Iraq

IN NOVEMBER 1914, the Ottoman Empire threw in its lot with that of imperial Germany and the Austrian Empire in World War I. Consequently, when the Western Allies were victorious, the Muslim Ottoman Empire, which had once posed a mortal threat to Christian Europe, was swept away. The words of the Iranian poet Firdawsi, which Ottoman Emperor Mehmet II spoke as he entered vanquished Constantinople in 1453, now stood as an epitaph for his empire. Firdawsi wrote, “the spider serves as gate-keeper in Khusrau’s [Cyrus the Persian’s] hall; the owl plays his music in the palace of Afrasiyab.”

With the fall of Damascus, Syria, in 1918 to the British Empire forces of General Edmund Allenby, the future of what would be Irak—later Iraq—entered the spotlight. Captain T E. Lawrence, the future Lawrence of Arabia, had joined the Arab Revolt in December 1916, after having served British military intelligence in the Arab Bureau in Cairo. The revolt was led by Sharif Hussein, the keeper of the great Muslim holy places of Mecca and Medina. However, operational control was invested in his son, Prince Faisal, and it was to Faisal that Lawrence traveled with promises of British support and shipments of British gold. Even then, Lawrence saw future promise in Hussein and his sons. (Another son, Abdullah, served as his father’s astute political advisor.) In February 1917, Lawrence wrote, “the Arab Movement has the capacity for expansion over a very wide area.” While a guerrilla force, and thus unable to face the Ottoman Turks and their German advisers in open battle, Lawrence, Faisal, and the Arabs pinned down a significant number of Turks with their hit-and-run desert war. Peter Mansfield wrote in A History of the Middle East that the Arab Revolt “immobilized some 30,000 Turkish troops along the Hejaz Railway from Amman to Medina and prevented the Turco-German forces in Syria from linking up with the Turkish garrison in Yemen.” When Allenby launched his Big Push with his attacks on Gaza and Beersheba on October 31, 1917, the Arabs played a vital role in harassing the Turkish Fourth Army. Lawrence and Faisal continued to make a signal contribution up to the ultimate triumph at the fall of Damascus in September 1918.

However, while Lawrence was urging Faisal and the Arabs to carry on against the Turks, at the same time he was cognizant of the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, which had divided up the Middle East possessions of the Turks between the French and English. Roughly speaking, Great Britain would fall heir to Palestine, today’s Israel, the West Bank, and Jordan, and France would receive modern Syria and Lebanon.

Feeling guilt at his duplicity, Lawrence nevertheless backed Faisal to be king of Syria and Lebanon. France responded with a military invasion that defeated Faisal and his followers. A French League of Nations mandate was proclaimed by the French for Greater Syria (Lebanon and Syria) on September 1, 1920. Faced with this patent betrayal of the promises of freedom that Lawrence and the British had given during the war, the entire Arab world simmered on the brink of a massive jihad, or holy war. British Colonial Secretary Winston S. Churchill, faced with the possibility of a situation England might not be able to contain (the rebellion in Ireland was raging at the same time) called a conference in Cairo in March 1921 to address the fulminating Middle East. Churchill, later a conservative luminary in London, as was his father Randolph Churchill, sought the advice of Lawrence, Allenby, and Gertrude Bell, perhaps the most influential woman in British foreign relations.

A League of Nations mandate was established for Iraq in July 1922, and Faisal, largely through the influence of Lawrence, eventually became the ruler of Iraq. His brother Abdullaah become the emir, later the king, of Iraq. In 1923, however, the Treaty of Lausanne promised an independent state to the Kurdish population that inhabits Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. Although basically rescinded diplomatically, this promise still promotes dreams of an independent Kurdistan today, a possibility that would disrupt the entire Middle East. In 1930, a 25-year treaty was concluded between Faisal of Iraq and Great Britain. During this period, after the

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Cairo Conference, Churchill began an innovative program of policing the Iraqis with Royal Air Force Rolls-Royce armored cars and plans, to save money on an army garrison.

When Faisal died in 1933, his son and successor as king was Ghazi, reputed to be a playboy monarch (he would later be killed in an automobile crash). Real power devolved upon the conservative Arab nationalist Nuri al-Said, whose extensive political service had begun under the Ottomans. While political democracy was ephemeral at best, still Iraq did not become a dictatorship under the rule of Faisal and his heirs, as later it would. With the discovery of oil in 1927, Iraq was on its way to becoming one of the major suppliers of oil in the world. As the 1930s wore on, the growing crisis of fascism in Europe spread to the Middle East. Germans, who had lived in the region since Kaiser Wilhelm’s dream of the Berlin to Baghdad Railway before the First World War, began to form Nazi Party cells. They cultivated a pro-German clique within Iraqi politics and the armed forces known as the Golden Circle.

In March 1941, the pro-Nazi Rashid Ali al-Gailani seized power in Baghdad, the ancient capital of Iraq, with the Golden Square putsch. Nuri had to flee, as did the infant King Faisal II, who had become king when Ghazi died in an auto wreck in 1939. The British, faced with the power of German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel and the German Afrika Korps in North Africa, were now confronted by a dire threat to their vital supplies of oil.

