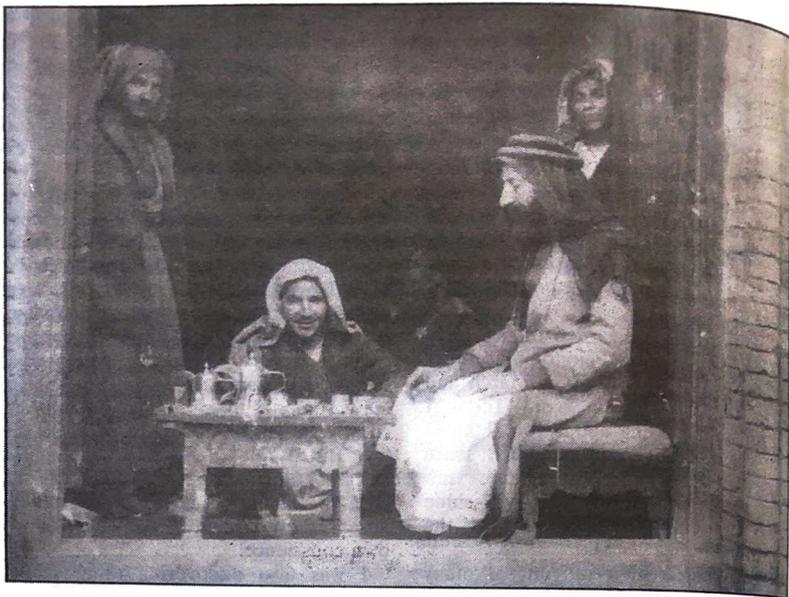




THE modern nation state of Iraq has only existed for sixty-seven years and came into being following the first world war when, with the demise of the Ottoman Empire, the major Western powers of the day carved up the Fertile Crescent and Arabian Peninsula in accordance with their imperial designs. It is primarily due to its being an infant nation state blessed with arbitrary borders which have little regard for ethnic and tribal differences within the nation that Iraq has experienced so many difficulties since its creation. Such problems as these have been exacerbated first by British rule and subsequently by leaders who have been nothing more than British stooges, or, after the 1958 overthrow of the British installed monarchy, by leaders who have tried to break the nation's colonial bonds and push the country towards neutrality and non-alignment in pursuance of nationalist goals or the wider cause of Arab nationalism.

It was at the beginning of the first world war that Britain seized the opportunity to occupy part of Iraq in order to protect her regional interests and Gulf oil fields. As soon as it became clear that Turkey would not be fighting on the British side during the war, British armed forces moved in to Basra and Fao. Although attempts were also made to move British troops as far as the capital, Baghdad, this attempt proved futile.

Following the first world war Britain was keen to preserve her position in the region and at the San Remo Conference in April 1920 it was announced that Iraq was to become a British Mandate. This decision had been arrived at as a result of the British/French Sykes-Picot Agreement. Initially a temporary government was established in Iraq following the announcement of the mandate, with Sir Percy Cox serving as High Commissioner. But in 1921 Britain decided to make Faysal, son of the Sharif Husayn



From Mandate to State

Formed by the British to placate the hashemite monarchy, Iraq was always a delicate balance between a host of tangential realities. **Sally Rabbaniha** traces the history of the nascent state and identifies the roots of its problems

of Mekka, king of Iraq. This move was meant to placate the Hashimites, from which Faysal came, who had been badly betrayed by the British following the first world war. The British government had made certain pledges to them regarding Arab independence, including that of Palestine, if they assisted the British in destroying the Ottoman Empire by engineering an Arab uprising. But having done this the Arabs were soon to discover that they had been betrayed and that various promises made to them were never fulfilled.

