of reform and prosperity began to appear [in the country] and the social conditions were on the verge of a dramatic transformation. People were happy, justice prevailed and rights were respected. Three years later, in 1873, in Government House, with a grim face, he declared, "This is what I promised you and God the day I met you in this place, and I would have fulfilled this but for the misfortune [of having to leave]. I bid you farewell, my dear Iraqi friends. . . . " With tearful eyes [his audience] responded.[11]

In 1876, Iraq entered a renewed constitutional experiment under the Ottoman Sultan ʿAbd-ul-Ḥamîd II, who was brought to power by the reformist Midḥat Pasha, now the Grand Vizier, and his liberal compatriots in Istanbul. The newly enthroned ʿAbd-ul-Ḥamîd II promulgated this constitutional experiment on 23 December 1876. However, it came to an abrupt end when ʿAbd-ul-Ḥamîd II reversed his views, sending Midḥat Pasha into exile in Mecca and

Dâr Ibn Khaldûn, n.d.), pp. 31–33. For an excellent history of the Mamluk period in Iraq, see ʿAbbâs al-ʿAzzâwî, *Târîkh al-ʿIrâq Baina Iḥtilâlain*, vol. 6 (Baghdad: Sharikat al-Tijârah wa al-Ṭibâʿah, 1954).

[10] Nieuwenhuis, *Politics and Society*, p. 171.

[11] Fahmî al-Mudarris, *Al-ʿÂlam al-ʿArabî*, no. 1965 (Baghdad, 9 August 1930).

initiating a period of despotic rule and corruption that ended with the revolution of the Young Turks in 1908. This powerful military Pan-Turkish nationalist clique, which led Turkey into World War I, practised a policy of Turkification that roused and angered many Ottoman Arabs, including the Iraqis, especially those making up the embryonic intelligentsia.

In their opposition to Turkification, Ottoman Arabs used secret societies and clandestine Arabic newspapers to advance the nationalist cause; as non-Turkish separatist movements in the empire (e.g., in Bosnia, Bulgaria, and Crete) became more vocal, they inspired Arab nationalists in Iraq and Syria. Arab officers in Istanbul, the most influential group in society to benefit from these developments and exposure to technical (often Western) training, assumed important roles within the growing underground movement. Iraqi officers, who were often the most prominent members of secret societies like *al-ʿAhd* that were formed among the Arab components of the Ottoman army, committed themselves to working for Arab independence. Similar in purpose to *al-ʿAhd* in Iraq, a branch of the Ottoman Decentralization Party – *al-ʿUṣbah al-Ḥamra* – was founded in Cairo for the purpose of winning equality and autonomy for the Arab provinces within the framework of the Ottoman Empire. Even though such efforts weakened the Ottoman Empire in the face of European encroachment, many Arabs regarded their demands for decentralization as necessary to protect their cultural and linguistic identity in the face of the reforms emanating from Istanbul. With the return of the constitution in 1908, and with branches of Arab nationalist societies beginning to appear, predominantly in Basra and Baghdad but also in Mosul and other Iraqi cities, the seeds of political and social awakening grew rapidly.

In addition, Arab newspapers and journals proliferated, with the number of dailies in Iraq rising from a single one between 1894 and 1904 to sixty-one between 1904 and 1914. Even though many existed only for a short period before Ottoman efforts to closed them, the flowering of a new intellectual expression took hold of the Arab population. Following the introduction of the modern printing press, Egyptian journals and newspapers became readily available to other Arabs and facilitated greater contact between the rising young intellectual class in Iraq and the rest of the Arab world. The increased availability of Arabic journals through the foreign postal services – bypassing Ottoman censorship – acted as a catalyst in the rapid development of socialist consciousness throughout Iraq. Journals such as *Al-Muqtaṭaf, Al-Hilâl, Al-Siyâsah*, and *Al-Muqaṭṭam* soon became part of the regular diet of discerning members of Iraq's emerging educated classes.[12]

Foreign Influences

In addition to Arabic journals, the publications of the Communist Party of Britain also began to circulate among a limited number of intellectuals in Iraq,

[12] For more detail, see Philip Willard Ireland, *Iraq: A Study in Political Development* (London: Jonathan Cope, 1937), pp. 222–236.

