



ESTABLISHMENT OF THE BRITISH PROTECTORATE IN NORTHERN MESOPOTAMIA DURING THE END OF WORLD WAR I /THE GREAT WAR

BİRİNCİ DÜNYA SAVAŞI SONRASI DÖNEMDE KUZEY MEZOPOTAMYA'DA
İNGİLİZ HİMAYESİNİN KURULMASI

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Abstract

In the aftermath of the First World War, because of the new conditions challenging the use of direct imperial methods, Britain had difficulties in the establishment of the administration over the Kurdish regions in Mosul. It aimed to create an autonomous Kurdish state – or states – in northern Mesopotamia to be governed under its protection. It therefore used various different methods between the years 1918 and 1920. For both the legal uncertainties surrounding Mosul and the internal dynamics within the social structure those attempts were proven futile. As it was understood that the Kurdistan scheme could not be fulfilled, debates on retreat came into prominence. Kurdish question came yet once again at the top of the problems Britain faced in Iraq after the creation of that state. The question got even more troublesome when Turkey stepped in. After the League of Nations Council announced its final decision on the future of Mosul and ruled that Mosul would be united with the State of Iraq under a British mandate, Britain, upon Council's invitation took the necessary administrative measures to guarantee the protection of the Kurdish people. Thus, a Kurdish national identity, to enable the creation of a Kurdish state in the future, was built. Using mainly the British, Ottoman and Iraqi archival material has been inquired about Britain's perception of the Kurdish question and its reasons for failure.

Key Words: Britain, Kurdistan, Mosul vilayeti, Iraq, Turkey.

Öz

Birinci Dünya Savaşı sonrasında, doğrudan emperyalist yöntemlerin kullanılmasını zorlaştıran yeni koşullar nedeniyle İngiltere Musul vilâyetinin Kürt bölgeleri üzerinde bir yönetim düzeni kurmakta zorlandı. Öncelikle Kuzey Mezopotamya'da kendi koruması altında özerk bir Kürt devleti -ya da devletleri- kurmayı amaçladı. Bu nedenle 1918 ve 1920 yılları arasında birçok farklı yöntem dendi. Fakat hem Musul vilayetiyle ilgili savaş sonrası koşullarının yarattığı hukuki belirsizlikler, hem de vilayetin toplumsal bünyesindeki iç dinamikler bu girişimlerin sonuç vermesini engelledi. 1920 yılı başlarında "Kürdistan" planının uygulanamayacağı anlaşılınca, İngiliz yönetim çevrelerinde bölgeden geri çekilme tartışmaları ön plana çıktı. Tartışmalar, Irak devletinin kurulmasından sonra da devam etti. Tartışmaların temelinde, Kürt sorununun İngiltere'nin başını ağrıtmaya devam etmesi yatıyordu. Aynı yıl Türkiye'nin de soruna dâhil olması, sorunu İngiltere açısından daha içinden çıkılmaz bir hale getirdi. Fakat stratejik-ekonomik kaygı ve öncelikler, İngiltere'de Musul vilayetini muhafaza etme seçeneğinin ağırlık kazanmasını sağladı. Milletler Cemiyeti Konseyi'nin Musul'un geleceğiyle ilgili olarak, vilayetin İngiliz mandası altındaki Irak Devleti ile birleşmesini öngören nihai kararını açıklamasından sonra, İngiltere, Konsey'in çağrısına uyarak, Kürt halkının korunmasını güvence altına alan gerekli yönetsel önlemleri hayata geçirdi. Bu çerçevede, gelecekte bir Kürt devletinin oluşturulmasını sağlamak amacıyla bir Kürt ulusal kimliği inşa edildi. Yukarıda özetlenen süreç ve İngiltere'nin Kürt sorunuyla ilgili algısı, İngiliz, Osmanlı ve Irak arşiv malzemesi kullanılarak incelenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İngiltere, Kürdistan, Musul vilayeti, Irak, Türkiye

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Introduction: Changing Methods of Imperialism

At the beginning of the First World War, the prevailing opinion was that the British Empire had expanded beyond its powers and that to conquer new territories would be dangerous.² The problem was not one of conquering new territory but of how to keep it once conquered. Not only would it be very expensive to deploy soldiers on the large swathes of land, but in the long term, such a situation would provoke local ire, which would necessitate the use of more force and create even more expense. In the end, withdrawal would become inevitable and this would lead to a perception that the British Empire had been defeated by an eastern population, thus creating an unfavorable precedent for other populations living within the Empire. If Britain aimed to safeguard and expand its Empire, it had to develop political and economic methods beside military ones.

In fact, Britain already had a certain experience in this domain. With the advent of new actors in the imperial struggle, it had been necessary to colonize new territories, especially in Africa, and the expansion of colonial territory had led to the need to develop new management methods to rule these colonies. Thus, certain colonies under Britain's financial and commercial hegemony had been granted political autonomy. These countries, which were ruled by local notables under the supervision of British advisors, provided greater profits than any merely gained through military might, and at relatively little cost.³

Efforts to Adapt Imperialism to the Wilsonian Idealism

Two dangers had surfaced in the aftermath of the First World War, challenging the use of direct imperial methods: the rise of nationalist movements in less-developed countries, and the spread of socialism after the Bolshevik Revolution. Installing 'national' administrations led by local notables who would serve the interests of imperialism was not only the best, but also the cheaper method to counter the twin dangers of nationalism and socialism. Moreover, it was widely accepted that, given the United States' stake in the final victory, its priorities could not be overlooked and that post-war arrangements would have to conform to the Woodrow Wilson's fourteen points. This signified that direct imperialism could not be established on territories conquered through war. The question was what method to adopt instead. This uncertainty concerned above all those territories that had formerly belonged to the Ottoman Empire.

² British desiderata in Turkey-in-Asia, 30 June 1915 in UKNA, PRO, CAB 27/1.

³ Stivers, *Supremacy of Oil*, 19–20.

On 7 November 1918, Britain and France released a joint statement addressed to the populations of occupied Ottoman territories. The statement claimed that both countries strived for the ‘liberation of the peoples so long oppressed by the Turks.’ The native populations were promised that ‘far from seeking to force upon the populations of these countries any particular institution, France and Britain [have] no other concern than to ensure by their support and their active assistance the normal working of the governments and institutions which the populations shall have freely adopted.’⁴

This statement, which aimed to dispel the negative effect created by the Sykes-Picot Agreement while conforming to the fourteen points, was in fact contrary to all agreements the Allies had reached during the war. There were a number of ambiguities in the text. For example, it was not clear what was meant by ‘the initiative and the free choice of the native populations,’ neither was it stated what the scope and duration of their ‘support and active assistance’ would be. Arnold Wilson, the acting civil commissioner in Baghdad, warned that should the promises made in the statement be fulfilled, the security of functionaries in the region would be compromised, which would complicate governance, and that gains made in Mesopotamia could be lost. The oriental secretary to the British commission in Iraq, Gertrude Bell, qualified the government’s policy as contradictory, unclear and dishonest.⁵

In fact, whatever promises were made in the joint statement, government officials in London and those in Baghdad all agreed on the need to establish effective British rule over Mesopotamia. However, international conditions allowed neither for annexation, nor for the sort of official protectorate proposed by authorities in Baghdad. The government wished to establish the same sort of indirect method of governance that had existed in Egypt between the years 1882-1914, that is, a native government in appearance, but a rule by British advisors in fact. All that remained was to find the appropriate formula. The matter was resolved with the establishment of the mandate system, which entrusted the victorious states with the governance over the people of territories seceding from states defeated in the war until these populations developed the ability of self-rule. The system was recommended with the aim of concealing the bad name and methods of colonialism and to provide it with an image more befitting with present-day conditions. A legal basis for this method needed to be found, and an international organization functioning under the sole control of the big powers could

⁴ Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East*, ii, 30.