Initially Sharif Husayn had hesitated about leading a rebellion against the Turks and despatched his son Faysal to Constantinople by way of Damascus to discuss the proposition with Arab nationalist leaders in the Syrian capital, in March 1915. Two months later he returned to Damascus where the Central Arab Nationalist Committee had been formed to see what conditions would have to prevail if they were to agree to help the British

destroy the Turks. The conditions were embodied in the Damascus Protocol which stated that Britain would have to recognise independence for Arab countries within the following delineations: North: The line Mersin-Adana to parallel 37°N to the Birejik-Urfa-Mardin-Midiat-Jazirat-Amadia line to the Persian frontier; East: From the Persian frontier down to the Gulf; South: The Indian Ocean (Aden was not to be included); West: The Red Sea and Mediterranean Sea back to Mersin. In addition to these area delineations the Arab nationalist leaders insisted that undue privileges to foreigners should be terminated and that a defensive alliance should be formed between the independent Arab state and Britain. The Sharif was acknowledged as the spokesman for the Arabs and it was agreed that he should be able to get the British to agree to the proposals contained in the Damascus Protocol, then the Arabs in Syria would rise up against the Turkish overlords.



After World War I, Iraq was carved out of the ruins of the Ottoman Empire: A map depicting pre-Iraq borders

At the same time as these Arab deliberations were getting under way the British Foreign Office informed Sir Henry McMahon the High Commissioner in Egypt in April 1915 that the British considered it in the interest of the region that "the Arabian Peninsula should remain in the hands of an independent sovereign state" (telegram No.173, April 14, 1915). Two months later McMahon was told to declare that the British government supported the creation of an independent Arabia and an Arab Caliphate, and leaflets this to effect were duly dispatched throughout Egypt, Sudan and Syria. British planes dropped more over Wajh, Yanbo, Jeddah and Rabegh. Following this declaration correspondence started between Sharif Husayn and Sir Henry McMahon. Between July 1915 and March 1916 ten letters were exchanged between the two men which were later to become known as the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence. Most of these letters revolved around the question of the territorial demands and future status of the Arabs. Britain's primary war-time ally France was

informed about the correspondence that had been going on between representatives of the British crown and the Arab spokesman and the French were encouraged to discuss with the British and Russians what their main interests would be in the region once the Ottoman Empire had collapsed. Secretary of the British War Cabinet Sir Mark Sykes, and a representative for the French government M. Picot, then proceeded to negotiate with Russia about the future division of the spoils of the Ottoman Empire. The agreement reached became known as the Tripartite (Sykes-Picot) Agreement for the partition of the Ottoman Empire, which was to seal Iraq's fate, but neither McMahon nor Sharif Husayn were informed of this secret agreement. Whatever the pledges made to the Arabs in order to ensure an uprising it was the Sykes-Picot Agreement which came to prevail after the war and division of the region was undertaken. According to this Agreement what is now Saudi Arabia and Yemen were to be independent states, Lebanon and Syria were to come under French control

and Iraq and Transjordan under British. Parts of Palestine were to be put under an international administration until further consultation had been undertaken.

The placing of Faysal on the Iraqi throne was one way by which the British thought they could save face with regard to such broken pledges. Faysal had performed well against the Turks with his Arab armies capturing Aqaba and assisting in the capture of both Amman and Deraa. After the war practically the whole of Jordan was thus in the hands of his Arab Armies. At the 1919 Paris Peace Conference Faysal demanded independence throughout the Arab world but was strongly opposed by Britain and France. He had set up an independent government in Damascus following the war but in the wake of the San Remo Conference he was forced to leave Syria. Following the Cairo Conference in 1921 he was offered the Iraqi throne by the British and to complete their scheme of control for the region his brother Abdullah was acknowledged as the ruler of Transjordan in April 1921.

