PROCONSUL TO THE MIDDLE EAST

SIR PERCY COX AND THE END OF EMPIRE

JOHN TOWNSEND

I.B.TAURIS

John Townsend was born in Australia in 1928. He was Economic Adviser to the government of Oman in the early 1970s and his first book, Oman: *The Making of the Modern State,* was published in 1977. Over the course of two decades, from 1969 to 1989, he followed Sir Percy Cox's footsteps in Oman, around the Persian Gulf, in Saudi Arabia and in Iraq. He has also worked as a consultant on business conditions in Saudi Arabia for Business International, an American consultancy which is now part of The Economist Group. He was awarded a PhD by Oxford Brookes University in 2001.

Major General Sir Percy Cox. London May 1918

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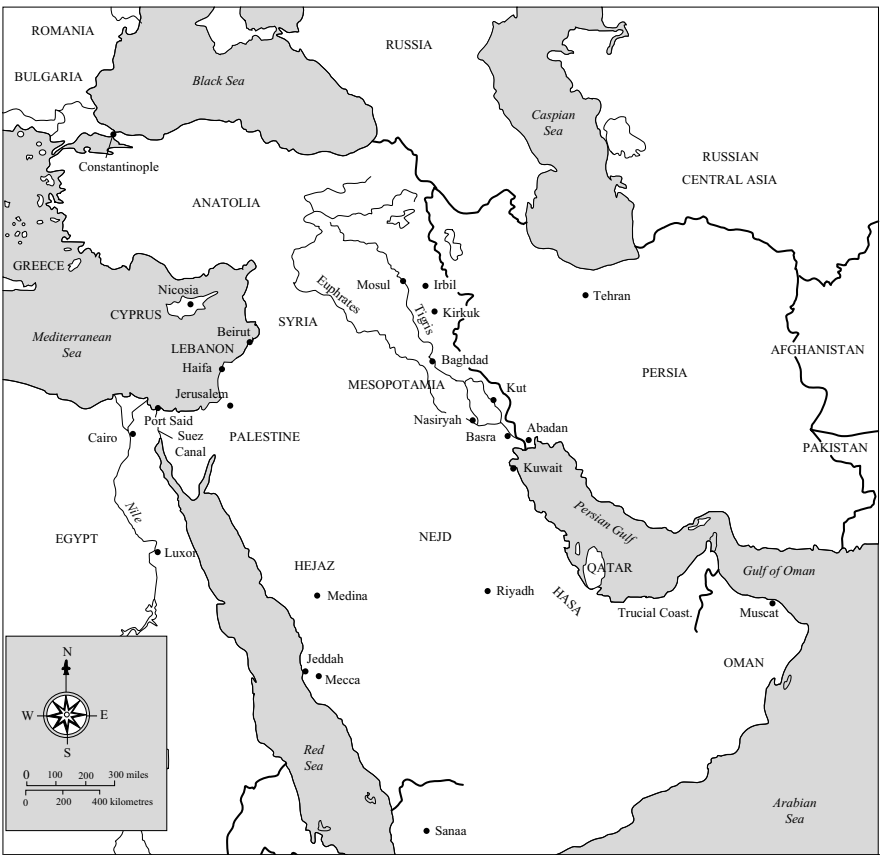
The Ottoman Empire

Early 1916



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Note on Transliteration

The question of transliterations from Arabic texts is always a problem. I have tried to be consistent and to adopt common usages, especially of those years when Cox was active in the region of the Persian Gulf and Iraq. Even this apparently simple rule has its problems. Does one write Faisal or Feisal? Hussain or Hussein? No one seemed quite certain in the early part of the twentieth century.

Acknowledgements

This book is a condensed version of a text I wrote over a decade ago and which has been lodged in the Middle East Centre of St Antony's College, Oxford. The bibliography is that of the original text, marginally amended. Otherwise, there are some significant changes.

Among the many who have given me assistance and encouragement with the present volume are Sir Terence Clark, who served as British ambassador to Iraq and to Oman, my assiduous and professional editor Richard Gallimore and his caring wife Mary, Dr Lester Crook, Liz Friend-Smith and Jayne Ansell of I.B.Tauris, Debbie Usher, archivist in the Middle East Centre at St Antony's College, Alan Mackie, a staunch friend who was in at the beginning, Trevor Preece, book and magazine designer, Norman Cameron and Mrs Merilyn Hywell-Jones of the Royal Society for Asian Affairs, Sarah Strong of the Royal Geographical Society, Sue Jenkins of the Mary Evans Picture Library, Ian Proctor of the Imperial War Museum Photo Archives and many willing voices on the telephone in the National Archives.

Finally, but by no means last, I acknowledge with gratitude the very great help which I have been fortunate to have received from my dear wife Barbara throughout the life of this project. She was there at the beginning, she put up with me during the often tedious research and writing stages, she has been of inestimable help with proofreading and general common sense and, all in all, a greatly loved friend and companion.

For any shortcomings in my text I am alone responsible.

For Barbara, again

Preface

Sultan Sa'id bin Taimur, the then ruler of Oman, had granted me an audience in his palace in Salalah in the summer of 1969 to review the work I had been doing in Oman in previous weeks. As the audience drew to its close, and wishing to finish on a relaxed note, I mentioned the role of Sir Percy Cox in Muscat in the early years of the twentieth century.

The Sultan's response was immediate: "Ah, Sir Percy Cox! He took my father, Taimur, to Delhi in 1903 to the durbar. He was a great man!"

I had found several references to Cox in my pre-assignment reading before I went to Oman, but nothing of any depth. There was a photograph of him – a thin face with a crooked nose – in the building which was then the British Consulate-General in Muscat, a building in which Cox had lived when he was stationed there. The photograph suggested a somewhat dry sense of humour.

Over the next twenty years I spent some time in Oman as well as in Abu Dhabi and Iraq, and made a large number of visits to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and the other countries in the Persian Gulf. Whenever background reading touched upon the history of the region in the first decades of the twentieth century, Cox's name would appear. Tantalisingly, the information was almost always thin; I could never come to grips with "Cox-the-man" rather than simply "Cox-the-servant-of-empire".

Older Arab citizens of the Gulf region would often have heard Cox's name from their fathers and uncles. But the Arabic language of the Gulf region has difficulty with the English consonantal "x" sound, which tends to be rendered as "kus". Thus "sixty" becomes "sikusty" and "Cox" became "Kokus". It was as "Kokus" that a whole older generation of Iraqis and Gulf Arabs knew Percy Cox.

In the early 1990s I was "offered" early retirement. A friend said: "Have you ever thought of a biography of Percy Cox?" This was one of a number of ideas which led to projects on which I worked for the next few years and the one which was the genesis of this book.

The research for and the writing of this book has been a satisfying undertaking. I am glad that my early years in the Gulf region and Iraq were largely (but not entirely!) pre-air-conditioning in that, very often, I had experiences which could not have been far from those of Cox five or six decades earlier.

When Cox describes the approach to Muscat by sea, it is an experience that I had shared. I have watched passengers from India land on Muscat's old khor jetty from the ship's boat of the BI steamer anchored in Muscat harbour. When Cox writes of his travels in Oman, I can see in my mind the country over which he had travelled. I know what it is like to sleep on the roof of a house in Muscat, night after

night, in mid-summer. I know what torrid days in July and August in Basra and Baghdad are like. I have seen the Tigris and the Euphrates in flood. I have been to Mosul and to Kirkuk, and to the wilds of Kurdistan.

In the course of my research for this book, I have re-lived many of my own experiences, drawn into focus by Cox's descriptions of the same scenes. Above all, my own feeling for the people and the lands to which Percy Cox devoted his life has been strengthened by a deeper understanding of their history and the part played by Cox in that history.

Sultan Sa'id's description of Cox as a great man was apposite. I would refine it a little:

> He was a man, take him for all in all,
> [We] shall not look upon his like again.

Yet am I being sufficiently just to Percy Cox to refer to him simply as "a great man"? A great man he certainly was, but so were many others amongst his contemporaries. At a time when the spirit of empire was weakening, he was a defender *sans pareil* of British interests in Iraq and in the wider Persian Gulf over the years 1919–1923. I would argue that his achievements in those years would justify our ranking of him as a great proconsul.

I have made use of a significant number of direct quotations in this book, simply because the words of prominent players in the drama of Percy Cox's life have an immediacy (and in the case of Gertrude Bell, a sparkle) which no amount of paraphrasing can reproduce. He had a reputation for being able to keep silent in several languages. He was not a man to leave extensive personal archives or copious personal correspondence, documents or files. In short, I have tried to let the documents and letters reflect the action. My objective has been to ensure that, in the unfolding of Cox's life from 1914 to 1923, each of the principal actors speaks his or her lines through the archives.

Prologue

Basra, November 1914

The entrance of Turkey on the side of Germany in World War I at the end of October 1914 represented a significant strategic threat to Britain and its empire, above all to that "jewel in the crown", the presence in India. Turkey had soldiers threatening the Suez Canal; in theory it occupied most of the Arabian peninsula, in practice this meant the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, connecting by the Hejaz railway to Anatolia via Damascus, and thence to Constantinople; its suzerainty extended to Basra, at the head of the Persian Gulf. The sea route to India, perceived then in Whitehall and in the government of British India, as being the vital artery of the British Empire, was at risk.

This threat was not simply military. The Sultan of Turkey was also recognized as the *caliph,* the spiritual head of Islam. In the Indian sub-continent, many tens of millions of the subjects of the British crown were Muslims. At stake was the credibility of the British imperial dialogue.

Finally, there was oil. A significant discovery had been made near Abadan in south west Persia (as Iran was then known). This had highly important implications for the future of the Royal Navy.

Thus the British government and the government of British India, recognizing the threat implicit in Turkey's active enmity, jointly deemed it essential to take urgent counter measures intended to negate any strategic threat before it could materialise. Already in September 1914, Sir Edmund Barrow, the Military Secretary of the India Office in London, had prepared a paper entitled "The Role of India in a Turkish War"[1]. In the event of war with Turkey (which at that time seemed virtually certain), Barrow argued for an expedition to the Persian Gulf to seize the mouth of the Shatt-al-Arab and to capture Basra.

Barrow's conclusion was that the circumstances called for a rapidly mounted and surprise attack aimed at taking Basra. He wrote that the time was then ripe for action. Such action would "check Turkish intrigues" as well as encouraging the Arabs collectively to support Britain, thus providing additional safeguards to passage through the Suez canal and to the British position in Egypt. Finally, of course, it would ensure effective protection for the newly-found oil field and facilities in Abadan.

Barrow would seem to have not given sufficient weight to the organization and equipment of the army in India. For several years both the British government and the government of British India had been imposing stringent financial economies on the Indian military establishment, it being assumed that there was no longer a significant external threat to the sub-continent.

Thus:

> ..."reductions [in military expenditure] were made on the assumption that the Indian Army need not contemplate the likelihood of a collision outside India with the army of a European power, and the provision of the equipment, organisation and transport of the Indian Army was regulated by the requirements of frontier warfare alone."[2]

On 3 October 1914 a communication was received in New Delhi from the government in London authorizing an expedition to the Persian Gulf. On 4 November what was then known as "Indian Expeditionary Force D" landed at the mouth of the Shatt-al-Arab. With this small army, made up of an amalgam of British and Indian soldiers with the latter a majority, was Sir Percy Cox, appointed by the Viceroy of India, Lord Hardinge, as Chief Political Officer.

Cox was a servant of empire *par excellence*. When he landed on the soil of what was then known as either Turkish Arabia or Mesopotamia, he had behind him some thirty years' experience in defending and projecting the spirit of empire, half of which time had been spent in the Persian Gulf.

Chapter 1

The Man and the Imperial Prerogative, 1864–1913

"In the lexicon of youth, which Fate reserves for a bright manhood, there is no such word as – fail."

Edward George Bulwer-Lytton
(1803–1873)

"Tell me a man's a fox-hunter, and I loves him at once."

R.S.Surtees
(1803–1864)

Cox's experience in the Persian Gulf went back to 1899, when he was promoted over the heads of other men, at the specific request of Lord Curzon, then Viceroy of India, to be British Agent in Muscat charged with finding a solution to a sensitive political problem. In 1904 he was promoted to be British Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, a post he filled with considerable aplomb and effectiveness. In 1913 he was appointed to head the Government of India's Foreign Department. He was due to retire on full pension in 1914.

At this time, his only son had secured a place at Cambridge to study engineering. There seemed to be every reason for Cox to look forward to a comfortable and peaceful retirement in England, spending much time in a favourite pursuit, hunting.

Instead, aged almost fifty, he volunteered for a mission accompanying the expeditionary force to the upper Persian Gulf. At that time, he possessed the unrivalled experience, perception and political skill without which the whole enterprise would have risked foundering.

Cox was an outstanding exemplar of the individuals who shaped the British Empire at its apogee. His were the archetypical values of Victorian England with its Arnoldian concept of muscular Christianity. His background – a third son of minor landed gentry, then public school (Harrow), Sandhurst, the army in India, the Indian Political Service – put him in the mould of those who believed, unshakeably, in what they perceived as the God-given right of Britain to rule Kipling's "lesser breeds without the law" and inculcate British values in such people "for their own good." Above all, there was a certainty (some would argue illusion) that Britain and its empire were infallible and permanent. The social system into which he was born, and

through which he was educated and formed, was intended to instil a boundless self-assurance.

He was born Percy Zachariah Cox on 20 November 1864 at Herongate, near Brentwood, Essex, the sixth surviving child and third son of Arthur Zachariah and Julienne Emily Cox. The Christian name "Zachariah" had been bestowed upon successive generations of ancestors since at least the late seventeenth century.

Percy Cox's father was born Arthur Zachariah Button, the seventh and last in a line of Zachariah Buttons who traced their ancestry back to the mid-seventeenth century. A relative, Philip Zachariah Cox, died in 1858 with no heir. His will, proved on 9 July of that year, had a somewhat strange condition, that was that his real estate be left to relatives, including Arthur Zachariah Button, on condition that they and their male children should take the surname Cox.

Later biographers have reason to be thankful to Philip Zachariah Cox for willing that the male descendants of his Button relatives should adopt the surname Cox. The name "Sir Percy Button" might be thought to be somewhat pickwickian.

Percy Cox's father, Arthur, was a Deputy Lieutenant of the County of Essex, a Justice of the Peace, a Master of Fox Hounds and an officer in the Essex militia. In other words, he was a man of some substance and weight in the county. He passed his passion for riding and for hunting foxes on to his son Percy.

Arthur Cox died in April 1870 following an accident on the hunting field. His estate, being entailed, went to his eldest son Arthur Philip, who was educated at Harrow and who became a student in Magdalen College, Oxford. It appears that Philip Cox soon developed a penchant for spending money. Philip Graves wrote[1] of him that he "… became an amiable man passionately devoted to field sports. He had, and made, wealthier friends whose style of living he imitated with unfortunate consequences." Graves continued that he subsequently "drifted away" from the family. Eventually his debts caused the entail on the estate he inherited from his father to be lifted. He died in 1920, virtually a pauper.

His mother's father ensured that Percy received a sound education. He entered Harrow in September 1878. Graves, who knew the family well and who relied on information that Cox's youngest sister Mary Helen supplied, wrote that Percy was a thin and slight boy and that:[2]

> Percy, although he promised well at cricket and had learned to ride before his father's death, was studious. As he grew older, he collected birds eggs, butterflies, shells and stamps and developed an interest in bird life which never waned. He was not a very sociable boy, being silent by habit and fond of books on natural history, geography and travel, which he would read for hours at a time.

His school record at Harrow was reasonably good, but by no means outstanding. On leaving Harrow, he followed a path well-trodden by relatively impoverished younger sons, entering Sandhurst (then known as the Royal Military College) as a "Gentleman Cadet" in 1883. His record at Sandhurst mirrored that from Harrow: good enough but not outstanding.

Percy Cox was just nineteen in February 1884 when he passed out of Sandhurst, being commissioned in a regiment then stationed in India, the Cameronians (Scottish Rifles). Officers without substantial private means were attracted to service in India, where an officer's modest pay went significantly further. People who knew him then would have recognized a young man with fair hair and blue eyes, slightly built but lithe and athletic and of above average height. He looked taller than he was because he stood exceptionally straight. His most notable physical feature was a rather large nose, which was set decidedly askew in his face, a physical attribute which must have caused him a degree of embarrassment and accentuated his natural reserve. He would have been thought rather shy by people who met him for the first time; he had no small talk. He was scholarly without being brilliant, he liked to collect small objects, he was interested in (and very well informed about) birds. He was a believer and a churchgoer in an England where Victorian values were built around a robust Christianity. He rode well and loved hunting. Finally, he had great determination.

Above all, like the products of his background and education, he was self-assured. He was a product of the public school system of Victorian Britain, an outlook which did not countenance even a thought of failure. Young men were inculcated with a boundless belief in their own capacity. This was not a creed which people thought about; it was taken for granted, just as the infallibility of British institutions and the British Empire were taken for granted.

Second Lieutenant Percy Cox arrived at Bombay and passed through the Gateway to India on 8 April 1884, some six months short of his twentieth birthday. He went on by train to Shahjahanpur, where his regiment was stationed. He was to spend most of the next fifteen years either in India or in a territory in which the government of India had a political relationship (the north coastal region of Somalia) and again most of the ensuing fifteen years as a trusted and effective servant of the government of India in the Persian Gulf. India moulded and hardened the clay of his character and the man who was to leave his mark in the Persian Gulf and Iraq was a product of the system of government of British India.

This was Kipling's India, the India of Kim and the Great Game, of Soldiers Three, of the colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady, of Delilah Aberystwith, the lady "not too young" with her little house in Simla, of screw guns "that came into bits," with "high noon behind the tamarisks

– the sun is hot above us." It was the Imperial India of Queen Victoria, where privilege and precedence were considered to be of the greatest importance.

A century and more later, the concept of "the white man's burden" exercised through empire is seen as absurdly anachronistic, offensively patronising, racist and even downright silly. But in the last decades of Victorian Britain and in the early years of the twentieth century, the concept was upheld with a fervent missionary zeal by men and women who devoted their lives, and often gave their lives, to serving a cause which was not to be challenged.

Some perceptive senior British officials were aware of the fragility of the British hold in the sub-continent. Thus Sir Walter Lawrence, a man with many years experience and who became secretary to the viceroy Lord Curzon could write:[3]

> Our life in India, our very work, more or less, rests on illusion. I had the illusion, wherever I was, that I was infallible and invulnerable in my dealings with Indians. How else could I have dealt with angry mobs, with cholera-stricken masses, and with processions of religious fanatics? […. ….] They, the millions, made us believe that we had a divine mission. We made them believe that they were right.

A young subaltern like Percy Cox, arriving in India in the last decades of the nineteenth century would have found life in the officer's mess of a British regiment little more than a natural extension of his life and experience in his public school and at Sandhurst. Regimental routine could be excruciatingly boring, and it was normal for a young officer to find outlet in hunting and in travel. Learning *urdu* (the "language of the horde"), the *lingua franca* of the Indian army, was encouraged. Cox found that he had a gift for learning languages.

His early military service was undistinguished. He spent his ample spare time hunting and shooting and in studying Indian bird life and in working at his language studies. He had several months' leave in England from October 1887 to January 1889 on a medical certificate. Not long after his return he made two major decisions which shaped the rest of his life: he got married, and he joined the Bengal Staff Corps. On 14 November 1889 he and Belle Hamilton were married in All Saints' church, Lucknow and, five days later, on 19 November, 2nd Lieutenant Percy Cox became a Wing Officer on probation in the 29th Punjabi Infantry regiment on being admitted to the Bengal Staff Corps.

Belle Hamilton was the third child and younger daughter of Brigade Surgeon John Butler Hamilton of the Army Medical Staff (later to become the Royal Army Medical Corps). Later accounts of her suggest

a pleasant, amiable, large-framed young woman of no special attainment.

There was no rule in the army in India at that time that subaltern officers should not marry; simply, early marriages were not encouraged. It was also very common for brides to be chosen from among the daughters of officers serving in India.

The Indian Staff Corps (as it became in 1891) was a post-Mutiny creation. In 1861 the officers of the then three separate Indian armies were grouped together in the Bengal, Bombay and Madras staff corps, thus providing a pool of officers from which both civil and military posts in India and beyond the frontiers of India could be filled.

Entry to one of the three Indian staff corps at the time Percy Cox joined was open to any officer who had served at least one and not more than five years in a British regiment in India, who had passed the lower standard examination in *urdu,* and who had demonstrated his ability to lead troops in Indian conditions. In fact, the records show that Cox, as far as linguistic ability was concerned, had qualified in *urdu* and Persian at the "higher standard."

Military and political appointments came to Cox over the next few years. The most significant took place in the summer of 1893 when he was posted to Somalia. The posting took him to Aden and thence to Zaila on the Somali coast, not far from the French-administered port of Djibouti.

This was far from being an attractive posting, but he and Belle almost certainly decided together that the career opportunities likely to arise in such an apparently god-forsaken corner of the earth would outweigh the disadvantages. For an impecunious young couple, the extra financial allowances arising from living in Zaila may also have been a consideration.

Cox reported to a Political Agent in Berbera, who in turn reported to a Political Resident in Aden, who reported to the Political Department of the Bombay Presidency. The Coxes were both physically and organisationally far from the centres of power and intrigue in British India. It seems very likely that this consideration did not weigh very heavily upon them and that they were in any case not seekers after the "social delights" of the various stations and cantonments of the *raj.*

Belle Cox seems to have had no hesitation in accompanying her husband to such a remote and primitive location. She was deeply devoted to him and "whither thou goest, I go" could well have described her personal creed. It was certainly not uncommon for wives to accompany their husbands to remote posts. She shared his love for natural history and tended to collect small menageries of wild creatures wherever they went. It seems that she did not share, however, his ability to learn languages. They seem to have adapted well enough in Zaila[4] and Belle succeeded in making a home in the austere and

comfortless living quarters provided for them, a simple bungalow set amid a cluster of native huts in a treeless land and in a climate which was far from clement. They collected together sea shells and postage stamps. Zaila at that time was little more than a narrow inlet on the coast, accessible only from the sea by dhows, and where caravan routes to the interior converged.

The work load was light and Cox had time to work at and improve his Arabic, the *lingua franca* of the northern Somali coast, and to study the natural history of the region, especially its bird life. He spent a considerable amount of time talking to the local people and picked up enough information for him to be able to construct genealogical tables for two Somali tribes.

Of some note was an exploration and hunting trip which he made into the interior and which resulted in him shooting and killing a lion which had been attacking a local tribe's domestic animals.

His duties included looking after visitors. At that time, there was a considerable traffic of hunters and explorers, generally expatriates coming from the Indian sub-continent. The numbers at times became something of an embarrassment to Cox and his superior in Berbera.

Philip Graves wrote[5] that one such visitor was George Nathaniel Curzon (1859–1925), the future Lord Curzon of Kedlestone, who would become a cabinet minister and Viceroy of India. Curzon had already made a substantial reputation. Graves said that Cox arranged a hunting trip for him. It has not been possible to find any mention of this trip in either Curzon's published or unpublished papers. Yet the encounter was important for both men; Curzon recognized Cox's potential and noted it for future reference. At the same time, as a Vice-President of the Royal Geographical Society, he nominated Cox for membership of the Society as a Fellow in July 1895 when the latter was on leave in England.

In the early part of 1895, a few weeks before he was to go to London on leave and to depart from the Somali coast for good, Cox organised and led a small military expedition against an unruly tribe, an expedition which caught the attention of his superiors and which earned him praise. In a classic small nineteenth-century colonial war, he displayed outstanding qualities of leadership, initiative and courage.