⁵ Wilson to Montagu, Baghdad, 16, 17, 20 Nov. 1918 in BL, IOR, P-S 10/781; Helmreich, *Paris to Sevres*, 9; Nevakivi, *Arab Middle East*, 82-4; Busch, *Britain, India and the Arabs*, 198-200; Foster, *Making of Modern Iraq*, 67-8.

provide just this. The League of Nations was created with this aim in mind. The rules regulating the mandate system, formulated by Jan C. Smuts, were introduced in Article 22 of the covenant of the League of Nations. This article stipulated that the well-being and development of those ‘peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world’ should be entrusted as ‘a sacred trust of civilization’ to ‘advanced nations who by reason of their resources, their experience or their geographical position can best undertake this responsibility, and who are willing to accept it.’ This ‘sacred trust’ would be exercised under the title of mandatory on behalf of the League.⁶

Difficulties in Establishing Order in the Mosul Vilayet

The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 had placed Mosul vilayet (today’s northern Iraq) under French influence, because Britain aimed to use France as a buffer against Russia that was to settle in Eastern Anatolia. However, following the Bolshevik Revolution, Russia had withdrawn from the scene, which meant that Britain no longer needed to leave Mosul to France. Furthermore, the vilayet had increased in importance due to the abundant presence of oil, which had become a product of vital importance during the war. Therefore, Britain occupied the Mosul vilayet a few weeks after the ceasefire had officially entered into force. British and French prime ministers, David Lloyd George and Georges Clemenceau negotiated and reached an agreement on Mosul in December 1918 in London. Thus, France accepted to transfer Mosul vilayet to the British zone of influence on condition that it received a share from the oil.⁷

British officials in Baghdad argued that, for strategic and economic reasons, the vilayets of Mosul, Baghdad and Basra needed to join the state that was to be created in Mesopotamia. Foreign Office, on the other hand, advised against making administrative plans until the legal uncertainty over Mosul had completely disappeared; that is, until France had definitely and officially relinquished the rights it held over the vilayet through the Sykes-Picot Agreement.⁸

The main difficulty in establishing an administration in Mosul stemmed not from the legal uncertainties surrounding it, but from the internal dynamics within the social structure. The most pertinent observations on this matter were made by Bell, who had arrived in Mosul right

⁶ Minutes of the 39th meeting of the Eastern Committee, 27 Nov. 1918 in UKNA, PRO, CAB 27/24; Montagu to Wilson, London, 28 Nov. 1918 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/5227; Wilson, *Mesopotamia*, 104-18; Sluglett, *Britain and Iraq*, 23-38; Smuts, *League of Nations*; Eagleton, *International Government*, 272-4. Busch, *Britain, India and the Arabs*, 27, 275, 301-2; Nevakivi, *Arab Middle East*, 83-5, 136; Stivers, *Supremacy of Oil*, 20-2.

⁷ Howard, *Partition of Turkey*, 212; Nevakivi, *Arab Middle East*, 86-91.

⁸ Busch, *Britain, India and the Arabs*, 273-4.

before the 1908 revolution in Turkey. She described Mosul as a city that had been governed for centuries by rich and powerful Arab families. Although the central government had gained more power after the revolution, Bell doubted that the constitutional order could transform the basic dynamics of power. Local notables were determined to protect the power and wealth they had accumulated through force and coercion against threats from external powers. According to her, the presence of the Ottoman Empire in the region was based not on written rules but on unwritten principles of administration and a long-standing tradition of submission to authority. The operative agents of the Ottoman establishment were not governors or military commanders, but rather village aghas, tribe leaders and local sayyads, whose power derived neither from the Sultan, nor the constitution. The source of their social power came from specific relationship patterns which had regulated the population's daily life for generations. Bell compared the region's level of development with that of Britain and observed that they had barely advanced beyond the Moot Court, let alone the Magna Carta. She maintained that it was impossible to speak of the Arab nation as such, and that it would be harmful to impose highly-developed institutions on such a backward society. The expansion of communication means, public education and the establishment of a strong, central authority would all lead to the development of the social structure, but this would be a very long and difficult process. Bell therefore advised that British rule be established in accordance with this analysis and in such a way as to accommodate the existing structure.⁹ Wilson, who took this advice seriously, disregarded the Foreign Office's warnings and established direct rule from the centre in Baghdad over the vilayet of Mosul.

Turkish functionaries had withdrawn along with the Turkish army and, in the process, destroyed all official documents and records. There were no locals qualified to replace these Turkish functionaries. The British, which maintained the administrative, land and fiscal policies the Turks had developed in the centre and in the provinces, chose to appoint Indian functionaries to staff their administration. *Sancak* (province) and *liva* (sub-province) units were re-organized. Sixteen provinces were created in Iraq. Three of these –Mosul, Kirkuk and Suleymaniya– belonged to the vilayet of Mosul. Each province was governed by a political officer responsible for every type of administrative, financial and legal matter and who was subordinate to the civil commissioner in Baghdad. Following the occupation, Gerald Leachman took up his duties as political officer in Mosul, Stephen Longrigg in Kirkuk, and Edward Noel in Suleymaniya. A provincial council was created in the capital of each

⁹ Kedourie, *England and the Middle East*, 199–201; G. Bell, *Arab of Mesopotamia*, 11–21; F. Bell (ed.), *Letters of Gertrude Bell*, ii, 464; Longrigg, *Iraq*, 102; Sluglett, *Britain and Iraq*, 34–5.

province, presided by the political officer and staffed by local notables and officials. Administrative units created by the Ottomans, such as the kaza (district) and nahiye (sub-district) remained untouched and were governed by a district governor and a sub-district governor, selected from amongst local tribal leaders. Responsibility over a certain number of sub-districts was granted to assistant political officers who acted under the supervision of political officers. These assistants were in charge of collecting information on tribes, establishing good relations with the public, ensuring population's obedience to the government, and collecting taxes.¹⁰