including al-Raḥḥâl, who translated them into Arabic and held discussions about them with his friends in Baghdad. At the same time, the French Communist Party newspaper, *L'Humanité*, available to those Iraqis who spoke French, was also translated into Arabic and made available to Raḥḥâl's circle. The development of socialist thought among Iraqis was further influenced by the progressive foreign socialists who worked with the British in Iraq. Among these was a Scotsman, Donald M. McKenzie, who opened McKenzie's Bookshop in Baghdad in 1925 and operated it until his death in 1946. McKenzie made a number of foreign books, especially those examining socialist ideas, available at cost to young Iraqi socialists, while selling them at a profit to the British and to wealthy Iraqis.[13] His wife also played an important role in spreading socialist ideas among women's groups and was credited with connecting these groups through the first Eastern Women's Congress, held in Damascus in July 1930.[14] In addition, between 1919 and 1926 an Australian named Riley, who worked as a teacher in the British Department of Education in Mosul before becoming the director of education, gave lectures on social conditions, informed by socialist notions, to students and the Iraqi elite. Returning to Australia in 1926, he took up journalism and ended up in China, where he was killed. Finally, McKenzie's wife and an American woman by the name of Miss Kerr lectured in girls' clubs and schools in Baghdad, where socialist notions were also advanced.[15]

Russians and Iraqis had limited contact until World War I, when, as part of the Ottoman armies, Iraqi soldiers and officers met their Russian adversaries on the Russian front. Interaction between civilian Iraqis and Russians following Russia's October 1917 revolution was also limited, but the opinion of Iraqis who did encounter the revolutionaries was favourable to the Bolsheviks. When the Ottoman armies were retreating in early 1917, the Russian forces occupying the northern and western parts of Ottoman Iraq treated the population humanely, and in this environment, some of the Russian soldiers who were politically inclined towards Bolshevist notions spread the seeds of those ideas, which the Iraqis began to propagate.

In addition, because Kurds and Arabs who became Russian prisoners of war (POWs) after the Russian revolution were treated well, they began to spread vague revolutionary notions on their return to Iraq. Some become known in Iraq as Bolsheviks. One such Baghdadi, known as Bolshevik Ṣâliḥ (1892–1973), adopted his nom de guerre and used it for the rest of his life. In a 1968 interview he remarked:

> My contact with the Bolsheviks was a humane one, and even when I was in captivity during the Tsarist period I could tell from the way our guards treated us who was a Bolshevik and who was not. As soon as the revolution took place I was freed, and

[13] See Muḥsin Dizaya, *ʾAḥdâth ʿÂṣartuhâ* (Erbil, Kurdistan: Aras, 2001), p. 164.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Interviews by author with Ḥusain al-Raḥḥâl and Zakî Khairî, Baghdad (18 January 1976).

became part of the comradeship, which is how I acquired my name – and I am proud of it. Although I have never been a communist, I thought the Bolsheviks were very caring, and thus, their ideology must also be of that nature.[16]

In Iraqi Kurdistan, returning Kurds were also dubbed Bolsheviks,[17] and in the religious centres of Shiʿism in Najaf and Karbala, the same appellation was applied simultaneously to many returnees. Some Shiʿi ʿUlama believed that the Bolsheviks were favourably inclined towards Islam, and soon after World War I, the Mosul branch of *al-ʿAhd* society, in a letter sent to the headquarters in Damascus, called for the formation of an Islamic-German and Bolshevik alliance to challenge the colonialist occupiers.[18]

When al-Raḥḥâl left Iraq around 1914, the country was one of the most remote and least developed provinces of the Ottoman Empire. According to Hanna Batatu, prior to the British military campaign during World War I "private property, in the sense of private appropriation of the means of production, was non-existent outside Iraq's towns and their immediate hinterland, and even in the towns had a precarious basis . . . exposed to recurring confiscation."[19] Some incipient economic classes existed in the towns, but only in a "rudimentary form and in parallel structures within the recognized religious communities," and nationwide social classes had yet to emerge.[20] Iraqi "society" still remained deeply divided along ethnic and sectarian lines, with Sunni Muslims in privileged positions and with very little interaction and few common interests among the various other segments of the population.