The expedition and its victorious outcome earned Cox a commendation from his immediate superior, Major Ferris, in Berbera:[6]

> The greatest credit is due to Captain Cox for the excellence of his arrangements before, during and after the expedition; his clearness of perception and coolness of head are qualities that render him a most valuable officer to the Political Department.

Cox was to earn further praise from his superior officer. In his

official report on the Protectorate [Northern Somaliland] for 1995–96,[7] Ferris writes:

> As Captain Cox has, since the close of the year, relinquished charge of the office and there is a probability of his not returning to the Somali coast, I wish to record that it would be impossible to find a more zealous, and difficult to find a more competent and capable officer. His work had been invariably well and thoroughly accomplished, his intimate knowledge of the Somali and his ways and his exceptionally calm and just temperament have rendered him a most valuable assistant to this Agency while at the same time making him popular and respected among the tribes to a rare degree. His personal influence has been a distinct feature in the administration of the coast and his loss cannot but be felt.

Percy and Belle Cox were on leave in England for the remainder of the summer of 1895 and did not return to the Somali coast. Belle gave birth to their son, Derek Percy Cox, on 1 October 1895 in Whitby, Yorkshire.

Cox's next appointment was to an independent Indian state. On 27 November 1895 he became First Assistant to the Governor-General's Agent in Baroda. He and Belle made a decision which was not uncommon in British society in India at the time: their son was left in the care of Cox's mother in England when Belle returned to India.

In January 1899, Curzon became Viceroy and Governor-General of India. In June Cox learned that the Viceroy wanted him to go to Muscat, in the south eastern corner of the Arabia peninsula, as British Political Agent. It was a substantial promotion, taking Cox over the heads of more senior men.

For most of the nineteenth century, the Persian Gulf had been little more than a torrid backwater. The British presence was paramount, but it touched the untidy fringes of the Ottoman Empire in the Arabian peninsula. In the last decade of that century there were two developments which were to have substantial consequences. First, European powers, following their grab for colonies in Africa in the last decades of the century, were looking at the Gulf region with a view to extending at least a modest commercial hegemony. Germany, having launched the Berlin-to-Baghdad railway, contemplated extending it to Kuwait. France had ideas in Muscat and along the coast of Oman. Russia was extending its influence in Persia (Iran).

Second was the extension of international cable links joining Europe (specifically in this instance, London) to the Indian sub-continent via the Persian Gulf. Reports of disturbances and potential threats could be on the desk of the Viceroy in India and the government in London

within hours and countering orders issued promptly. In the pre-cable, slow communication age, decisions had to be made by the officials on the spot.

Curzon had a fine appreciation of the implications of the newly-developing realities for the exercise of British power. He also had a vision of empire, which it is easy to deride over a century later. He was also only too well aware that the region of the Gulf had become a potential element of competition among the major European powers. He had in his mind's eye the concept of an imperial swathe of British influence stretching from the home islands through the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East to the Indian sub-continent, the Far East and Australia. Persia and the nations and tribes of the region of the Persian Gulf had therefore to become an integral part of the defence of British imperial interests, not merely passive and largely indifferent bystanders as had often been the case in the past.

British policy in the region was re-stated in a speech to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Lord Lansdowne, on 5 May, 1903:[8]

> ... I say without hesitation – we should regard the establishment of a naval base, or of a fortified port, in the Persian Gulf by another power as a very grave menace to British interests, and we should certainly resist it with all the means at our disposal.

At about the same time the newly-established Committee for Imperial Defence had set out British worldwide defence priorities. These were naval, Indian and colonial, in that order.[9] It followed that Turkish Arabia (as Iraq was then known), the Arabian peninsula, the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, as well as Persia itself and Afghanistan, in addition to being astride the vital imperial communication link to India, represented "a glacis which Britain did not wish to occupy, but could not afford to see occupied by an enemy."[10]

But there was more. It was also argued that the mere presence of another European power in the Persian Gulf, fortified or not, would have a grave and unsettling effect on the British presence in India. Peoples in India would see such a presence as being evidence that the British imperial power was being eroded and hence could be challenged.

In other words, what was at stake was the illusion of British imperial infallibility, an illusion which permitted a few thousand British officials and soldiers to govern hundreds of millions of people in the sub-continent. A growing awareness of this fragility sharpened men's minds. Specifically, at the dawn of the twentieth century, it was of vital importance that the rulers of the communities making up the inhabitants of the Persian Gulf region did not think that British power was

being, or could be, shaken. If British power was sensed as weakening, then it could be put to the test elsewhere as well as in the Persian Gulf.

The crisis which was to bring Cox to Muscat arose from what (with the wisdom of hindsight) we can see as being no more than low-level meddling by French officials with an eye for intrigue. It had been resolved in contacts between London and Paris during the summer of 1899. The British official in Muscat, Cox's predecessor, had handled the crisis with a considerable degree of ineptitude and relations between Britain (through the government of British India) and the Sultan in Muscat were at a low ebb.

In parentheses, it should be born in mind that the Sultan's remit at that time was somewhat vague. Not all the tribes of the interior of Oman were prepared to offer allegiance to him. For much of the twentieth century, the country was known as "Muscat and Oman." When the present ruler, Sultan Qabus bin Sa'id, came to power in 1970, he insisted that, henceforth, the country should be known simply as "the Sultanate of Oman."

Oman was never a formal British protectorate, as were the Emirates which made up the tribal communities inside the Persian Gulf. This did not prevent a substantial presumption by the British government which, in any case, had been paying a small annual subsidy to the Sultan (the "Canning award") since 1862 to offset his loss of revenue following the prohibition by Britain of the trade in slaves along the east coast of Africa.

British policy was spelled out to Cox by Curzon in Simla on the eve of the latter's arrival in Muscat. Cox had been on leave in England. He travelled by ship to Bombay and thence by train up to Simla.

On 19 September 1899 Curzon reported to the Secretary of State for India in London:[11]

> I have had Cox up at Simla and have coached him carefully for Muscat. My advice has been summed up in this precept – make the Sultan understand that every consideration of policy, of prudence, of past experience, of future hopes compels him to be on our side – not necessarily against anyone else but to recognise that his interests are bound up in loyalty to Great Britain.

Cox was promoted to major and took up his duties in Muscat effective from 1 October 1899. His prime objective was to win the Sultan's confidence; this he did brilliantly. Over the course of the next four years, he built up a strong personal relationship with the Sultan.

A source of significant concern for Cox was the intrigue of the French Consul. At over a century's distance, these intrigues and Cox's counters seem arcane and trivial, bordering on the farcical, but at the

time they were regarded, as least in Muscat, as being of not little import.

The apparent use of the French flag as a flag of convenience by some Omani dhow captains disturbed Cox. The trade in slaves had been banned by international agreement in the mid-nineteenth century, a consideration not recognized by some Omani traders, some of whose cargoes were suspected of being slaves brought from the East African coast. The Royal Navy was policing this trade off the coast of Oman but if a suspected dhow was flying the French flag, it was, for all intents and purposes, inviolate.

Eventually the issue was settled in direct negotiation between London and Paris, a fact which troubled Cox somewhat, making him worry that "affairs of state" at a European level could negate his best endeavours and weaken his local credibility.

In the early summer of 1902 Cox undertook a long-contemplated journey into the interior of Oman, a journey which few Europeans had made previously. He left Muscat by sea for Abu Dhabi and thence returned overland through inner Oman. On this journey he climbed Oman's towering "Green Mountain" (Jabal Akhdar). This journey formed the subject of a paper he presented to the Royal Geographical Society in London in April 1925.

Only three Europeans had explored Oman's interior previously and Cox covered ground over which no other European had travelled. He made his journey mostly by camel but the ascent of the Jabal Akhdar was made on foot with donkeys carrying his baggage and that of the one servant accompanying him. He carefully mapped and noted prominent features and wildlife as he went.

Cox was always seeking ways in which he could strengthen the Sultan's belief in the power and effectiveness of the government of India and of the British government. He arranged for Sultan Faisal's son, Taimur, then aged seventeen, to attend the Coronation Durbar of King Edward VII in Delhi in January 1903 and accompanied Taimur himself.

A high point in the British creation of an illusion of an unchallengeable power took place in November and December 1903. This was the Vice-regal tour of Lord Curzon around the Persian Gulf accompanied by a fleet of some half-dozen Royal Navy vessels. The journey began in Muscat, where the town and its forts were illuminated at night, as was the small British fleet anchored offshore. A Durbar was held on the deck of *HMS Argonaut,* a first-class cruiser, during which Sultan Faisal was presented with the Grand Cross of the Order of the British Empire.

Curzon's trip around the Gulf was long remembered. It represented a high point in the spelling out of what Curzon perceived to be Britain's imperial mission. In Sharjah on 21 November 1903, Curzon addressed the assembled emirs and shaikhs of the Persian Gulf.

In a speech setting out to justify the reasons for the strength of the British presence in the Persian Gulf at that time, his characteristic rhetoric was completely unambiguous:[12]

> We were here before any other power … We found strife and we have created order … It was our commerce as well as your security that was threatened and called for protection. The great Empire of India, which it is our duty to defend, lies almost at your gate … We are not going to throw away this century of costly and triumphant enterprise; we shall not wipe out the most unselfish page in history. The peace of these waters must still be maintained; your independence will continue to be upheld; and the British government must remain supreme.

A century later, even allowing for Curzon's hyperbolic form of words, the sentiment expressed is anachronistic and it is not difficult to be cynical. Yet these words were a manifestation of the high noon of empire, a fervent expression of a sense of mission, and are not without a certain nobility.

Cox accompanied Curzon on the first leg of this tour. He knew at that time that he was on the eve of his departure from Muscat. Curzon had promoted him over the heads of men with a longer record of service to be Acting Political Resident, Persian Gulf, based at Bushire on the Persian littoral. (He was to be "acting" until 1908; the bureaucracy of the Government of India was not always happy with appointments made by Curzon which upset the normal rules of seniority.) He left Muscat early in January 1904 and, after a period of leave, took up his new appointment the following May. As Political Resident, he reported to the Government of India. But he was also British Consul-General and, as such, he reported, through the British minister in Tehran, to the Foreign Office in London.

Cox's achievement in Oman had confirmed Curzon's estimate of his ability and effectiveness. Above all, the Viceroy's judgment that Cox shared his perception of the rapidly developing importance for British imperial interests had been upheld. Given the volatile political environment of the region, it is all too easy to overlook the strength of British commercial interests in the region of the Persian Gulf. Thus Cox's responsibilities included increasingly the assertion and defence of market share as well as embracing the more traditional strategic interests in a world which was rapidly becoming more competitive commercially as well as geo-politically.

Cox served for the best part of ten years in the Gulf, from his arrival in Bushire in May 1904 to December 1913. When he left the region to take up an appointment as acting head of the Foreign Department of

the government of India, he had established a formidable personal reputation. He did not seek publicity, his work seldom made headlines, but his reputation lived on for at least another half century. During a decade of change, Cox would ask himself as he contemplated any new development, be it political or commercial, in the region: "What does this mean for the British position in the Gulf?"

A portrait of Cox emerges from an examination of some issues of substance with which he had to deal with over the course of his period of service based in Bushire. He demonstrated foresight and courage and easily and naturally had the gift of being able to instil confidence in others, be they Gulf emirs or shaikhs or the men with whom he worked. Both in India and in Whitehall, ministers and officials could rely on him to defend British interests intelligently through the exercise of his personality and by the integrity and sincerity of his approach to all those with whom he had to deal.

There was no precedent in the Persian Gulf, in the records of the Government of India, or in London, to assist in formulating a policy for most of these issues. Inevitably there were times when an appreciation of the implications of issues in the Gulf were seen differently in Simla and in Whitehall, causing a confusion of objectives. "Policy" is rarely, if ever, written immutably in stone.

An immediate problem for Cox was the proposal coming from Berlin for an extension of the Berlin-to-Baghdad railway to a terminal on the Persian Gulf, probably in Kuwait. This involved the status of Kuwait, which, in theory at least, owed allegiance to what had been the Ottoman Empire and hence to Turkey. It would also provide a springboard for a characteristically energetic German commercial penetration of the Gulf region. The status of Kuwait and British relations with Kuwait were to have a high priority during the period of Cox's tenure.

The background to then-contemporary Kuwaiti-British relations had begun in 1899, when the ruler of Kuwait, Shaikh Mubarak, in response to accusations of piracy in the waters off Kuwait, and in response to pressure from Lord Curzon, had concluded a bond with Britain, signed by Cox's predecessor as Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, Colonel Meade. This was not a protectorate agreement, paralleling such agreements signed with the shaikhs of the lower Persian Gulf, but simply an agreement whereby the ruler of Kuwait bound himself and his successors, first, not to receive any agent or representative of any foreign power on his territory without the prior approval of the British government, and second, not to "cede, sell, lease, mortgage, or give for occupation" any part of his territory to any third party without the prior consent of the British government. The implied element of British protection (and the sum of money paid over by the government of India as a consideration) gave the ruler of Kuwait an incentive to discourage piracy among his subjects. This bond agreement had been

kept a close secret; Mubarak's nominal political overlord, the Ottoman Sultan, was not formally advised of the existence of the bond.

The British government did not regard the arrangement with the ruler of Kuwait as more than a local defensive measure. Curzon's instructions in 1899 were summed up by the Permanent Under Secretary of the India Office in London[13] "… we don't want Koweit *(sic),* but we don't want anyone else to have it."

Kuwait's status was uncertain and the bond agreement with the British government had done little to remove this uncertainty. The Ottoman *wali* (governor) of nearby Basra regarded Mubarak was being under his authority with the Ottoman title of *Qaimaqam* (head man) in the *qadha* (administrative district) of Kuwait, but it is uncertain whether the government in distant Constantinople would have upheld this view. Had Mubarak's bond agreement with Britain been challenged under international law at the time, there is no certainty that the British government would have been judged to have a watertight case. The bond agreement fell substantially short of the formal protectorate agreement which Mubarak wanted (and which the Shaikh of Bahrain had had since 1880). The British government had informed the Ottoman government in November 1892 of the fact of British protection of Bahrain. To take this step with Kuwait in 1899 would have risked a more serious confrontation with the Ottoman government than Britain was prepared to contemplate at that time.

The ambiguity of Kuwait's international position did not prevent Curzon, in his characteristic vice-regal style, visiting Mubarak in Kuwait in November 1903. Curzon reported at the time that Mubarak was not seeking a formal protectorate agreement "because he conceives that it already exists."[14]

This might be thought to be disingenuous on Curzon's part: he had arrived off Kuwait with a considerable fleet and in the circumstances Mubarak could hardly say anything else. In any case, traditional Gulf Arab social politeness included a desire to tell important visitors what these visitors like to hear.

During Curzon's visit to Kuwait, the idea of appointing a permanent British Agent to Kuwait (an agent who would have had responsibilities similar to those of the British Agent in Muscat) was raised again. The possibility had been discussed in a desultory way between the India Office and the Foreign Office previously, without a positive decision being made. At the same time the question of sending an agent to Ibn Saud was considered. Ibn Saud was to become King Abdul-Aziz and the founder of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia some quarter century later and was at that time mounting a serious challenge to Ottoman authority in the central Arabian peninsula. The proposal was shelved after the Foreign Office refused to consider it on the grounds that such a move would be seen in Constantinople as supporting an opposition movement against the legitimate Ottoman government.

Captain S.G. Knox, a subordinate of Cox, went to Kuwait as British Political Agent in August 1904. Knox's instructions were to build up firm personal relations with Mubarak, to ensure that there was no hindrance to British trade to and through Kuwait, and to keep an eye on Turkish activities as well as providing general political reporting. Cox, newly arrived in the office of the Resident, was pleased with the appointment, as was Mubarak. Cox was already thinking of the Persian Gulf and its littoral as becoming an exclusively British preserve. Two years later, in 1906, Cox's main concern, mirroring that of the Government of India and of Whitehall, was the proposed extension of the German railway to the Persian Gulf.

Lord Minto, who had succeeded Curzon as Viceroy, summed up everyone's concern in a despatch to the Secretary of State for India on 12 July 1906:[15]

> The arrival of a German railway at Basrah, Um Kasr, Kuwait or any other point in this quarter must tend to the Germanisation of the Baghdad and Basrah wilayets, the diminution of British prestige and commerce in these provinces, and the disturbance of our relations with the Arab Chiefs on the southern and western shores of the Gulf; it would react on our position in Persia, and would possibly, if indeed not probably, necessitate a considerable increase to the British naval forces which are at present stationed in these waters.

On Cox's initiative, an insurance against the possible location of a terminal for the Baghdad railway in Kuwait was arranged in 1907; this involved the lease by the British government of a piece of land 3750 yards long by 300 yards deep in Kuwait. This strengthened both Mubarak's and the British position in that the former had a more tangible guarantee of a British interest in ensuring his security and Britain had a sizeable bargaining counter in any negotiation on the positioning of the proposed terminal on the shore of the Gulf.

For the next six years there were few local problems in Anglo-Kuwaiti relations. Captain W.H.I. Shakespear replaced Knox as British Agent in 1909. Over this period negotiations between Britain, Germany and Turkey on the route and the financing of the proposed railway took place. The British position was essentially simple; Britain was not prepared to compromise on having absolute control of the port of Kuwait, even if this meant collecting customs revenues and paying the receipts over to the Turkish government.

At the same time lengthy negotiations took place between the British and Turkish governments aimed at agreeing a Convention settling all outstanding issues between them. The Young Turk revolution had deposed the Ottoman Sultan, but he remained *caliph* of Islam. Shaikh

Mubarak in Kuwait worried, with some justice, that he was regarded by both sides as being little more than a pawn in a much wider field and that his claims and interests were sacrificed to political exigencies.[16]

Cox was charged with smoothing Mubarak's ruffled feathers. He set out in a letter dated 4 July 1913 to stress to Mubarak the advantages to Kuwait of the draft Convention and wrote:[17] " ... you have the formal assurance of the British government to support you in your affairs, so long as you faithfully observe your engagements to us as you have in the past."

Mubarak had little choice at the time and in the circumstances other than to accept the formal position of the British government. Three months later, in October 1913, Mubarak, by then a very old and a very sick man, was persuaded to sign a precautionary bond giving the British government priority regarding the disposal of any oil which might be found beneath Kuwait's deserts.[18]

The final act in Cox's formal relationship with the Shaikh of Kuwait was a letter dated 3 November 1914, after the outbreak of war with Turkey, in which he informed Mubarak that Britain recognized Kuwait as "an independent state under British protection."[19] The position was formalized in an agreement signed by Cox with the new ruler of Kuwait, Shaikh Mubarak having died in December 1915.

Mubarak had played another important role impinging on British interests in the Persian Gulf. He had had a close relationship with Shaikh Abdul-Aziz bin Abdul-Rahman Al-Saud (Ibn Saud), then Emir of the Nejd region of the Arabian peninsula. Already in 1906 Cox had become convinced of Ibn Saud's potential. In a detailed report to the government of India dated 16 September he had recommended a more formal British association with Ibn Saud. After pointing out the obvious advantages of a closer association with Ibn Saud, Cox pointed out that the Arab tribes of the central Arabian peninsula were so desperate to throw off Turkish domination that they might seek the support of some other European power.[20]

The India Office replied that British interests and influence should be confined to the coast of the Persian Gulf and that no steps should be taken to enter into a relationship with Ibn Saud. For all that, Cox's subordinate in Kuwait, Captain Shakespear, met Ibn Saud in March 1910 and reported favourably to Cox. This meeting involved an exchange of little more than politeness but it was followed by a more serious meeting in the desert in March 1911 during which common interests were discussed.

In May 1913 Shakespear had another meeting with Ibn Saud. The timing of this meeting was perhaps unfortunate, for it took place shortly before Ibn Saud drove the Turkish garrison out of Hasa and thus extended the territories under his control to include a strip of the Gulf coast. It is extremely unlikely that Shakespear would have been

aware of the plans of his host. However, it was difficult to persuade the Turkish government that Britain had had no knowledge of Ibn Saud's intentions and that there had been some collusion.

In any case, Shakespear sent a detailed report to Cox after this meeting, which Cox passed on with his own report to the government of India. The reports were sent on to London with a cautious accompanying note from the government of India:[21]

> It stands to reason that we must keep friends with and come to satisfactory terms with Nejd [Ibn Saud's territory] as the Amir [Ibn Saud] controls the whole hinterland of the Persian Gulf. We always intended to encourage the opening of friendly relations with him as soon as the Kuwait and other questions were settled with Turkey.

Shakespear's report, with the covering report from Cox and comment from the government of India was not well received in the Foreign Office. Priority at that time was being given to the delicate negotiations with the government of Turkey which were to lead up to the draft Anglo-Turkish Convention. Ultimately, on 26 May 1913, the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, sent a stinging rap over the knuckles for Cox which concluded with the words:[22]

> The cardinal factor of British policy, which is based on considerations not merely local, is to uphold the integrity of the Turkish dominions in Asia.

Cox was instructed to patch up the situation as best he could. Turkey's entry into the war on the side of Germany changed everything, of course, and the draft Anglo-Turkish convention was never ratified.

Instead, in December 1915 Cox was able to sign a treaty with Ibn Saud under which the British government was to make significant concessions to the Emir as the "immediate price of his friendship." But before this, Ibn Saud, realising that, like his friend Mubarak in Kuwait, he and other Arab leaders tended to be regarded as mere pawns in elaborate games between conflicting European powers, had himself signed a treaty with the Turkish government as a sort of insurance policy.[23]

The twentieth century arrived in the Persian Gulf with the first discovery of oil at Masjid-I-Sulaiman near Ahwaz in south-west Persia on 26 May 1908. Export of the oil would have to be through a pipeline to the coast near or on the Shatt-al-Arab, near Basra. It was envisaged at the time that a refinery would have to be built at the pipeline terminal.

The route of the proposed pipeline would traverse Mohammera

(modern Arabistan), the Arabic-speaking south western province of Persia. This in turn would require permission from the Shaikh of Mohammera, and the man to conduct the negotiation was Cox.

At that time, Mohammera, although formally part of Persia, was separated from Tehran by distance and by indifferent communications. Its administration was delegated to its shaikh, Shaikh Khazal. There had been, prior to the discovery of oil, little to make successive shahs interest themselves in this relatively downtrodden province *(see page 18)*. A detailed description of the negotiations is provided by Arnold Wilson, who had been involved in the oil project from its early days.[24] (He was later to head the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, a fore-runner of BP.)

Wilson wrote that the Shaikh of Mohammera recognized that his quasi-independence from Tehran would vanish once oil revenues became significant. This was a development which he could see was inevitable. As an Arab he looked with alarm on the prospect. He hoped, in vain, that the British government would offer him some protection. But at least there were some immediate benefits accruing to him.

According to Philip Graves,[25] the agreement negotiated by Cox and signed on 16 July 1909 provided for the renting by Khazal to the Anglo-Persian Oil Company of an area on Abadan island, intended for the construction of a refinery, and a way leave for the proposed pipeline. In addition, the company was to pay Shaikh Khazal an annual rental, ten years in advance, and a cash loan, provided nominally by the British government but in fact by the oil company. Cox received a letter of thanks from Sir Edward Grey for his efforts.

The German challenge in the Persian Gulf was not simply a matter of the prospective continuation of the Berlin-to-Baghdad railway to the shore of the Persian Gulf. There was also a significant commercial challenge in the form of an export business ranging from a number of diverse commodities from mother-of-pearl to barley, managed by Germans and carried in German ships. German ships were encouraged to call at Gulf ports. These ships, offering highly competitive freight rates and a regular calling schedule, represented a substantial threat to British commerce. The Germans were so efficient that Cox and many others believed that they benefited from a government subsidy, but no evidence of this was produced.