Analyzing the scant transportation and communication networks available throughout the mountainous areas in which the Kurds lived, Wilson concluded that the military risks involved in trying to occupy these areas were too high and therefore decided to assert indirect control. The mainly Kurdish population in the east of the vilayet had but little contact with the Christians. There were therefore no negative feelings between the two. In the north, on the other hand, the population was mixed, which led to animosity between the Muslims and the Christians, and anti-western feeling was rife. There were practically no links between the Kurds who lived in the two regions roughly separated by the Greater Zap River. The British administrators, who were aware of this fact, applied different methods in the two regions. In the east, they chose to cooperate with tribal leaders and to support and strengthen their established order. In return, these leaders would ensure that British decisions were upheld and that taxes were collected in a regular fashion. In the north, the British tried to establish their power by using and abetting tribal friction. The method was to support one of the tribes – the stronger one, naturally – against the others and to establish order through the bias of trustworthy local chieftains who were remunerated for their efforts. This was the traditional Ottoman method and had always been effective as there was continuous friction between the tribes.¹¹

The population of Mosul reacted negatively to the British occupation. The Christians had been under the influence of French Catholic missionaries for years and had hoped to be governed by France. The fact that the Sykes-Picot Agreement had granted Mosul to the French had further spurred those hopes. The Muslim population, which generally felt an

¹⁰ 'Mesopotamia administrative record during British occupation,' memorandum by political department, India Office, 20 Aug. 1919 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/4149; Administration report on the Arbil division and the district of Keui Sanjaq for the year 1919 by William R. Hay, 19 Oct. 1920 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/5069; Longrigg, *Iraq*, 108–12.

¹¹ Southern Kurdistan, UKNA, PRO, FO 371/4192; Hay, *Two Years in Kurdistan*, 124–7; Sluglett, *Britain and Iraq*, 116.

affinity with the Turks, hoped that they would come back under Turkish rule. There was a general atmosphere of hesitation, because it would be as dangerous to express the wish to return under Turkish rule, as it would to express loyalty to Britain while the possibility of Turkish return remained. The British, in the campaign to win over public support, began to publish newspapers in the main cities. *El-Musul* was published in Mosul and *Necme* in Kirkuk. To begin with, both newspapers were published in Arabic, but due to popular acclaim in Kirkuk, *Necme* was soon published in Turkish. Suleymaniya, in its turn, saw the birth of the Kurdish-language newspaper, *Pişkevtin* (Forward), in 1919.¹²

London decided to organize a plebiscite in order to determine popular opinion and to prepare a legal foundation for the administration that it planned to set up in Mesopotamia. The directive from London instructed that three questions be put to the public: 1) Did they favor a single state under British tutelage stretching from the northern boundary of the Mosul vilayet to the Persian Gulf? 2) In this event, did they consider that a titular Arab head should be placed over this new State? 3) In that case, whom would they prefer as head?¹³

Upon reception of the directive, Wilson instructed his political officers to act in cooperation with British collaborators to ascertain the direction of popular will. Should popular opinion be determined to be favorable, then the political officers would organize a meeting with local notables deemed to represent the people and would ask them for their collective opinion. Voting would neither be individual, nor secret. The sheikhs, chieftains and sayyads would doubtlessly know what was expected of them during this meeting organized by the British officials in uniform. The right answers would be recorded in the minutes of the proceedings and sent on to Baghdad, while those answers that were not 'right' would simply not be recorded. In the event that public opinion was judged to be unfavorable to the desired position, then Baghdad would simply be informed of the situation and the meeting would not be held. The results that were revealed towards the end of 1918 after the compilation of the 'right' answers were naturally just as Wilson had wished. That is, the first question received a positive answer from the whole of the population; the second question was endorsed only by the Arabs, whereas no clear name had emerged from amongst the Arabs as regards who should be the head of the new state. It was announced that the 'plebiscite' had concluded that

¹² Mesopotamia administrative record, UKNA, PRO, FO 371/4149; Al-Jumaily, *Irak*, 134–40; Longrigg, *Iraq*, 94–5, 110.

¹³ Montagu to Wilson, London, 28 Nov. 1918 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/5227.

the people were in favor of the creation of a state encompassing the three vilayets which would be ruled under effective British supervision.¹⁴

Efforts to Create an Independent Kurdistan

During the final days of the war, Arnold Toynbee, in his memorandum dedicated to Mark Sykes, who at the time was adding the final touches to his draft ceasefire agreement, advised that if an Arab state under British rule were to be created in Mesopotamia, then for security reasons, a buffer state should also be created to the north of this, just as in India's northwestern border region, thus advocating the creation of an independent Kurdistan under British protection. According to Toynbee, this independent Kurdistan would start from the south of the Lesser Zab River and encompass the regions stretching to the southern border of the future state of Armenia. Sykes also believed in the need of an independent Kurdistan; however, in his view, the creation of Kurdistan was important not because it would act as a buffer for the security of the future Arab state in Mesopotamia, but because it was a precondition for the creation of the state of Armenia.¹⁵ Debates upon the creation of a Kurdish state under British protection centered around two names: Wilson and Noel.

According to Wilson, who believed that the zone of British influence in Mesopotamia must imperatively include Mosul vilayet, an autonomous Kurdistan could only be considered once Britain had established itself over the whole of the region. Considerations regarding Kurdistan had to take into account the fact that the Kurds, still living in tribes, and in a position of extreme social and geographical fragmentation, would neither be able to determine their own future, nor to govern themselves; and that they had proven themselves incapable on both counts throughout history. A state of Kurdistan could only be created through the effective support and assistance of an external power. In order to win over the Kurds who had no wish to live under an Arab administration, while having no possibility of uniting amongst them, Wilson proposed that a confederation of Kurdish tribes be founded to the east of the vilayet, and a belt of Kurdish statelets to the north. The Interdepartmental Conference on the Middle East accepted Wilson's proposals and granted him the authority to create the belt of autonomous Kurdish statelets that he had conceived.¹⁶

¹⁴ 'British policy in Mesopotamia,' by Hubert Young, 19 July 1920 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/5228; *New Age*, xxxii (1923), 213-14; Busch, *Britain, India and the Arabs*, 279-94; Longrigg, *Iraq*, 116-17.

¹⁵ Toynbee to Sykes, London, 22 Oct. 1918 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/3407; Curzon to Calthorpe, London, 6 Jan. 1919 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/4156; McDowall, *Kurds*, 118; Busch, *Mudros to Lausanne*, 182-3.

