

Imperial Myopia: Some Lessons from Two Invasions of Iraq

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This article tries to chart some of the parallels between the British Mesopotamia Campaign in the First World War and the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Both campaigns were justified by faulty or contrived intelligence; both were launched with little consideration of the future potential needs of the liberated/occupied territory; and both were characterized by a lack of planning and clear objectives. However, in spite of their obvious paternalism, several military and civilian members of the British-Indian expedition had a fair understanding of the Middle East, Arabic, Islam, tribal society, and so on; this sort of expertise was almost completely absent both among those planning, and among those running, the US invasion of 2003.

While I am not entirely convinced that later generations can learn lessons from the experience of earlier ones, I am reasonably sure that few historical actors have spent very much time considering whether or how far they might in fact be able to learn such lessons from what might seem to be at least roughly comparable situations. Hardly any, it can only be imagined, could have been quite as cavalier — in this as in so many other areas — as the Bush Administration, in its ill-conceived and inadequately thought out invasion of Iraq in March 2003. In many ways, the blunders and errors of judgement, whose consequences resonate so loudly, today are eerily reminiscent of the failings of the British Mesopotamia Campaign in 1914-1917, although the very much more primitive communications and other technological inadequacies meant that the mistakes of the earlier campaign were perhaps more excusable, or more understandable, than the more recent ones of the American invasion.

In what follows I will try to draw what I hope are some not too far-fetched parallels between the British invasion and occupation of Mesopotamia during the First World War and the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and its aftermath. Very briefly, basing its actions largely on what turned out to be unfounded reports of Ottoman troops massing in lower Iraq, the Military Department of the Government of India despatched Indian Expeditionary Force (IEF) 'D,' to the Gulf on October 16, 1914. The Allies declared war on the Ottoman Empire on November 5, and IEF 'D' landed at Fao three days later. The scope of the holding operation that the force originally had been charged with carrying out soon became dramatically enlarged; Basra was taken early in December, and after the arrival of reinforcements the force proceeded slowly towards central Iraq. By October 1915 it had reached 'Aziziya, some 50 miles from Baghdad. At this point more Ottoman troops actually materialized, and British troops were obliged to retreat, first to Ctesiphon and

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finally to Kut, where they endured the bitter hardships of a five-month siege and ultimate surrender. As a result of this reversal, and as news of the appalling deficiencies of supply and medical provisions in Mesopotamia gradually reached London, the Military Department of the Government of India was relieved of its command. On February 3, 1916, IEF 'D' became the Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force (MEF), and the War Office took full charge of operations. Eventually, more substantial reinforcements were despatched; British forces entered Baghdad on March 10, 1917, and their commander's zealotry ensured the capture of Mosul some three days *after* the Armistice of Mudros (the end of hostilities between the Allies and the Ottomans) on October 30, 1918.

In the course of the negotiations at the Paris peace conference, the governance of Lebanon and Syria was assigned to France, and that of Iraq, Palestine, and Transjordan to Britain. The entry of the United States into the war in the autumn of 1917 ensured that the "straightforward" colonization or imperial absorption of conquered territories would no longer be possible; hence, the former Ottoman provinces became mandates, under the ultimate supervision of the Permanent Mandates Commission of the newly established League of Nations. Britain and France, as mandatory powers, were entrusted with the task of preparing their new charges for independence. A major uprising against the British occupation of Iraq took place during the late summer and autumn of 1920; it took local British commanders by surprise, and some modifications of the relations between Britain and Iraq were introduced. Britain imported a king, Faysal, the son of the Sharif of Mecca, who had been one of the principal figures in the British-inspired Arab Revolt of 1916-18, but who would prove considerably less complaisant than his backers had hoped. After 12 years, the British found it expedient to leave Iraq; Iraq became a member of the League of Nations in October 1932, and the mandate came to an end. Nevertheless, Britain continued to have close relations with the regime it had installed in Baghdad for the next 25 odd years: a British subsidiary was the majority shareholder in the Iraq Petroleum Company, there were two British air bases in Iraq, and strong British influence remained until the revolution of July 1958.¹

I will look at the two episodes from a variety of different viewpoints, mostly planning (and the kinds of preconceived ideas circulating immediately prior to the dispatch of the two expeditions), military, and administrative, and the differing styles of both campaigns and of the kinds of governing regimes that they instituted, or tried to institute, in their attempts, as both invaders might have conceived of the process, to bring "good governance" to the Iraqis in the aftermath of conquest. Of course, while there are similarities, there are also important differences, and at the risk of stating the obvious, it makes sense to begin by reviewing them.

SITUATIONAL VARIATIONS

In the first place, there can be no possible comparison between the horrors most Iraqis have endured for much of the last half-century and the inadequacies and incompetence of late Ottoman provincial government, dating from about the mid-19th century un-

1. For the mandate, see Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation-Building and a History Denied* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), and my *Britain in Iraq: Contriving King and Country* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

til 1914. Nevertheless, a regular mantra of the British psychological armory in World War I Iraq was that, in General Maude's words, "our Armies have not come into your Cities and Lands as Conquerors, or enemies, but as Liberators," that is, "Liberators" from those "alien rulers, the Turks who oppressed [you],"² thus both invoking, and exaggerating, "Ottoman tyranny" to justify the British invasion and occupation. In spite of attempts by both near contemporaries and later ideologues to describe the process differently,³ it is not in fact the case that, at the end of the 19th century, any significant number of the inhabitants of the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire had long been straining to "throw off the Ottoman yoke" and rule themselves independently of Istanbul.⁴

Nationalism took some time to reach the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire, for two main, and interconnected, reasons. First, it was generally the case at the end of the 19th century that identity was conceived of in religious, rather than ethnic, terms. Secondly, most of the Arab population was Sunni Muslim, as were the Ottoman Turks themselves. Thus notions of the Ottoman period as one of "oppressive rule by alien rulers" are anachronistic backward projections, features of a mindset which emerged in Iraq and elsewhere in the Arab Middle East during the 1920s and 1930s, but one which was not widely shared until the very end of the Ottoman period. It was only with the counter-coup of April 1909 and the ousting of 'Abd al-Hamid II that the Committee of Union and Progress' increasing support for "Turkification" gradually began to lose some of the support which its earlier pro-civil rights and anti-absolutist ethos had attracted.⁵ Even in these circumstances, the news of the Italian annexation of Tripolitania (1911) and the major Ottoman defeats in the two Balkan Wars (1912-1913; 1913) occasioned large *pro*-Ottoman demonstrations in Aleppo and in other Arab cities.⁶ Of course, with the defeat of the empire in 1918, Ottomanism ceased to be an option, but until then, it is most likely that "the [Ottoman] empire, for most Muslims and even some Christians, was simply seen as the only remaining politi-

2. "Since the days of Midhat Pasha the Turks have talked of reforms yet do not the ruins and wastes of today testify to the vanity of those promises?" General Maude's Proclamation to the People of Baghdad, March 19, 1917, reproduced in Philip Willard Ireland, *Iraq: A Study in Political Development* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), pp. 457-458. The theme is ably summarized in "Corruption, Fragmentation and Despotism: British Visions of Ottoman Iraq," Chapter Three of Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, pp. 43-61. Similar tropes were used by the French authorities in Syria.