One potentially profitable affair was a concession awarded to a German company for the export of iron ore from Abu Musa, a small island nominally under the control of the Shaikh of Sharjah. When Cox heard about the German initiative early in 1905, he warned the shaikh not to conclude any formal agreement with the German company involved without first consulting the British government and demanded that the already-signed concession agreement be ended on the grounds that it contravened the agreement between the Shaikh of

Sharjah and the British government. The German company refused to stop working the ore, arguing that they had contractual rights under their concession. In October Cox authorised the use of force to compel them to stop. The legality of this move was highly dubious. The dispute was eventually settled by negotiation between the British and German governments.

Cox justified his actions in a note he prepared for use in the Anglo-German negotiations in which he justified his actions on the grounds that he was seeking to stop German interests securing a footing on Abu Musa, even if this would involve the payment of compensation.

Not all Gulf trade was legitimate. There was active, and generally very profitable, smuggling, especially of arms. Many of the smuggled rifles had been manufactured in England and Gulf governments, especially the government of Oman, found the revenues accruing to them from the smuggling trade were significant. As many of the smuggled rifles and a great part of the ammunition ended up in the then north-west frontier of India, where British solders were being killed, the British authorities found themselves in something of a dilemma. This presented an ongoing problem for Cox over much of the time he was Political Resident. Eventually a solution was found: a bonded warehouse was to be established in Muscat effective from 1 September 1912 and kept under the strictest supervision, in theory at least under the watchful eye of a British officer.

Much of Cox's everyday work in the Gulf region was tantamount to a police function: ensuring the peace be kept in a region which was both lawless and impoverished and in which, in general, local rulers had limited authority over their subjects. Although British interests and British responsibilities normally did not extend beyond a narrow coastal strip, there were exceptions to this, especially in Persia.

In the early years of the twentieth century Persia was an especially ill-governed country. Difficult geography and poor communications meant that local officials and tribal chiefs wielded a considerable local power without fear of sanction from Tehran. Control from the centre was so loose and ineffectual that the Shaikh of Mohammera could commit the government to an oil pipeline concession without interference from the capital *(see page 17)*. Murder and armed robbery were commonplace and culprits were not afraid of being caught or of retribution.

Every year, in his Annual Reports from Bushire, Cox drew attention to the effect that this lawlessness was having on British trade in southern and south-west Persia and on the physical danger to which British and British Indian traders were exposed. Cox was as proficient in Farsee as he was in Arabic and from Bushire was well placed to continue to be well-informed about conditions in the country. In any case, as British Consul-General, he reported to the British Minister in Tehran.

During his tenure, Cox was always seen to be determined to ensure that British interests were upheld and that the market share of British and British Indian commerce was maintained. The imperial British attitude as exemplified by his personality and endeavours might seem incongruous a century later. Rulers of the communities around the littoral of the Persian Gulf knew that they should listen to British advice if they wished to avoid political problems. Above all, he was greatly respected as a strong man exuding moral dominance whose word could be trusted. Hence the description of him as "a great man."

Two descriptions of Cox by men who knew him, one a colleague, the other an opponent, add depth to our understanding of Cox-the-man. First, Arnold Wilson writing home to his father in 1909 and describing Cox and the negotiations with the Shaikh of Mohammera:[26]

> His Arabic was excellent: his bearing dignified. He exercised from the outset great influence on the Shaikh of Mohammera, but was very careful not to press him unduly. His patience was unbounded, his temper unaffected by the great heat. [… …] Cox was content to sit like the shaikh on cushions on the floor with his devoted Oriental Secretary [… …] by his side. He attached great importance to devising a form of words which should not give rise to disputes and invariably drafted a clause in Persian or Arabic, and discussed it in that form. Only when it became finally agreed to in the vernacular did he essay a translation into English. His ideal was that the Persian text should prevail, being that of the weaker party.

Cox's opponent for much of his time and his duties in the Persian Gulf was Wilhelm Wassmuss, the German Vice-Consul in Bushire, who wrote of him:[27]

> [Cox] feared every economic influence which Germany might obtain in the Gulf and he considered any means justified to prevent it. For he knew that in the countries round the Gulf, where there is nowhere a settled administration, economic interests cannot be maintained without political support, and he saw his ambition of making the Gulf an exclusively British sea endangered by every ship's load of barley and every ton of oxide exported by Germans.

Chapter 2

The Stage: The Evolution of British Policy in the Persian Gulf and "Turkish Arabia", 1913–1918

> "The cardinal factor of British policy, which is based upon considerations not merely local, is to uphold the integrity of the Turkish dominions in Asia."
>
> Sir Edward Grey, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 2 July, 1913[1]

> "... France and Great Britain have agreed to encourage and assist the establishment of native governments in Syria and Mesopotamia ..."
>
> Anglo-French Declaration, 9 November, 1918[2]

*

The pistol shot in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914 was the harbinger of radical change in Europe, change which presented an extraordinary challenge to British policy makers. A nation which, throughout its recent history, had demonstrated its ability to define and defend its vital interests through naval supremacy found itself caught up in a continental war. A kaleidoscope of radical changes in foreign policy and defence objectives dominated the corridors of power. There were periods when British policy makers seemed confused with the result that some policies, for example in the Middle East, appeared muddled and contradictory.

The contribution of Sir Percy Cox to the British cause during the First World War was substantial. This contribution may be considered on two planes: first, Cox's role in maintaining overall British objectives in so far as the Persian Gulf and Iraq were concerned in a rapidly changing international political environment, and second, his contribution to building a stable British presence in the conquered Turkish dominions in Asia.

Throughout the war, Cox was both a high level adviser to the British government and an executant of the requirements of this government in the Persian Gulf, eastern Arabia and Iraq. Because of this dual role, he was perhaps the only British official at the end of the war capable

of ensuring that the basic British position in the Persian Gulf and Iraq was maintained and at the same time give effect to the war-time promises of the British government and make the words of the Anglo-French Declaration a reality: he established "a native government in Mesopotamia". This is his unique place in the history of British involvement in the Middle East in the twentieth century.

His personal objectives never changed: he sought to defend the supremacy of the British presence in the region of the Persian Gulf, thus ensuring that the integrity of the Indian Empire was not be threatened and that British commercial interests in the region remained unchallenged. His achievements in Iraq between 1920 and 1923 tailored the new realities of national self-determination to the overall British objectives.

On the first plane, Cox's contribution to overall British policy formulation and the setting of strategic objectives as far as Iraq, or Mesopotamia – the land between the rivers – as it was generally known at that time, requires an analysis of the evolution of British official thinking on what to do about the Turkish dominions in Asia when (and if) the war ended in a decisive Allied victory. The story of British promises made to the Arabs during the years 1914–18, together with the concomitant promises to the Zionists, has been often told and retold.[3] To ensure a background for the assessment of Cox's achievements it is necessary to outline the essential elements of this story once again, and specifically in so far as these elements effect the development of British ideas on what should be done with the territories sometimes known as "Turkish Arabia", the erstwhile Ottoman *Vilayets* (provinces) of Baghdad, Mosul and Basra.

The entry of Turkey into the war on the side of Germany meant that the policy of upholding the integrity of the Turkish dominions in Asia became a mere mouthful of words. The Ottoman Empire was as dead as the Byzantine Empire became on the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in May 1453. This did not stop hundreds of thousands of Turkish soldiers fighting doggedly for some four years to defend these dominions.

Britain entered the war with a strong alliance with France and a somewhat looser alliance with Russia. These alliances were regarded as being of fundamental importance for the final victory. Germany and its allies could only be beaten by a continental war in Europe, and only France and Russia had the armies capable of ensuring this victory. As both France and Russia had also their interests in the disposal of the Ottoman Empire, the British government could not, out of deference to the possible wishes of its allies, itself decide unilaterally on what parts of the erstwhile Ottoman territories it wished to keep for itself.

A number of influences and streams of narrower objectives eventually formed a conjuncture which led to a determination of the British

government to ensure that British interests in Iraq would remain paramount but that at the same time an acceptable and viable independent Arab government could be to be put in place in Baghdad.

The streams effecting the often apparently slow groping of the British government towards these objectives included the promises made to certain Arab leaders to encourage their participation in the war against Turkey at a time when the military resources of Britain were becoming dangerously stretched. Another major consideration was that there was almost certainly a considerable amount of oil in Iraq; as the Royal Navy was rapidly switching from burning coal to burning fuel oil, this was a consideration of very great importance. The intention of Britain to defend its Indian Empire remained a fact which was not to be challenged, bearing in mind that this defence pre-requisited security of communications with India and hence a sustained and secure presence in the Persian Gulf. Then there were early ideas of the importance of substantial British technological innovation and assistance along the lines already proven in parts of India, especially the Punjab, to encourage economic development in the Turkish territories to come under British control. The British position would be assured, it was thought, and at the same time substantial business opportunities would be created for British companies by investment in irrigation and food production in the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

Another idea forced its way into British official thinking, an idea which could not be resisted, that of nationalist self-determination. The war opened a veritable Pandora's box of hitherto unconsidered pressures, perhaps the most powerful of which was that which led the British government to accept the principle of political self-determination for erstwhile subject peoples, "the establishment of national governments deriving their authority from the initiative and free choice" of these peoples. This idea inevitably would spell the end of the illusion of British infallibility. The Indian Empire could not survive such a change, though it took another generation and another World War for the fact to be accepted.

Finally, perhaps as a result of the spread of popular democracy in Britain itself, the national will to empire was being eroded. When the British nation took a deep breath at the end of World War I, its taxpayers made it clear to the government that they were not prepared to contribute to expensive foreign imperialist adventures.

An ongoing complication in the formulation of British post-war intentions for "Turkish Arabia" (as the region encompassing most of the Arabian peninsula was known at that time) was that consideration of the problem took place in three different centres: London, Delhi (or Simla) and Cairo. Differences in appreciation of situations between the British government and the government of India were neither new nor remarkable, and had generally been resolved intelligently. The contribution of British officials in Cairo was often at odds with that of Cox

and his contemporaries in the region of the Persian Gulf. This also is not surprising, given that the history of the Arab world is taken up to no small degree by rivalry (and often lack of comprehension) between Baghdad and Cairo. The consideration is not so much one of pointing fingers at these differences between British officials, but of noting the positive action taken at various times, not least by Cox, to ensure effective coordination of policy formulation.

One stumbling block in the way of the thinking of British officials was the possibility that either the war might end with a negotiated settlement or that it might be possible to detach Turkey from Germany by diplomacy. In either case the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire would remain a substantial consideration, if nothing else but as a bargaining chip.

* *

The prospect in early 1915 of an Allied victory against Turkey and an Anglo-French occupancy of the Straits prompted Imperial Russia to make a claim for the "warm water port" considered essential by Russian governments for at least two centuries. Specifically this claim was for the annexation of Constantinople, the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. On 10 March, the British War Council accepted this Russian claim in principle, but on condition that Russia should accept reciprocal British and French claims on the integrity of erstwhile Ottoman dominions in Asia.

On 18 March the British and French navies tried to force the Dardanelles but were beaten back with heavy loss. The next day the British War Council met again and Sir Edward Grey wondered about the possible disintegration of the Ottoman Empire in the light of the Russian claim. He posed two questions:[4]

> 1) If we acquire fresh territory shall we make ourselves weaker or stronger?
> 2) Ought we not take into account the very strong feeling in the Moslem world that Mohammedanism ought to have a political as well as a religious existence?

Following his second question, he went on:

> If the latter question were answered in the affirmative, Arabia, Syria and Mesopotamia were the only possible territories for an Arab Empire. If we took this standpoint we could say to our Moslem subjects that, as Turkey had handed itself over to the Germans, we had set up a new and independent Moslem State.

The British government, in classic manner three weeks later, on 8 April 1915, set up a senior inter-departmental committee to consider[5] the nature of British desiderata in Turkey in Asia in the event of a successful conclusion of the war.

The work of this committee was significant in that it drew together the thinking of all those departments with an interest in the question of what to do with the Turkish dominions in Asia in the event of a decisive Allied victory. The committee's report represents a record of the contemporary ideas of the various concerned government departments. As such, it is an important document in the evolution of the formulation of British policy in the Middle East. It is also of no small interest as a window on imperial attitudes of the time.

This committee, the "Committee on Asiatic Turkey" (otherwise the de Bunsen committee), was chaired by a senior diplomat, Sir Maurice de Bunsen (1852–1932), who had been Ambassador in Madrid from 1906–1913 and in Vienna up to the outbreak of the war. Its members included George (later Sir George) Clerk from the Foreign Office, (he was a senior diplomat heading the Office's war department), Sir Thomas Holderness, (Permanent Under-Secretary at the India Office) and senior representatives of the Admiralty, the War Office and the Board of Trade. Also a member was Lord Kitchener's personal nominee, Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Mark Sykes, M.P., (1879–1919).

The committee issued its report on 30 June 1915. It set the scene by declaring that, following the expected success of the attack on the Dardanelles the Russian government had communicated to the Allied governments its claims on Constantinople (Istanbul). Briefly, these claims would entail the possession by Russia of the city of Constantinople, the European coast from the Black Sea to the end of the Dardanelles, the Asiatic shore of the Bosphorus, the islands in the Sea of Marmora as well as the islands of Imbros and Tenedos.

In return, Russia would make a firm promise to respect the special interests of Britain and France in the area claimed and to view with sympathy the claims which these powers entertained in regard to other regions of the Ottoman Empire.

The committee reported that the British government agreed generally to the Russian proposals, "subject to the war being prosecuted to a successful conclusion, and to Great Britain and France realizing their desiderata in the Ottoman Empire and elsewhere," and expressly asked for commercial freedom for merchant vessels in the Dardanelles and for the creation of a free port at Constantinople for goods in transit to and from territory other than Russian. The committee added that, before formulating other British desired gains following the expected collapse of the Ottoman Empire, it would be necessary to consult both the French and Russian governments and to consider the whole question of ulterior British and French interests in Asiatic Turkey. However, the members of the committee made two

definite and important observations: first, that British would expect a revision of the Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1907 respecting Persia, and second, that when the fact that Russia was to have Constantinople at the end of the war became public, the British government would state that it had throughout all the negotiations stipulated that in all circumstances Arabia and the Moslem holy places should remain under independent Moslem rule.

The French Government was more precise in announcing its counter-claims to Russia. France demanded Cilicia (south eastern Anatolia) and Syria, in which latter term they included Palestine and the Christian Holy Places. The precise form of the French claim was not specified; whether annexation or protectorate or sphere of interests. The committee considered that Russia would accede to the French claim to Cilicia and Syria proper, but will demur strongly to the inclusion of Palestine.

The committee was asked "to consider the nature of British desiderata"; it was not asked to formulate specific policy recommendations. It considered four possible alternatives for Turkey-in-Asia in the 1915 view of the shape of the post-war world. These were, first, that the whole of the Turkish territory should merely be occupied by and partitioned among the three allies in the event of their decisive victory; second, to put all of Turkish territory under effective European control although a Turkish government would retain nominal independence; third, to leave the Ottoman Empire in Asia more or less independent and intact, with some relatively minor territorial adjustments; and fourth, to decentralize the Empire into five federal states, excluding Arabia. These suggested divisions, Anatolia, Armenia, Syria, Palestine and Iraq-Jazirah, the committee considered, defined themselves because "Turkey in Asia falls ethnographically and historically into five great provinces...". Again, some territorial adjustments of external boundaries was considered appropriate.

The committee foresaw an independent Arabia without specifying whether this would be a united or fragmented state.

In its Conclusions, the committee argued that for over 100 years there has been one constant phenomenon in the political history of Europe. Dynasties had come and gone, states had expended or been absorbed, boundaries have shifted backwards and forwards, but steadily and apparently inevitably, whether as a result of war or of a peace congress, Turkey has lost territory in Europe.

For as long as Turkey remained in Europe, the committee continued, no permanent settlement for interests already acquired it was possible, but it is possible to hope that with the disappearance of Turkey from Europe, a final and stable solution could be found The committee maintained that it has looked for a way out of the impasse by proposing a solution which, while securing the vital interests of Britain, would give to Turkey in Asia some prospect of a permanent existence.

The committee felt that the best option for the future would be a form of decentralization of the rump of the Ottoman empire. It considered that this rump, which geographically and historically had consisted of five provinces: Anatolia, Armenia, Syria, Palestine and Iraq-Jazirah, should become a federation.

The committee had assumed a decisive victory against Germany and Turkey. If the war were to end with a negotiated peace, the committee considered in the final paragraph of its report that in any event it would be desirable to ensure that the special interests of Britain in the Arabian peninsula and Mesopotamia (Iraq) be formally recognized in any peace negotiations and to ensure also the cessation of all German activity in the area. Specifically, modifications to the Berlin-to-Baghdad railway agreement would be required. The overall British interest was to be certain of maintaining control of any concessions to be awarded in the region, including markets for British products, as well as security for interests already acquired, especially irrigation works and navigation of the Shatt-el-Arab and the rivers Tigris and Euphrates.

In the main body of the report brief mention was made of the importance of ensuring the security of oil production in the territories of the Ottoman Empire.

The report was of considerable relevance to Sir Percy Cox in Iraq as Chief Political Officer to the British Indian Expeditionary Force. In the summer of 1915, when this report was issued, an advance on Baghdad was being contemplated with a degree of enthusiasm by the generals in command in Iraq and by Cox himself. As will be seen in the immediately following chapter, he had wished the British government to announce that the occupation of Basra would be permanent. Such an attitude was wholly consistent with his concept of the importance of the Gulf to British (and British Indian) interests.

The India Office and the Government of India had thought a great deal about the future of Mesopotamia. A number of notes, including a lengthy memorandum (written before the de Bunsen committee was set up) dated 14 March 1915 by Sir Arthur Hirtzel, Secretary of the Political and Secret Department of the India Office, were submitted to the committee. These documents are an amalgam of the considered thoughts of the India Office, the Viceroy, the Foreign Department of the Government of India and Cox, of course, and as such are of particular interest.

Hirtzel's memorandum, included with the report of the committee as Appendix VI, was entitled "The Future Settlement of Eastern Turkey and Arabia". It must be stressed that the memorandum was intended as a paper for discussion, not as a firm recommendation.

Hirtzel set out his objective in his first paragraph. He recalled that on the outbreak of the war with Turkey the British government had given assurances to the rulers of Kuwait and Mohammera as well as to Ibn Saud that Britain, in return for their support, would ensure that

Basra would never again come under Turkish control. He went on to write that the notes he was presenting to the committee were an attempt to indicate some of the factors to be borne in mind when considering options.

In a section of his memorandum headed "Irrigation" Hirtzel writes of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and makes the point that both rivers must be considered as a whole for irrigation purposes. The implication of this was that whichever power was to control the Basra *Vilayet* would therefore need to control also the Baghdad *Vilayet* as well as the upper reaches of both rivers to the latitude of Mosul.

The India Office was well informed on Mesopotamia. Anglo-Indian commerce in the Baghdad and Basra provinces was considerable and many thousands of Indian Muslims made the pilgrimage each year to the Shia holy cities of Kerbala and Najaf. A British company provided a river transport service. The Office had also had professional opinion on the potential for irrigation in the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates available to it. Before the war, an eminent British engineer, Sir William Willcocks, with extensive experience of irrigation works in the Indus valley in India, had prepared a scheme for the reclamation of Mesopotamia by placing its irrigation on an efficient basis. Willcocks himself in June 1912 had presented a paper[6] to the Royal Geographical Society in London entitled *The Garden of Eden and Its Restoration,* a paper which included some of the ideas he had submitted in a report to the Turkish government.

Willcocks, in the conclusion to his paper, made a point that could not have pleased the British interests which ran the shipping along the rivers:

> On the subject of navigation I hold the view of nearly every engineer in Upper India. In the arid regions of the earth, water should be monopolized for irrigation, and railways for transport.

Yet finally:

> ... it is my firm trust that works carried out on the broad lines of the project submitted by me to the Turkish Government, provided the works themselves are executed with the expedition and liberal supervision which are their life, will secure a firm foundation for the resuscitation and future prosperity of this once famous land.

There was, however, (quite apart from funding the capital cost of Willcock's plans) a practical problem: the local population of the land between the rivers was at that time small in number, considerably less

than an optimum population needed to exploit land made cultivable by mass irrigation schemes. Hirtzel's tentative solution for this problem is interesting:[7]

> It has accordingly been proposed – and this is a proposal requiring mature consideration – to colonize Mesopotamia from India. The arguments in favour of this course are:-
>
> 1) That we should get from the Punjab and Sind colonists admirably suitable for the agricultural development which irrigation will make possible.
>
> 2) That we should be giving India a tangible reward for her services in the war, and by directly interesting her in the country remove some of the resentment which Indian Moslems may be expected to feel at the British share in the dismemberment of the Turkish Empire.
>
> 3) That creating an Indian colony the excuse for emigration to the white man's colonies would be removed.
>
> 4) That an Indian, and especially a Punjabi, colony would help to provide the army necessary for its own defence.
>
> These are weighty considerations, and the difficulties which there must necessarily be in the way of any such large scheme are believed by its advocates to be far from insuperable. It is probable that the indigenous population would not regard the settlement of such immigrés with favour. But there is already a considerable Indian colony, and the number of Indian pilgrims makes Indians more or less familiar. Religion might cause some difficulty, for the bulk of the Arabs are Shias and the colonists would probably be Sunnis.

After considering where the northern boundaries of the area of southern Iraq to remain under British control might be (whether as an Indian colony or not), Hirtzel considers the nature of the administration desirable for this region. He was obviously relying on recent information from Cox when he wrote:

> It is one thing to detach this area from the Turkish

> Empire, it is another to provide an administration for it. Undoubtedly objection may be raised to its annexation by Great Britain. In a recent letter from Koweit the political agent has divided public opinion among the Arabs into three classes:
>
> 1) That which, greatly admiring our methods, wishes to come under our protection (e.g. the Sheikh of Koweit himself).
>
> 2) That which, admiring us and desiring close political relations with us, desires to manage its own affairs (e.g. the Emir of Nejd).
>
> 3) That which neither admires us nor desires to have anything to do with us. He thinks the second predominates, but he does not mention any shade of opinion which wishes to be annexed by us.

Hirtzel gives the point of view of the Government of India on the question of the Hejaz, a position of some interest and importance when seen against the background of what was happening in this Arabian province in 1915.

> A further word must be said about the Hedjaz. It has been a principle of our policy to leave the Khalifate to take care of itself as a matter of purely domestic concern to Mussulmans; but we have made no public announcement on the subject. If the *de facto* possessor of the Holy Places is *Caliph,* and if the Grand Sherif of Mecca definitely dissociates himself from the Turks, he will *ipso facto* become *Caliph,* at all events temporarily; and when Turkey's wings have been clipped, as it is presumed they will be, there will be no Mussulman Power possessing both the will and the power to eject him. The only source of possible danger to him will be Arabia itself. But in Arabia the only chief capable of disputing his claim is Bin Saud, and Captain Shakespear, in a report written shortly before his death, has assured us that "we have little need to fear an attempt on the part of Bin Saud or his family to arrogate this title."
>
> The Wahabis only acknowledge the first four *Caliphs,* and the trend of Arab opinion, as Captain Shakespear heard it expressed, was that, if, as appeared to be anticipated, Enver Pasha should displace the present Sultan, "the

> Khalifate will by common consent of Islam revert to the descendants of the Prophet's family in Mecca, of whom the present head is the Sherif, and who I feel sure would command Bin Saud's support in such an event rather than his antagonism."