¹⁶ Wilson to Montagu, Baghdad, 27 Oct. 1918 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/3384; Wilson to Montagu, Baghdad, 30 Oct., 7 Dec. 1918 in BL, IOR, P-S 10/781; 'Mesopotamia: present political situation,' 28 Oct. 1919; Montagu to Wilson, London, 9 May 1919 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/5228; Wilson, *Mesopotamia*, 116-44; Busch, *Britain*,

Noel, who felt a close affinity with the Kurds, argued against Wilson's proposals and asserted that the Kurds *did* possess the necessary wherewithal to govern themselves. Aware of the enmity between Kurds and Arabs, he was against their inclusion in a future Arab state, as he was against the inclusion of Mosul vilayet in this state. In the event that an independent Kurdish state was not created, the best solution for the Kurds would be to leave them under Turkish rule, but with wide-ranging autonomy. Noel knew that the social and geographical context in which the Kurds lived prevented them from uniting. He therefore suggested the foundation of three separate political entities which he called Southern, Central and Western Kurdistan. The capital of Southern Kurdistan had to be Suleymaniya. As a Kurdish-Christian entity, Central Kurdistan had to be created around the city of Mosul. The capital of Western Kurdistan would be Diyarbakir.¹⁷

Wilson came to Suleymaniya on 1 December 1918 and officially inaugurated the plan with a meeting of around 60 tribal chiefs held under the banner of 'Kurdistan for the Kurds.' Two statements prepared by Wilson were pronounced in the meeting. The first announced that the British government, which aimed to save all eastern populations from Turkish oppression and to grant them their independence, would accept the request for British protection made by the representatives of the Kurdish people. The second statement declared that the chieftains, in order to benefit from British protection, had accepted to unite with the Arab state that was to be founded and undertook to obey the orders and advice of authorities in Baghdad, and that Sheikh Mahmud, head of the Berzenji tribe in Suleymaniya, was recognized as the leader of the region between Diyala and the Greater Zap. While the first statement was also signed by Wilson, the second was signed only by the tribal chiefs. The majority of chiefs sitting at the meeting objected to coming under an Arab government and expressed the desire to be administered directly by London.¹⁸ However, such was the state of their poverty that they could not reject a British offer for help, regardless of its stipulations. Finally, they signed the statement penned by Wilson.

Thus, the tribal confederation suggested by Wilson had been formally established. The system was modeled on a feudal organization. Sheikh Mahmud was appointed governor to

India and the Arabs, 274–302; Helmreich, *Paris to Sevres*, 203–4; Nevakivi, *Arab Middle East*, 136; McDowall, *Kurds*, 121.

¹⁷ Note by Edward W. C. Noel in regard to the political status of Kurdistan in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/4149.

¹⁸ Wilson to Montagu, Baghdad, 31 Oct. 1918 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/3384; Wilson to Montagu, Baghdad, 16 Nov., 4 Dec. 1918 in BL, IOR, P-S 10/781; Southern Kurdistan, UKNA, PRO, FO 371/4192; Turco-Iraq Frontier Commission, further answers to the questionnaire submitted to His Majesty's Government by the League of Nations Irak Frontier Commission, 5 March 1925 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/10824; Wilson, *Mesopotamia*, 129.

Suleymaniya. His role would be to ensure security over agricultural and commercial activities and to oversee the regular collection of taxes. The other Kurdish chieftains were appointed to different central administrations and were allotted a salary. Each tribal region was organized as an administrative unit. An agha or a chieftain was appointed to every unit, from commune to village. All governmental offices were staffed with Kurds. Kurdish was given the status of an official language.¹⁹

The system was implemented in a large region extending from Halapja to Rawanduz. Noel was confident enough to suggest that this system, which he believed to be the most appropriate to fulfill the people's national will while safeguarding the characteristics of Kurdistan, be extended up to Van and that it be permitted to evolve from autonomy to independence. Sheikh Mahmud had also embraced this system, for he believed that it would allow him to take the other tribal chiefs under his control and to strengthen his personal authority. A more democratic organization model, excluding tribal formations, would not serve his personal ambitions, and therefore was not desirable for the Sheikh. In any event, such a model was not possible within the region's particular social structure.²⁰

This system, which had filled Noel with such hope, proved in just a few weeks to have almost no popular support, and it ended in a shambles. All the tribes, excepting his own, were opposed to Sheikh Mahmud. They explicitly stated that they did not recognize his leadership and wished to enter under British rule. The established and educated population of cities such as Kirkuk, Kifri and Arbil found it humiliating to be brought under the leadership of a tribal chief from the mountains and had expressed their opposition from the start. On the other hand, seeing how Sheikh Mahmud showed favors and gave precedence in all matters to his relatives and tribe members, it was understood that his conception of governance could not go beyond the model of tribal governance and that he would be unable to conform to even the lowest and slackest of standards of administration. To top matters off, Sheikh Mahmud was not open to cooperation with the British authorities to whom he owed his situation. He believed that his authority stemmed not from British support but from the moral strength he

¹⁹ Southern Kurdistan, UKNA, PRO, FO 371/4192; Administration report of Suleymaniya division for the year 1919 by Ely B. Soane, 23 July 1920 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/5069; Frontier Commission, UKNA, PRO, FO 371/10824; Sluglett, *Britain and Iraq*, 116.

²⁰ Administration report of Suleymaniya, UKNA, PRO, FO 371/5069; Noel to Wilson, Suleymaniya, no date in UKNA, PRO, AIR, 20/512.

exerted over the Kurds, whereas in fact his moral strength was based on the guns, ammunition and the 10.000 rupees in funds supplied to him by Britain.²¹

Once it was accepted that the system of guided independence based on a feudal structure would not work, measures were taken to curtail Sheikh Mahmud's authority. Kirkuk and Kifri seceded from Sheikh Mahmud's Kurdistan and were directly linked to Baghdad in February 1919. They were followed by Koysanjak, Rawanduz, Halapja and other centers. Finally, Noel was taken off his duties and was replaced by Ely Soane who was known to have opposed the system right from the beginning.²²

Following these developments, Sheikh Mahmud called upon his supporters from Iran and staged a rebellion against the British in May 1919. He announced that he had cut off all relations with Baghdad and declared his independence. A large-scale military operation in the region allowed Britain to quickly regain control. The Battle of Bazyan Pass, waged on 17 June, saw the defeat of the heavily wounded Sheikh Mahmud, who was sent to Baghdad to be put on trial. During the battle, the majority of Kurdish tribes, which the Sheikh had thought to form the basis for his power and authority, fought efficiently alongside the British forces. Although Sheikh Mahmud was condemned to death, the general officer commanding-in-chief of the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force, fearing the possible consequences of such a sentence, commuted it to ten-year banishment to India. Suleymaniya and its surrounding area began to be governed directly by Soane. It was decided to construct a railway from Kifri-Kirkuk to Mosul so as to be able to intervene quickly in similar events in the future.²³

The general attitude of the Kurdish tribes during the Sheikh Mahmud rebellion led British authorities to conclude that the principle of self-determination could not be applied to the Kurds, because in order for a population to govern itself, it must first of all be able to reach a compromise on a method of government and on who will lead this government. However, in

²¹ Southern Kurdistan, UKNA, PRO, FO 371/4192; Administration report of Suleymaniya, UKNA, PRO, FO 371/5069; Review of the civil administration of Mesopotamia (1920), 60–2; Wilson, *Mesopotamia*, 129–32; Longrigg, *Iraq*, 104–5; McDowall, *Kurds*, 156.

²² Southern Kurdistan, UKNA, PRO, FO 371/4192; Administration report of Suleymaniya, UKNA, PRO, FO 371/5069; McDowall, *Kurds*, 157.