Throughout the rule of the Hashemite dynasty in Iraq, which was not overthrown until 1958, the country's foreign policy was very heavily Western oriented. Little attention was paid by the nation's rulers to the Gulf region. The main interest was in neighbouring Iran and Turkey, the Fertile Crescent and Egypt. Initially the new born Iraqi state had experienced some difficulties with Turkey over what had formerly been the Mosul Wilayah which Mustafa Kamal claimed belonged to his country. By 1922 he was trying to reinforce his claims militarily. The British claim to concessionary oil rights and the problem of what to do with Mosul's majority Kurdish population became obstacles to resolving the status of the province. The British were sure that Mosul was rich in oil deposits and for this reason they were keen to ensure that it remained attached to Iraq as it eventually did after a decision was taken by the League of Nations in early 1925 based on the fact that the Kurdish population of the disputed area seemed to prefer British rule to Turkish. At this time Iraq itself was not a member of the League of Nations but in June 1930 a treaty was agreed with the British that was to pave the way for Iraq's membership of that body. The Anglo-Iraq Treaty of that year ensured that within two years Iraq would become a League of Nations member. It also ensured more

importantly that ties between Iraq and Britain would remain particularly close and involved extensive military and foreign policy cooperation. Britain was to continue to lease two air bases in Iraq and British forces were to be allowed access to all Iraqi airports, railways, ports whenever the need arose. Iraq was also required to consult on foreign policy moves and in return would have her armed forces equipped and trained by Britain.

With Iraq's becoming a member of the League of Nations the state gained independence, at least in name. The foreign policy pursued by the country's leaders however, and the country's alliances were purely a continuation of what they had been under the Mandate. Within the country itself though much interest was being shown in Arab nationalism and the drawing of Iraq into a more influential role in the whole Arab world. These feelings were ignited by increasing anti-British sentiment throughout Iraq which was not improved by the escalating chaos in Palestine.

With the Bakr Sidqi coup of 1936 the military got a taste of governing the country and despite earlier difficulties with Turkey, Iraq drew closer to her neighbour. The coup installed Hikmat Sulayman as head of the government, a great believer in Kamal's social and economic reforms. Hikmat, probably because of his Turkish origins, sought close ties with both Iran and Turkey at the expense of the wider Arab world. In 1937 the Sa'adabad Pact was signed between Iraq and Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan. Hikmat's blatant disregard for Arab issues caused much consternation within Iraq and resulted in him remaining as head of the government for a mere ten months.

During the second world war Iraq was occupied by British troops once again and when they left the country they ensured that the government they left behind them in Iraq could be relied upon to pursue British regional interests still further. Anti-British sentiment amongst the Iraqi populace, especially in the wake of the creation of Israel, still ruled however. Iraqi troops had fought in Palestine in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war alongside the Arab Legion from Jordan, but the manner in which the ceasefire had been reached and the prevention by Jordan of allowing Iraqi troops to respond to Egyptian pleas for assistance, impressed upon the Iraqi people that the British and Americans, with Jordanian assistance, had connived at the victory of the Jewish settlers.

Because of this suspicion levelled against Jordan, the standing of the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq fell still further in the nation's eyes.

Following the second world war the West encouraged Turkey to play a pivotal role in the region, as regards stopping Soviet encroachment and safeguarding Western interests. To further this end Turkey signed with Iraq in 1946 a mutual defense treaty which was to pave the way for the later Baghdad Pact which would also be joined by Iran, Pakistan and Britain. In 1950-51 the United States, Britain and France had wanted to establish a Middle East Command, but with Egypt refusing to cooperate in the venture the Western powers devised a 'Northern Tier' defense system with Iraq as a major partner. This system was developed as a response to Britain's vastly diminished post-war influence in the area. This 'Northern Tier' defense plan involved, in addition to Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Pakistan, and it was hoped that as Iraq was the only Arab member she would eventually be able to entice other Arab states to ally themselves with the military and strategic interests of the Western powers. Based on this defense plan, the Turco-Iraqi Pact of Mutual Cooperation, later to become known as the Baghdad Pact, was born. This pact, rather than attract other Arab states was to prove to have a very divisive effect on the rest of the Arab world. One of the most important outcomes was to be the hostility which was to grow between Egypt and Iraq as Nasser was unable to palate Iraq's alliance with the West, and seeming lack of concern for Arab unity or the interests of the people of the Middle East. Due to the hostile relationship which developed between Egypt and Iraq, the latter became concerned in February 1958 when Nasser announced that his country would be entering into a union with Syria, to be known as the United Arab Republic. To counteract any possible threat that the United Arab Republic might pose Jordan approached Iraq with regard to forming an Iraqi-Jordanian federation in 1958, an idea which appealed to the Iraqis as a way of unifying the Hashemite kingdoms. Iraq also invited Kuwait to join the federation but this was an offer which the Kuwaitis refused thinking that Iraq had ulterior motives over Kuwaiti land and resources in making the offer. The idea of the Hashemite federation however was to remain just that. By the late 1950's the Iraqi people had had