3. See particularly George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1938). This is one of the first accounts in English of the origins of Arab nationalism, but it is misleading to the extent that it does not distinguish sufficiently between, on the one hand, the literary production and the associated political polemics of a relatively small (if influential) group of Arab intellectuals and, on the other, a more widespread and less elite movement of "Ottoman disavowal" among the Arab population of the Empire. The latter movement does not antedate the First World War. For an interesting re-evaluation of Antonius, see Stephen Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), pp. 1-15.

4. Albert Hourani wrote in 1962: "That those who speak Arabic form a 'nation', and that this nation should become independent and united, are beliefs which only became articulate and acquired political strength during the present century." *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 260.

5. See Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire 1908-1918* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997).

6. That is, rather than any signs of rejoicing that the "tyrants had been thwarted." For Aleppo, see Kamil al-Ghazzi, *Nahr al-Dhahab fi Ta'rikh Halab [River of Gold in the History of Aleppo]* (Aleppo: Maronite Press, 1926), Vol. III, pp. 352-354.

cal force capable of forestalling European colonial ambitions.”⁷

The military situation at the beginning of the two campaigns was also very different, as the balance of forces was far more even in the earlier campaign. While British forces in 1914 to some extent, and of course American forces in 2003 to a much greater extent, proved unequal to, and unprepared for, the task of providing post-invasion security, the British, after what seemed at first to be a more or less effortless march northwards through lower Iraq, were totally unprepared for the Ottoman riposte in the late autumn of 1915; it was not until March 1917 that British troops finally captured Baghdad. For their part, the Americans faced no serious military check, and their technological superiority ensured that their defeat of Iraqi forces was more or less a foregone conclusion. Again, on the level of obvious differences, while the British certainly faced opposition to their occupation once the fighting had stopped, and there was an almost country-wide anti-British revolt in 1920,⁸ they did not face the subsequent well-armed and well-funded international insurgency which took the 2003 coalition so much by surprise.

The First World War took the lives of nearly one million British and British imperial troops. Conscription for single men was introduced in Britain in January 1916, and was extended to married men a few months later. Early in 1918, the age limit was raised to 50. Dreadful as the casualty figures are, the all-out nature of the war meant that it affected all classes. Since 2003, more than 4,000 US troops (and, of course, but this not the main point here, infinitely greater numbers of Iraqi civilians) have died in Operation Iraqi Freedom, but, as has often been pointed out, almost all of them come from underprivileged sections of society and from parts of the United States where career opportunities for the less well-educated are rather limited. In contrast, two of the sons of Herbert Asquith, the British Prime Minister until 1915, were killed in the trenches. In the current campaign, few close relatives of those directing it have been similarly exposed.

Finally, the time-scales of the two operations were very different. British forces landed in Fao in November 1914, but Baghdad was only captured in March 1917, and Mosul some 18 months later. Like the Americans in 2003, the British had to be nudged into what might be called “nation-building,” largely because, in both cases, much of what had been in existence before had either been destroyed by the invasion and occupation, or had collapsed for other reasons.⁹ However, the idea of the “long haul” was not especially intimidating for the British, who, certainly at the beginning, simply treated Iraq/Mesopotamia as if it were going to be another colony, an extension of British India, setting up a civil administration in Basra immediately after they had captured the city and extending it as they marched northwards. However, subtle changes in the international climate in the 1910s and 1920s (partly due to the United States’ disdain for the economic exclusivity of the “traditional” metropolitan/colonial arrangements, and partly due to President Woodrow Wilson’s idealism) gradually made it clear, more rapidly to some of those involved than others, that old style “direct rule” colonialism was

7. Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World: The Roots of Sectarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 176.

8. Known (perhaps rather grandiloquently) as the “Great Iraqi Revolution,” *al-Thawra al-‘Iraqiyya al-Kubra*. Its significance as a demonstration of “national unity” has probably been exaggerated.

9. For example, a few weeks after the capture of Baghdad, it was reported to the India Office in London that only 48 out of the original 170 Ottoman officials had remained at their posts. Cox, Baghdad, to India Office, April 20, 1917. LP & S 10 4097/14 (1917)/1661.

no longer an option.¹⁰ Even with the limitations imposed by the mandate, what became known as “indirect British rule” lasted until the country became “independent” in 1932; subsequently, the Royal Air Force maintained two bases (at Shu‘ayba and Habbaniya) until their formal handover to the Iraqi Air Force in 1955, and the British-dominated Iraq Petroleum Company controlled Iraqi oil until it was nationalized in 1972. It is difficult to imagine, in spite of some of Senator John McCain’s pronouncements, that any US administration would be content to see its commitments extending quite so far ahead.

BLUNDERS REPEATED

In the first place, both the Mesopotamia Campaign and Operation Iraqi Freedom were based on faulty or inadequate intelligence, disseminated in what may or may not have been good faith by individuals anxious to justify military adventures that proved to have far less urgency than they intimated were needed at the time. On the eve of the First World War, it was not at all clear which way the Ottoman Empire might jump; would it go in the direction of the Central Powers, or towards the Entente? Many British ministers and civil servants were convinced, long before it actually happened and without any very clear supporting evidence, that the Ottomans would join the Central Powers, and these assumptions led to actions such as the pre-emptive and provocative confiscation on August 1, 1914, before the war had even started, of two warships being built in British shipyards for the Ottoman navy, which naturally aroused intense fury in Istanbul.¹¹ While the Ottomans did eventually throw in their lot with the Central Powers, this was by no means a foregone conclusion. Evidence subsequently gathered from documents captured after the War shows, for example, that British intelligence reports to the effect that substantial numbers of Ottoman troops were being transferred to Mesopotamia in the summer of 1914 were simply not true. In fact, “[n]o attempt was made to move [Turkish] reinforcements to Mesopotamia until after the British occupation of Basra in November 1914.”¹²