²³ Southern Kurdistan, UKNA, PRO, FO 371/4192; Administration report of Suleymaniya; Administration report on the Arbil; Administration report of Kirkuk division for the year 1919 by Stephen H. Longrigg, 5 June 1920 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/5069; Frontier Commission, UKNA, PRO, FO 371/10824; 'A note on Northern Kurdistan,' Gertrude L. Bell, 8 March 1920 in BL, IOR, P-S 10/782; Mesopotamia to War Office, Baghdad, 5 July 1919 in UKNA, PRO, FO 608/95/365; Governor of Erzurum es-Seyyid Mehmed Reşid to Interior Ministry, 18 Sept. 1919; 15th Army Corps report, 12 Sept. 1919 in BOA, DNKM 50-3/25; Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks and Arabs*, 29-52; Wilson, *Mesopotamia*, 136-9; Longrigg, *Iraq*, 104-5; Busch, *Mudros to Lausanne*, 186.

this community of people unable to see beyond their tribal identity, such compromises were impossible to reach.²⁴

In the north, Britain faced major problems. British authorities in Baghdad had prepared a settlement plan for the Assyro-Chaldeans. Upon Russian pledges they had rebelled against the Ottoman government in 1915 but had been left unprotected when Russia withdrew from the war in 1917, leaving them as targets to the surrounding, hostile Muslim population. Thereupon, they had abandoned their homelands in Hakkari and Urumia and had sought asylum in Iraq, under British occupation. 35000 Assyro-Chaldean refugees were settled in the Bakuba Camp, which was established near Baghdad in November 1918. According to the plan, the immigrants would be settled in the Greater Zap valley, and given support to create an autonomous government. Two mercenary Assyrian battalions were used with the task of cleaning out certain areas and opening them up to Assyrian settlement. What was meant by 'cleaning out' was to vacate the Kurdish villages in the area by force. It was well-known that Muslims had experienced problems with Armenians and Assyrians in the past and had contentious relations with the Christians. This method was therefore an open invitation to rebellion. In effect, a wave of rebellion erupted from March 1919 onwards and took over the north of the vilayet of Mosul.²⁵

Encouraged by Abdurrahman, the Sheikh of Shirkak, the Goyan tribe warriors attacked Assyrian villages. The political officer of Zaho was killed in April. Although the British authorities sent a punitive expedition to the area, the aggressors were able to escape outside the borders of the Mosul vilayet. The Sublime Porte, eager to please Britain, offered to send the Ottoman troops to help to punish the fugitives. However, Admiral Arthur Calthorpe, the British High Commissioner in Istanbul, rejected this offer. He argued that the rebels had already acted under the incitement of Turkish authorities and that to accept the offer would be perceived as a British weakness and proof that it would withdraw from the region, leaving it to the Turks. The punitive intervention having failed, the rebellion spread over the whole of the region. Gendarmerie posts and military convoys were attacked one after the other. The Barwari and Guli tribes had now joined forces with the Goyan tribe. Although the British

²⁴ Northern Kurdistan, BL, IOR, P-S 10/782; Sluglett, *Britain and Iraq*, 117.

²⁵ *Report on Iraq Administration, October 1920 to March 1922*; Calthorpe to Curzon, Istanbul, 10 July 1919, 29 July 1919, Crowe to Curzon, Paris, 12 Oct. 1919 in *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, i/iv, 679, 704-5, 813; Governor of Van Haydar to Interior Ministry, 6 May, 15 July 1919 in BOA, DNKM 50-3/25; Toynbee, *Survey*, i, 484; Wilson, *Mesopotamia*, 127-44; Helmreich, *Paris to Sevres*, 203-4; McDowall, *Kurds*, 153-5.

suppressed the settlement plan and withdrew the Assyrian troops in June, it was unable to crush the rebellion.²⁶

Noel, who had been sent to Southeastern Anatolia in April 1919 with a view to determine the will of the Kurds to create a Kurdish state under British protection, suggested that a general amnesty be issued to win back the Kurds. He believed that the main reason that led the Kurds to remain close to the Turks was the fear that they would be held accountable for what they had done to the Armenians. In order to allay this fear, the Kurds must be assured that no demands would be made of them apart from the restoration of Armenian possessions. Wilson, with London's assent, published a statement aimed at the Kurds within the Mosul vilayet saying that crimes committed during war would not be punished and that retribution would not be sought. Noel was given the authority to guarantee that Northern and Western Kurdistan would also benefit from this pardon if and when they came under British governance.²⁷

However, these guarantees did not prove to be effective and the rebels attacked Amadiya in July, killing two British officers and three Indian officials. They were again able to escape before the punitive force reached the area. In October, Barzan, Zibar, Surchi and Soran tribes joined the rebellion. In November, the rebels attacked and killed the political officer of Mosul and plundered the city of Aqra. Having understood that regular army forces were incapable of dealing with Kurdish rebels, a new method based on the effective use of air forces was developed. Thus, the situation was mostly brought back under control in the first months of 1920.²⁸

New Policy Alternatives and the Debates on Retreat

The armed rebellion that continued throughout the year disproved the theory that the Kurds desired to come under British protection. Britain had finally reached the conclusion that the difficulties and costs related to bringing under control the lawless Kurdish population, devoid of leadership and the dynamics of social unity, would not be worth the benefits to be gained.

²⁶ Correspondence on the issue in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/4191; Southern Kurdistan, UKNA, PRO, FO 371/4192; Note by Alexander Cobbe, Military Secretary, Indian Office, 11 Nov. 1919 in BL, IOR, P-S 10/781; Longrigg, *Iraq*, 102-3.

²⁷ Wilson to Montagu, Baghdad, 16 Nov. 1918 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/3385; Wilson to Montagu, Baghdad, 12 March 1919 in BL, IOR, P-S 10/818; Noel to Wilson, Nusaibin, 26 Apr. 1919; Interdepartmental Committee on Middle Eastern Affairs, 12 May 1919 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/4191; Southern Kurdistan, UKNA, PRO, FO 371/4192; Northern Kurdistan, BL, IOR, P-S 10/782.

²⁸ Robeck to Curzon, Istanbul, 26 Dec. 1919 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/4161; Southern Kurdistan, UKNA, PRO, FO 371/4192; Note on Rawanduz by William R. Hay, 26 Dec. 1919 in 5068; Administration report of Arbil, UKNA, PRO, FO 371/5069; Northern Kurdistan, BL, IOR, P-S 10/782; Governor of Van Haydar to Interior Ministry, 23 July 1919, Governor of Van Midhat to Interior Ministry, 22, 27 Nov. 1919 in BOA, DNKM, 50-3/25, Governor of Bitlis Vehbi to Interior Ministry, 8 Sept. 1919; Governor of Van Necib to Interior Ministry, 5 Nov. 1919 in 53-3/65; Wilson, *Mesopotamia*, 152-3; Longrigg, *Iraq*, 102-6; McDowall, *Kurds*, 154-5.