enough of seeing their government prostrate itself before Western interests and turn away from cooperation and unification with neutral Arab states in the region and in May 1958 when Jordan's King Husayn requested Iraqi troops to be sent to his kingdom to ensure its protection following the outbreak of war in Lebanon, instead of proceeding in the direction of Amman they executed a coup against the monarchy. On July 14 1958 the Hashemite reign was brought to an end and the republic of Iraq was born.

From the birth of the republic the orientation of Iraqi foreign policy was set on a different course to what had been pursued in the previous years since independence. The country's new rulers wanted above all to put Iraq on a neutral footing and to do this they opened relations with the Soviet Union and other Eastern bloc countries as a counterbalance to Western alliances and trading partnerships which already existed with Iraq. The leader of the republic's new regime; General Abdul Karim Qasim also wanted to see Iraq develop deeper ties with the rest of the Arab world, but his policies towards the Gulf nevertheless, did not differ significantly from those of his predecessors. The new government did however dispel any hopes for federation between Iraq and Jordan and in mid-1958 Iraqi troops stationed in the remaining Hashemite kingdom were recalled. Although the new rulers were not overly sympathetic to protecting Western interests they did however exercise caution when it came to disentangling themselves from pacts and treaties entered into by previous governments. Iraqi troops did take over the Habbaniya air base however on July 29 and a month later British service men there were told that their services were no longer required. Following this the Baghdad Pact headquarters were shifted from Iraq to Turkey and the organisation was re-christened the Central Treaty Organization. The following spring Iraq announced that it would no longer be serving as a member of the pact.

Western governments naturally became quite unsettled by the new Iraqi regime's stance although that nation displayed no outright hostility towards the West and continued to maintain diplomatic relations with both the United States and Great Britain. But there was a clear intention on Qasim's part to shake Iraq from the hold of the colonial powers. For this reason in addition to diplomatic channels being opened up with the Soviet

Union and the Eastern bloc nations, relations were also established with Communist China and Albania. Agreements were signed in 1959 whereby the USSR would provide Iraq with economic and technological assistance. So disturbed did the United States become by these measures that by April 1959 the director of the CIA Allen W. Dulles was calling developments in Iraq "the most dangerous in the world today". Nasser also had no time for the leaders of the new republic seeing them as being no more in favour of overall Arab unity than any other of Iraq's pro-British rulers. Qassim was not a believer in the fact that Arab unity could be achieved immediately not least of all because the Arab nation states had over the course of the years gone in different directions and had developed their own self interests which could only be overcome in a piece-meal fashion.

But such anti-Qassim tirades on the part of Nasser were fuelled by Iraqi policies and especially by the fiasco with Kuwait which began in the middle of 1961 following Kuwait's gaining independence from the British. This affair was to serve more than any other of the republic's foreign policy measures to ensure that Iraq became totally isolated from the rest of the Arab fold. General Qassim refused to recognise Kuwait's independence claiming that it rightly belonged to Iraq having during the Ottoman Empire formed part of the *wilayat* of Basra. In fact the Turks had only made Kuwait part of the *wilayat* of Basra in response to Britain's signing a protectorate agreement with it at the end of the nineteenth century, so Qassim's claims that Kuwait belonged to Iraq had very little basis as the rest of the Arab world recognised. Yet he pushed ahead with his claims and even threatened, although this was not actually put into practice, to back them up by armed force. There were reports however that troop movements were taking place on the Iraqi side of the border, and concerned at the possible threat this could pose to them the Kuwaitis called on Britain for protection. British forces arrived in the country at the beginning of July 1961, an outside intervention which did even less to endear Iraq's rulers to the other Arab states. The Arab League however, dealt with the issue and arranged for an Arab force to protect Kuwait's sovereignty until all threats from Iraq had subsided. This was subsequently done. However, Iraq still did not give up the fight for Kuwait and as a result of Kuwait's