A handful of fairly junior members of the Political Service of the Government of India, stationed in various parts of the Persian Gulf, were almost solely responsible for intelligence-gathering on Arabia, the Gulf, and southern Persia. Since the “Great Game,”¹³ the generally inconclusive struggle between Britain and Russia over Iran, Afghanistan,

10. With his customary prescience, Sir Arthur Hirtzel of the India Office wrote to a colleague at the Foreign Office at the end of 1917: “[The Turkish] menace has apparently been removed. But another has taken its place, of a different kind, and one which, I think, makes it imperative for us to get to work. What I mean is that we must at least consider the possibility of a peace which will not give us the absolute political control of Mesopotamia that we should like to have.” (to W. H. Clark, Foreign Office, Private, December 31, 1917. FO 368/1999/1071). The broader changes in the international climate have been discussed by William Stivers, *Supremacy and Oil: Iraq, Turkey and the Anglo-American World Order, 1918-1939* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1983), and more recently in Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, pp. 5-42.

11. Particularly as the ships had been partly funded by public subscription; see Elizabeth Monroe, *Britain’s Moment in the Middle East, 1914-1971* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1985), p. 24.

12. See Peter Morris, “Intelligence and its interpretation: Mesopotamia 1914-1916,” in Christopher Andrew and Jeremy Noakes, eds., *Intelligence and International Relations* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1987), p. 86.

13. David Gillard, *The Struggle for Asia 1828-1914: A Study in British and Russian Imperialism* (London: Methuen, 1977).

and Central Asia, had absorbed the almost exclusive attention of the Foreign Department of the Government of India for nearly a century, few of those in charge in India had much knowledge of or interest in the Gulf area. Most of the collection of information about Mesopotamia in the immediately pre-World War I period was carried out by three individuals — W.H.I. Shakespear, G.E. Leachman, and Gertrude Bell — all of whom, together with their more influential colleague Arnold Wilson, were almost obsessively anti-Ottoman and (within limits) pro-Arab.¹⁴ With hindsight, their reporting in 1914 was unduly alarmist, but it neatly dovetailed with London's *parti pris* against the Ottomans.

There was no real sense in which Iraq, or the Ottoman authorities there, actually presented a major threat to Britain or British interests in the Gulf area in the autumn of 1914. On the contrary, over the previous few years, the Ottomans had begun what turned out to be a fairly systematic retreat from the area; the Saudi reconquest of al-Hasa (from the Ottomans) early in 1913 was soon followed by the Ottoman withdrawal from Qatar,¹⁵ and there had never been any Ottoman troops in Kuwait. To complete the regional picture: although the Saudis would play a less prominent part in the war than the British might have wished, a treaty of alliance between Ibn Sa'ud and Britain, essentially assuring Saudi neutrality *vis-à-vis* the Ottomans, for which Ibn Sa'ud had been angling for several years, was concluded in December 1915.¹⁶ Finally, although Iran soon became the object of unwelcome attentions from the Ottomans, the Russians, and the British, it had formally declared itself a non-belligerent on November 1, 1914.¹⁷ In sum, therefore, there was no obvious "clear and present danger" in the region which might have justified the despatch of IEF 'D.'

Poor intelligence was clearly a major reason for the failures of Operation Iraqi Freedom, ranging from the highly suspect (and, as we know now, baseless) stories about weapons of mass destruction to the evident inability to anticipate the extent and strength of potential opposition to the US presence once "victory" (which never could have been seriously in doubt) had been achieved. In the early 2000s, it seems that the post-9/11 campaign in Afghanistan (though successful to the extent that the Taliban were overthrown) was not going to produce sufficiently spectacular results for the Bush Administration.¹⁸ It therefore decided on a campaign against Iraq, whose regime was charac-

14. Peter Morris, "Intelligence and its interpretation," pp. 77-101. Gertrude Bell is relatively well known; Arnold Wilson became Acting Civil Commissioner in Mesopotamia during the very crucial period between spring 1918 and autumn 1920 while Sir Percy Cox was on secondment to Tehran. For brief accounts of Leachman (killed in 1920) and Shakespear (killed in 1915) see my entries under their names in the *New Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

15. See Jill Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 112-118.

16. See Clive Leatherdale, *Britain and Saudi Arabia 1925-1939: The Imperial Oasis* (London: Frank Cass, 1983), pp. 372-73.

17. George Lenczowski, "Foreign powers' intervention in Iran during World War I," in Edmund Bosworth and Carole Hillenbrand, eds., *Qajar Iran: Political, Social and Cultural Change 1800-1925* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983), pp. 76-92.

18. In addition, operations in Afghanistan seem to have been constrained by the limitations on the pressure that the US could exert on the regime of President Pervez Musharraf in Pakistan, details of whose country's role in nuclear proliferation (and in particular the activities of Dr. Abd al-Qadir Khan) were beginning to emerge late in 2001. See Seymour M. Hersh, *Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), pp. 121-162, 287-322.

terized both as presenting a danger to the world because of its WMD capabilities and as a pariah because, *inter alia*, of its supposed links to al-Qa'ida. The first charge was tenuous at best, and the second was most unlikely. Given the strongly held, if somewhat eccentric, tenets of al-Qa'ida's leadership and the religious basis of its constituency, it would lose much of its appeal if it was seen to be consorting with secular renegades of the stamp of Saddam Husayn. Reprehensible as Saddam Husayn's regime undoubtedly was, it soon became obvious that neither of these charges was going to stick.

Furthermore, in spite of a fairly well-known body of secondary literature produced over the 1990s and 2000s which had characterized both the evil nature and the fragility of the Ba'th regime fairly accurately,¹⁹ no one in any position of seniority in the Pentagon or elsewhere seems to have anticipated the extent to which, deprived of its totalitarian leadership and unable to continue its reign of terror, the Iraqi state would implode from within and collapse so rapidly and completely. That this was so poorly understood probably has less to do with the notion of an "unbridgeable gap" between America and Iraq (or the Middle East in general) than the lack of Middle Eastern/Islamic expertise at most levels of the US military and civil service,²⁰ and the Pentagon's dogged determination to ignore or dismiss any advice it was given which did not fit with its preconceived (and largely ignorant) views.