William Hay, the political officer at Arbil, indicated that the more he came to know the Kurds, the more he was convinced that they had no desire to create an independent government. According to Hay, who described the Kurds' social relations as one where peasants lived in fear of aghas and aghas lived in fear of each other, what the Kurds wanted was an external power to assure stability and security, without meddling in the main social fabric. Viewing the matter more superficially, Bell argued that the suppression of the agha system would free the population from the aghas' oppression and enable them to cooperate with Britain. Soane, who had close knowledge of the Kurds, agreed with Hay. He thought that the tribal structure was due to natural circumstances and emphasized that the population did not wish for change. The centralized structure that had been tried with Sheikh Mahmud had been rejected by the public because it had been perceived as a threat to the traditional lifestyle. Soane emphasized one fact especially: the Sheikh Mahmud rebellion had not been repressed by British forces; it had failed because of the lack of public Kurdish support.²⁹

The Kurdistan plan was based on two premises: to guarantee Mesopotamia's security through the establishment of a buffer state in the north and to lay the groundwork for the foundation of the state of Armenia. The condition for both ideas was the elimination of Turkish influence from the region and the removal of the Turks was possible only through the full occupation of Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia. However, Britain was experiencing an economic meltdown after the war. It would be unthinkable to embark on new adventures and to ask for new resources to occupy the mountains of Anatolia while London was questioning the cost even of the military force needed to secure Mesopotamia.

In order to create the state of Armenia, it was necessary not only to remove the Turks from the region, but also to prevent a Kurdish reaction and to ensure that the United States would assume the responsibility of establishing a mandate in the region. Kurdish resistance would either be repressed through force and the occupation of the whole region, or be broken down through the use of political promises. As the implementation of the first choice was materially impossible, it was decided to cultivate Kurdish nationalism and to take advantage of it. Yet, it was soon realized that there was no Kurdish nationalism to be cultivated. The Kurds had begun to cooperate with the Turks once the Turkish national movement was organized at the behest of Mustafa Kemal Pasha. When the Kurds compared the Turkish nationalists'

²⁹ Southern Kurdistan, UKNA, PRO, FO 371/4192; Interdepartmental Committee on Middle Eastern Affairs, 17 Nov. 1919 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/4193, Note on Rawanduz, UKNA, PRO, FO 371/5068; Northern Kurdistan, BL, IOR, P-S 10/782; Note on the political situation in Southern Kurdistan by Ely B. Soane, April 1920 in UKNA, PRO, AIR 20/513; Busch, *Mudros to Lausanne*, 189-90; Helmreich, *Paris to Sevres*, 204; Wilson, *Mesopotamia*, 136-53.

propagandistic discourse on the ‘Armenian danger’, ‘Islamic union’ and ‘the protection of the Caliphate’ with Britain’s pro-Armenian policies, it was easy for them to choose which side to join. Kurdish involvement in the Turkish nationalist movement was accelerated in those areas where the perception of Armenian-Assyrian danger was the greatest. The suggestion of a general amnesty, made by Noel, who had noticed this development, was only partially executed, but even had it been fully executed; it was questionable whether the Kurds believe in the sincerity of these promises.³⁰

With the refusal of the American Senate to ratify the Versailles Agreement and the covenant of the League of Nations, all hopes for an American mandate over Armenia were dashed. Following the Senate decision, Clemenceau traveled to London to meet with Lloyd George and to notify him of the French decision to withdraw from Cilicia. Thus, the Armenian project was left bereft of all material support.³¹

Once it was accepted that the Kurdistan plan would not work, two ideas gained support among the British authorities. The first, led by the Foreign Secretary Curzon, and which was followed by some military as well, was that the best option was for Britain to fully withdraw from the Kurdish areas and leave the Kurds to themselves. The opposite proposition, defended by Wilson from the start, and which now had a wide following, was for Britain to withdraw beyond the borders of Mesopotamia, which would be drawn according to strategic needs, and encompassing the Mosul vilayet. Besides these two main propositions, there was a third one which came from Noel who agreed with Curzon that Britain should fully withdraw from all Kurdish territories, but was against abandoning the Kurds to themselves. He argued that if the Kurds were not to be taken under British protection, then they should be left as a whole under Turkish rule, but with a great degree of autonomy.³²

While disclosing his country’s final decision at San Remo on 19 April 1920, Curzon said that neither Britain nor France would undertake the protection of Kurdistan and that he distrusted how much an element of stability Kurdistan would be, were it to separate from Turkey and create an independent state. Researches had proven that there was not a single Kurdish leader capable of representing the Kurdish people. There were no Kurds who could represent more than their tribe. It was unknown what the Kurds really wanted; but it was certain that they did not believe in their survival without the support of a great power. As this power could be

³⁰ Southern Kurdistan, UKNA, PRO, FO 371/4192.

³¹ Anglo-French meetings in London, 11 Dec. 1919 in *Document on British Foreign Policy, 1919–1939*, ii, 727.

³² Wilson to Montagu, 22 Oct. 1919 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/4193; Wilson, *Mesopotamia*, 143; McDowall, *Kurds*, 120, 165; Busch, *Mudros to Lausanne*, 189-91.

neither Britain, nor France, it would have to be Turkey. Moreover, the Kurds were accustomed to Turkish rule. Curzon added that it was hoped that, should an independent Kurdistan be created, that part of the Mosul vilayet called Southern Kurdistan would also join this state, but that in fact the Kurds living in Mosul had indicated no desire of such a solution and that in practice, it was impossible to partition the vilayet in such a way. If an independent Kurdistan were created, it would have to be left to the Kurds in Mosul to decide whether they wanted to join this state or to remain within Mesopotamia. Articles sixty-two, sixty-three and sixty-four of the Treaty of Sèvres concerning Kurdistan were drawn up with this logic in mind.³³

The Iraqi Revolt of 1920 had underlined the need to create an Arab state without delay. During the revolt it was suggested that Britain should withdraw from Mosul and concentrate its forces in Baghdad and Basra. However, as Percy Cox, the high commissioner who had replaced Wilson in Baghdad, refused, arguing that this would undermine Britain's prestige in Mesopotamia and lead to a great catastrophe, Mosul vilayet stayed within the newly founded state. The British authorities believed that the best system of government for such an ethnically and religiously mixed population, mainly composed of migrant tribes, would be a constitutional monarchy. On 23 August 1921, Faisal was crowned as the King of Iraq.³⁴

The Iraqi State and the Kurdish Question

The Kurdish question came yet once again at the top of the problems Britain faced in Iraq. The Kurds were incapable of self-rule, but at the same time, it was clear that they would create problems if they were included in the State of Iraq. There had been deep divisions over the Kurdish question during the Cairo Conference where the decision to create the state of Iraq had been taken in March 1921. Finally, Cox's proposal was accepted: the settlement of this problem would be left to time, and in the interval, although they remained within Iraq, the Kurds would be governed directly by the British High Commissioner. Cox's plan was to spread the use of Kurdish in those regions of Mosul where Kurds constituted the majority and to recognize Kurdish identity without impairing Iraq's political integrity. However, Winston Churchill, the secretary of state for the colonies, who wished to see the creation of Kurdistan

³³ Meeting of Allied representatives, 19 Apr. 1920; Revised draft articles concerning Kurdistan by Curzon, 19 Apr. 1920 in *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, viii, 43-5; Helmreich, *Paris to Sevres*, 301; Busch, *Britain, India and the Arabs*, 387-8.