King Faysal of Iraq and his British sponsors

admittance into the Arab League on July 20, 1961. Iraq's leaders suspended ties with the League and threatened that any country recognising Kuwait ran the risk of having their diplomatic ties with Baghdad severed. As a direct result of this threat and because of the widespread recognition extended to Kuwait, Iraq was, during the following year forced to break off diplomatic ties with numerous countries and was ultimately left isolated and friendless as the result of a futile dispute from which she gained absolutely nothing. What was worse the episode sowed the seeds of distrust and suspicion between the two neighbouring Arab states for many years to come. Attempts in later years to restore good relations between the two countries were to flounder on the rocks either because of Kuwait's doubts regarding Iraq's ultimate intentions over the country, or because subsequent Iraqi leaders took it on themselves once again to resurrect demands if not for Kuwait itself, at least for territory which was regarded as belonging to Kuwait.

Arab nationalists within Iraq thus became highly dissatisfied and within 4½ years of Qassim's accession to power he was finished. Opposition had grown to his rule not only because of his foreign policies which above anything had done great harm internationally to Iraq but also because of his inability to deal effectively with the domestic troubles which flared up concerning the Kurdish people.

It is perhaps between 1963-68 that

Iraq's foreign policies vis-a-vis the rest of the Arab world began to show a marked difference. During this time Iraqi policies began to illustrate the point that she was at last keen to recognise the importance especially of the Gulf region. The country's leaders were keen once again however to develop strong relations with the West a trend which was not reversed until the June war of 1967 between Israel and her Arab neighbours.

During the 1960's Iraq tried to patch up differences she had had with Kuwait and other moves favouring cooperation were also made in the direction of the other Gulf states. The moves towards solving the problem with Kuwait however were to be of no avail as Baghdad continued to stress its right to Warba and Bubiyan islands, the possession of which would have ensured for Iraq an enviable security in the Gulf.

Iraq's relationship with Iran during this period was also a reflection of the desire for cooperation. During 1967 an economic agreement between the two countries was expanded and agreement in the field of oil exploration was also arrived at between Tehran and Baghdad. By 1968 Iraq was hoping that Iran and Iraq would be able to function harmoniously to the extent that as a partnership they would be able to police the Gulf.

Relations with Saudi Arabia however were not marked by cooperation. Problems which had already existed between the two nations were only exacerbated by events in Yemen.

When the Ba'ath party came to power in Iraq for the second time in 1968 they were also keen to enhance Iraq's standing with the rest of the Arab world and to project Iraq into a position where it could play a very influential role throughout the region. The Ba'ath with their socialist based ideology were keen to maintain and develop links with the Soviet Union as well as enhancing the cause of pan-Arabism. However links with the West were also not allowed to disintegrate and during the mid-seventies Iraq turned increasingly to Western suppliers especially for weapons and manufactured goods which were sorely needed but which could not be obtained elsewhere, or at least not to the desired quality. By the middle of the decade as many as 22 American companies had representatives in Iraq and future possibilities began to look very bright especially after the invasion of Afghanistan and the removal of the Shah of Iran from power. At this time the United States also began

to see the beneficial role Iraq could play in safeguarding the West's interests in the region. Observers seem to conclude that following the fall of the Hashemite kingdom in Iraq in particular, the United States had pinned its hopes on seeing Iran and Saudi Arabia built up as pro-Western bastions in the Gulf and that it was only later that the potential that Iraq had to offer in this role really began to dawn on them especially with the turn of the political tide in the region following the success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

The potential which Iraq possessed for playing an important and influential role in the region came into full bloom particularly after 1975 when Iraq really started to cooperate with the other states in the Gulf especially with regard to trade. The Arab states of the region had largely put their individual differences and ideologies to one side during this time, mainly as a result of the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. It was during this war that the Arab states had for the first time ever effectively united in an oil boycott of the West and seen how devastating such a policy could be.