Underestimating the necessary troop numbers "to complete the job" was another feature common to both campaigns. As has been implied earlier, far too few troops were originally committed to the Mesopotamia campaign, although that statement requires some qualification. Indian Expeditionary Force 'D,' which left Bombay on October 8, 1914, landed at Fao on November 6 and went on to capture Basra on November 22, consisted of a single Indian infantry brigade (the 16th Indian) which, with its various support troops (sappers and miners, signals and artillery units, engineers, ambulance and medical staff, mule corps, and so on) the force was composed of some 5,000-5,500 men. This was probably enough for the force's original purposes, since neither the Cabinet in London nor the Government of India had envisaged a major advance inland.

According to the Military Secretary at the India Office, the force had four objectives: to check Ottoman intrigues; to encourage the local Arab rulers, in particular the shaykhs of Kuwait and Muhammara, to rally to Britain's side; to safeguard Egypt (the expedition's ostensible destination); and to ensure the flow of oil from the Anglo-Per-

19. See, for example, Samir al-Khalil [Kanan Makiya], *Republic of Fear: The Inside Story of Saddam's Iraq* (London: Hutchinson, 1989); Charles Tripp, *A Political History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (1st edition, London: Kegan Paul International, 1987, 3rd revised edition, London: I.B. Tauris, 2001); Pierre-Jean Luizard, *La Question Irakienne [The Iraq Question]* (Paris: Fayard, 2002); and most recently Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 2nd edition (Boulder: Westview, 2004).

20. As far as I can tell, none of the "what-a-shambles-it-has-all-been" books — most of which make fascinating, if rather dispiriting, reading — has been written by anyone with previous academic or scholarly mileage in the Middle East: see Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory* (New York: Owl Books, 2005); David L. Phillips, *Losing Iraq: Inside the Post-War Reconstruction Fiasco* (Boulder: Westview, 2005); Aaron Glantz, *How America Lost Iraq* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2005). The best journalistic description is Anthony Shadid's *Night Draws Near: Iraq's People in the Shadow of America's War* (New York: Henry Holt, 2005), which gains added depth from its author's knowledge of Arabic and his subtle understanding of Middle Eastern society and culture.

sian Oil Company's refinery at Abadan.²¹ However, the initial lack of resistance — the main reason for the expedition's early successes — coincided with disastrous rebuffs to British and Allied arms elsewhere, notably on the Western Front and at the Dardanelles. Thus, thinking that there were no serious obstacles in front of them and persuaded that a successful campaign in Mesopotamia would provide a sorely needed boost to morale, the British authorities in India and the field commanders on the ground took the fateful decision, in October 1915, that IEF 'D' (now reinforced up to division strength with additional troops from India, amounting to some 12-15,000 men in all) should advance on Baghdad. In these new circumstances, there were far too few men for the job, and in addition, the decision failed to take account of the length of the line of supply. There were not enough shallow-draught boats, nor enough mules or camels, to supply forces fighting several hundreds of miles from their base at Basra; furthermore, the Anglo-Indian force did not have the necessary reserves or logistical support to retain Baghdad, even if it had been able to capture it.²² As had been the case in the Dardanelles/Gallipoli venture, political considerations trumped more sober military calculations.

At the beginning of 2005, the "coalition of the willing" consisted of about 160,000 troops, 130,000 of whom were from the United States.²³ Iraq is slightly larger than Texas, with a population of some 24 million. Giving evidence before the Senate on February 23, 2003, General Eric Shinseki, the Chief of Staff of the United States Army (the only Japanese American, incidentally, to have held the position) had estimated, based on his field experience in Kosovo, that several hundred thousand troops — under further questioning, he put the figure at 300-400,000 — would be needed to police and administer post-war Iraq. This elicited howls of protest from the civilian chiefs at the Pentagon, most notably Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, who countered that far fewer numbers (in the region of 100,000 troops) would be sufficient.²⁴ Since neither had any hands-on experience in running large military operations, their dismissal of the Chief of Staff's estimates is quite astounding; such arrogance 90 years ago would not, one imagines, have spared either of them in the face of an inquiry comparable to the Mesopotamia Commission.²⁵

21. With hindsight, securing Abadan was probably the most significant result of the campaign, since it assured an uninterrupted supply of oil for the British navy for the rest of the war (see below).

22. See David R. Woodward, "The Middle East during World War One," BBC, http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/war/wwone/middleeast_02.shtml; A.J. Barker, *The Neglected War: Mesopotamia 1914-1918* (London: Faber, 1967).

23. The troop figures are from Perspectives on World History and Current Events, "Coalition of the Willing," <http://www.geocities.com/pwhce/willing.html#list4>.

24. See Eric Schmitt, "Pentagon Contradicts General on Iraq Occupation Force's Size," *The New York Times*, February 28, 2003.

25. While many aspects of the doctrine of the separation of powers in the US system are admirable, the fact that ministers and their deputies are directly accountable to parliament in most European countries is not without its advantages. Given the series of catastrophes over which they both presided (and for which they failed to take ministerial responsibility), it would have been almost impossible for either Rumsfeld or Wolfowitz to have kept their positions as, for example, members of a British cabinet. For a rare example of civil/military disagreement in wartime involving a senior military figure, see Nancy Maurice, ed., *The Maurice Case: From the Papers of Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice* (London: Leo Cooper, 1972).

But “[t]his pattern of blind zealotry overriding expertise,” as Rashid Khalidi has described it, has been one of the more constant (and more alarming) features of official Washington, at least since the 1980s.²⁶

In an article in October 2004 and at greater length in a more recent book,²⁷ Larry Diamond of Stanford University, who served with the Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad between January and April 2004 (on the invitation of his former colleague Condoleezza Rice), gives a useful insider’s perspective on many of the blunders that observers of the process further removed from the scene had been questioning for several months. In “What Went Wrong in Iraq” — without a question mark — Diamond catalogued the many errors of judgement of the coalition forces (and subsequently of the Coalition Provisional Authority) from the point of view of both design and implementation. High on his list of the most significant of these were the inadequate numbers of troops deployed for the operation in the first place, the lack of attention to the kind of peace-keeping force which would be required, and what duties it would need to perform.