Among other notes prepared for the de Bunsen committee was one dated 21 April 1915 and entitled 'British Desiderata in Mesopotamia on the Basis of "Spheres of Interest'". This is Cox's view, of course and was included in the de Bunsen committee's report as Appendix XVII. This note assumed that most of the *Vilayet* of Basra would come under direct British control and in addition that "the British sphere of influence is, roughly, the *Vilayets* of Bagdad, Mosul, and such part of the Basra *Vilayet* as is not ceded, and the Syrian wilderness south of the line Basra-Deir...".

Two paragraphs are of particular interest:

> 9) A local department of irrigation and agriculture to be erected in the British sphere under British control, and concessions for irrigation and oil to be given only to firms recommended by His Majesty's Government.
>
> 10) All officials of the Ottoman Government in the British sphere to be Arabs, and the official language to be Arabic.

A third note from the India Office to the committee is entitled simply "Arabia" and is dated 26 April 1915. It is included in the committee's report as Appendix XXVIII and contains a great deal of Cox's thinking. Of special interest is a paragraph concerning Abdul Aziz bin Abdul Rahman Al Saud (Ibn Saud):

> In dealing with Nejd two things cannot be too firmly fixed in the mind:
>
> 1) That no distribution of territory, no setting up or recognizing of sovereigns or suzerains over his head, that is not effected with Bin Saud's concurrence, previously obtained, will last for a month;
>
> 2) That Bin Saud is master of the situation. He can give us infinite trouble, and we cannot touch him. It is essential, therefore, to carry him with us in any settlement of Arabian affairs that may be proposed.

The note finishes with a summary of British interests in Arabia (as seen in mid-1915) and says (again reflecting Cox's thinking) that these interests:

> ... are at present threefold. His Majesty's Government require
>
> 1) that there should be peace in the Persian Gulf, to ensure which the Power or Powers in the Arabian hinterland must be friendly to us;
>
> 2) that the thoroughfare of the Red Sea should be kept open, to ensure which no potentially hostile Power must be allowed to acquire a naval base on the Arabian coast or islands;
>
> 3) that the arms traffic should be stopped. To these requirements should in future be added;
>
> 4) that Koweit and the British area and sphere of interest in Mesopotamia shall be secure against infringement from Central Arabia.

The de Bunsen committee report represented an agreed position between the Foreign Office and the India Office on policy in the region of the Persian Gulf and central Arabia and had also the *imprimatur* of other vitally interested government departments. Cox's documentary contributions, via the India Office and Hirtzel, were significant.

From a general point of view, the Report of the Committee on Asiatic Turkey is a predictable document emanating from officials educated, trained and experienced in the nineteenth century British imperial tradition. Such men had qualities of intellectual integrity and the will to defend the Empire without question or second thought. Defence of the Empire was a dogma, simply not to be questioned.

Like the gods, empires existed for just as long as people believed in them. The principal members of the de Bunsen committee were the high priests of empire, perhaps the last of the confession.

It is only to be expected that this report was conservative, designed to maintain and defend the interests of a power regarded as pre-eminently "Naval, Indian and Colonial", but engaged with allies in a major continental war. The committee went a long way down the road of according a degree of autonomy to erstwhile subject peoples of the Ottoman Empire in Asia by suggesting a federation of five separate states (after suitable territorial excision, specifically Basra and the head of the Persian Gulf) for the territories of Turkey in Asia, but not at the

expense of British interests. There was no question of proposing complete political independence for each or any of these states. Above all, any suggestion which would encourage expressions of nationalism and political self-determination would have been anathema to the members of the committee; no imperial and colonial power could afford to espouse the cause of self-determination for its subject peoples.

With this proviso, it can be said that this report represented a significant milestone in British policy formulation, a milestone based on the logic of past and existing policies. The committee had stated an ideal and a second-best objective to the British government as well as outlining desiderata for a negotiated settlement. There were a series of negotiating positions, positions which were backed up with a great deal of supporting argument and documentation. Any diplomat charged with negotiating at that time with Britain's allies, France and Russia, a common position on post-war policies for the dominions of Turkey in Asia would have found the report an adequate and topical brief.

* * *

The de Bunsen committee's report was, unfortunately, never considered in detail at a political level by the British government. The second half of 1915 was an especially trying period for the government. By that time there was a certainty that there would be no quick or easy victory and that, in consequence the war could drag on for a number of years. Asquith's deficiencies as a war leader were becoming painfully apparent, as was Kitchener's inability to work with others. Sir Edward Grey was ill and had lost much of the will to be effective. Britain had been drawn into a continental war ill-suited to the attitudes and resources of an island people and the British Army, led by generals trained and experienced in colonial wars, had suffered hundreds of thousands of casualties in France and Flanders. Yet for every British casualty, there were two or three French casualties. The British government knew that Germany could only be defeated on land in Western Europe and that there was no conceivable alternative to a close alliance with France if final victory was to be won.

Thus the next stage had to be to evolve a common Allied policy for the post-war dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, a policy in which the British government would have to ensure that, for the sake of the fundamentally important alliance with France, French interests were defended as well as British interests. The man charged with this negotiation was Sir Mark Sykes, a Francophile politician and the only member of the committee who was not a senior official of the government, hence the only member without full and demanding wartime responsibilities.

But before beginning negotiations with the French and Russian governments, Sykes had to get the views, and ideally the approval, of senior British officials in the Middle East and in India. He left Britain in June 1915 before the de Bunsen committee report was submitted and took a copy with him to discuss with officials in Athens, Cairo, Aden, India and Basra. He did not return to Britain until the following November.

Sykes is one of a number of gifted amateurs who played a significant role in the kaleidescope of events which can loosely be described as "British policy formulation" in the Middle East during World War I. These amateurs often had insights, even brilliant insights, into possible trends which the professionals, conditioned by training and outlook, risked ignoring or missing completely. Yet the lack of training, and often of intellectual rigour, which marked these amateurs often let them down and caused basically sound ideas to founder.

Sykes was 36 in 1915; he was born in March 1879 and was the only son of Sir Tatton Sykes, Bart. and Jessica Cavendish-Bentinck. He was elected to Parliament in 1911. He was wealthy and had a reputation for boundless energy and enthusiasm, as well as having great wit and charm and being an outstanding public speaker. Kitchener liked to have such young men around him.

Sykes's early education was unconventional; ultimately he spent a few terms at Cambridge, but did not take a degree. Winston Churchill wrote in an Introduction to a biography of Sykes by Shane Leslie that:[8]

> His parents gave him the advantage of a public school education in sparing and sporadic instalments, with the result that his originality was never cramped, and he afterwards enjoyed a University career without becoming a slave to the conventions which it not infrequently implants in susceptible youth. He failed to acquire the standing of a Master of Arts, perhaps because he was really proficient in so many of them. The art of conversation he had inherited from his brilliant mother...

T.E. Lawrence made the same point very much less diplomatically in Seven Pillars of Wisdom. He described Sykes as:[9]

> ... the imaginative advocate of unconvincing world movements... also a bundle of prejudices, intuitions, half-sciences. His ideas were of the outside; and he lacked patience to test his materials before choosing his style of building. He would take an aspect of the truth, detach it from its circumstances, inflate it, twist and model it, until its old likeness and its new unlikeness together drew a laugh; and laughs were his triumphs. His instincts lay in

> parody: by choice he was a caricaturist rather than an artist, even in statesmanship. He saw the odd in everything and missed the even. He would sketch out in a few dashes a new world, all out of scale, but vivid as a vision of some sides of the thing we hoped. His help did us good and harm.

Sykes's first important round of discussion on the de Bunsen committee report took place in Cairo. But in Cairo there was at that time an early example of what was to become a fairly common twentieth century phenomenon: an intelligence department staffed with officials with tunnel vision, working with minimum control and allowed to make and implement policy in addition to its prime function of information gathering.

Military necessity had caused Lord Kitchener, then responsible for the overall military direction of Britain's war effort, at a time when the British Army in France (the end of October 1914) was being stretched to its limits under continued German attack and when Turkey had become an active enemy, to respond to an initiative from the military intelligence department in Cairo. Defence of the Suez Canal was a major concern for Britain, and a Turkish attack on the canal was virtually certain to take place. Many of the subsequent actions of British officials in Cairo were driven, understandably, by their view of the imperatives of military necessity.

Kitchener had been British Agent and Proconsul in Egypt immediately before the outbreak of war and had had some contact with the Amir Abdullah bin Hussain (grandfather of the late King Hussain of Jordan), son of the Sharif of Mecca. The Sharif was also nominal ruler of the Hejaz (the Arabian province bordering the Red Sea) under overall Turkish sovereignty. At that time, the question of eventual British support to Hussain to help the latter oust the Turks from Mecca had been discussed loosely. The principal conduit between Kitchener and Abdullah was Ronald (later Sir Ronald) Storrs (1881–1955), then Oriental Secretary to the British Agency in Cairo and another of the witty young men Kitchener liked to have working with him. In September 1914, when war with Turkey seemed likely, Storrs wrote a private letter from Cairo to Kitchener in London reminding him of the contact with Abdullah.

Kitchener replied through official channels on 24 September[10], authorizing Storrs to make contact with Abdullah to find out whether, in the event of Turkey entering the war on the side of Germany, "the Arabs of the Hejaz would be with us or against us".

Storrs, as requested, arranged for a messenger to go to Mecca in October; he reported back favourably at the end of the month. On 31 October, the day that Turkey entered the war on the side of Germany, Kitchener (with Sir Edward Grey approving) authorized the sending of

a message of encouragement to Abdullah, a message of which he supplied the text.[11]

The message was transmitted to Abdullah on 1 November. Storrs added to the Kitchener text some words of his own including "...the cause of the Arabs, which is the cause of freedom, has become the cause also of Great Britain" at the end of the first paragraph and a final sentence which did not appear in the draft authorized by Kitchener and Grey: "it will be well if Your Highness could convey to your followers and devotees, who are found throughout the world, in every country, the good tidings of the freedom of the Arabs, and the rising of the sun over Arabia."[12]

This is no place for yet another examination of the rights and wrongs of the correspondence between British officials in Cairo and Sharif Hussain in 1914, 1915 and 1916, to look again at who promised whom what and to puzzle over apparently loose translations. This ground has been well ploughed. A further examination is only relevant in so far as it touches on the character and achievements of Sir Percy Cox. It is immediately striking to recall how Cox was strongly criticized by Grey in the summer of 1913 for presuming to suggest a closer British relationship with Ibn Saud when considering what Storrs added to Kitchener's text to Abdullah bin Hussain.

The fact is that Cox, working at the other end of the Mashreq (the eastern Arab world) and admittedly in less complex circumstances than his amateur colleagues in Cairo, was able to negotiate agreements and treaties with Arab leaders in which neither the Arabic nor the English text ever gave any substantial cause for later argument. The meaning intended or the quality of the Arabic translation in any agreement negotiated by Cox was never questioned by the Arabs or by the British government.

The nearest thing to a formal statement of British policy towards the Arabs of the peninsula in 1915 is contained in the report of the de Bunsen committee (paragraph 91). Britain offered to Arab chiefs in the Arabian peninsula:[13]

> ... a guarantee of independence in some form or another for effective or successful support in the war against Turkey. It remains to be seen in some cases whether the Chiefs will fulfil their part of the bargain.

In the minds of trained imperial officials, and especially of officials of the government of India, this formula did not seem ambiguous. Implicit, if not spelled out in so many words, in the conditional offer of "independence in some form or another" was the qualifying clause: "under British protection". In any case few officials at that time believed that the Arabs could unite and organize themselves well enough to present a serious military threat to Turkey.

When Mark Sykes arrived in Cairo with the de Bunsen committee report, he met formally Sir Henry McMahon, the High Commissioner, (who had previously been Secretary in the Foreign Department of the government of India) and General Sir John Maxwell, commanding British troops in Egypt. At the same time, he met, and became close friends with, Storrs, who was two years his junior. Storrs had been a Classics scholar at Cambridge where he had taken a good degree and where he had also studied Arabic, in his own words "savouring rather than studying"[13] the language. Like Sykes and like Lawrence (who was ten years younger than Storrs) he was the son of a mother with an exceptionally strong personality.

T.E. Lawrence was another amateur contributor to the thinking of British officials in Cairo about the status of the Arabs following the demise of the Ottoman Empire, but a contributor with a steel and a depth of character which both Storrs and Sykes lacked. He was a romantic in the Byronic tradition, dreaming that Arabia (or at least some Arabs) might yet be free from Turkish oppression.

Lawrence arrived in Cairo in December 1914 as a very junior intelligence officer to serve in the military intelligence department under Gilbert (later Sir Gilbert) Clayton. He threw himself into his work with energy and enthusiasm. He and Storrs became close friends. Within three months a scheme for getting the long-talked-of Arab revolt moving was being discussed and he thought that he would have a role to play.

He wrote on 22 March to his mentor, D.G. Hogarth, in England:[14]

> ... You know India used to be in control of Arabia – and used to do it pretty badly, for they hadn't a man who knew Syria or Turkey, & they used to consider only the Gulf, & the preservation of peace in the Aden Hinterland. So they got tied into horrid knots with the Imam, who is a poisonous blighter at the best. Egypt (which is one Clayton, a very good man) got hold of the Idrisi family, who are the Senussi and Assyr together, as you know: and for some years we had a little agreement together. Then this war started, & India went on the old game of balancing the little powers there. I want to pull them all together, & roll up Syria by way of the Hedjaz in the name of the Sherif. You know how big his repute is in Syria. This could be done by Idrisi only, so we drew out a beautiful alliance, giving him all he wanted: & India refused to sign. So we cursed them, & I think that Newcombe & myself are going down to Kunfida as his advisers. If Idrisi is anything like as good as we hope we can rush right up to Damascus, & biff the French out of all hope of Syria. It's a big game, and at least one worth playing. Of course, India has no idea

> what we are playing at: if we can only get to Assyr we can do the rest – or have a try at it. So if I write & tell you that it's all right, & I'm off, you will know where for. Wouldn't you like to be in it? Though I don't give much for my insurance chances again. If only India will let us go. Won't the French be mad if we win through? Don't talk of it yet.

Anyone reading this letter, knowing nothing of the background and little of Lawrence, could be forgiven for thinking that the real enemies Britain was facing at that time in the Middle East were France and the government of British India. In a very narrow sense and from the viewpoint of Lawrence and Storrs and others like them, this was so, in that the two powers most opposed to any expression of nationalist self-determination and "freedom for the Arabs" were the governments of France and of India. Lawrence's attitude towards France and French ambitions in Syria was typical of that of many of his brother officers in Cairo at the time. In fairness, it has to be said that many contemporary French officers regarded "l'Angleterre" as their principal opponent in the region.

More specifically, Lawrence was determined to rid the friends he loved in north western Syria from the Turkish tyranny and was concerned, with some justice, that French colonial rule would be as tyrannical. He seems to have seen the government of British India (of which he had no personal knowledge at that time) also as a tyranny. His vision was intensely personal and he seems to have had no feeling for the essential wider geopolitical and geostrategic priorities of the British government at that time.

Yet British officials in Cairo do not seem to have been thinking in terms of offering complete political independence to the Arab leaders with whom they were communicating. A benign and paternal permanent British presence was implicit in all ideas and propositions advanced.

In any event Mark Sykes arrived in Cairo during the second week of July 1915 and presented the findings of the de Bunsen committee to McMahon and to Maxwell. He sent their comments back to Kitchener in the War Office in mid-July before leaving for Aden and India. The important consideration at this stage is that, irrespective of whether it was a good policy or not, the British government did have a policy for the disposal of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the war (assuming a decisive Allied victory), a policy which had at least the broad approval of London, Cairo and India, but which had still to be discussed with France and Russia and which had still to receive overall political approval in London.

The next significant document in the record of the evolution of British policy in Mesopotamia is McMahon's often-quoted letter to Sharif Hussain dated 24 October 1915. This letter can be taken to read

as though McMahon had only the most superficial understanding of the de Bunsen committee's report. For ease of reference, the paragraphs of this letter relevant to Cox's actual and future responsibilities are cited again:[15]

> When the situation admits, Great Britain will give to the Arabs her advice and will assist them to establish what may appear to be the most suitable forms of government in those various territories. On the other hand, it is understood that the Arabs have decided to seek the advice and assistance of Great Britain only, and that such European advisers and officials as may be required in the formation of a sound form of administration will be British.
>
> With regard to the *Vilayets* of Baghdad and Basra, the Arabs will recognize that the established position and interests of Great Britain necessitates special measures of administrative control in order to secure these territories from foreign aggression, to promote the welfare of the local populations and to secure our mutual economic interests.

Again it must be emphasized that in citing this undertaking the author does not seek to judge or to take sides. The McMahon letter to Hussain is simply an important element in the evolution from a policy of upholding the integrity of the Turkish dominions in Asia to "the establishment of national governments and administrations deriving their authority from the initiative and free choice of the native populations". It is also an example of how governments and officials acting under the stress of wartime conditions can lose sight of the importance of coordinating diplomatic initiatives and of controlling intelligence departments.

When Hirtzel saw a copy of the McMahon letter on 27 October 1915 he pointed out in a Minute that "these assurances are incompatible with any of the schemes discussed by the inter-departmental committee".[16] Lord Hardinge in India telegraphed on 4 November[17] that McMahon's letter had been sent off:

> ... without due regard to Indian interests, by inclusion of the provinces of Baghdad and Bussorah in the proposed independent Arab State, only "special measures of advanced administrative Control" in these two Vilayets being reserved to His Majesty's Government or the Government of India. We think we should not have been committed to such a policy, and that we should have

> been consulted before a pledge of such vital importance to future of India was given... We have always contemplated as a minimum eventual annexation of Bussorah *Vilayet* and *(? some form)* of native administration in Baghdad *Vilayet* under our close political control. McMahon guarantees apparently putting annexation out of the question.

The officer at that time commanding the British Army in Iraq, General Sir John Nixon (to whom Cox reported) was also unhappy with what McMahon had promised. It is virtually certain that Cox either drafted or contributed substantially to Nixon's telegram dated 14 November 1915:[18]

> ... the formation of an autonomous state in Iraq appears to be impossible and unnecessary. Here in Iraq there is no sign of the kind among the people, who expect and seem to be quite ready to accept our administration... we are of the opinion that from the point of view of Iraq it is highly inexpedient and unnecessary to put into the heads of the backward people of the country what seems to us the visionary and premature notions of the creation of an Arab state – notions which will only tend to make endless difficulties for Great Britain here and serve no present purpose but to stimulate a small section of ambitious men to turn their activities to a direction from which it is highly desirable to keep them for many years to come. Apart from the fact that such a commitment appears to be premature and will prejudice existing British interests at Basra and Baghdad it seems to me to involve complete misconception of attitude of inhabitants of *Vilayets*. It moreover overlooks the important and fundamental fact that four-fifths of the population of Basra and two-thirds of Baghdad *Vilayets* are Shiahs.

There can be few better examples of the imperial attitude of the necessity of stopping a spring with a twig before it becomes a river than the words in this telegram. The creation of an Arab state would be a direction "from which it is highly desirable" to keep Arab minds for many years to come. The river of self-determination was eventually to sweep away both the British Indian and the British colonial empires. Men like Cox, dedicated to serving and sustaining empire, could not be expected to look with equanimity on any such development.

There was more behind the McMahon letter than the letter itself expressed. McMahon's paragraph about the *Vilayets* of Baghdad and Basra was in response to a letter from Hussain in which the latter

claimed was for all practical purposes all of Iraq and all of the Arabian peninsula. Hussain wanted:[19]

> England to acknowledge the independence of the Arab countries bounded on the north by Mersina-Adana up to 37° of latitude, on which degree falls Birijik, Urfa, Mardin, Midiat, Amadia Island, up to the border of Persia; on the east by the borders of Persia up to the Gulf of Basra; on the south by the Indian Ocean, with the exception of the position of Aden to remain as it is; on the west by the Red Sea, the Mediterranean Sea up to Mersina.

The Sharif was not happy with McMahon's response on Baghdad and Basra and wrote back a very Arab reply to McMahon on 5 November 1915. Part of the problem created for the British government over the misunderstandings in the Hussain-McMahon correspondence sprang from the fact that British officials in Cairo seem not to have understood the workings of the minds of the Arabs of the Peninsula and the Gulf. There is no implied value judgment in this; the fact is that Cox always saw what his Arab interlocutors meant, even if they did not spell their meaning out. In any event, the Sharif wrote to McMahon:[20]

> As the Provinces of Irak are parts of the pure Arab Kingdom and were in fact the seats of its Governments in the time of Ali Ibn Abu Talib, and in the time of all *Caliphs* who succeeded him; and as in them began the civilization of the Arabs, and as their towns in those provinces were the first towns built in Islam where the Arab power became so great; Therefore these provinces are greatly valued by all Arabs far and near, and their traditions cannot be forgotten by them. Consequently, we cannot satisfy the Arab nations or make them submit to give up such a title to nobility. But in order to render an accord easy, and taking into consideration the assurances mentioned in the fifth article of your letter, to keep and guard our mutual interests in that country as they are one and the same, for all these reasons we might agree to leave under the British Administration for a short time those districts now occupied by the British troops, without the rights of either party being prejudiced thereby especially those of the Arab nation (which interests are to it economic and vital), and against a suitable sum paid as compensation to the Arab Kingdom for the period of occupation, in order to meet the expenses which every new Kingdom is bound to support, at the same time respecting your agreements with the Sheikhs of those districts, and especially those which are essential.

McMahon ignored the question of a monetary payment "in lieu" in his reply dated 17 December 1915:[21]

> The Government of Great Britain, as I have already informed you, are ready to give all guarantees of assistance and support within their power to the Arab Kingdom, but their interests demand, as you yourself have recognized, a friendly and stable administration in the *Vilayet* of Baghdad, and the adequate safeguarding of these interests calls for a much fuller and more detailed consideration than the present situation and the urgency of these negotiations permits.

Hussain's reply, dated 1 January 1916, is beautifully Arabic in concept and seems to have gone over the heads of the Cairo officials:[22]

> With regard to what had been stated in your honoured communication concerning El Irak, as to the matter of compensation for the period of occupation, we, in order to strengthen the confidence of Great Britain in our attitude and in our words and actions, really and veritably, and in order to give her evidence of our certainty and assurance in trusting her glorious government, leave the determination of the amount to the perception of her wisdom and justice.

McMahon did no more than take note of this reply. But later in 1916 the British government began to pay a monthly subsidy of £125,000 to Hussain and on 25 August the Sharif wrote again to McMahon:[23]

> Your Excellency knows that the above-mentioned monthly pay of £125,000 is for the organization of government and its necessary administrations, and will be deducted from the amount which we left to the justice of Great Britain to decide for our deficient Government, which is under Great Britain's guardianship and protection during her occupation of Basra and Irak.

There can be little doubt that Hussain believed that the British government was including in its subsidy to him a payment to cover the "temporary" occupation of Basra by British forces prior to the creation of an Arab kingdom. The point is important; it was to condition Hussain's response to Sykes and Georges-Picot when he met them on a British ship off Jeddah in May 1917, after the British capture of Baghdad.

In October 1916, after the Arab revolt against Turkish rule had

broken out, Abdullah bin Hussain arranged for his father to be acclaimed king of the Arabs and the saviour of Islam. Abdullah alleged that he had tacit British support for this initiative. Although no formal recognition of this title was given by the British government, British officials henceforth referred to him as "King Hussain".