Around 75 per cent of Iraq's population was Arab, with Kurds, Persians, Turkomans, Armenians, and some smaller groups making up the remaining 25 per cent. The vast majority of the population were Muslim, divided between Shiʿi and Sunni. However, there were also some small Christian, Jewish, and Sabean minorities. Out of a total population of 2.25 million at the turn of the twentieth century, 59 per cent were rural peasants, 17 per cent were nomadic and seminomadic herders, and only 24 per cent were urban dwellers;[21] in total, only one per cent of the population was literate.[22]

Internal social stratification was based on a hierarchy of status that gave special privileges to the holders of religiously based positions, such as *sadah*, or descent from the Prophet, and to the leaders of the Ṣûfî orders, as well as to Sunni and Shiʿi ʿ*Ulama* (religious leaders) and to the *chalabis* (rich merchants) who were concentrated mainly in Baghdad, in addition to the small group of high Ottoman officials (mainly of non-Iraqi origin) who ruled the

[16] Interview by author with Bolshevik Ṣâliḥ, Baghdad (18 March, 1968).
[17] Jalâl al-Ṭâlabânî, *Kurdistân wa al-Ḥarakah al-Kurdiyyah* (Beirut: Dâr al-Ṭalîʿah, 1969), p. 58.
[18] ʿÂmir Ḥasan Faiyyâḍ, "Judhûr al-Fikr al-ʾIshtirâkî fî al-ʿIrâq, 1920–1934" (MA thesis, College of Law and Politics, Baghdad, December 1978), pp. 233–240.
[19] Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, p. 8.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ḥasan, *Al-Taṭawwur al-Iqtiṣâdî fî al-ʿIrâq*, p. 52.
[22] Hâshim Jawâd, *Muqaddimah fi Kiyân al-ʿIrâq al-Ijtimâʿî* (Baghdad: al-Maʿârif Press, 1946), p. 104.

country. The privileged strata together constituted a very small proportion of the population. A small middle class made up of professionals, artisans, and domestic merchants occupied another level, while the vast majority of the urban population consisted of poor service workers. An industrial working class was virtually non-existent until the late 1920s,[23] and in the countryside the tribal system, which had existed for centuries, was still largely intact. The *Shaikh al-Mashâyikh* (chief of tribal confederations), the *shaikhs* (leaders) of the tribes among the Arabs, and the tribal *begs* (community sub-leaders) or *aghas* (tribal chiefs) among the Kurds remained in firm control of the affairs of their tribal communities. All in all, Iraq was a mosaic of social groups, stratified along tribal, religious, class, and ethnic lines. Each community lived in accordance with its inherited traditional patterns, into which it assimilated foreign influences and modern practices. In other words, historic and inherited cultural norms were more complex in nature, and had been passed down from the time of the Sumerians, and more recently, from the Abbassid period in the eighth century. These values allowed communities to adapt to change and to adopt new ideas and ways of living, initially difficult for Westerners to comprehend.

British Ascendancy

Britain's penetration of the Persian Gulf in the seventeenth century, as a direct result of the merging of British government and British East India Company interests, led to its eventual control of the Iraqi Tigris and Euphrates valleys during the First World War. The British East India Company initiated commercial activity in Basra in 1635, and established its first factory there eight years later, making Basra an important outpost for the company in the region. Later, in 1764, Britain opened an official consulate in Basra to consolidate British political and economic influence and to replace the British East India Company representative. The British presence was expanded further in 1798, when a permanent residency opened in Baghdad. Eventually, Baghdad became the centre of British activities in Arabia, replacing Basra as a response to heightened French interest in Iraq, which was masked by Napoleon's challenge to British control of India at the end of the eighteenth century.[24] By 1834, the introduction of gunboats on the Tigris had created a safe environment for transport on the river, thus increasing British economic penetration. Thus during the mid-nineteenth century, Iraq became incorporated into the British imperial market system, and Ottoman Iraq was transformed into an area of vital British influence and interest. According to one student of British foreign policy in Iraq, the British viewed Iraq as the cornerstone of the survival of the British Indian Empire: "This conception, originating with the British about the year 1830, and developing during the ensuing four decades, was firmly established by

[23] Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, p. 11.
[24] ʿAbd-ul-Raḥmân al-Bazzâz, *Al-ʿIrâq min al-Iḥtilâl Ḥattâ al-Istiqlâl*, 3rd ed. (Baghdad: al-ʿÂnî Press, 1967), p. 46, and Aḥmad, *Mûjaz Târîkh al-ʿIrâq al-Ḥadîth*, p. 43.