In the aftermath of the First World War, faced with a situation where the practices of “traditional colonialism” had perforce to be greatly modified, the British decided that their interests would be best served by relying on four principal partners, or perhaps more unkindly, “collaborators.” These were: an imported and thus (it was thought) highly dependable monarch; an army officered almost entirely by Sunni Muslims; the more or less secularized Sunni middle class; and the large landowners and tribal leaders, both Sunnis and Shi‘is. In 2003, the Americans had learned, perforce, that they should favor the Shi‘is and the Kurds, whom they identified en bloc as the groups most persecuted under the previous regime; members of the Iraqi exile community, preferably secular Shi‘is, in Britain and the United States, and those whom they took to be the “traditional leaders” in the rural areas. The exiles, most notably the circle dominated by the charming but profoundly self-serving Ahmad Chalabi (whose reputation, as critics often remarked at the time, was infinitely more solid on the Potomac than on the Tigris), told the Americans exactly what they wanted to hear: that there would be little or no resistance; that US troops would indeed be hailed as liberators rather than occupiers; and that once the regime was overthrown, he and his friends would be able to easily take over the state and demonstrate their eternal gratitude to their liberators, and so on. All this was from a man who had left Iraq in 1958 at the age of ten.

In the first place, while “the Sunnis,” who account for about 20% of the Arab population, had certainly been running Iraq since the inception of the modern state, and constituted almost the entirety of the upper echelons of the Ba‘th Party, they were, like the other sects and ethnicities in the country, neither homogenous nor monolithic. Admittedly, sectarianism had been on the rise after Saddam Husayn’s “discovery of Islam” in the late 1980s, which was accompanied by the intensification of the persecution of Shi‘is which had been rumbling on since before the war with Iran. Nevertheless, the regime had no hesitation in persecuting Sunnis who did not support it, and the secular

26. Rashid Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints and America’s Perilous Path in the Middle East* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005).

27. Larry Diamond, “What Went Wrong in Iraq,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 5 (September/October 2004), pp. 34–56; Diamond, *Squandered Victory*. Diamond is best known for his studies of the process of democratization in southern Europe and the Third World and as founder of the *Journal of Democracy*.

middle classes (in the broadest sense) of both the major sects were generally more united than divided by their aspirations for a decent future for themselves and their children. Their identities as Iraqis, as mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, professionals, shopkeepers, and so on were just as much part of their identities as membership in the religious sect in which they found themselves by an accident of birth. This quite basic notion seems to have passed the occupation administration by, as evidenced by its insistence on elevating the sectarian affiliation of all those with whom it came into contact as those individuals' most significant marker of identity. In this way, although the reality is of course very much more complex, the Americans more or less created confrontational sectarianism in a situation where it had previously held far less, and certainly far less dangerous, significance.²⁸

It also goes without saying that very few of the tribal leaders whom the Americans were initially eager to get to join provincial and municipal assemblies were in any sense "representative" of their areas, another case of history repeating itself. During and after the First World War, the British sought out those tribal shaykhs whom they found it convenient to recognize as traditional local leaders; their historic moment had passed, in the sense that they were somewhat out of place in a modern state with its notions of equal rights of citizenship for all. In consequence, the British found themselves in the paradoxical (but not entirely unfamiliar) position of having to bolster the shaykhs' authority artificially.²⁹ When the Revolution came in 1958, the shaykhs were pushed aside, but in the 1980s and 1990s, Saddam Husayn decided to revive their powers in an attempt to consolidate his regime more widely in the countryside. This move was widely and correctly regarded by most observers both inside and outside Iraq as completely fraudulent.³⁰

During and after the First World War, the British had favored the Sunnis over the Shi'is for a number of reasons. In the first place, the Ottoman Empire was a Sunni institution and tended to employ Sunnis in the administration. Secondly, when the modernized Ottoman educational system first arrived in Iraq at the end of the 19th century, few Shi'is attended the new state schools, and finally, for the more literate Shi'is, state service was not very highly regarded, for semi-religious reasons. Consequently, when the Iraqi state was created in 1920, there were few "suitably" qualified Shi'is able or willing to take part in either the leadership of the government or in the administration. Of course, it is also the case, as Pierre-Jean Luizard has demonstrated, that in their desire to control Iraq, the British (to simplify a much more complex reality) found the Sunnis more congenial partners, and essentially nipped the Shi'i political project of an "Islamic state" (in the broadest sense) in the bud in the early 1920s.³¹

28. This point is made in a somewhat different way in Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, especially pp. 299-301.

29. See here the efforts made on behalf of 'Ali Sulayman, "paramount chief" of the Dulaym tribe in the early 1920s in Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, pp. 174-75.

30. Such government appointees were popularly derided as *shuyukh al-tisa'inat*, the shaykhs of the nineties. For a slightly less negative view in which rather greater instrumentality is ascribed to tribal loyalty, see Amatzia Baram, *Building Toward Crisis: Saddam's Strategy for Survival* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Paper No. 48, 1998).

31. Pierre-Jean Luizard, *La formation de l'Irak contemporain: le rôle politique des ulémas chiïtes à la fin de la domination ottomane et au moment de la construction de l'Etat irakien* [*The Formation of Contemporary Iraq: The Political Role of the Shi'i Ulama at the End of the Ottoman Empire and at the Moment of the Formation of the Iraqi State*] (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1991).

In this context, it is interesting to compare the attitudes of the British and the Americans towards the Shi'i clergy. During the First World War and into the early 1920s, British officials were intensely suspicious of the 'ulama of Karbala and Najaf, whom they saw as "black reactionaries," "enemies of progress," and so on. In fact, the situation was much more complex; many of the leading 'ulama had been closely involved in Iran's Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911, whose main objective had been to limit royal autocracy by imposing checks on the Shah's authority and by convening some sort of national assembly. Of course, the Iranian Majlis was a far cry from popular parliamentary government, but it was a first step in that direction. Hence the attitude of the clergy towards the British occupation was hostile not (or not necessarily) because it implied a degree of Westernization which they found unacceptable, but because — in however disguised a form — it represented the kind of foreign interference with which they had been familiar, and which they had resented, for most of the 19th and early 20th century. Thus, at the end of 1922, a number of prominent *mujtahids*³² issued a *fatwa* condemning participation in the elections to the Constituent Assembly, inaugurating a campaign which would lead to the deportation of many of them to Iran in the summer of 1923. The deportations (and the muzzling which this represented) effectively reduced the political influence of the clergy in Iraq for several decades. This period coincided with the beginning of the wave of secularization which engulfed most of the Islamic world and saw the decline both in the prestige of the religious profession and in the numbers entering its ranks.³³

In contrast, by the time the Americans came to Iraq in 2003, the Shi'i world had been turned upside down by the Iranian Revolution some 25 years earlier and by the rise of specifically Shi'i political forces throughout the Arab world — largely as a result of that revolution.³⁴ Persecution by Saddam Husayn had sent many of the leaders of the Iraqi Shi'i opposition parties into exile in Iran, the surrounding Arab countries, or Europe and the United States. Many of them became prominent in the broad coalition to topple Saddam Husayn, which was supported (of course for very different reasons) by the governments of both Iran and the United States for much of the period between 1991 and 2003.