³⁴ *Report on Iraq Administration, 1920-1922*; Note on the causes of the outbreak in Mesopotamia by secretary of state for India, 26 Aug. 1920 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/5229; Note on the Mesopotamia-Persia situation by Percy Cox, 24 July 1920 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/5231; Busch, *Britain, India and the Arabs*, 401-26; Longrigg, *Iraq*, 132-9; Toynbee, *Survey*, 484; Foster, *Making of Modern Iraq*, 95-6; Howard, *Partition of Turkey*, 321.

as a buffer state between Iraq and Turkey, objected to this plan.³⁵ Cox was able to convince him after having explained the dangers of creating an independent Kurdistan. According to Cox,

- to leave the Kurdish regions outside of Iraqi control would leave the terrain open to Kemalists who would settle there and directly threaten Mosul's oil fields;
- to exclude the Kurdish regions from Iraq would create conflict with Arab nationalists who considered the whole of the Mosul vilayet as an inseparable part of Iraq. Britain could not risk a new conflict after having faced the consequences for the last one;
- not only the Arab nationalists, but the Turks and the Iranians would also object to the creation of an independent Kurdistan;
- to exclude the Kurds from Iraq would create a Shiite-Sunnite imbalance in favor of the Shiites, which would endanger Faisal's position, as he was a Sunnite, and through him, Britain's survival in the country would also be placed at risk;
- however ideal it may seem at first glance, to draw lines along ethnic identities would create serious obstacles when it came to practice, because the populations were so intermixed that it was impossible to draw an ethnic line between Arabs, Kurds and Turkomans;
- to separate the Kurdish regions of the vilayet of Mosul from Iraq would leave the country with borders difficult to defend once Britain withdrew;
- finally, it should not be forgotten that the presence of Kurds as a continuous source of trouble was an advantage for Britain. The Kurds, who were in minority, cooperated with the British against the Arabs; this was a situation which Britain could use as a pressure tool and thus increase its influence over Baghdad.³⁶

Hindering Turkey's Efforts to Save Mosul

The Turks in Iraq had organized themselves in April 1919 under the name of the Turkish Foundation, which worked against British occupation in close cooperation with the Arab nationalists. During the Iraqi revolt, Ankara had sent money and arms to the Arabs fighting against British forces. Turkish and British troops had clashed between Mosul and Jazira. A plan for a military operation in Mosul was considered by the Turkish General Staff in

³⁵ Cox to Churchill, Baghdad, 21 June 1921, Churchill to Cox, London, 24 June 1921 in BL, IOR, P-S 10/782; Busch, *Britain, India and the Arabs*, 469; Longrigg, *Iraq*, 131; McDowall, *Kurds*, 166-7.

³⁶ Cox to Churchill, Baghdad, 5 July 1921 in BL, IOR, P-S 10/782; Cox to Churchill, Baghdad, 20 Sept. 1921, Churchill to Cox, London, 3 Oct. 1921 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/6347; Sluglett, *Britain and Iraq*, 119.

November 1920. In 1921 Turks began to incite the Kurdish tribes to revolt against the British. To this end, three officers and an infantry rifle company of a hundred men were sent to Rawanduz. A local assembly called *Meclis-i Milli*, the National Assembly, was created with Kurdish tribal leaders, aghas and local notables. Ragip Surchi, of the Surchi tribe was made president. The Assembly decided that police stations in Northern Iraq would be attacked by Kurdish tribes. In June 1922, militia commander Özdemiş was sent to the region to reinforce troops in Rawanduz.³⁷

The British authorities responded with an escalation of counter-propaganda through the creation of the Kurdistan Foundation and its newspaper, *Bang-i Kurdistan*. On 12 July 1922, British political officers met in Suleymaniya and decided that the only way to break Turkish influence in the region was to quickly create a Kurdish national government. However, taking swift action, Özdemiş attacked and defeated British forces at Derbend on 1 September. Britain retreated completely from the east of the vilayet and was forced to leave the region under Özdemiş's control.³⁸

The only way to weaken Kurdish support to Özdemiş was to bring Sheikh Mahmud back from exile. Mahmud was brought from India to Baghdad, where he pledged not to allow the Turks to enter in the region and to act in accordance with British interests, after which he was appointed Governor of Suleymaniya. However, he forgot all about his promises as soon as he arrived in Suleymaniya, where he declared himself to be the King of an independent Kurdistan. He shut down the pro-British newspaper, *Bang-i Kurdistan*, and started the publication of the nationalist *Rozh-i Kurdistan*. He published his own stamps, began to tax all caravans passing through the region and to confiscate the goods of all caravans who did not carry a safe conduct issued by the 'Kingdom of Kurdistan.' Baghdad government's efforts to cut Sheikh Mahmud's revenues by changing the trade routes taken by caravans proved to be ineffective. Britain's aim in bringing Sheikh Mahmud back was to detract as many tribes as

³⁷ Wratishaw to Curzon, Beirut, 4 May 1920 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/5048; Wilson to Montagu, Baghdad, 5 Aug. 1920 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/5228; Causes of outbreak, UKNA, PRO, FO 371/5229; 'Mesopotamia: preliminary report on causes of unrest,' Major N. N. E. Bray, 14 Sept. 1920, Remarks on report by Hubert Young, 12 Oct. 1920 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/5230; 'Mesopotamia: causes of unrest-Report No. II' Major N. N. E. Bray, 21 Oct. 1920; Correspondence on the issue, 3-11 Nov. 1920 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/5231; G. O. C., Mesopotamia to War Office, Baghdad, 28 Nov. 1920 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/5232; Cox to Churchill, Baghdad, 19 Apr. 1921 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/6346; Iraq intelligence report, No. 16, 15 Aug. 1922, No. 17, 1 Sept. 1922 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/7772; Cox to Churchill, Baghdad, 5 July 1922; Report on situation in Kurdistan, 30 Aug 1922 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/7781; *Report on Iraq Administration, 1920-1922*; General Staff, Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force, *Confidential Military Report on Mesopotamia, Area 9 Simla, 1920*, 7, 87, 102, 130-1, 141-3, 148-9 in DKWI, 808-t/4/1; *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Gizli Celse Zabıtları*, i, 68-74; Saral, *Türk İstiklâl Harbi*, iv, 266-8, 282; Al-Jumaily, *Irak*, 62-7, 85-6, 154-5.