the year 1878. . . . Mesopotamia was virtually turned into a British sphere of influence."[25]

By the second half of the nineteenth century, however, some changes started to become noticeable. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, and the development of powered transportation on the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers, made Iraq more accessible to penetration by products and ideas from the outside world, particularly those of British origin.[26] This caused a decline in indigenous commerce and production, reducing Iraq to the status of a dependent market for British goods and a source of cheap raw materials for British industry, and increasingly connecting Iraq to the international, imperial market. In contrast to the trend up to the late eighteenth century, when Iraqi trade had been predominantly with other Middle Eastern countries, Iraqi commerce now was mainly with industrial Europe in general, and with Britain in particular.[27] Indeed, the value of European imports coming into Iraq through Basra increased from £51,000 in 1868–1870 to £3,066,000 by 1907–1909.[28] A large part of these imports consisted of inexpensive British-made textiles, whose growing influx caused the gradual ruin of the domestic handloom industry in Iraq, as had previously occurred in both Lebanon and Syria. At the same time, however, Iraq's agricultural production rose rapidly. From the 1860s to the 1920s, grain production increased by around one per cent per annum, and the yield of dates increased by even greater margins. In addition, the area under cultivation expanded, from perhaps less than 100,000 *dunums* in the 1860s to about 1,613,000 *dunums* by 1913.[29] The character of crop production also underwent a transformation, from the peasant subsistence economy that had previously prevailed to an economy based on cash crops, mainly cereal grains, the export of which increased about twenty times over the periods 1867–1871 and 1912–1913.[30]

On the eve of the First World War, Great Britain's standing as the dominant power in the Persian Gulf was about to enter a new phase. Three centuries of Britain's efforts to expand and protect its trade, as well as to increase its diplomatic and strategic influence and to protect the land route to India from domination by other powers, were settled through negotiated agreements. Over

[25] Zaki Saleh, *Mesopotamia (Iraq), 1600–1914: A Study in British Foreign Affairs* (Baghdad: al-Maaref Press, 1957), p. 170. For details on the Gulf region and Iraq, see Jacqueline S. Ismael, *Kuwait: Social Change in Historical Perspective* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1982), pp. 37–53.

[26] Ibid., p. 239. On the eve of World War I, Britain's share of the trade in Iraq and the Gulf area amounted to £9,600,000, about three-quarters of the total; Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (London: KPI, 1987), p. 7.

[27] Ḥasan, *Al-Taṭawwur al-Iqtiṣâdî fî al-ʿIrâq*, p. 87.

[28] Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, pp. 239–240.

[29] Ḥasan, "The Role of Foreign Trade in Economic Development in Iraq, 1864–1964: A Study in the Growth of a Dependent Economy," in M. A. Cook (ed.), *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East from the Rise of Islam to the Present Day* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 350. See note 50 for the dimensions of the *dunum*.

[30] Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, p. 3.

a series of meetings and exchanges dating from 1909 to 1913, Great Britain achieved recognition of its position from Germany, from France, and from the government of the Ottoman Empire. Under the terms of the Anglo-Turkish Agreement, signed on 29 July 1913, Britain completed its de facto annexation of the Persian Gulf and cemented its dominant position within the Mesopotamian *vilayets* (provinces) of the Ottoman Empire. Further, it secured recognition of its "special position" in the Persian Gulf and of the validity of its existing treaties with the sheikdoms of Kuwait and Bahrain; limited the terminus of the Baghdad railway to Basra (beyond which the rail line could not be extended without British consent); gained sole control over the development of the port of Basra and the city of Baghdad (thereby denying port facilities in the Gulf to Germany or any other power); and achieved Ottoman recognition of its right to buoy, to light, and to police the Shaṭ al-ʿArab and the Persian Gulf. These measures were seen as insurance for British claims on Mesopotamia in the event of the break-up of the Ottoman Empire.[31]

In attempting to extend its influence in the region further, Britain used the agreement to control access to water. In this way British authorities could promote economic growth through agriculture and control revenue assessment and collection despite the shared role it was to have with Germany in developing irrigation for the Cilician Plain in Asia Minor. Finally, the Ottoman oilfields were transferred to British control, and Germany was forced to recognize further oil exploration in southern Mesopotamia and in southern Persia as the exclusive domain of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. However, because of diplomatic concerns requiring Britain and Germany to heed deliberations by the French, Italian, and Russian representatives, the Anglo-German Agreement was not signed until 15 July 1914, and ratification was further delayed until separate Turko-German negotiations were concluded.