The British responded with an invasion of Iraq, with the main fighting done by expeditions led by Brigadier Joe Kingstone and John Bagot Glubb Pasha, leader of the legendary Arab Legion. By the end of May 1941, Nuri al-Said was restored to power, and Rashid Ali in flight. The military leaders of the Golden Square were later executed. Under Nuri, Iraq joined the Second World War against Germany in January 1943, and stalwartly supported the war effort. As World War II was drawing to a close, Iraq joined the new Arab League in March 1945. Later, in December 1945, Iraq was admitted into the United Nations.

In 1956, Nuri and the Iraqi government helped establish the Baghdad Pact, which was designed to help curb the growth of Soviet communist influence in the Middle East. President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, who had first emerged in the Egyptian Free Officer’s coup of 1952, which had toppled King Farouk was incensed. Nasser, a major recipient of Soviet military and economic aid, urged a military putsch in Baghdad in retaliation. Responding to Nasser’s call, Iraqi General Abd al Karim Qasim led a bloody insurrection on July 14, 1958, which led to the killing of Nuri al-Said, the Prince Regent, and the young King Faisal II. Qasim’s tenure in office was characterized by a leftist policy that caused CIA Director Allen Dulles in April 1959 to characterize Iraq as “the most dangerous [country] in the world.”

In 1959–60, the Ba’ath Party launched a military coup and took power as the National Council of Revolutionary Command. One of the early Ba’ath plotters was Saddam Hussein. While temporarily in eclipse, the Ba’athists returned to full power in 1968, and Hussein emerged even stronger within the military Ba’ath command. President Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr resigned as president on July 16, 1979. Hussein emerged as the unchallenged ruler of Iraq, a position he would hold for two decades.

In foreign policy, Hussein carried out an aggressive war with Iran from 1980 to 1988, which began over dis-
puted rights to islands and the strategic Shatt-al-Arab water artery to the Persian Gulf. The war raged unabated until a United Nations cease-fire brought it to an end in 1988. During the war, Hussein employed poison gas against the numerically superior Iranian Army of the theocratic Islamic extremist regime of the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. The first record use was, according to the United Nations, at Majnoon in March 1984. After peace came, the U.S. State Department estimated that “20,000 Iranian soldiers were killed in Iraqi chemical attacks from 1983–88.”

Domestically, Saddam Hussein followed no less a brutal career. Chemical weapons were employed also against the Kurdish population, who still sought the independence that had been promised them by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. Hussein used chemical weapons on the Kurdish village of Halabja in 1988. His reign of terror embraced any potential dissidents in Iraq; untold thousands were killed in a campaign in which his homicidal sons, Oudai and Qusai, served as willing lieutenants. After his fall from power in the spring of 2003, the New Yorker magazine and Time documented countless incidents of his brutal rule. An article in the New Yorker documented how when a Baghdad butcher had been arrested for talking against the regime, he was arrested, ground up into ground beef—and then returned to his family.

In August 1990, Hussein resumed his foreign aggression with an invasion of the neighboring emirate of Kuwait. Responding to the occupation of Kuwait and the threat to Saudi Arabia and the vital supply of oil, President George H.W. Bush led a coalition in Operation Desert Shield (later Desert Storm) that effectively drove Hussein out of Kuwait by February 1991. However, in spite of the terms of the peace agreement, Saddam returned to his purge of the Kurds and Shi’ite Arabs, which forced the United States to establish a protected zone for the Kurds in northern Iraq. During the next decade, Hussein kept up his defiance of the United States and the United Nations, especially over concern that he was continuing the program to develop weapons of mass destruction (WMD), chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons, a program he had instituted before the war of 1990–91. He persisted in his recalcitrance in spite of an economic embargo that inflicted unspeakable hardship upon his own people. Following the expiration of a March 17, 2003, United Nations deadline to disarm and permit inspection of all possible WMD sites, the United States and Great Britain initiated the invasion of Iraq, Operation Iraqi Freedom, on March 20. On April 16, with the war effectively over, U.S. General Tommy Franks entered Baghdad. After an extensive manhunt, Hussein was captured near his native village of Tikrit on December 13, 2003.

SEE ALSO
Volume 1 Left: Middle East.
Volume 2 Right: Middle East; Totalitarianism.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Ireland

THE MODERN POLITICAL history of Ireland dates from the British Glorious Revolution of 1688, in which the Catholic Irish supported King James II against William of Orange. When James’s army in Ireland was defeated in 1691, and the Treaty of Limerick signed, British rule in Ireland became complete. However, thousands of Catholic Irish would leave Ireland to carry on the fight against Protestant William of Orange in the armies of the Holy Roman Empire and France. Catholics who remained behind were subjected to the heavy penal laws if they did not abjure (disavow) their ancestral religion.

The 18th century saw a period of formative peace in Ireland, a fact noted by the repeal of many of the penal laws against Irish Catholics in 1778, 1782, and 1792, as the BBC noted in Prosperity, Revolution, and Famine. A growing crisis continued between Catholic groups, known as Defenders, and Protestants who called themselves the Peep O’Day Boys, and earned their sobriquet