At the other end of the Mashreq, the eastern Arab world, Cox, with full approval and backing of the Government of India and the British government, had been making engagements as to the future status of this region. When British forces landed at the mouth of the Shatt al-Arab in November 1914, Cox had written to the Sultan of Oman, to Ibn Saud, and to the rulers of Bahrain, Kuwait, Mohammera and Qatar saying:[24]

> I am authorized by my Government to assure Your Excellency that in the event of our success – and succeed we shall, Inshallah – Basra will never again be allowed to be subject to Turkish authority.

After the capture of Basra, Cox issued a proclamation addressed to the people of Basra in which he said:[25]

> We have no enmity or ill-will against the populace, to whom we hope to prove good friends and protectors. No remnant of Turkish administration now remains in this region. In place thereof the British flag has been established, under which you will enjoy the benefits of liberty and justice both in regard to your religious and your secular affairs.

According to a paper prepared by the India Office for the Middle East Committee of the War Cabinet dated 30 January 1918:[26]

> In December 1914 Sir P. Cox asked for authority to make a definite public announcement to the effect that "our occupation of Basra is permanent". His Majesty's Government demurred, on the ground that such an announcement "would be regarded as a definite breach of the undertaking between the Allies that a final settlement must await the end of the war;" but they raised no objection to a proposal made by the Government of India that Sir P. Cox "should allow it to be understood in conversation that places where we assume control with the co-operation of the inhabitants may in all circumstances count on our future protection against the Turks".

Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy, visited Basra and the Gulf. He met a deputation of citizens in Basra and told them (with Cox at his elbow):[27]

> You are, of course, aware that, in the great struggle in which we are involved, we are not fighting single-handed, and we cannot therefore lay down plans for the future without a full exchange of views with the other great Powers who are our allies; but in any case we may be permitted to indulge a very confident assurance that henceforth a more benign administration will bring back to Iraq that prosperity which her rich potentialities give her so clear a title.

During the course of 1915, Cox negotiated and signed on behalf of the Government of India formal treaties with Ibn Saud and with the ruler of Kuwait. He signed the treaty with Ibn Saud, the latter being described as "Ruler of Najd, El Hassa, Qatif and Jubail, and the towns and ports belonging to them," on 26 December 1915. The Treaty was ratified by the Government of India on 18 July 1916.

In November 1915 the British government had set up another senior inter-departmental committee under Sir Arthur Nicolson, at that time the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to discuss its Middle East options and policies. The committee had its first meeting on 13 November. Mark Sykes, who had just returned from his visit to Cairo, India and Mesopotamia, was a member.

Sir Edward Grey had invited the French Ambassador in London, M. Paul Cambon, to send a representative to meet this committee. The French government's choice was François Georges-Picot (1870–1951), who had served in Beirut and in Cairo and who was at that time on the staff of the French Embassy in London. Georges-Picot attended the second meeting of the committee on 23 November.

At a third meeting of the Nicolson committee on 21 December 1915, Georges-Picot, having been in Paris for new instructions from his government, put forward a position involving spheres of influence for Britain and France in the Ottoman territories. This was not too far removed from the de Bunsen committee's second option and the Nicolson committee felt that detailed negotiation could lead to a common Anglo-French position. Sykes was delegated to work with Georges-Picot to formulate such a position.

Sykes and Georges-Picot produced a joint memorandum (with an accompanying map) on 5 January 1916. This document became the Sykes-Picot Memorandum and was approved by the British government at a political level on 4 February 1916. In making this decision the government put the immediate military imperatives dictated by the alliance with France well above any possible longer term advantages which might come out of backing an Arab inde-

pendence movement at that time. It is difficult to put together a convincing case to demonstrate that this argument was misguided in the circumstances facing the British government at the beginning of 1916. The policy of giving priority to the alliance with France at that time cannot be seriously challenged. In any case, the Sykes-Picot Agreement was a logical extension of the position of the British government as set out in the de Bunsen committee report.

The French government also approved the Memorandum and Sykes and Georges-Picot were deputed to take it to St Petersburg to obtain the assent of the Russian government. This task was successfully accomplished and Sykes was back in London in April 1916.

As far as Mesopotamia was concerned, the Agreement would have permitted the establishment of an Anglo-Indian colony in the Basra *Vilayet* of Iraq and a British protectorate in the Baghdad *Vilayet* at the end of the war. France would have had control of the Mosul *Vilayet*.

It was not until May 1917, some fifteen months after the agreement was accepted by the British and French governments, and two months after Baghdad had been captured by the British Army, that the detail of the Sykes-Picot Agreement was formally communicated to the only generally recognized leadership in the Arab world at that time, the Sharif Hussain and his sons. Sykes met the Amir Faisal bin Hussain at Wejh on the Red Sea coast of the Arabian peninsula on 2 May to explain the agreement to him. Later that month, on 17 May, Sykes and Georges-Picot jointly met Faisal in Wejh, whence they went on to Jeddah to meet Hussain himself on 19 May and 20 May on board the British ship *H.M.S. Northbrook* and to inform the Sharif formally of the joint Anglo-French agreement.

At this stage it becomes apparent that Hussain was worrying as much, perhaps even more, about the threat to his dreams of becoming titular head of the Arab world with British and French support emanating from Ibn Saud than he was in fighting the Turks. Hussain wanted the British government to put pressure on Ibn Saud to accept his (Hussain's) leadership.

Again the point has to be made of the lack of real communication between Mark Sykes and Georges-Picot on the one side and Hussain on the other. Hussain almost certainly had by far the sharpest political antenna of the three and must have sensed at that time that a viable strategy for his own Hashemite cause would be to sow dissension between Britain and France, and thus hope to profit from the climate of indecision between the Allies so caused. It can be conjectured that Cox would never have allowed himself to be put in such a position in negotiation.

Hussain seems to have been clear in his own mind that the fact that he could claim that part of the British subsidy he was receiving covered the temporary British occupancy of Basra (even though the British government never intended this meaning) would assure him of

receiving a similar French subsidy for the "temporary" occupation of Syria.

To go back a little in time, 1916 was an awful year for the British government. Asquith was forced to resign as prime minister and was replaced by David Lloyd George on 7 December. Lloyd George formed a coalition government.

Previously, admitting defeat, Britain had evacuated the Gallipoli peninsula early in January. In Iraq, Kut had fallen in April, the courage of the British and Indian soldiers in battle softening to a certain extent the blow to British prestige in the Middle East caused by this defeat. Attempts by the British Army in Egypt to push beyond the Sinai peninsula into southern Palestine failed. Lord Kitchener had been drowned when *H.M.S. Hampshire* had hit a mine off the north west coast of the Orkney Islands on his way to Russia. Still an immensely popular figure in the eyes of the British people, he had by that time lost the confidence of his colleagues in government.

On 1 July the British Fourth Army, commanded by Sir Henry Rawlinson, with whom Cox was at Sandhurst, with a French army on its right flank, attacked the German Army in the valley of the river Somme. At the end of that day, there were almost 60,000 British battle casualties, including just under 20,000 men killed in action. No British Army had ever bled in battle like this, and the bleeding continued throughout the summer and autumn until November. A few square miles of French territory had been won back, but at an enormous cost. The operations of the Arabs against the Turks at this stage were completely insignificant when set against the British battle casualties along the Somme in 1916.

In June, the long-discussed Arab revolt against Turkish rule in the Hejaz began. Raids on Turkish positions and sporadic fighting were led by Ali, Abdullah and Faisal, the sons of Sharif Hussain. Mecca was secured and Jeddah captured, giving access to the Red Sea and, above all, to communication with British forces in Egypt and Sudan. Britain supplied the rebels with arms and with money. In terms of the overall British geopolitical and geostrategic position at the time, the early months of the Arab revolt were of very small moment.

In Iraq direction of the war had passed from the Government of India to the War Cabinet in London, and a new and vigorous British commander, Sir Stanley Maude (who also had been at Sandhurst with Cox in 1883) assumed control of operations. Cox, as Chief Political Officer to the Expeditionary Force, continued to report to the Viceroy and the Government of India, but through Maude.

The first real victory of the war took place in March 1917 when Maude captured Baghdad. Mark Sykes was instructed by the War Cabinet in London to draft a proclamation to the people of Baghdad. After a certain amount of discussion and some amendments, his draft was accepted. Its often florid style reflects Sykes's drafting. When the

propaganda elements were stripped away, the words of the proclamation that mattered politically were:[28]

> ... the British government cannot remain indifferent as to what takes place in your country now or in the future, for in duty to the interests of the British people and their Allies, the British Government cannot risk that being done in Baghdad again which has been done by the Turks and Germans during the war. But you people of Baghdad, whose commercial prosperity and whose safety from oppression and invasion must ever be a matter of the closest concern to the British Government, are not to understand that it is the wish of the British Government to impose upon you alien institutions. It is the hope of the British Government that the aspirations of your philosophers and writers shall be realized and that once again the people of Baghdad shall flourish, enjoying their wealth and substance under institutions which are in consonance with their sacred laws and their racial ideals. In Hejaz the Arabs have expelled the Turks and Germans who oppressed them and proclaimed the Sherif Hussain as their King, and his lordship rules in independence and freedom, and is the ally of the nations who are fighting against the power of Turkey and Germany; so, indeed, are the noble Arabs, the Lords of Koweyt, Nejd, and Asir.

At the same time as this proclamation was made to the people of Baghdad, the British government telegraphed the Government of India confirming that its policy was:[29]

> 1) That the Basra Vilayet should remain permanently under British administration; and
>
> 2) That the Baghdad Vilayet should be made into an Arab State with a local ruler or Government, but under a British Protectorate in everything but name; the State, behind its Arab façade, to be administered as an Arab province by indigenous agency and in accordance with existing laws and institutions as far as possible.

Effective from September 1917 Cox was appointed Civil Commissioner in Iraq, responsible for administration of the occupied territory, and reporting direct to the Secretary of State for India (Edwin Montagu) in London, who was a member of the War Cabinet and later, of the

Eastern Committee of this cabinet. His administration will be considered in the following chapter.

On 2 November 1917, the British government issued the Balfour Declaration promising the Zionist movement a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine. Although this declaration had no effect on Cox's responsibilities in Iraq, it was to have a fundamental and far-reaching impact on overall British policy in the Middle East.

The Arab revolt made limited progress during the early part of 1917. The capture of Aqaba in July, inspired and largely led by Lawrence, made the British government take the Arab movement more seriously. The fact too of having an easily accessible supply port made the problem of supplying the Arab armies significantly easier. For all that, the pressure by Hussain and his son Abdullah for more precision in British promises to build a unified Arab state under Hussain's leadership continued. Sir Reginald Wingate, who had replaced McMahon as High Commissioner at the end of 1916, wrote in a Note for the War Cabinet dated 23 December 1917 that:[30]

> The latest conversations (of November 24th and 25th) between Colonel Wilson and King Hussain afford confirmation of the latter's design to become the paramount power in Arabia ... he deprecates action by us liable to enhance the prestige of other Arabian Chiefs, and resents our treaties with the latter as calculated to prevent his exercise of constraint upon them in future. His attitude is a logical one, from his point of view, and he appreciates that our initiative in the directions of Ibn Saud, Idrissi and others, reflects uncertainty as to how far his aims are capable of realization and, if realized, could safeguard our interests.

Wingate analysed past British political objectives in the Arabian peninsula before continuing:

> At the outset it is clear that our aggrandizement of the Sherif of Mecca and the extension of his political influence have been watched with anxiety in Central and South-Western Arabia. The Wahabites over-ran the Hedjaz in recent times and might do so again. Ibn Saud, as the sword of a purified Islam, with or without the connivance of Idrissi, might pierce the more secular shield of the Emir of Mecca – in despite of our treaties with the three of them, and to the scandal of our Pan-Arab propaganda. But commercial considerations might blunt the edge of even Nejdean fanaticism, and Ibn Saud must think of his markets – of which the Eastern ones (King Hussain

> reflects with satisfaction) are now in British hands. So Hussain suggests that we should put the screw on Ibn Saud from the Gulf and Mesopotamia...

It seems that the Sharif was becoming obsessed with the threat posed to his position by Ibn Saud. Given the subsequent history of the Arabian peninsula, he had every reason to be concerned. Major (later Sir) Kinahan Cornwallis, then a member of the Arab Bureau in Cairo, met Hussain and Abdullah in December and reported details of the discussions in a private letter dated 14 December 1917 to Captain the Hon. W. Ormsby-Gore, M.P., at that time secretary of the Middle East Committee of the War Cabinet. Cornwallis was concerned about the prospect that Hussain might turn:[31]

> ... his attention to his Arab neighbours, only I am rather afraid that he is intending to do something foolish; he continually spoke of Ibn Saud and the Idrissi in terms of contempt and abuse, in a way which did not augur well for the future. What I most disliked about his conversation was the apparent absence of any real effort to work towards Arab unity. Sherif Abdullah is quite different. He fully realizes that his father can only make good in Arabia by conciliating the other Emirs, and is wise enough to see that a strong Chief, if friendly, will be a great asset. He wants to see each of the big Emirs self-ruling in his own dominions, but recognizing his father's nominal suzerainty as King of the Arabs. He is very suspicious of Ibn Saud's good faith, but will be open to reason about him.

Given the subsequent history of the Arabian peninsula and the ultimate ascendancy of Ibn Saud, it has often been asked whether, in supporting Hussain rather than Ibn Saud the British government was not "backing the wrong Arabs". A constant and determined exponent of this thesis was H. St J. B. Philby. He made the point again in a book *Arabia of the Wahhabis* published in London in 1928. Cox reviewed this book for the *Geographical Journal*[32] in March 1929. He gave an outline of the background:

> Early in 1914 Ibn Saud had succeeded, by a bold and sudden effort, in wresting the control of the Hasa province from the Turks and expelling them bag and baggage from his territory; it seemed natural therefore to expect that, on the outbreak of war a few months later, both his mood and his circumstances would dispose him to a policy of cooperation with the Allies. In that belief,

> on the firing of the first shot in the Mesopotamian campaign at Fao, Captain W.H.I. Shakespear, who as the Government of India's representative at Kuwait had established very cordial personal relations with the Ruler of Nejd, was deputed to the latter's headquarters with instructions to induce our friend if possible to move up immediately towards our left flank in order to give us support in the establishment of our position at Basra. Not fully seized of the imminence of war in Iraq, Ibn Saud proved to be absorbed at the moment in his own schemes of conquest, and when Captain Shakespear came up with him, his tribal contingents were already mobilized, and he was on the point of attacking his hereditary enemy, Ibn Rashid of Jebel Shammar. Success in that direction would also have been useful to us at the time, but in the collision which took place a few days later and in which, most tragically, Captain Shakespear lost his life, the forces of Ibn Saud, if not actually defeated, recoiled from the shock so badly crippled that it became clear that no effective cooperation could be expected from them for a long time to come: and so, to use Mr. Philby's words, "King Hussain stepped into the breach".

Cox continued by outlining some of the causes of Philby's attitude and added that Philby had:

> ... clearly the feeling that he was not receiving all the attention and support which he had a right to expect, from the powers that be. Placed as he was, he was perhaps apt to forget that our Mesopotamian venture was but part of a colossal life-and-death (and often hand-to-mouth) struggle, and that we had perforce to turn to those who could best "deliver the goods". Mr Philby's own pages make it sufficiently clear that with the best will in the world Ibn Saud was unable to make delivery, and as a result of his lack of achievement others stepped into the breach and with more material success.

* * * *

These relatively petty affairs were of little real concern in London, where, as in other capitals, there was a conviction that the war could not continue beyond 1919. If Germany could not be defeated militarily, some form of negotiated peace might become essential. Hence some thought had to be given to the shape of the post-war world and to likely negotiating positions. Lloyd George, who provided a degree

Ibn Saud, Sir Percy Cox and Gertrude Bell with the Shaikh of Kuwait and other Arab notables, November 1916
(Mary Evans Picture Library/Illustrated London News Ltd)

of (sometimes controversial) top level coordination of British policy formulation, made a speech to British Trades' Unions on 5 January 1918 in which he spelled out British war aims. In this speech he said that "Arabia, Armenia, Mesopotamia, Syria and Palestine are, in our judgment, entitled to a recognition of their separate national conditions." This statement would seem to have been based on the de Bunsen Committee recommendations.

In the United States on 8 January President Wilson made a speech to a joint session of the US Congress in which he outlined his "Fourteen Points". Three were of relevance to the British government's policy in Iraq:

> I. There should be open covenants of peace, openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view.
>
> V. There should be a free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based on a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the government whose title is to be determined.
>
> XII. The Turkish portions of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development.

At the end of 1917, shortly after seizing power, the Bolshevik government in Russia published the Sykes-Picot agreement. The knowledge of the way the Arab world had been apparently "carved up" as it were between Britain and France was, naturally enough, deeply disturbing to informed Arab opinion. The publication of this agreement, Lloyd George's statement and President Wilson's Fourteen Points together had a dramatic impact in the Arab world.

Cox would have had little time to think through the implications of these statements for his daily work load remained enormous. He was "at the end of the line" and had little opportunity to keep abreast of changes in the thinking of the government in London.

One problem with which he was faced was the ever-increasing enmity between Ibn Saud and Sharif Hussain in the Arabian peninsula.

Early in January 1918 he sent Philby, then a member of his political staff in Baghdad, on a mission to Hussain with the objective of seeking to bring the Sharif and Ibn Saud closer together. Philby reported on 9 January[33] that what Hussain really wanted was "some outward visible sign that Bin Saud accepts his leadship *(sic)* or suzerainty."

The same message was coming from Hussain's most politically-minded son, Abdullah. Major Kinahan Cornwallis reported on 3 January on a conversation he had had with Abdullah on the question of proclaiming Hussain *Caliph* in succession to the Sultan of Turkey. Abdullah said that:[34]

> His father was on all counts the man most fitted, and his assumption of the office would bind the Arab nation together to a degree with was otherwise impossible. In particular the difference which at present existed between his Father and the important Emirs of the Arabian Peninsula could be solved without difficulty.

On 22 January Wingate sent a telegram to the War Cabinet in London in which he referred to the "growing uneasiness among Arabs about the Entente's intentions for Arab countries" and asked authority to give Hussain definite assurances:[35]

> 1) that His Majesty's Government is still determined to secure Arab independence and to fulfil the promises made at the beginning of the Hejaz revolt;
>
> 2) that His Majesty's Government will countenance no permanent foreign or European occupation of Palestine, Irak (except the province of Basra) or Syria after the war; and
>
> 3) that these districts will be in the possession of their natives, and that foreign interference with Arab countries will be restricted to assistance and protection.

Wingate sent a copy of this telegram to Cox, who, in turn, himself sent a telegram to the Foreign Office, (with copies to the India Office, the Viceroy and Wingate) on 25 January. In this telegram Cox said that Wingate:[36]

> ... speaks of growing uneasiness "among Arabs" and the critical state of "Arab feeling". I gather he refers to Sherif's family and to Arab Nationalist element within his sphere. There are no such indications of possibility of Arabs of

> Irak or anywhere within my purview nor are there likely to be. If His Majesty's Government are satisfied that it is really necessary in order to remove *(?)* or retain adherence of element referred to by High Commissioner, to make any fresh declaration of our intentions, I earnestly hope at all events as far as Irak is concerned, reference to previous promise(s) of 1915 will be abstained from. As regards Irak, surely public announcement of our policy made in Baghdad proclamation is sufficient. I respectfully urge, that as in negotiations of 1915, so since His Majesty's representatives in Egypt have failed adequately to appreciate the Irak aspect of problem affecting both spheres and that it is opposed to Imperial policy and interests that the future of this country with its enormous possibilities which is already making visible progress under our administration should be treated as a pawn in our negotiations or relations with young Arabs of Egypt and the Sherif, whose comprehensive ambitions in direction of kingship of all Arabia have been sufficiently demonstrated in the recent telegraphic correspondence regarding Nejd.
>
> I submit further, that the great universal shortage of cereals with which we are now faced endows Irak not only with national, but with world importance as a centre of production capable of great and speedy development, provided always that a fully effective administration is maintained. Incidently, in my judgment, state of Arab feeling on the Hejaz side to which High Commissioner draws attention seems to afford us additional ground for not *(? neglecting)* utility of Bin Saud as a counterpoise to Hejaz element, though I quite accept decision of His Majesty's Government, that he should not be reinforced sufficiently to be a *(,) [corrupt group in original cypher].*

The Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford (who had replaced Lord Hardinge in 1916), backed Cox in a telegram to the India Office dated 28 January:[37]

> We agree with Cox in strongly deprecating any further announcement regarding future of Iraq. Any such announcement could scarcely fail to seriously embarrass our present and prejudice our future position there. If discussion with Amir Abdullah and King Husain is really unavoidable at this stage, we would suggest that opportunity be taken to try tranquillizing effect of informal verbal discussion in the first place, with a view to obtaining King Husain's agreement to definite

> modification of MacMahon's *(sic)* unfortunate pledge in the light of actual facts and his acceptance of principle that we should have right to continue administration in both Vilayets with the object of gradually building up self-government in both. Stand might be taken on the facts that the people themselves would welcome this, that until it is educated there is absolutely no local material which could replace or adequately carry on administration and development we have begun and that King Husain himself has no claim to these areas where Shiahs largely predominate.

The India Office, recognizing that there was a risk of a another gap developing in the formulation of British policy in a new situation, prepared a Memorandum for the Middle East Committee of the War Cabinet on 31 January 1918.[38] The memorandum refers to the Baghdad proclamation and the British government's subsequent policy statement on the future of Iraq. Important subsequent paragraphs are:

> 4) it is doubtless arguable that the principle of "self-determination" is incapable of being put into practice in a country like Mesopotamia. But it does not follow that we shall be able to prevent the attempt from being made. The Prime Minister, in his recent speech on British War aims (5th January), included Mesopotamia among the parts of the present Ottoman Empire "entitled to a recognition of their separate national conditions", and President Wilson has also spoken of the right of these districts to security and autonomy. "Autonomy" and "separate national conditions" do not appear compatible with annexation (as contemplated by us in respect of the Basra *Vilayet*) in any form; and they can only be reconciled with British suzerainty or a British Protectorate, if the people concerned, or the local Chiefs on their behalf, can be induced to accept our assistance and supervision of their own accord.
>
> 5) In other words, our position towards Mesopotamia is, or may become, not that of a ruler towards his subjects, but that of a candidate towards his constituents. We shall want their votes; and unless we nurse the constituency in advance, we may not get them. Is it possible so to handle the local population, or the elements in it that count, as to

> ensure that, if and when the moment for "self-determination" arrives, they will pronounce decisively in favour of continuing the British connection?
>
> That seems to be the immediate question we have to ask ourselves; and it is one to which the local authorities are alone competent to furnish us with a reply. They alone can say what elements in the population it is desirable to strengthen and encourage, what materials exist for setting up a local administration of a suitable character, what leaders if any can be found who are likely to command general acceptance, and by what means these leaders can be brought to identify themselves with British interests.
>
> 6) For the above reasons it seems essential to explain the whole situation fully to Sir Percy Cox, and to invite him to consider what means can be devised locally to secure that, whatever form the ultimate settlement may take, the main object desiderated by His Majesty's Government, viz: a Mesopotamia under British influence, should be secured to the utmost extent that circumstances permit. In putting forward this suggestion the India Office is as far as possible from advocating any gratuitous surrender of British interests. On the contrary, it is on the very ground that British interests may suffer, if steps are not taken to provide against contingencies no longer remote, that the whole question has been raised at the present time.