At the time of the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war these tentative links with Gulf states had effectively become very strong to the extent that Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, the two states which had in previous decades experienced the most difficult and tense relations with Iraq, were willing to pump large amounts of money into Iraq when that country began to face financial difficulties brought about by the drawn out hostilities. But not just these two countries in the Gulf have illustrated support for Iraq's onslaught into post-revolutionary Iran. The United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Qatar also shared the Iraqi rulers' nightmare that Islamic revolution would spill over into their nations and it is clear that they supported Iraq's efforts to knock the young Tehran government to the ground. Such is the situation now that Iraq has cultivated far stronger relations with other Gulf states than currently exist with fellow Ba'athist state of Syria, or former ally Jordan, still under Hashemite rule.

In addition to the consolidation of interests and outlook of the Arab Gulf states during the mid to late 1970's, the United States was also encouraged by the fact that Iraq was clearly beginning to show disillusionment with the Soviet Union, which for its part was shifting the focal point of its attention away from the heartland of the Middle East. And with Egypt

having isolated itself from the Arab fold and discredited itself as leader of the Arab world due to its peace treaty with Israel, Iraq really seemed to the West to be the shining star of the future. President Carter had repeatedly stressed that his country would be willing to resume diplomatic relations with Iraq, severed in the wake of the 1967 war, but this was not actually achieved until 1984 under the Reagan presidency. For at least three years prior to the restoration of diplomatic ties the US had been impressing upon the Iraqis their importance to the West, an importance which was particularly marked by the 1981 visit to Baghdad of US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Morris Draper.

However, faced with such attention from the United States the Ba'athist rulers of Iraq seemed to drop any notions they may previously have held regarding neutrality and non-alignment and started to make it clear that they viewed their interests and those of the West to be intertwined. This change of heart was most markedly made in a remark that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein made to American Congressman Stephen Solarz in which he reportedly declared: "There is not a single Arab official who considers in his policy the so-called destruction of Israel and its obliteration from existence". Such pro-Western leanings were rewarded in many ways not least of all by the sale of much needed computer technology to Iraq in the summer of 1985. For a long time Iraq had expressed the desire to get hold of such technology but was unable to due to restrictions put on such exports by the United States Department of Defense. The sale of the equipment by two American companies, Sperry and Digicon was regarded therefore as a real breakthrough.

Thus Iraqi foreign policy would seem to have come full circle. After the creation of the nation state by the British the country was until 1958 closely allied and subservient to serving the interests of the West. This foreign policy position was very unpopular within Iraq and was to eventually lead to the coup which would install General Qassim as the nation's leader. He had tried to break the hold which the colonial powers had wielded over his country and tried to push more in the direction of neutrality. But his policies were to prove very unpopular with the Western powers and ultimately with his own people who considered that his policies caused too much division in the Arab world and were swinging too far

towards the communist camp. Following a period of virtual non-alignment until the mid-1970's Iraq however has, courtesy of the Ba'athist rulers come once again to be the slave of Western interests and executor of their designs throughout a vitally strategic and resource-rich part of the globe. These policy swings illustrate that since its creation as a nation state, Iraq's policies have been both contradictory and confusing with the country's leaders rarely having been able to escape from dancing to the tune of foreign powers. Current developments within Iraq could ensure that this post-independence pattern however, soon comes to an end. The Iraqi people throughout the nearly seven decades of their country's existence have perpetually demonstrated their dislike of policies pursued by the country's leaders whether in the name of the West, the East, Pan-Arabism or nationalism. As a result one can expect that in the years ahead they will look for the establishment of a government which rejects these notions and ushers into the country values of which they have been deprived for so long. This would mean a government in Baghdad dedicated to putting the country in a true state of independence and non-alignment from foreign interests, and one which pursued the higher cause of pan-Islamic unity rather than any solidarity or friendship based purely on nationalistic or ethnic principles. ■

As the war takes its toll, where to now?