With the outbreak of World War I on 28 July 1914, the Anglo-German treaty and its considerations were, in effect, nullified, and in the ensuing conflict British arms were required to confirm what British commerce and diplomacy had established before the war. With Britain's occupation of Basra in 1914, then of Baghdad in 1917, and finally, of Mosul in 1918, as well as with treaty arrangements farther south in the Gulf proper, British hegemony became incontestable, and suzerainty passed – without the consent or involvement of the region's Arab population – from the Ottomans to the British Empire. The cost to Britain was immense, involving over two hundred million pounds and some hundred thousand casualties in the Mesopotamia campaign.

Commensurate with those developments was the population's growing tendency towards sedentarization, and the increase in the number of peasants who cultivated the land. Indeed, the percentage of nomads among the region's rural

[31] For a discussion of British diplomacy in the treaty, see Jill Crystal (ed.), *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); see also Richard Schofield (ed.), *The Iran-Iraq Border: 1840–1958*, 11 vol. (Buckingham, UK: Archive Editions, 1989), for a copy of the 1929 Anglo-Turkish Agreement.

population fell from 35 per cent to 17 per cent between 1867 and 1905, while the percentage of cultivators increased from 41 per cent to 59 per cent. By using the Ottoman Land Code of 1858, tribal *shaikhs*, former tax farmers,[32] and rich city merchants began to acquire title deeds (*tapu sanads*) to previously state-owned or communally held properties.[33] On the eve of the war this process had not progressed all that far, and the Ottoman authorities attempted to repossess land that had already been registered as private property.[34] But with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the British occupation of Iraq, the pace of change accelerated rapidly, exaggerating social tensions, economic disparities, and political discord.[35] In the political settlements following the First World War, Britain and France carved the Middle East into spheres of influence, prearranged by the 1915 Sykes-Picot Agreement and implemented at the San Remo conference in April 1920.[36] Britain received mandates over both Iraq and Palestine. This was a transparent attempt to legalize the British occupation of Iraq, and Iraqi nationalists viewed it as "imperialism in a new guise and as colonization under a new name."[37]

Spearheaded by tribal *shaikhs* in the Middle Euphrates and by the Shiʿi leadership of Najaf, Iraqi agitation against the British mandate was initiated in the summer of 1920, just six weeks after the formal announcement of the arrangement. This agitation soon grew into a popular insurrection, and on 4 July 1920, British garrisons and offices came under attack throughout Iraq in what one historian considers the first national 'war of liberation' against British imperialism, with "a chief feature of the movement being the unprecedented cooperation between the Sunni and the Shiʿi communities."[38] Significantly, the 1920 revolution was "the first manifestation of a form of Iraqi national identity."[39] Although the British were able to suppress the insurrection, the repression encountered heavy criticism at home for its human and financial costs, utilization of chemical weapons against the rebels, and overall heavy handedness.

Subsequently, the British Colonial Office set up a sub-department for the newly acquired Middle Eastern territories, and at a conference in Cairo in March 1921, chaired by Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill, new structures

[32] In "tax farming" the central authority contracted with local businessmen or headmen to collect a specific sum as tax from an area by whatever means they saw fit; tax farmers would generally collect a much larger amount than required and keep the difference for themselves.
[33] Roger Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy, 1800–1914* (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 186.
[34] Interviews by author with Ḥusain al-Raḥḥâl; Zakî Khairî, Baghdad (18 January 1976).
[35] Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, p. 4. During the whole period, the increase in privately registered land was still rather modest. The *miri* (state land) fell from about four-fifths in the 1860s to about 60 per cent in the 1933–1958 period, and the *topu* land rose from about 20 per cent in the 1860s to about 30 per cent on the eve of the 1958 Revolution. See Ḥasan, "The Role of Foreign Trade in Economic Development in Iraq, 1864–1964," p. 350.
[36] David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East*, 2nd ed. (London: Henry Holt, 2001).
[37] Philip W. Ireland, *Iraq: A Study in Political Development* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), p. 262.
[38] Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), p. 33.
[39] Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, pp. 10–11.