The suggestion of the India Office to seek Cox's views were accepted by the Middle East Committee. The minutes of the committee for 2 February 1918 under the chairmanship of Lord Curzon state:[39]

> It was pointed out that both Sir Percy Cox and the Government of India had expressed the hope that in any reassurances to be given to King Hussain no further announcement should be made with regard to the future of Irak; further, the view was submitted that it might be desirable to inform Sir Percy Cox regarding the recent trend of political thought concerning the war aims of the Entente Powers. Lord Islington said that what he had in mind was not any idea of requiring the Civil

> Commissioner and the officers under him to abandon their policy of reconstruction in Mesopotamia, but rather the desirability of explaining clearly to Sir Percy Cox the general trend of events in Europe, the specific declarations of President Wilson and the Prime Minister on the subject of Mesopotamia, &c., and the factors making for a peace based on the principles of "no annexations" and "self-determination".
>
> If Sir Percy Cox were fully apprised of the tendencies now operating on the situation, and of their probable outcome, he would be in a position to consider and report to His Majesty's Government on the local action best calculated to safeguard British influence in Mesopotamia against future contingencies. Lord Islington considered that even more might be done than had so far been attempted to render the British connection acceptable and indispensable to the people of the country at the end of the war.
>
> 'On the other hand the view was expressed that any telegram suggesting to Sir Percy Cox that our intentions with regard to the future of Mesopotamia had undergone any recent change might have a very unfortunate result. It therefore seemed desirable that any communication of the kind suggested should be made to him by word of mouth. This could be done either by sending someone having full knowledge of the general political situation from England to Mesopotamia, or by arranging for Sir Percy Cox to come home on leave, or, at any rate, as far as Cairo.

Cox left Baghdad on 24 February 1918 by rail for Kut, whence he travelled down river by ship to Basra and thence to Aden and Cairo. In Cairo he had a formal meeting on 23 March with Wingate, Clayton, C.E. Wilson, Hogarth, Cornwallis and others.

Of this meeting, Cox wrote later:[40]

> Our deliberations ranged over all the problems in which we in Mesopotamia and they in the Hejaz were mutually interested. I was chiefly concerned with the difficult one with which both alike were confronted in the bitter personal relations existing between our two Arab allies King Hussain and the Sultan of Nejd.

The Minutes of the conference state that:

> Sir Percy Cox began by reviewing the attitude of Ibn Saud. It was evident, he said, that Ibn Saud was exceedingly jealous and suspicious of King Hussain and he (Sir P. Cox) was personally convinced that Ibn Saud would never acknowledge the King as his temporal overlord, though he would always pay him, as he does now, the great respect due to his religious position. Ibn Saud has always been most frank and straightforward in his dealings with us; he realized his obligations to us and the necessity of conforming to our policy, and it was inconceivable to Sir P. Cox that, at all events so long as the war continued, he would deliberately attack the King...

On the future of Mesopotamia, in reply to a question from Hogarth, Cox said:

> In view of our Baghdad Proclamation the people of Mesopotamia no doubt expected some form of Arab façade to the Administration but it was essential that there should be complete British financial and administrative control, free from the slightest Turkish taint. They did not apparently contemplate or demand any Arab individual as ruler.

Wingate wrote about the conference to Sir Ronald Graham in London:[41]

> I have had some long and interesting talks with Sir Percy Cox, who is a very charming personality and whose intimate knowledge of Mesopotamia and all its intricate problems you will find most interesting and valuable. It would take too long to give you a resumé of our general conclusions, but as Cox will be home at the same time as this letter, you will no doubt get an impression of what passed from him. I should however say that we were all in general agreement and that therefore you may take Cox's appreciation as representing our combined views.

In London Cox had a round of official visits, being himself briefed on the latest top level thinking on possible post-war strategies and himself briefing ministers and officials on the situation in Mesopotamia as well as on his recent conference in Cairo with Wingate and others. He had a formal meeting with the Eastern Committee of the Cabinet under Curzon's chairmanship on 24 April.[42] He was invited by Curzon to spend a weekend with him at his country house, Hackwood, near

Basingstoke and another invitation to spend a weekend with the King and Queen at Windsor. He saw his sisters and his grandson, and would have met his daughter-in-law for the first (and the last, as it happened) time. She was to die early in 1920.

A constant nagging worry at the back of Cox's mind was that the British government might make a separate peace with Turkey. In that event, Britain would almost certainly evacuate Mesopotamia, thus making his work in building a stable new administration based on an implicit trust of his own word in vain. The effect of a withdrawal from Mesopotamia would also be likely to have a dramatic effect on British relations with Ibn Saud and on the British position in the Persian Gulf generally. During the early part of 1917, there was serious consideration in the Foreign Office of the advantages to Britain in the enormous and costly struggle against Germany of a separate peace with Turkey. Curzon was an out-and-out opponent of this idea.

Perhaps it was this worry, coming at a time when he had crowned his diplomacy with Gulf leaders at a durbar in Kuwait at the end of 1916 (see next chapter), which prompted Cox in February 1917 to propose that Britain declare the Persian Gulf a *de jure* British exclusive preserve, giving force of international law to the then existing *de facto* situation. There was no enthusiasm in London for this idea.

Cox left London at the end of May, passed through Cairo again in mid-June heading for India and Simla via Khartoum and Port Sudan. T.E. Lawrence participated in the meetings this time. Of Cox's meetings in Cairo on 16 June 1918, Clayton wrote to C.E. Wilson in Jeddah that:[43]

> The idea that from Mesopotamia and Irak [the Sharif] will in future be paid a dole – either as Caliph, Suzerain or Custos of the Holy Shrines – is well to the fore – in London and here (Sir Percy Cox himself sees no radical objection) but cannot be mentioned to him at present.

He arrived in Bombay on 8 July and took the train to Simla, where on 22 July he received a message from Curzon telling him that he, Curzon, wanted him to go to Tehran as Acting British Minister to negotiate an Anglo-Persian Treaty.[44] Curzon believed that such a treaty would be of vital importance for British interests in the region in the wake of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia and the risk of that contagion spreading south.

The British government considered that A.T. Wilson, Cox's deputy in Baghdad, (see next chapter) was competent and capable of acting in Cox's stead as Civil Commissioner. Cox left Simla the next day – 23 July – for Bombay and sailed for the Gulf on 5 August for Basra where he collected his wife, went on to Baghdad and thence to Tehran, where he arrived on 15 September.[45]

Thus did Sir Percy Cox step for a brief moment off the stage in Mesopotamia. It was perhaps fortuitous that he did so at that time, keeping his own reputation intact through the next two years of rising tension, insurrection and bloodshed.

Before considering Cox's work in Persia, it is necessary to go back in time to November 1914 and look at the second plane of his activities in Mesopotamia during the four years of war, when he was initially Chief Political Officer to Indian Expeditionary Force "D" (as the invading British Army was originally known) and then Civil Commissioner to the army after the capture of Baghdad, by which time it was known as the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force. An account of his achievements is the subject of the next chapter.

While Cox was travelling to Cairo, India, Basra, Baghdad and Tehran during the summer of 1918, in London the debate on "what to do about Mesopotamia" continued. This was no longer a debate among officials. The discussion had flowed into Parliament and into the Press.

Nor was there a clear perception that, in the wider Middle East, contradictions had been engendered in British policy which would bedevil the future. The Arabs collectively had been led to believe that "self-determination" really meant what it said: genuine political independence. But at the same time, the Balfour declaration was the seed of an enormous, even, insoluble problem which came to dominate the region for generations. Finally, the agreement between the British and French governments to divide the erstwhile Ottoman Empire between them in "sphere of influence" (the Sykes-Picot agreement) was generally taken by people in the region, with some justification, as evidence of bad faith on the part of the two European powers.

With hindsight, perhaps more germane was the contribution to the debate was that of Sir Maurice (later Lord) Hankey (1877–1963), the secretary of the Imperial War Cabinet. He wrote to Balfour on 1 August on the eve of a meeting of the Imperial War Cabinet called to discuss war aims:[46]

> ... oil in the next war will occupy the place of coal in the present war, or at least a parallel place to coal. The only big potential supply that we can get under British control is the Persian and Mesopotamian supply. The point where you come in is that the control over these oil supplies becomes a first-class British war aim. I write to urge that in your statement to the Imperial War Cabinet you should rub this in. ... Admiral Slade tells me that there are important oil deposits in Mesopotamia north of our present line.

Chapter 3

Adviser, Diplomat, Administrator: Chief Political Officer and Civil Commissioner, Mesopotamia, 1914–1918

> "My duties as Chief Political Officer to the G.O.C.-in-Chief were partly military and partly civil. In the first place I was the medium of communication between the Military Commander and the civil population, and his adviser in his political dealings with them. For this purpose I worked as a member of his G.H.Q. Intelligence and was always in close touch with that branch, assisting in the examination of prisoners and spies, the sifting of information, the provision of informers and interpreters and so on. On the purely civil side it devolved on me, under the G.O.C.'s supreme control, to implement as far as the fluctuating tide of war allowed, the assurances which we had given to the Arabs at the beginning of the campaign, both in the Persian Gulf and in lower Mesopotamia..."
>
> Sir Percy Cox[1]

> "I think Sir P. Cox knows best. His experience is very great."
>
> Lord Hardinge (as Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, July 1917[2]

Parallel to his contribution to the evolution of British policy objectives and war aims in Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf during the war years are Sir Percy Cox's achievements as adviser, diplomat and administrator in Mesopotamia itself. (It is proposed to continue to refer to the "land between the rivers" as "Mesopotamia" in this chapter, the name by which it was known to Cox and tens of thousands of British soldiers during the war years. The Arab name, "Iraq" was seldom used by English speaking people until 1918.)

One salient fact dominated Cox's outlook during the period from November 1914 to March 1918 when he was totally involved with his duties in the territories captured from the Turks: the occupation of the province of Basra would be permanent, the British presence would be there for all time, and a British flag would fly in Baghdad at the end of the war. There could be no question of the Turks being allowed to return, nor of any other nation occupying any part of the littoral of the Persian Gulf. Such an attitude was wholly consistent with Cox's endeavours over the previous fifteen years in the Gulf. It had become something of a faith to him. It was, of course, also the stated policy of the British government (in spite of an occasional

tendency to wobble) during the period of Cox's active involvement in the administration of the *Vilayets* of Basra and Baghdad, that is, until March 1918.

It followed that among Cox's objectives during the war years in Mesopotamia was the establishment of a permanent British-controlled administration. Inevitably, this administration would have a strong Anglo-Indian flavour, with an equitable and efficient revenue system based on a tax on agricultural production at its heart. Complementary to the revenue system was an honest and corruption-free administration of justice.

In late September 1914 war with Turkey seemed to be inevitable. After an interchange of telegrams between the India Office and the government of India, it was agreed on 5 October that a military operation to occupy the head of the Persian Gulf and Basra should be mounted. It was decided that a brigade of British Indian troops (at that time, four infantry battalions, three Indian and one British, with modest artillery support, totally rather more than 4,000 men) would be adequate for the initial operation and that ultimately a division (three brigades) would probably need to be landed to defend the captured territory. The operation was to be directed from India.

The brigade was embarked and sailed for Bahrain, with Cox accompanying it as Political Officer. This force, and the following additions and reinforcement which ultimately became a considerable army, was known initially as Indian Expeditionary Force "D". The officer commanding the brigade, General Delamain, had strict orders that he was not to land on Turkish territory until war had been declared. Cox, who was under Delamain's orders, was to "open communications" with "Bin Saud, the Shaikh (Amir) of Nejd, the Shaikh of Muhammera, the Shaikh of Kuwait."

A state of war existed between Britain and Turkey from the end of October 1914. The mouth of the Shatt-al-Arab and the oilfields in neighbouring south-west Persia were occupied against light Turkish opposition on 6 November and Basra was captured on 22 November. The ease with which the initial victory against Turkish forces had been won was a siren call to further action.

On the day Basra was captured Cox sent a private telegram to the Viceroy in which he said:[3]

> After earnest consideration of the arguments for and against I find it difficult to see how we can well avoid taking over Baghdad. We can hardly allow Turkey to retain possession and make difficulties for us at Basra; nor can we allow any other Power to take it; but once in occupation we must remain, for we could not possibly allow the Turks to return after accepting from the Arabs

> co-operation afforded on the understanding that the Turkish regime had disappeared for good.

At the same time Cox had wished to make a public announcement that the British occupation of Basra was permanent; the government in London considered that such an announcement would be contrary to an agreement with France under which there would be no confirmed permanent occupation of captured enemy territory prior to an eventual post-war settlement.

Although both the Indian and British governments were cautious about a further advance on the ground, agreement was given to the general commanding in Mesopotamia to push on to Qurna, a town some fifty miles upstream from Basra at the point where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers come together to form the Shatt-al-Arab. This was achieved against very light opposition by 9 December.

The Viceroy visited Basra in February 1915 and saw for himself the state of the army as well as receiving briefings from Cox on the political situation and hearing Cox's views on future options for Force "D".

The ease with which the victories had been won tempted the government of India to go further. An additional division was sent to Mesopotamia and General Sir John Nixon was sent at the end of March 1915 as overall commander. His orders, dated 24 March 1915, may be summarized.[4] Cox was to come under Nixon's orders. As far as operations were concerned, Nixon was to ensure the control and retention of the Basra *Vilayet* and, as far as he reasonably could, the oilfields of south-western Persia (Iran). In addition, he was to prepare a plan for an advance to Baghdad.

General Nixon took over command of IEF Force "D" from Lieutenant-General Barrett, who returned to India, somewhat disgruntled and saying that he had resigned. Barrett felt that he had been simply relieved of his command. This was not the case: Nixon was the senior officer. But a rumour had been started among senior army officers, a rumour which linked Cox's name to Barrett's dissatisfaction and accused Cox of excessive interference in purely military matters. The matter may seem petty today in a world in which we are used to jealousies and bad feeling between senior ministers and officers in governments, armies, navies and large organizations generally, but professional rivalries lay right outside the openness of Cox's personality. Yet later in the Mesopotamian campaign, when General Maude commanded, Cox was to be accused again of excessive interference in matters which senior officers felt that were none of his business.

In any case, in early 1915 the rumour inevitably disturbed Cox considerably, so much so that on 7 April he telegraphed Hardinge expressing his concern. Hardinge replied by telegram on 10 April:[5] saying that he had not heard of Barrett's resignation and that he

believed that Barrett could not resign during the course of a campaign. The Viceroy went on to say that as far as he knew there has been no dissatisfaction at military headquarters with General Barrett, and that he was sure that Barrett's return to India had no connection with Cox.

Cox replied to Hardinge on 13 April:[6] expressing gratitude for "setting his mind at rest."

The issue in Mesopotamia at that time was not who might be exercising an excessive influence on whom but the overall objectives of the campaign. S.H. Longrigg, who was on Cox's staff through much of the war, wrote that the British Army in Mesopotamia, having achieved its initial objectives, was gradually led into:[7]

> ... advances and adventures never indicated by its essential role – though this too, thanks to the divided councils of the War Office, Foreign Office, India Office, Viceroy, and local commanders, was never clearly formulated. The military command was needlessly ill-informed of Iraq conditions; its Intelligence and Political officers were almost all unacquainted with the territory, as was Cox himself. The Turkish Army was underrated, the deficiencies of the Indian military machine only gradually revealed; but these considerations hardly explain a persistent lack of precision in the objectives of I.E.F. Force'D. To the defeat of the Turco-German armies the Expedition made from first to last, and in spite of all its successes, a contribution quite unequal to its own cost and grievous losses.

General Nixon was enthusiastic about an advance on Baghdad, as was Cox. There is no way of assessing over ninety years later just how much Cox's enthusiasm influenced Nixon. Major-General Townshend, commanding the Sixth Indian Division, (which was to make the thrust towards Baghdad) wrote in his diary on 25 August 1915:[8]

> Sir Percy Cox, the political officer, told me that if I went into Baghdad it would have almost the same political significance and importance as if I were to enter Constantinople. The news would go through all Asia.

And in his diary on 14 October Townshend wrote that he had received a telegram from Cox saying that:[9]

> ... information had reached him that, owing to our marking time, certain Arab chiefs were beginning to wobble and treat with the Turks.

In any event, the collective enthusiasm among British officers in Mesopotamia in the later summer and autumn of 1915 led to an advance on Baghdad which, after initial brilliant successes, was checked at Ctesiphon in November and ended in the siege and surrender of the British Indian garrison in Kut on 29 April 1916. Townshend lost his reputation, not because of his conduct of the campaign, but because he allowed himself subsequently in captivity to be extremely well treated by the Turks at a time when there was great suffering and a high death rate among the remaining British and Indian prisoners of war captured at Kut.

Of this defeat Cox wrote later that:[10]

> ... it is not possible or necessary for me to deal with the military aspects of the campaign and I must pass over the eventful winter of 1915 and the spring of 1916, which witnessed Townshend's victorious advance up the Tigris, culminating in the battle of Ctesiphon; his retirement to Kut, with its siege and final surrender; and the terrible trials of our troops in their gallant attempts to relieve the beleaguered garrison...

When he wrote these words in 1927, it is a pity that Cox did not deal in more depth with the decision to advance on Baghdad taken in 1915. On the other hand, he probably felt that, in the context in which he was writing (a chapter to accompany the collected letters of Gertrude Bell edited by Gertrude's step-mother) any further comment would be inappropriate and that there was little point at that time in scratching at the scars of old wounds.

Cox left Kut just as the Turkish ring was closing around the defenders on 5 December 1915.[11] On 7 December he wrote a personal letter to Hardinge as his launch was chug-chugging down the Tigris towards Basra, marginally hastened by the sluggish current. His immediate reaction to the military situation, as well as his longer-term thoughts, carefully set down in his large, neat handwriting with its bold down strokes, are of considerable interest:[12]

> 'Times without number during the months which have passed since Your Excellency left the Gulf I have wanted to write to you, in connection with some specific event, and I fear you may have thought me ungrateful for not doing so, but all the hot weather it was a struggle to keep abreast of the work at all, and interruptions always came in when I hoped to get the hour or two in which to do so. I had promised myself to do so on board my launch on the journey up to Amara in September, but then Sir Mark Sykes turned up and came along with me and I had

to use the opportunity to go through and discuss his interesting papers [the de Bunsen Committee report] with him, and so another chance went.

I am now on my way back from Ctesiphon & Kut and devoid of files, and trust you will bear with a long letter. Let me first touch on some of the now long past events regarding which I wanted to write at the time, but failed to do so.

[The following paragraphs touch on personal and administrative matters]

I will revert now if I may to the time when Sir Arthur Barrett was relieved. If you remember, just before he left he told me that he felt sure that the reason for what he considered his supercession, at all events in part, was because he had listened too much to his Chief Political Officer. I could not conceive that such was the case, but it made my position a little uncomfortable; and General Nixon's attitude on arrival made it clear that there must be some foundation for Barrett's belief.

The fact was that the latter was a soldier pure and simple – knew and cared nothing about politics, & did not consider himself empowered to correspond with Foreign Dept. If any political issue arose he asked my opinion and discussed the question & if any communication had to be made to Foreign Dept he told me to make it. I, of course, showed him everything and sent nothing he did not see.

Apparently Army H.Qrs did not like my communicating direct with Foreign at all, for when General Nixon came (I have known him since I was a subaltern in the Cameronians, so we met as old friends) he asked me at our first discussion, to let all political telegrams be sent in our joint names. I replied by all means. I recognized that I was his Political Staff Officer in regard to Force matters, and any arrangement which would suit him from that point of view, I was ready to accept. He has treated me very well indeed and I hope I have earned his confidence.

But as Your Excellency probably knows he is an entirely different stamp of man to Barrett. Much quicker wits, and

(rather like my best of friends Admiral Slade) prima facie ready to handle any question in any sphere of work, politics, irrigation, or anything else. But he is a clever man and quick to understand things and not obstinate so I do not find him difficult to work with. He is punctilious about his own position and likes everything to go and come in his name, but if he desires that, he is entitled to it and it does not bother me. Withal, he is most kind and considerate to me and my relations with him & his staff are of the most friendly and intimate.

He is, as he naturally would be with a larger command, much better staffed than Sir Arthur Barrett was, and his Intelligence Branch much more efficiently run & we get no petulant telegrams from the C.G.S. [Chief of the General Staff] Dept nowadays as we used to in his predecessor's time.

As regards writing to Your Excellency privately regarding the affairs of the expedition – I have never felt that I could safely or properly do so, with complete loyalty to the Army Comdr. I know he does so himself, that is, he writes to you privately sometimes, as he tells me he has written or has heard from you; but placed as I am, I should not like to write anything that I would not wish him to see, and I think the mere fact of his thinking I was in private communication with Your Excellency would impair his complete confidence in my loyalty. I am confident therefore that Your Excellency will not put it down to me for unrighteousness that I have been silent in this respect.

Our failure to get through to Baghdad was a great disappointment, I only pray that it may prove only a temporary set back and will not react elsewhere to any serious extent.

It was a splendid fight; from sunrise to dark, and we bivouacked that night on their front line of trenches, but our men had been severely punished in the process and we simply had not enough men to go on. We really needed another Division to have done the task completely; even a couple of Brigades would probably have been sufficient. As it was, every man that we could raise was fighting and they were too decimated to go forward next day.

> I stayed at Kut until the last minute as I feared that if the neighbouring Shaikhs heard I had left they might think things were worse than they were; but the recently "friendly" Arabs between Kut and Aziziyeh having sniped Genl. Townshend's force all the way during their retirement to Kut, and having even sniped us in Kut the night before his force got in, it was clear that we could not depend any longer on any of them. Finally the Turks came down to within 8 miles of Kut, and it became certain that we should be invested, & I came to the conclusion that no more politics could be done from Kut itself, and that I was doing no good by staying there and getting cut off from communication, so I came away by the last boat. Genl. Townshend is confident that he can hold out, and reinforcements are being pushed up as fast as possible, but it is necessarily slow work as the river is so low and the transport boats so limited. It was most unfortunate losing the "Comet" and the "Firefly". It is my earnest hope that it may not be many weeks before we move forward again.
>
> The negotiations regarding the "Arab Kingdom" seem to me most premature. As far as I can see, the fact is that a few Arab agitators in Egypt have simply put up the Sharif to make these extravagant claims, & have bluffed the Egyptian authorities into believing that if the Sharif did not get what he wanted he would join Bin Rashid "with 16,000 men" etc, stories which we now know were all buncombe. Goodness knows where we shall be landed, in the way of commitments if we work in water tight compartments, and if the Egyptian compartment, with the Arab nationalist at their elbow, exercises a controlling voice in the disposal of Turkey in Asia.

Cox's confidence in the ability of Kut to hold out was misplaced and Townshend surrendered on 29 April 1916. The defeat was investigated by a Parliamentary Committee in London, and the Report of the Committee, tabled in July 1917, stated:[13]

> The advance to Baghdad under the conditions existing in October, 1915, was an offensive movement based on political and military miscalculations and attempted with tired and insufficient forces, and inadequate preparation. It resulted in the surrender of more than a division of our finest fighting troops and the casualties incurred in the ineffective attempts to relieve Kut amounted to some

> 23,000 men. The loss of prestige associated with these military failures was less than might have been anticipated, owing to the deep impression made, throughout and beyond the localities where the combats occurred, by the splendid fighting power of the British and Indian forces engaged.
>
> Various authorities and high officials are connected with the sanction given to this untoward advance. Each and all, in our judgment, according to their relative and respective positions, must be made responsible for the errors in judgment, to which they were parties, and which formed the basis of their advice or orders.
>
> The weightiest share of responsibility lies with Sir John Nixon, whose confident optimism was the main cause of the decision to advance. The other persons responsible were: in India, the Viceroy (Lord Hardinge), and the Commander-in-Chief (Sir Beauchamp Duff); in England, the Military Secretary of the India Office (Sir Edmund Barrow), the Secretary of State for India (Mr. Austin *(sic)* Chamberlain), and the War Committee of the Cabinet.