[Continued from previous page]

See also Luizard's "*Le mandat britannique en Irak: une rencontre entre plusieurs projets politiques*" ["The British Mandate in Iraq: Competition between Different Political Projects"], 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: Brill, 2003), pp. 361-384. For a useful discussion of the history and (relatively recent origins) of the Iraqi Shi'is, see Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). The history of the Shi' 'ulama' in the 19th century and the emergence of the notion of *marja'iyyat-i taqlid* is discussed in Meir Litvak, *Shi'i Scholars of Nineteenth Century Iraq: The 'Ulama' of Najaf and Karbala* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

32. It is significant that these included elderly and respected figures such as Muhammad Husayn al-Na'ini and Abu'l-Hasan al-Isfahani, as well as younger "firebrands;" see Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, p. 56.

33. See Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, pp. 193-94.

34. Especially in Iraq and Lebanon — it is impossible to do justice to this process here, but useful pointers are given in Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York: Norton, 2006), and especially in Yitzhak Nakash, *Reaching for Power: The Shia in the Modern Arab World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

Of course, not all the clerical leaders left Iraq, and “in the slums [of the major cities] desperately needed social services came via the efforts of such clerical leaders as the ayatullahs Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr (the father of Muqtada), Abol Qasem al-Khoi and ‘Ali al-Sistani.”³⁵ It was to these people, rather than exiles like Ahmad Chalabi or ‘Ayad ‘Allawi, that the Shi‘i street turned when the regime fell. It is not too great a simplification to say that few of the Americans engaged in the overthrow of Saddam Husayn had any inkling of the complexities of this situation. As far as both civilians and the military were concerned, the Shi‘is had taken the brunt of the excesses of the Ba‘th regime, which made them the natural allies of the United States. However, the majority of poor Iraqi Shi‘is were far more attracted to the ideals either of religious figures such as Ayatullah Sistani or more radical leaders like Muqtada al-Sadr than to those of individuals whom they soon came to regard as being hopelessly tainted by their long association with the United States. For a while, before the tide of anti-Americanism reached its height, Sistani was partly successful in bridging the gap between the occupiers and the occupied — he was widely respected, had not been involved in Iranian politics, had not been in exile, favored majority rule, did not insist on “Islamic government,” and so on — but eventually even he could not prevail over the populist appeal of Muqtada al-Sadr.³⁶ In addition, as the fierce intra-Shi‘i fighting around Basra in the spring of 2008 indicated very clearly, the community was far from monolithic, another failure of perception on the part of Iraq’s most recent invaders.

An interesting “commonality” of the two invasions is the tendency of both occupation regimes to make great play of their own disinterest, and to allege that their principal purpose in being in Iraq was or is to benefit the Iraqis. I suppose that it is just possible, in 2003, that had the operation been better planned, had it been effective in restoring civil society, repairing the damaged infrastructure, and bringing about democratic change, the United States might perhaps have created a grateful constituency in Iraq and an atmosphere of goodwill towards it comparable to that now found in the more prosperous states of Eastern Europe. There were, in the early months, and there surely always will be, numerous Iraqis for whom the overthrow of Saddam Husayn’s regime was an essential preliminary to any kind of positive change, however much the situation may have deteriorated since.

On another level, it is fascinating to see much of the same language, conspicuous for its overarching and meaningless generalities, being employed in various US statements of intent in much the same way as the victorious allies in 1918. President Bush speaking to a mainly Arab-American audience in Dearborn, Michigan in April 2003 said:

As freedom takes hold in Iraq, the Iraqi people will choose their own leaders and their own government. America has no intention of imposing our form of government or our culture.³⁷

Here is a sentence from the Anglo-French Declaration to the Arabs of November 7,

35. Nasr, *The Shia Revival*, pp. 85-86.

36. See Patrick Cockburn, *Muqtada: Muqtada al-Sadr, the Shia Revival and the Struggle for Iraq* (New York: Scribner, 2008).

37. George W. Bush, Speech at the Ford Community and Performing Arts Center in Dearborn, Michigan, April 28, 2003, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/04/20030428-3.html>.

1918:

Far from wishing to impose any particular institution on these lands, they [sc. France and Great Britain] have no other care but to secure by their support and effective aid the normal workings of the Governments and Administrations which they shall have adopted of their own free will.³⁸

Of course, such protestations of good intentions are part of the stock in trade of imperial powers, and are wearily familiar to historians, as can be seen for example in Latin America: “Between 1898 and 1934, the United States intervened militarily on more than thirty occasions to support conservative oligarchs in Central America and the islands of the Caribbean ... Although the official justification of these interventions was the ‘export of democracy’, the real motives were economic and geopolitical.”³⁹

As Rashid Khalidi and others have made clear, the American record of supporting democracy in the Middle East in the recent past has not been, and is not, such as to inspire much confidence for the future.⁴⁰ The US has been conspicuous for its support of regimes in the region which are at best only superficially democratic (Egypt, Israel, Morocco, Turkey), and at worst almost unashamedly dictatorial (pre-revolutionary Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia). It should be remembered that until 1990, and more specifically all through the Iran-Iraq War, Iraq under Saddam Husayn was a substantial and more or less unconditional beneficiary of such support. It is difficult to think of examples of the United States actually supporting democracy anywhere in the developing world, with the possible exception, as has been mentioned before, of the newly emancipated territories of Eastern Europe.

OIL AS A FACTOR

I would like to conclude this dismal catalogue of failure, stupidity, and downright wickedness (under which I include Abu Ghraib,⁴¹ the torture of suspects, and of course the killing of innocent bystanders both by insurgents and by the US military, none of which have any obvious parallels in the earlier campaign) by looking at the role of oil in the two campaigns. Oil had not been discovered in commercial quantities in what is now Iraq in the late Ottoman period, and indeed the first major strike did not happen until 1927, at Baba Gurgur near Kirkuk. Nevertheless, as has previously been mentioned, one of the clear objectives of the Mesopotamia campaign was to secure the Abadan oilfields, and, as I wrote nearly 30 years ago, it is clear beyond reasonable doubt that oil as well

38. The full text is reproduced in (for example) Ireland, *Iraq: A Study in Political Development*, pp. 459-460. For similar juxtapositions, see Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire*, p. 37.