³⁸ Churchill to Cox, London, 7 Sept. 1922 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/7772; Al-Jumaily, *Irak*, 158-9.

possible away from Özdemir. True to form, after the Sheikh's arrival, many tribes switched to his ranks. This disunion was effective; it forced Özdemir to withdraw his forces from some of the regions he had acquired after the victory at Derbend. Thus, although Sheikh Mahmud had caused trouble for the British, he had also proven to be very helpful. By November, Özdemir had surrendered all of the territories he had conquered and retreated to Rawanduz.³⁹

Because of the start of negotiations at Lausanne, Britain forced to suspend military operations and offered a truce to Sheikh Mahmud in order to gain time and to prevent him from uniting with Özdemir. With this aim in mind, Baghdad issued an official proclamation on 20 December 1922, presented as a joint British-Iraqi effort, stating that the Kurds were to be granted the right to establish their own government within the borders of Iraq. Kurds were asked to send their authorized representatives to Kirkuk in order to discuss the structure, features and borders of this government. A number of tribal leaders signed a protocol in January 1923 in Suleymaniya to the effect that they recognized Sheikh Mahmud as King of Kurdistan and that they wished for independence under British protection. The Kurdish delegation arrived in Kirkuk on 19 January for discussions as described in the proclamation. However, claiming that there were pro-Turkish elements within the delegation, the Baghdad government announced that the discussions would not be held.⁴⁰ Therefore, the proclamation of December and the pledges therein had a life span of only one month.

Faced with Britain's dismissive behavior, Sheikh Mahmud contacted the Turks and sent a delegation to Ankara. He told Özdemir that he wished to ally with the Turks on condition that he be allowed to keep his position as Governor of Kurdistan. Özdemir sent the Sheikh a draft agreement of ten articles, including one on autonomy. Britain took advantage of the suspension of negotiations at Lausanne and issued an ultimatum to Sheikh Mahmud on 24 February 1923 to the effect that he leaves Suleymaniya. On 16 May, British troops occupied the city without meeting any resistance whatsoever. The Sheikh retired to Saradash valley along with his warriors. However, once the British forces retreated, Sheikh Mahmud entered Suleymaniya among great displays of affection and with the mien of a victorious general and announced his kingdom one more time. One year later in May 1924, British forces occupied

³⁹ Air Officer Commanding, Iraq to Air Ministry, Baghdad, 30-31 Oct. 1922; Irak intelligence report, No. 24, 13 Dec. 1922 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/7772; Cox to Churchill, Baghdad, 10 Sept., 22 Oct. 1922 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/7781; Frontier Commission, UKNA, PRO, FO 371/10824; Correspondence on the issue, DKWI, 208-S.65/16/6; McDowall, *Kurds*, 161, 174-5; Toynbee, *Survey*, 487-8; Longrigg, *Iraq*, 144-5; Al-Jumaily, *Irak*, 89-90; Saral, *Türk İstiklâl Harbi*, 278.

⁴⁰ *Report on Iraq Administration, April 1922 to March 1923*, 38; Irak intelligence report, No. 2, 19 Feb. 1923; No. 3, 2 March 1923 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/9009; Sluglett, *Britain and Iraq*, 120-1; Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks and Arabs*, 312; Toynbee, *Survey*, 488.

Suleymaniya once again and established definite control over the region. Sheikh Mahmud and his supporters fled to the mountains, never to return.⁴¹

What really caused a headache for the British was Özdemir's presence. For as long as the Turks stayed there and had direct contacts with the Kurds, the region could not be taken under full control. Once weather conditions had improved and roads were reopened, the Turks could send in reinforcements and the tide could change against the British. Kurdish tribes, which for the most part acted with a 'wait and see' mentality, could join Turkish ranks en masse. Thus, in April 1923, British forces sprang into attack. Rawanduz was taken on 22 April. Özdemir and his men withdrew to Iran, where they were disarmed by Iranian authorities and sent back to Turkey.⁴²

Final Administrative Organization Underlining Future Kurdistan

The League of Nations Council announced its final decision on the future of Mosul on 16 December 1925 and ruled that the vilayet would be united with the State of Iraq under a British mandate. In its decision, the Council invited Britain to take the necessary administrative measures to guarantee the protection of the Kurdish people. On 2 March 1926, Britain filed a letter indicating that the necessary conditions had been fulfilled and applied to the League to take action as it would deem necessary. In annex to this letter was a memorandum signed by Bernard Bourdillon, the acting high commissioner in Baghdad, and Abdulmuhsin al-Sa'dun, the prime minister of Iraq, which indicated the scope of the rights given to the Kurds. In this joint memorandum, it was reported that ten out of thirteen judges and head clerks working for the ministry of justice would be Kurdish, that tribunals would function in Kurdish and records would be held in Kurdish. Foundations, postal and telegraph services, public, legal and water services as well as all units of the customs bureau and the ministry of agriculture would employ thirty-eight Kurds out of fifty-five officials. There were twenty-five schools in the Kurdish regions. Five of these were Christian schools and the languages used were Chaldean and Arabic. Sixteen out of the twenty remaining schools taught in Kurdish; in four schools, Christians and Kurds were taught together and the language employed was Arabic and Kurdish, together. While the Kurdish language was used

⁴¹ Irak intelligence report, No. 10, 6 June 1923, No. 12, 5 July 1923, No. 13, 17 July 1923, No. 14, 25 July 1923, No. 15, 24 Aug. 1923 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/9009; Rauf Bey to İsmet Paşa, Ankara, 27 Apr. 1923 in *Lozan Telgrafları*, ii, 224; Busch, *Mudros to Lausanne*, 374-5.

⁴² Air Officer Commanding, Mesopotamia to Air Ministry, Baghdad, 20 March 1923; Dobbs to Devonshire, Baghdad, 20 March 1923; Correspondence on Turkish evacuation of Rawanduz, 22 Apr. /3 May 1923 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/9004; Irak intelligence report, No. 9, 23 May 1923 in 9009; Rauf Bey to İsmet Paşa, Ankara, 26 May 1923 in *Lozan Telgrafları*, ii, 358; Saral, *Türk İstiklâl Harbi*, 278-81.

neither in official, nor in private writings before the war, it had obtained an alphabet and had become a communication tool thanks to the efforts of British officials. Before, only Farsi, Turkish and Arabic had been used in written correspondence. The use of Arabic and Turkish was still wide-spread in the whole of the vilayet. However, thanks to thorough efforts, Kurdish had also become a literary language. Kurdish newspapers were published in Suleymaniya. The government not only allowed the use of Kurdish in a wide range of areas, it also encouraged it.⁴³ Thus, a Kurdish national identity, to enable the creation of a Kurdish state in the future, was being built.

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⁴³ Report by Undén, 14 Dec. 1925 in UKNA, PRO 30/52/104, C. 821, 1925-VII; Memorandum on administration of Kurdish districts in Irak, by Bernard H. Bourdillon and Abdul'Muhsin-al-Sa'dun, 24 Feb. 1926 in UKNA, PRO, FO 371/11458.

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