Austen Chamberlain resigned when the Report was published and was replaced by Edwin Montagu. In the broad sweep of the history of the war, the British defeat at Kut was over-dramatized at the time. Compared to the defeat at Gallipoli a few months previously and the check along the river Somme in France three months later, the loss of Kut was little more than a tactical reverse. Yet there can be no doubt that the sufferings of the wounded British and Indian soldiers were made unnecessarily severe and distressing by rank incompetence and complacency (as they were on a much large scale during the battle of the Somme). The image of British infallibility was badly tarnished by the reverse at Kut. Also, Mesopotamia gained an ugly reputation in the minds of the British public, which was to reveal itself in the early 1920s and caused difficulties for Cox.

Sir Percy Cox was not asked to give evidence by the Mesopotamia Committee and his mention in its report is minimal (and in no sense censorious or critical). Yet he was an early advocate of an advance on Baghdad and, as Nixon's adviser on political affairs, must have had a not inconsiderable say in the decision to try for Baghdad. It is possible to consider that there may well have been senior officers in the British Army in Mesopotamia in 1916 who believed, rightly or wrongly, that Cox had had a greater responsibility for pushing for the decision to advance to Baghdad than the official report mentioned and that,

accordingly, he should have accepted some of the blame which descended on to General Nixon's shoulders.

Cox was also most certainly also both the strongest and clearest-minded senior officer at the headquarters of the army in Mesopotamia and would thus have exerted, willy-nilly, a significantly greater influence than his place in the official hierarchy may suggest.

If, as he says in the paragraph quoted at the beginning of this chapter, he had overall responsibility for military intelligence, then it is possible that he could be faulted also for not picking up the imminent arrival of fresh Turkish divisions in front of Ctesiphon, divisions which played an important role in the check of the British advance and which subsequently invested the British force in Kut. The decision to advance on Baghdad seems partly to have been taken on the basis of poor military intelligence.

The Committee's Report says of one recommendation by Cox in the context of the actual siege of Kut:[14]

> ... the real enemy was starvation, and it was this that compelled the surrender of the place on April 29th 1916, after a most gallant and tenacious defence of 147 days. .... This disaster would have been averted for a long time if the Arab population, about 6,000, had been expelled before the investment began. Sir P. Cox, the political adviser, was averse to such a measure, as he was unwilling to hand them over to the tender mercies of the Turks and hostile Arabs, but their retention undoubtedly added to the difficulties of supply.

Cox's compassion for the Arab population of Kut does him credit. Unfortunately, it was wasted compassion, for when Kut surrendered to the Turks at the end of April 1916, the Arab population did suffer severely at the hands of ill-disciplined Turkish soldiers. The treatment of the British and Indian prisoners from Kut by their Turkish captors was callous and unfeeling. Large numbers perished. There is little wonder that the thought of the Turks being allowed to come back into Mesopotamia as part of an overall peace settlement was anathema to Cox.

What the first fifteen months of the campaign in Mesopotamia did reveal was the fact that the Indian Army, for all the courage and fighting ability of its officers and men, had never been intended as more than a force to preserve internal security and to fight classic small frontier wars. Thus on 16 February 1916 responsibility for the overall direction of the Mesopotamian campaign was taken from the government of India and assumed by the War Office in London.

Even if the government of India had revealed outstanding military competence, this decision would have made sense; it was essential that there be an overall co-ordination of the British military effort.

Henceforth, IEF Force "D" was known as the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force (MEF).

This change did not affect Cox's reporting links. He remained subordinate to the General Officer Commanding MEF but with the right to communicate direct to the Viceroy.

* *

Another aspect of advice to the commanding general in Mesopotamia emanating from Cox concerned the question of encouraging Arab officers serving in the Turkish army to desert and to lead an Arab revolt against the Turks. Voices from Cairo as early as mid–1914 had suggested that Arab officers in the Turkish army in Mesopotamia were ready to mutiny. Encouraged by Kitchener, British officials in Cairo had endeavoured to make contact with Arab officers who were unhappy in the service of the Ottoman Empire and who were known Arab nationalists.

One such officer was Colonel Abdul Aziz al Masri, an Egyptian who had earned a substantial reputation and who was thus greatly respected by British officials who knew Turkey. He had fallen out with senior officers in the Turkish government and had effectively deserted to Egypt. His record was such that he was taken very seriously by senior British officers in Cairo.

Interviewed by a British intelligence officer, a Captain Russell, in Cairo in August 1914, al Masri said that he had been:[15]

> ... deputed by a Central Committee at Baghdad to ascertain the attitude of the British government towards their propaganda for forming a united Arabian state, independent of Turkey and every other power except England, whose tutelage and control of foreign affairs they invite.

At that time Turkey had not entered the war and there was still some hope of keeping the Turkish government at least neutral. The long-negotiated Anglo-Turkish Convention of 1913 had not yet been ratified; this provided a modest additional diplomatic lever in maintaining a dialogue between the British and Turkish governments. The result was that no formal reply was given to Abdul Aziz al Masri, though his message had not been forgotten.

Late in October, the situation had changed and it was virtually certain that Turkey would enter the war on the side of Germany. At that time, al Masri sought a further interview with a British officer and saw Captain Gilbert Clayton in Cairo. Clayton asked him whether the Arabs would remain on the side of Turkey in the event of war and recalled Britain's "friendly attitude towards the Arabs". In his report

dated 30 October 1914,[16] Clayton quoted al Masri as saying that he:

> ... was not hopeful of any great assistance being offered by the Arabs unaided... Colonel Aziz Bey then came to the real matter on which he wished to speak. He began by saying that the only way in which the Pan-Arabian programme could be carried out successfully and the country freed from Turkish domination was an organized revolution backed by a comparatively small but well equipped force. The nucleus of this force could be obtained from the Mesopotamian Army, in which the seeds of disloyalty had been sown for some time past and in which were large numbers of officers, N.C.O.s, and men who were only waiting for the word...

Clayton recommended that no action could be taken for as long as war with Turkey had not actually broken out. He reported that, to him, the scheme appeared pretty vague, and the details did not seem to have been thought through.

Al Masri emphasized that in his view the nucleus of any potential Arab resistance movement against Turkey lay in Mesopotamia. He spoke to Philip Graves, *The Times's* correspondent in Cairo and later Cox's biographer. Graves gave a note of the conversation dated 6 December 1914 to Sir Milne Cheetham, at that time Acting High Commissioner, who passed it on to Sir Edward Grey on 13 December.

In view of what happened subsequently – the advance on Baghdad and the retreat to Kut – Graves's note of his conversation with al Masri is interesting:[17]

> He [al Masri] supposed that the Anglo-Indian forces would eventually push forward towards Baghdad. There however there would be stronger opposition to face than at Basra: Kurd and perhaps Arab levies with regulars from Mosul and Kerkuk *(sic)* would by that time be in line. He remarked that though Basra and the Fao region which were in constant touch with India and with the chiefs of Koweit and Mohammerah, had apparently accepted the invasion with calm and indeed with satisfaction, yet it was not certain that the Arabs and especially the Arab officers further north would do the like. An invading army was sometimes an irritant however well it behaved and however great were the grievances of those whose country it invaded against their Government. Should some of the Arab officers at Baghdad take a mistaken view of the situation, they might stir up trouble in the line of communications of the Anglo-Indian Army...

> He believed that he could render us great assistance by getting into contact with these Arab officers and with the tribes, by inducing Arab troops to desert to us and by raising Arab national feeling against the Turks who were disliked throughout Irak. On the condition mentioned above, viz. that we did not intend to annex Mesopotamia, but intended to make some kind of buffer state British-occupied for many years to come and aided in its progress by Great Britain, he would do all in his power to assist us, if assistance were asked of him.

Before Graves's note was written, Sir Edward Grey had responded positively to Clayton's note about his interview with al Masri and other similar messages from Cairo,[18] saying that the Arab movement should be encouraged in every way possible. In addition, a green light was given to backing the ideas of Abdul Aziz al Masri. Cairo reported back to the Foreign Office, saying that Al Masri had asked for British help in getting in touch with Arab officers in Mesopotamia and said that by far the most important was a certain young Iraqi, Nuri Said.

Cox was instructed to contact Nuri Said. The interview took place early in December 1914 and Cox reported on 3 December that:[19]

> Nouri Saeed, who appears to me to be primarily a visionary socialist, is a delicate Arab youth of about twenty-five years of age, suffering from some infection of the chest, and is highly Europeanized. The scheme of himself and his associates seems to be mainly to raise to better things the Arab nation generally, and at our having occupied Basrah he expressed delight on the ground that the Arabs would achieve their ideals more easily under liberal British rule than any other. Nouri Saeed said that it was in the hope of inspiring the Arabs of Irak with the national ambitions of his party that he had come to Basrah, and they had entered into relations with Sayyid Talib... and were of the opinion that he would be able to put them in touch with tribal notables.
>
> In reply to a question as to what his present plans were, and if and how he wished to co-operate with us, he stated that he thought that if we intended to advance further in the course of time he might be able to help by converting and detaching from the army some of Djavid Pasha's officers, also that if he travelled in the Euphrates valley he might be able to win over some of the tribal sheikhs to his ideals, and persuade them that under

> British rule they would be more likely to achieve them, and should accept it accordingly.
>
> I regard the scheme as visionary and impracticable. I am sure that, given the backward condition of the tribes and sheikhs with whom they would have to deal, the "young Arabs" and their propaganda would not have the slightest effect on them. In any case, they might do more harm than good and would be of no immediate use to us. I recommend that, until the situation has cleared, Aziz el Masri be overawed from leaving Egypt.

Cox, who arranged for Nuri Said to travel to India for medical treatment for that "infection of the chest",[20] was confident that he had the local situation well in hand and hence that the encouragement of an Arab revolt would serve little purpose as far as the immediate objectives of IEF Force "D" were concerned, to say nothing of what the encouragement of an Arab nationalist movement by the government of India might mean in India itself. In any case, an active encouragement of Arab nationalism was contrary to the concept of a permanent British occupation of the Basra province. He continued in the same telegram:

> We have nothing to fear from the populace of Baghdad and there is good reason to hope that once we are in control over Baghdad and the river and telegraph to Basrah, the tribes of the Euphrates valley will accept our régime automatically.

Longrigg suggested that Cox was not well-informed on the Arab nationalist movement in Iraq; in this he was almost certainly right. It is possible that Cox chose not to see it. It would not have been easy for a man of his character to condone under-cover movements designed to overthrow an established order. Another possibility for an apparent lack of sensitivity to the forces of Arab nationalism on his part, is that his knowledge of that part of the Arab world which he knew, was of the relatively free shaikhdoms of the Gulf region. Even those nominally under Turkish suzerainty were far more influenced by the tyrannies of poverty and distance than they were by the threat of Turkish bayonets. But of the Arab nationalism born under the Ottoman yoke, Longrigg wrote:[21]

> The emergence of such a nationalist movement was an inevitable as that of reform in Turkey itself. The sense of anachronism and frustration was common to the protagonists of both; and the Arab character, proud and

> individualistic, is incapable of admitting permanent inferiority. The emancipation of the subject races of Europe was increasingly known to them.

And of the situation in Basra itself Longrigg continued:[22]

> Basra, farthest from Turkish interests and nearest to independent Arabia, took an unquestioned lead in the Arab movement. It was inspired or terrorized by Sayid Talib, a younger son of the venerated local Najib family. An able, charming, unscrupulous and ambitious statesman, gang-leader, and patriot, he had been Mutasarrif [governor] of Al-Ahsa, had close contacts in Najd, Kuwayt, and Muhammara and dominated Basra. He was at the opening of the century already well known in Istanbul as a man of the highest promise or danger, prepared to adopt whatever allegiances would favour his rise to an independent Amirate of southern Iraq.

Talib thought to ingratiate himself with the British as war became imminent. According to Longrigg:[23] "... Sayid Talib had approached the Chief Political Officer in October in return for recognition as Amir of the territory; but his suggestion was rejected and he was seen in Iraq no more until 1920."

The evolution of British policy towards the Arabs generally in 1915 culminating in the McMahon pledge to Sherif Hussain and the concomitant encouragement of an Arab revolt has been traced in the previous chapter. The overall British attitude was summarized by Sir Edward Grey in a telegram to McMahon on 6 November 1915:[24] "Our primary and vital object is not to secure a new sphere of British influence, but to get the Arabs on our side against the Turks."

Cox made a substantial contribution to getting the Arabs on the side of Britain (if not as actual combatants) on 26 December 1915 when he signed, after several months of negotiation, a formal treaty of mutual recognition and friendship between Ibn Saud and the British government. The question of Sherif Hussain's aspiration to assume the title of *Caliph* as part of his reward for seeking to encourage an Arab revolt was raised by Cox with the Ibn Saud. He reported that Ibn Saud has said of Hussain's wish that:[25]

> ... no one cared in the least who called himself *Caliph,* and reminded me that the Wahhabis did not recognize any *Caliph* after the first four. His calling himself *Caliph* would not make any difference to his status among other Chiefs and there would be no question of their accepting

> any control any more than they do now... there was no doubt a certain amount of talk about the *Caliphate* in Cairo, presumably because of the presence of a Sultan, but as far as the Jezirat-al-Arab [the Arabian peninsula] was concerned, he did not consider that the question had any significance or interest for them.

Cox summarized his discussions: "... the general impression gained on this side of Arabia since the beginning of the war, viz. that the question of the *Caliphate,* has no serious interest for the tribes of their Chiefs."

A copy of Cox's report on his meeting with Ibn Saud was sent to Cairo. In the Cairo Intelligence Bulletin dated 10 February 1916 T.E. Lawrence commented on the report:[26]

> The Wahhabis, who pose as the reformers of Islam, with all the narrow-minded bigotry of the puritan, and Ibn Saud as their chief, cannot express an opinion which is representative of the rest of Islam. In the Sherif of Mecca's scheme of expansion, all that is desired of Ibn Saud and Ibn Rashid is neutrality towards him, and towards each other... It is to the more civilized centres of Islam, in Syria and Western Arabia, that the Sherif must look for the driving power which will carry his venture to success. It is his aim to reconcile the different warring elements – to prevent, for instance, the Idrisi and the Imam Yahya from dissipating their strength through personal jealousy – and though up to the present he has not done more than persuade the Imam to refrain from giving active assistance to the Turks, a study of his methods and past career by no means bears out the estimate of him expressed by Ibn Saud.
>
> It is no doubt his aim to set up an Arab Empire, which will unite in himself the spiritual and temporal power at present exercised by the Sultan of Turkey, and present an undivided front to the rest of the civilized world. Such a scheme is impossible of realization. The Arabs, it is true, are not indifferent to the question of the *Caliphate,* and they are at one in their common dislike of the Turks. The Sherif, by taking advantage of this, may unite them in one supreme effort, which will result in the disappearance of Ottoman rule from Arabia, and the assumption by himself of the *Caliphate,* but he will never succeed in exacting more than a religious allegiance from the great Chiefs. Leaving out of account the great distances, and the lack of effective communication, long years spent in the

> struggle for bare existence have engendered in the Arabs a distrust of their neighbours, and a passion for independence which put any permanent union, or submission to one single authority, out of the question. Their main desire is to be rid of the Turks, and to be allowed to live their lives as they please.

Early in April, some six weeks after writing these words, Lawrence met Cox in Basra. He was the junior member of a team of three British officers, the other two being Colonel Beach (head of IEF Military Intelligence) and Aubrey Herbert (who had been seconded as an intelligence and liaison officer) who, acting under direct orders from Lord Kitchener, were trying to arrange with the Turkish commander on the spot, Khalil Pasha, to secure the release of the British forces besieged in Kut in exchange for a financial reward. The idea seems absurd some ninety years later, but it was pushed in all seriousness at the time.

Cox was extremely unhappy with the proposal, which involved bribery. He wrote to Colonel Beach on 7 April:[27]

> I should like to let you know what has passed regarding Captain T.E. Lawrence on and since his arrival here. He arrived on the night of the 5th and I saw him at Headquarters after dinner that night. The only instructions he had were to report himself to Headquarters here and he brought a demi-official introduction to me from Sir Henry McMahon... *(see page 78)*
>
> He himself understood that he had been sent here in order to give assistance in the carrying out of a certain project which, I understand, was recently suggested to the Army Commander ... .
>
> I should like to explain my position in regard to this project. I regard it as a purely military measure. That being so it is not necessary for me to express my personal views and feelings in reference to it. Apart from these, however, it appears to me to be neither in the interests of Government or of myself as C.P.O. that I or my name should be connected with the business in any way.
>
> You see, I am not a migrant – I am a permanent official in the Gulf and I may conceivably have to remain here for a time after hostilities are concluded. The project in view is pretty sure to become known sooner or later especially if it proves unsuccessful and I cannot afford as a Political Officer of the Government of India to be identified with it.

At the same time there was a proposition to send Arab nationalists from Cairo with the intention of detaching the Arabs of Mesopotamia from the Turks and especially encouraging Arab officers and soldiers serving in the Turkish army then fighting the British to change sides. Four days after Lawrence left Cairo on his way to Basra, the India Office sent a telegram to the Government of India saying:[28]

> In view of the intention of the Shereef to attempt at once to detach the Arab element from the Turkish army in Arabia and Syria, a corresponding movement is thought desirable in Mesopotamia, and McMahon has been authorized to send Faruki and possibly also el Masri *(sic)* to get in touch with the Turkish army there with this object... if you see any objection in the existing circumstances to the despatch of these two persons and especially of the latter telegraph as soon as possible repeating to Sir H.McMahon.

The telegram was repeated to Sir Percy Lake, then commanding the British forces in Mesopotamia.

Lawrence had had verbal instructions before he left Cairo to investigate the possibility of detaching "the Arab element from the Turkish army" in Mesopotamia with the British commanders on the spot and to make contact with Arab nationalists in Basra. Written instructions were prepared for him, but arrived too late to be of any use. Lawrence had left Cairo on 20 March but did not reach Basra until the evening of 5 April. The letter he carried from Sir Henry McMahon to Cox was dated 20 March:[29]

> My dear Cox,
>
> I send these few lines to introduce Captain Lawrence who is starting today for Mesopotamia under orders from the W.O. to give his services in regard to Arab matters.
> He is one of the best of our very able intelligence staff here and has a thorough knowledge of the Arab question in all its bearings. I feel sure you will find him of great use. We are very sorry to lose so valuable a man from our staff here.
> I hope things are going well on your side. We are anxiously awaiting news of Townshend's relief but have heard nothing for ages.
> All is going well here. Please forgive haste.

Cox could be forgiven for thinking, on reading this letter, that

Lawrence had been transferred by the Intelligence department from Cairo to Basra.

But before Lawrence arrived in Basra, Sir Percy Lake had poured cold water on the idea of bringing Arab officers from Egypt to Basra to encourage Arab officers in the Turkish army in Mesopotamia to desert, almost certainly after discussion with Cox. Lake's decision was supported by Lord Hardinge, and by Austen Chamberlain, the Secretary of State for India, who had taken over from Lord Crewe in a cabinet reshuffle in May 1915. Lake had replied on 30 March:[30]

> ... we feel unable to concur in the deputation either of Farokhi or el Masri to Mesopotamia now. The Turks maintain to the fullest extent vigilance in the search for spies, and it is not considered possible that either of the above individuals could themselves pass over from occupied territory to the sphere of the Turkish troops opposed to us on the Tigris or Euphrates, or could be of any practical use to us if they did.
>
> From the political standpoint it appears to us that their political views and schemes are much too advanced to be safe pabula for the communities of occupied territories, and their presence in any of the towns of Irak would be in our opinion undesirable and inconvenient. Should it be possible for them to reach by other routes than via the Persian Gulf or Irak the districts in the rear of the Turkish forces now operating against us, there would appear to be no military objection to their attempting such measures as they may think feasible for detaching the Arab element in the Turkish army.
>
> But in previous attempts made from here to utilize captured Arab officers professing to be able to influence their compatriots in the Turkish ranks they have always eventually been found unwilling or unable to face the practical difficulties and risks involved.

Lawrence gave his view of the situation in Mesopotamia in the first half of 1916 several years later in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom:*[31]

> ... we had hopes of Mesopotamia. The beginning of the Arab Independence Movement had been there, under the vigorous but unscrupulous impulse of Seyid Taleb, and later of Yasin el Hashimi and the military league. Aziz el Masri, Enver's rival, who was living, much indebted to us, in Egypt, was an idol of the Arab officers. He was approached by Lord Kitchener in the first days of the war, with the hope of winning the Turkish Mesopotamian

> forces to our side. Unfortunately Britain was bursting then with confidence in an easy and early victory: the smashing of Turkey was called a promenade. So the Indian Government was adverse to any pledges to the Arab nationalists which might limit their ambitions to make the intended Mesopotamian colony play the self-sacrificing role of a Burma for the general good. It broke off negotiations, rejected Aziz, and interned Sayid Taleb, who had placed himself in our hands.
>
> By brute force it marched then into Basra. The enemy troops in Irak were nearly all Arabs in the unenviable predicament of having to fight on behalf of their secular oppressors against a people long envisaged as liberators, but who obstinately refused to play the part. As may be imagined, they fought very badly. Our forces won battle after battle till we came to think an Indian army better than a Turkish army. There followed our rash advance to Ctesiphon, where we met native Turkish troops whose full heart was in the game, and were abruptly checked. We fell back, dazed; and the long misery of Kut began.

It is possible that in April 1916 Lawrence, influenced by the words of al Masri and others about the strength of the Arab opposition to the Turks in Mesopotamia, had in mind to try himself to raise the standard of Arab revolt along the valley of the Euphrates. McMahon's letter to Cox could be read to imply that Lawrence would be away from Cairo for some time. Be that as it may, Lawrence continued:

> ... I did nothing of what it was in my mind and power to do. The conditions were ideal for an Arab movement. The people of Nejef and Kerbela, far in the rear of Halil Pasha's army, were in revolt against him. The surviving Arabs in Halil's army were, on his own confession, openly disloyal to Turkey. The tribes of the Hai and the Euphrates would have turned our way had they seen signs of grace in the British.

This may well have been so. It is a classic "what if..." of history. Lawrence seems to have overlooked the fact that the people of Najaf and Kerbela were Shia, as were most of the tribes along the Euphrates, and that for the to be in revolt against Turkish (or any other authority, as the British Army was to find in 1920) was the normal state of affairs. In any case, a Sunni *caliph* in Mecca would have had little appeal to them.

Among the officers on Cox's staff in Basra whom Lawrence met at

the time was R.W. (later Sir Reader) Bullard, who knew Mesopotamia better than most of his colleagues at that time. Bullard had been in Turkey since 1908, spoke Turkish and had been British Consul in Basra immediately before the war. Bullard was to write later that Lawrence:[32]

> ... had a great knowledge of those Arabs of whom he had had experience, but was sometimes ill-informed about Arabs elsewhere, particularly in Iraq. He was naively surprised to learn that in an Iraq state composed of the three provinces of Basra, Baghdad and Mosul, there would be about as many Shi'is as Sunnis ...