39. Joe Foweraker, Todd Landman, Neil Harvey, *Governing Latin America* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), p. 34.

40. Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire*, pp. 37-73. For a less balanced but moving and impassioned account, see Tareq Y. Ismael and Jacqueline S. Ismael, *The Iraqi Predicament: People in the Quagmire of Power Politics* (London: Pluto Press, 2004).

41. Among the many other baffling features of “the peace” was the decision to retain Abu Ghraib as a prison. Knocking it down would have had infinitely more symbolic importance than demolishing a few statues of the dictator. Presumably there was no one around sufficiently familiar with Iraqi history to make the point.

as strategic considerations dominated British official thinking towards Iraq.⁴² In general, the rule of thumb adumbrated by Winston Churchill, the First Lord of the Admiralty in 1913, (since most of the British navy had converted to oil by then) seems to have resonated at least somewhere at the back of most civil servants' minds at the time:

We must become the owners or at any rate the controllers at the source of at least a proportion of the oil which we require.⁴³

Part of the reason why no major oil strike took place until 1927 was that no prospecting could take place during the war. Nevertheless, in the negotiations preceding the formation of the Turkish Petroleum Company in 1913-1914, the Ottoman Ambassador in London was informed by the Foreign Office that:

H. M. Government ... rely on the Ottoman Government to make without delay arrangements in regard to the oil wells of Mesopotamia which will ensure British control and meet with their approval in matters of detail.⁴⁴

However, the most important expression of the British government's interest in oil was its decision to purchase 51% of the shares of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company a few days before the outbreak of war in 1914, a transaction which automatically gave it a substantial interest in the Turkish Petroleum Company, then an Anglo-Dutch-German consortium.

No prospecting could be undertaken during the war itself, but surveys whose general indications were highly favorable were carried out in slightly *sub rosa* circumstances in 1919.⁴⁵ During the war, as emerges from the correspondence between Lord

42. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*. See also Helmut Mejcher, *The Imperial Quest for Oil, Iraq 1910-1928* (London: Ithaca Press, 1976) and Marian Kent, *Oil and Empire: British Policy and Mesopotamian Oil, 1900-1920* (London: Macmillan, 1976). Details of the oil companies' connections with the British government are too complex to be discussed here, but official distaste for the interweaving of public and private interest is plainly discernible from the following letter written on July 29, 1919 by George Kidston at the Foreign Office, to Sir George Clerk, then attending the peace negotiations in Paris: "With regard to the present situation I do not see what we can do to prevent combines and syndicates on a large scale being formed for the eventual exploitation of oil resources in any part of the world ... I hear quite vaguely that Lord Inchcape and *Messagéries Maritimes* are the moving spirits in the new combine ... Lord Inchcape is ... a member of the Petroleum Executive and also a Director on behalf of H. M. Government of the Anglo Persian Oil Company. ... *What can one expect, therefore when private and public interests are inextricably mixed up in a Government body of control?*" Bal-four Papers, FO 800/217 (emphasis added).

43. W.S. Churchill, speech in House of Commons, July 17, 1913, quoted in *Agreement with Anglo-Persian Oil Co. Ltd. with an Explanatory Memorandum and the Report of the Committee of Experts on their Local Investigations*, Cmd. 7419, 1914.

44. Quoted in Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to Ambassador, Constantinople (Sir Gerard Lowther), Despatch No. 239 of 5 June 1913; India Office, Letters, Political and Secret, Series 10, 3877/1912/1913/1/2222.

45. In the spring of 1919, General Sir John Cowans arrived in Mesopotamia to negotiate for oil concessions, accompanied by two geologists, Messrs. Noble and Evans. According to one Foreign Office source, quoted in India Office correspondence, Cowans was acting on behalf of the Shell Company. A Foreign Office official remarked, "The despatch of General Cowans to Mesopotamia was, I understand, a job put through by the War Office about which neither we [i.e. the Foreign Office] nor the India Office was consulted." Cowans left Baghdad on May 10, 1919, after his presence had been

Curzon, the British Foreign Secretary, and Bainbridge Colby, the US Ambassador to London, a certain amount of oil-working had taken place to provide for the daily requirements of both the British and Ottoman armies.⁴⁶ A cabinet memorandum of June 1921, *Petroleum in Mesopotamia and Palestine*, referred to the German-worked wells at Qayyara yielding 10,000 gallons a day in wartime, with lesser quantities being extracted at Tuz Karmatli, Qala' Naft, and Zakho. The memorandum conceded that deep drilling had yet to be undertaken, but stressed the close geological correlation between the areas north of Baghdad and the Maidan-i Naftun field in Persia:

It is not possible to give any estimate of the potential production of Mesopotamia as this can only be determined when deep drilling has been carried out over a wide area. There is no doubt however, that this region can safely be regarded as extremely promising. The actual output of the Maidan-i Naftun field in Persia is at present two million tons per annum, and this quantity could if necessary be very materially increased from the wells already drilled.⁴⁷

Eventually, although the large oil strikes were still to come, the Turkish Petroleum Company,⁴⁸ now reconstituted as an Anglo-Franco-Dutch-American consortium (that is, with the French and the Americans but without the Germans), negotiated a concession with the government of Iraq in March 1925. However, given the general surplus of oil to world requirements at the time, it was not until the early 1950s that oil revenues began to make a really substantial contribution to the economy of Iraq.

In 1972, along with most of the rest of the world's oil producers, who either had done or would soon do much the same thing, Iraq nationalized its oil — that is, the state took over exploitation and commercialization. At the time, Iraq was notionally run as a centrally planned command economy along Eastern European lines, and the regime was able to initiate several major development projects and introduce wide-ranging social welfare and educational programs. The new wealth, together with the oil price hike of 1973 and rising oil prices during most of the 1970s, meant that GDP per capita rose from ID (Iraqi dinars) 120 in 1970 to ID 1,015 in 1980.⁴⁹ However, by this time, Iraq under the Ba'th had developed into a state kleptocracy, so that while the symbolism of “taking Iraqi oil under the control of the Iraqi people” was extremely popular, this meant in practical terms that a large proportion of the oil revenues were diverted into the pockets of Saddam Husayn and his circle. It is also of some interest that the Iraqi regime did not diversify into refining, transporting, or retailing, and in consequence remained dependent on others for the downstream side of the operation.⁵⁰

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noted by employees of Standard Oil. Noble and Evans stayed on, apparently continuing their surveying operations. See L P & S 10 2249/1915/1919/2, pp. 2191, 1733, 4002, 5206.

46. *Correspondence between H. M. Government and the Government of the United States of America Respecting Economic Rights in Mandated Territories*, Miscellaneous No. 10, 1921, Cmd. 1226.

47. Cabinet Paper E 25, Memorandum by the Minister in Charge of Petroleum Affairs, June 30, 1921; E 7613/382/93: FO 371/6361.

48. It became the Iraq Petroleum Company in 1929.

49. Michael Adams, ed., *The Middle East* (New York: Facts on File, 1987), p. 37.

50. The Kuwaitis, for example, opened a chain of petrol stations in northern Europe during the 1980s and 1990s, calling their product Q8.

Over the past few decades, several regimes have come to power in the Middle East which might be dubbed “rogue,” or eccentric, notably Iran, Iraq, and Libya. Curiously, the changes of regime have had remarkably little effect on the destination of oil exports from the three states; all have continued (with some fairly minor variations) to export their oil to much the same importers as before. In addition, although the situation changed dramatically after the imposition of sanctions in 1990, it was the case that since the early 1980s, and covertly from much earlier, Iraq had enjoyed very close relations with the United States and other Western countries, partly because of its value as a market for both armaments and for more conventional consumer goods, and partly because of the Ba‘th’s stances first against Communism and then against Iran. The United States supplied for a considerable proportion of Iraq’s agricultural needs, but in addition, there were spectacular (if little remarked on) increases in Iraq’s exports of oil to the United States over the 1980s. In 1984, 1.2% of Iraq’s oil, 10.1 million barrels, went to the United States; in the first seven months of 1990 alone (the invasion of Kuwait took place on August 2) the proportion was 32.2%, or 514.5 million barrels, just under 9% of all US oil imports.⁵¹ It is only relatively recently that the economic growth of China and India has been responsible for a noticeable increase in world demand, which has brought about soaring oil prices and enabled less US-friendly regimes or rulers, like Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, to make threats about diversifying their customer base.⁵²

In many ways, therefore, on the general principle that Iraqi oil has to “be sold somewhere,” it is not immediately obvious why it should have been necessary for the United States to occupy Iraq in order for it to be assured of access to Iraqi oil. The country has precious few other marketable resources, so that any regime must perforce rely on oil both to feed the people and to ensure its own survival. However, there are signs that more complex factors may need to be taken into consideration. It seems that if applied in Iraq, what are known as Production Sharing Agreements (PSAs) between the Ministry of Oil and foreign oil companies would give the companies arrangements very similar to the concessions they or their predecessors enjoyed before nationalization, all the while retaining the facade of state ownership. The state would still own the oil, but PSAs would put development firmly in the hands of a (foreign) oil company: “In Iraq’s case, [such] contracts could be signed while the government is new and weak, the security situation dire, and the country still under military occupation. As such the terms are likely to be highly unfavourable, but they could persist for up to forty years ... Iraq could be surrendering its democracy as soon as it achieves it.”⁵³

Apparently, this procedure had already been suggested and discussed as part of

51. Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, *Annual Statistical Bulletin* (Vienna, 1991), Tables 51, 56.

52. The extent to which recent developments have brought oil consumers and producers into hitherto uncharted waters emerges very clearly in a recent article: “Past its Peak: Michael Klare on the Oil Crisis,” *London Review of Books*, August 14, 2008, pp. 38-39. Until 1993, China consumed less oil than any other major power; by the end of 2003 “it had overtaken Japan to become the world’s second biggest consumer and now consumes 9.2 per cent of the world’s oil.”

53. This is discussed in Greg Muttit, “Crude Designs: The Rip-Off of Iraq’s Oil Wealth,” Global Policy Forum, November 2005, <http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/oil/2005/crudedesigns.htm>, from which most of the material for this section has been taken.

the Future of Iraq Project as early as 2002, and thus in some sense formed part of US policy. In general, it is significant that no other Middle Eastern oil-producing states have opted for these arrangements, and that of the larger oil producers, only Russia has gone down this road and now bitterly regrets it. Those who favor this approach claim that it is the only way to attract the levels of investment necessary to restore production to, say, 1990 levels, to develop fields where oil is known to exist but which are not yet producing, and to free up the Iraqi budget for reconstruction spending. Given Iraq's extensive reserves (and the relative ease of borrowing against such collateral), this seems a preposterous argument. In general, whatever the true significance of PSAs for Iraqi oil, the involvement of many senior members of both Bush Administrations in the higher levels of the oil industry at some stage in their careers is almost too well-known to need repeating here and does not bode especially well for the future. Again, although perhaps not unattractive to some of its members, the Kurdish Regional Government's conclusion of its own oil deals (for instance with Hunt Oil in July 2007) inevitably weakens the Iraqi government's capacity to resist similar overtures, especially those that happen to be strongly backed by the US government.

CONCLUSION

This ends my survey of the dissimilarities and similarities between two military incursions to the same locality some 90 years apart. The long-term legacy of the British occupation and mandate of Iraq was a weak state buttressed by relatively strong and powerful armed forces, which took power in the late 1950s in the face of the inadequacy of the state. What emerged in Iraq (and the same phenomenon is visible in Egypt and Syria), was a structure familiar from other formerly colonized territories: the "relative autonomy of the state."⁵⁴ As an institution, the state is not deeply rooted in society, and its generally repressive nature means that it enjoys little popular support. As far as they can, its citizens turn their backs on it and try to do without it, exploiting networks of family, kin, tribe, village, ethnicity, and so on. Other institutions of civil society (parliaments, labor unions, pluralist political parties, professional, and civic associations) are largely absent, or if present, exist only in symbolic or complicit form. Such governments or regimes, however long they have been in power (and the Ba'ath lasted from 1968 until 2003), are essentially unstable because of their shallow roots; longevity should not be confused with stability. The remaining "post-revolutionary states" of the Middle East have still to reach the "higher ground" of post-dictatorship democracy attained, however shakily, by many of the states of South America in the latter years of the 20th century. To my great sorrow, having spent nearly all my academic life writing on this country, it is difficult to plot an even remotely optimistic trajectory that might see an end to the agony of the people of Iraq, in the foreseeable, let alone the more distant, future.

54. See Nikos Poulantzas, trans. Timothy O'Hagan, *Political Power and Social Classes* (London: New Left Books, 1973).