Others were to make the same point subsequently, and not just about Lawrence but also about other British enthusiasts for a mass Arab uprising against the Turks. For example, Arnold Wilson, writing of being in Paris for the Peace Conference in March 1919 with Gertrude Bell, said:[33]

> Experts on Western Arabia, both military and civil, were there in force, but not one, except Miss Bell, had any first-hand knowledge of Iraq or Nejd or, indeed, of Persia. The very existence of a Shi'ah majority in Iraq was blandly denied as a figment of my imagination by one "expert" with an international reputation, and Miss Bell and I found it impossible to convince either the Military or the Foreign Office Delegations that Kurds in the Mosul Vilayet were numerous and likely to be troublesome, that Ibn Saud was a power seriously to be reckoned with, or that our problems could not be disposed of on the same lines as those advanced for Syria by the enthusiasts of the Arab bureau.

P.W. Ireland, who seems to have followed fairly closely the opinions of the Foreign Office at this time, was to write in 1937 that the fact that a mass popular uprising in Mesopotamia in 1916 and 1917 Iraq was not organized by British officers:[34]

> ... was not due to any lack of men of undoubted ability to lead and to work with the Arabs, although none would have claimed the special gifts of the late T.E. Lawrence. ...
>
> The energies and talents of these men, as well as of others, instead of being utilized in organizing Arab co-operation as a means of winning the war as in western Arabia, were diverted to checking tribal quarrels, to preventing food and supplies reaching the Turks, to

> collecting revenue and laying the foundations of administration. Such activities, although no mean accomplishments in themselves and no small contributions to the eventual establishment of the Kingdom of Iraq, were in no way fully indicative of the capacity of the British officers nor of what might have been accomplished had the authorities ordered otherwise.
>
> For whatever reasons deemed sufficient at the time, the failure of the military authorities to make full military use of the Arabs of Mesopotamia, notwithstanding the efforts of Sir Percy Cox and his associates to win Arab support in other directions, had far-reaching effects, not only during the period of hostilities but also long after the end of the war.

These words could be taken to imply that Cox was in some way kept firmly under the thumb of the "military authorities". This implication is untenable; it seems probable that had Cox had a strong faith himself in the efficacy of an Arab revolt in Mesopotamia, had he been certain that such a revolt would have been of positive assistance to the British cause, and above all had he perceived such a revolt to be in the best interests of British imperial desiderata at that time, he would have exerted his very considerable strength and influence to cause it to happen.

The success of the Arab revolt in western Arabia in the second half of 1917 was due to a number of elements. This uprising was a revolt of nomadic tribes and rural Arabs with a common confessional background (they were all Sunni). The Arab tribes which rose against the Turks had a clear military goal (Damascus). They had a leader (Faisal bin Hussain), and they were given steel and resolution by Lawrence. By the time the revolt had built up a momentum, there was very little risk of a return of the authorities (although the Turks retained possession of Medina until the end of the war).

In Iraq in the summer of 1916, immediately after the surrender of Kut, there was no certainty that the Turks might not return. In any case, the British intention at the time was that Basra and Baghdad should remain under unambiguous British control after the final victory. It followed that any expression of nationalism was not to be countenanced. Britain had no strategic interests in the Hejaz and no desire to be in occupation of that territory after the war.

In any case, as men like Cox knew at the time, and as history was to prove, the survival of the British Empire, and very specifically the British Indian Empire, was not compatible with any attempt to encourage militant expressions of nationalism.

Gertrude Bell (Mary Evans Picture Library/Illustrated London News Ltd)

Be that as it may, the fact is that on 9 April 1916, Lawrence telegraphed Clayton in Cairo:[35]

> I have been looking up the pan-Arab party.... it is about twelve strong. Formerly consisted of Sayed Talib and some jackals. The other Basra people are either from Nejd, interested in Central Arabia only and to be classed with Arabia politically, or peasants who are interested in date palms or Persians. There is no Arab sentiment and for us the place is negligible. This partly explains Cox's limitations. He, however, admits that Baghdad stands on a different footing and should not be entered until a policy has been determined on.

Hardly the stuff, one would have thought, to provide the catalyst for a major uprising.

Lawrence met Cox soon after he arrived in Basra and subsequently telegraphed Clayton:[36]

> Cox disassociates himself from India very clearly; he does not know how Cairene he is. He favours the hoisting at Bagdad of the British flag and the Arab flag together, but until peace is declared is against a definite declaration that we will not annex Bagdad for fear of tying our hands. He can be brought around on this point as the people in Basra are getting tired of us, and the anticipation of something better when peace comes would prevent Bagdad going the same way, should the army perhaps want formal annexation of all conquests.
>
> Cox is entirely ignorant of the Arab Societies and of Turkish politics.... He does not understand our ideas but is very open and will change his mind as required. His complaint of Cairo is that Mesopotamia was mentioned to the Sherif. I think I have put this right.
>
> He is against the introduction of Arab officers as he thinks that we wish to rid Cairo of some gas-bags who are impatient there. I tried to explain, but I feel sure he will not take any step involving a policy without a lead from England.

It would have been fascinating to have been the proverbial fly on the wall during the conversation between Cox and Lawrence. The sentence in Lawrence's telegram "Cox disassociates himself from India very clearly; he does not know how Cairene he is" is Delphic. It is

difficult to believe that a man of Cox's integrity, seniority and experience would "disassociate himself" from the government of India, a government which he had served loyally and effectively for over thirty years, in a conversation with a young officer half his age whom he had not previously met. It is more likely that Cox simply appeared to Lawrence to be so very unlike his preconceived ideas of "Indians". Lawrence may have had in his mind a caricature "Indian": a short-tempered, red-faced reactionary with sun-dried brains. Instead, he met something of a kindred spirit and may have jumped to the conclusion that such a fair-minded man as Cox would automatically be on the side of the enthusiasts in Cairo.

In any event, the two men seem to have developed an early respect for each other. Lawrence wrote in his report on his visit to Basra:[37]

> Sir Percy Cox is High Commissioner except in name. He is absolute dictator in the Gulf, and will remain so as long as he is there. He is delightful to work with. His fear of us was mostly because he thought we aimed at getting the Sherif a temporal ascendancy over the Arab-speaking world. When I gave him a sketch of our ideas on a united Arabia he was pleased – and relieved. However, he will not take orders or suggestions about his policy from anyone but London, and he knows London so well that I feel sure this is only a diplomatic way of taking no orders at all.

Lawrence prefaced these words with two paragraphs on the Political Department of the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force:[38]

> The Political Department under Sir Percy Cox wears khaki uniform and white tabs. Some of its people are officers, and some civilians. Most of them know Arabic or Persian, and one (Bullard, Levant Consular Service) knows Turkish well, and most of Turkey and its politics. Another of them is Leachman, the Arabian; also Noel and Young and Eadie. As far as expert knowledge goes the Political Department is as well served as the Military Intelligence is badly served.
>
> "Political Department" is rather a false name. it is really a civil service and is mostly taken up in administration. Under it are Customs, Excise, Land Revenue, Taxation, Crown Lands, the Judiciary, the Police, River-Conservancy. Headquarters is at Basra, but there are assistants in all large centres in our occupation. They are, of course, entirely distinct from the Military Intelligence Officers at the same places.

Cox seems to have been impressed by Lawrence, for he concluded the letter he wrote to Colonel Beach on 7 April with the words:

> From Sir Henry McMahon's letter attached it would appear that Lawrence is intended to remain here, and if he did I should think he would be a very valuable addition to the Intelligence Staff; but he did not understand this at all and came under the impression that he was intended to undertake this business if necessary and see us all here from the liaison point of view, and then return.

Lawrence left Basra by river steamer on 9 April to meet General Lake but did not arrive at the general's headquarters for six days. He then went with Colonel Beach and Aubrey Herbert on the unsuccessful mission to bribe Khalil Pasha. He returned to Basra early in May, met a number of the British officials on Cox's staff, and left for Egypt on a troop ship on 11 May. He was not back in the Intelligence Office until the afternoon of 26 May. His report to Clayton was very critical of much that he had seen in Basra.

Cox and Lawrence had agreed on the very great importance of closer coordination of aims and objectives between the British authorities in Cairo and in Mesopotamia. In June, they exchanged telegrams on a "misunderstanding", Lawrence having apparently expressed ideas as emanating from Cox which were completely contrary to Cox's own beliefs. The matter was cleared up very quickly with a display of goodwill on both sides. Lawrence concluded his telegram to Cox with:[39]

> General impression I had was that your practice agreed perfectly with our theory and that if Clayton and yourself met there would be no conflicting opinion at all. In matters of detail our ignorance of war conditions in Mesopotamia had misled us. ...

* * *

Sir Percy Lake, who had replaced Sir John Nixon as General Officer Commanding in Mesopotamia, was himself superseded by General Sir Stanley Maude in August 1916. Maude, who, as has been seen, was at Sandhurst with Cox, had not been through the mill of the Indian Army. He arrived in Mesopotamia early in 1916 from Egypt commanding the 13th British (Territorial) Division, a division he had commanded in the final stages of the Gallipoli campaign. The combination of direct War Office control and a vigorous commander gave a new direction to the campaign in Mesopotamia.

The New Broom – Lieutenant-General Sir Stanley Maude, appointed to command the British and British Indian Army in Mesopotamia after the fall of Kut in 1916 (Mary Evans Picture Library/Illustrated London News Ltd)

Maude came from an army family; his father had been a general and had won a V.C. Educated at Eton, Maude himself had been commissioned in the Coldstream Guards in 1884 and saw action in Sudan in 1885. He served in South Africa in 1899–1902 and won a D.S.O. This was followed by four years in Canada as Military Attaché to the Governor General. He spent the early months of World War I, first as a colonel and staff officer with the British Army in France, then as a Brigadier-General, before being wounded in November 1914. In July 1915 he was promoted to Major General and was ordered to Gallipoli to command the 13th (Territorial) division. He was the last man to be evacuated from the Cape Helles position in January 1916. He arrived at the head of his division in Mesopotamia in March 1916, and was appointed General Officer Commanding in Mesopotamia in August of that month.

Maude's biographer writes of the change in command:[40]

> Maude arrived at Basrah on the 24th of August, and he then enjoyed the advantage of spending some days in consultation with Sir P. Lake before that general sailed for England on the 28th. There was a bond of sympathy and a complete understanding between the outgoing chief and his successor; for no one realized better than Maude what difficulties had been contended with and in many instances overcome during the past eight months under most trying conditions by the responsible head in Mesopotamia.

And of Cox's position the biographer wrote:[41]

> There is always a "Political Officer" in Asiatic campaigns which are being carried out under the orders of the Indian Government; this appointment had been held by Sir P. Cox for some considerable time in Mesopotamia, and he retained it under the new order of things, acting under the instructions of the Army Commander.

Apparently Maude could not see why he needed a political officer attached to his command. He argued that the British Army in France did not have political officers, ignoring the fact that France had its own highly developed government in place. On the other hand, Mesopotamia was slowly being wrested from the Turks and the British government envisaged some form of permanent British presence in the country at the end of the war.

Of the military situation he inherited, Maude himself wrote in a letter:[42]

> ... here there are such peculiar difficulties in connection with the campaign that it makes this far from easy to control. There is the long and vulnerable line of communications, shortage of river transport, the absence of roads and railways, the intense heat, the floods, the non-existence of local supplies, and the time which it takes at this distance to get our supplies and war stores here. These all complicate matters tremendously, and constitute an interesting though a stiff problem. However, here we are, and the only thing is to get at it heart and soul, for difficulties exist only to be overcome, and I cannot help feeling that with vigour and determination we may bring the campaign to a fairly speedy and successful conclusion. But we shall have to work hard, and the delays, the lethargy and the apathy apparent now in some quarters must cease once and for all.

Some six months later, in March 1917, Maude captured Baghdad in what was acclaimed as a brilliant military operation. This was the first significant British victory in the war.

The Cox-Maude relationship was not easy. Cox summed up the achievements of their collaboration in a few words:[43]

> ... I was to remain with Sir Stanley Maude's Headquarters on the Tigris front throughout the winter campaign, which saw the recovery of Kut, the sudden crossing of the Tigris at Shimran and the subsequent advance on Baghdad, ending in its occupation on 11th March 1917. The fall of Bagdad was an event full of significance and pregnant with possibilities both for ourselves and for the enemy. Throughout the Empire and among our allies the brilliant success of General Maude's campaign aroused the utmost enthusiasm, so that the tragedy of Kut seemed almost effaced in the public mind.

Cox's problems with Maude began after the capture of Baghdad. Cox understated the position when he wrote:[44]

> These first six months of our occupation of Bagdad were indeed no easy period for the Civil Administration. The Army was fully occupied consolidating its position round Bagdad and needed to husband its strength to the utmost for the coming winter campaign and so detachments for outlying places could not be spared; nor, for fear of inconvenient incidents, could civil officers be allowed to go far afield. In these circumstances it was naturally

> difficult for tribesmen to believe, especially in the face of violent Turko-German propaganda which was rife at the time, that the existing regimen at Bagdad was at all secure or that the Turks would not eventually return. Even in Bagdad itself great uncertainty prevailed as to the intentions of the Allies, even if they did win the war; in fact up to the time of our successful offensive in the autumn of 1918 it was the general impression that the Central Powers would be victorious or at any rate that nothing more than a stalemate would result.
>
> Those who prided themselves on their intimate acquaintance with world politics declared that Iraq would undoubtedly be handed back to Turkey in exchange for the liberation of Belgium. Such rumours found their echo among the Sheikhs in general, causing many of our firmest friends to waver, or at least to wait on events. Altogether, in view of the actual political situation and the fact that with our occupation of the Bagdad *Vilayet* the military regime found itself confronted with many difficult problems of a nonmilitary aspect, H.M.'s Government came to the conclusion that some development of my status as Chief Political Officer to the G.O.C.-in-Chief was now called for. Accordingly, from the beginning of July 1917, my designation was altered to that of "Civil Commissioner", and while I still, of course, remained subject to the supreme authority of the Army Commander, I was given the right henceforth of direct communication with the Secretary of State for India, in whose name the instructions of H.M.'s Government, in other than military matters, were thereafter issued.

The difference of appreciation between political and military points of view was set out in a message from Maude to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff in London (then Sir William Robertson) dated 24 June 1917:[45]

> We had reason to think on entering Baghdad that Kurds were ready to welcome and co-operate with us, but they always displayed hostility to the Russians, and latter have accentuated this feeling by unrestricted looting and ill-treatment of inhabitants.

Maude cited Cox's opinion on the difficulties involved in dealing with the Kurds. Maude wrote that Cox considered that it would be wise to have a British military presence in Kurdistan, to open a Kurdish

liaison office in Baghdad and to give consideration to the question of raising Kurd levies under British officers. He was, understandably, concerned about any move which would dissipate British military strength, especially if this meant having a military presence in Kurdistan. He had also very definite ideas on the value of guerilla warfare. In the same telegram to Robertson he said:

> I am not in favour of encouraging guerilla warfare or acts of hostility promiscuously against Turks, feeling sure that such measures will effect no tangible good and that they may be productive of harm to our cause. Nor do I favour raising of levies, feeling sure that they would not be worth the expense involved. I would apart from this submit that our policy should be to keep tribesmen quiet, to be friendly to them, to enlist their sympathies, to trade with them and to pay them reasonable prices for what they bring us. Also where it is possible, without interfering with military operations to develop among them some system of government and so to aid in settling country. Anything such as uncontrolled guerilla warfare or raising of levies only awakens the latent fighting instincts of Arabs, and unsettles the country.

He emphasized that the British primary aim should be to pacify country and its inhabitants though dealing decisively and instantly with them if they interfered with British operations. He concluded: "By such measures we shall be enabled to concentrate our energies on the destruction of our enemy's forces which is our primary objective."

Another view of the situation which developed during the summer of 1917 between Cox and Maude comes from one of Maude's corps commanders, Lieutenant-General Sir William Marshall, who was himself to become General Officer Commanding in Mesopotamia after Maude's death in November. Writing in his autobiography *Memories of Four Fronts*, Marshall described Maude's concern about the probability of a major Turkish counter attack (operation "Yilderim", otherwise "lightning") following the British capture of Baghdad and continued:[46]

> Percy Cox was most anxious to bring all the country behind our army under political control, and wished General Maude to garrison the line of the Euphrates from Felujah to Nasariyeh. for this view there was a good deal of justification, but Maude, with perhaps greater justification so long as the Yilderim idea held the field, refused to accede to Cox's representations on the ground

> that it was contrary to military expediency to scatter his available strength more than was absolutely necessary. They were both right, and they were both strong men intent on having their own way, so that there was some rift in the lute.

The Cox-Maude rift became so serious that Cox at one stage contemplated resignation. The issue was brought to a head by Gertrude Bell, writing a personal letter to Sir Arthur Hirtzel in the India Office on 15 June 1917:[47]

> Since I last wrote, a great deal of water has flowed under the bridges, and some of it pretty muddy. I am going to seize an opportunity of smuggling a letter to you and I shall therefore write fully otherwise I cannot write lest the censor should report to G.H.Q. that the C.P.O. [Cox] is using me to forward his views to the home Govt., and I take it that G.H.Q. does not wish a full account to be presented at home. The attitude of Gen. Maude, put forward frequently in conversation with Sir Percy, is that he considers the whole system a wrong one. There should be no Political Officer; all that is needed is Intelligence Officers directly under himself. In support of his argument he cites the fact that there are no P.O.'s in France. The last statement is incontrovertible and he is incapable of grasping the fact that an occupied territory is not on all fours with the position in France, where we have no administration to undertake.
>
> Gen. – is of the same opinion, and I sometimes wonder whether it is they or we whose views are worthy of the denizens of a lunatic asylum. But on mature consideration I feel persuaded that it is they. In pursuance of his idea Gen. Maude does his best to keep from the C.P.O. knowledge of actions directly connected with politics which he is taking.

Gertrude gives a number of specific examples before continuing:

> My most important task at this moment is that of persuading Sir Percy not to resign. It is not only that he feels himself to be so useless, but also that he is aware of innumerable actions which are not in accordance with the policy of H.M. Govt. for the execution of which he is responsible – responsible yet helpless.

The problem was, of course, that Maude was the one successful British general in the war so far, a man whom few politicians or officials in government felt eager to confront. The Cox-Maude rift became so serious that, thanks to Gertrude's letter to Hirtzel, the issue reached the Eastern Committee of the War cabinet.[48]

Eventually Cox's position was upheld, but not until Curzon had intervened on his behalf. The differences in establishing priorities between Cox and Maude throw a light on Cox's character. First, the two men had been at Sandhurst together and thus had known each other a long time. Their differences and arguments were conducted with the impeccable mutual politeness and attention to decorum deemed by each appropriate for the conduct of a British officer and an English gentlemen. It is inconceivable that either would have indulged in the raised voice and table-banging of other men in other environments and other ages. Perhaps Maude tried to provoke Cox into some display of emotion: if so, he did not succeed, but there is no evidence that he did.

For Cox the fundamental issue was what he saw as his duty to uphold and defend his perception of the longer-term British interests in Mesopotamia. Thus he could not accept the suggestion of the government of India for resolving the problem of his relationship with Maude by taking leave, for he could envisage, with justice, that all his careful work to build a solid base for the future British presence in the conquered territories would be swept aside if he were not there to defend it.

In a "Personal and Private" letter to Lord Hardinge dated 9 February 1918, Cox referred to the "very difficult" summer of 1917 and continued that:[49]

> ... [Maude] was a fine soldier and character and I had a great regard for him and respect for his qualities. We were at Sandhurst together too, and the best of friends in private life, so it was more a matter of regret to me and I hope to him too, that our views were so often in conflict on essentials. But compared to other G.O.C.'s I have served with I found him less able to look at both sides of the shield.

Maude's biographer, General C.E. Callwell, makes no mention of the confrontation.

Lieutenant-General Sir Stanley Maude died of cholera in Baghdad on 18 November 1917. He was succeeded as Army Commander by Lieutenant-General W.R. Marshall, who had been commanding a corps in the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force up to that time.

Writing to her family on 22 November, immediately after Maude's death, Gertrude Bell said:[50]

> General Maude was essentially a soldier; he had no knowledge of statecraft and regarded it as wholly unnecessary. He depended on himself alone, no one had his confidence, and at this moment not one of his staff knows what were his future plans. If we had been in the midst of an active offensive, or still more had we been hard pressed by the Turks, it might have gone very hard with us. As it is, the Syrian victories have removed any immediate danger on this front. He was determined beyond the verge of obstinacy, a narrow intelligence confined to one channel and the more forcible for its concentration. I have heard many soldiers say that the advance on Baghdad was an extremely fine and bold piece of generalship. I knew him very little; he was always very polite and agreeable but not interesting. If he had lived, there would have been a desperate tussle when administrative problems began to become more important than military, and that moment was not, I think, very far off. At any rate the time was near when questions which he had insisted on regarding as purely administrative and therefore of no immediate concern from the military point of view, could no longer be neglected or treated on purely military lines.

General Marshall had no difficulty working with Cox after he assumed command.[51]

> Percy Cox was indefatigable in bringing the area behind the army under administrative control; he possessed enormous influence with the Arabs, who had for long recognized in him a strong, wise and just administrator. I often wondered how he had so greatly impressed the Arabs, but I think that the fact that he had said so little and showed such patience with them when, with true Oriental diplomacy, they talked of everything except what was on their minds, was a salient factor in the hold he gained; besides, they recognized in him a straight man who dealt honestly with them.

Cox's reputation among the Arabs of Mesopotamia as "a straight man who dealt honestly with them" is epitomized by his relationship with Sayyid Abdul Rahman al Gailani, the Naqib or principal among of the notable citizens of Baghdad, a man who was to play a very significant role with Cox in later years when the kingdom of Iraq was established *(see chapter 6)*.

Cox wrote with his characteristic modesty that, in the first days after the capture of Baghdad, he visited:[52]

> His Reverence Saiyid Abdurrahman Effendi, the Nagib, or Chief Noble, of Baghdad, head of the Sunni community and custodian of the shrine of Abdul Qadir Gilani, upon whose attitude towards us and influence with the people of Baghdad a good deal depended. Under the old regime of Sultan Abdul Hamid the Nagib had enjoyed a position of great dignity and stood high in public esteem and he no doubt owed a considerable debt of obligation to the former Government; but under the Young Turk regime he had become of less account and indeed had little to thank them for. At this time his position was obviously a delicate one and his attitude had naturally to be one of reserve, yet I enjoyed his frank and wide co-operation in all measures affecting the welfare of his countrymen and likely to mitigate as far as might be the rigours and inconveniences of a military occupation. I saw a great deal of him in the course of my duties and the feelings of mutual confidence which were established between us at this time were to stand me in good stead later on, and are now a grateful memory.

Cox's greatest achievements were as a diplomat, and the period of these achievements encompassed both the Gulf and Iraq and stretched from his arrival in Basra in November 1914 to his final departure from Baghdad early in May 1923. He described the situation on the outbreak of war:[53]

> As regards the Persian Gulf, our self-imposed task of maintaining Pax Britannica had inevitably created for us in the course of several generations a series of treaties and obligations of responsibility towards the Arab rulers on its shores which there could now be no question of our disregarding. We had treaties of old standing with the Sultan of Muscat, with the Sheikhs of the Pirate (now the Trucial) Coast of Oman, with Bahrein, and with the Sheikh of Qatar. We were on intimate terms with Ibn Saud, the Wahabi Chieftain of southern Nejd, who in 1913 had succeeded in extending his independent authority to the Coast of the Persian Gulf, and whose future prosperity and success depended mainly on our recognition and sympathetic cooperation in his plans of progress and reform.

> At the head of the Gulf the Sheikh of Koweit had been assured of our support against any Turkish encroachment on his independence; and finally, on the banks of the Shatt-el-Arab was the Sheikh of Mohammerah, Arab by race though subject to Persia, who looked to us in view of the commercial stake we enjoyed in his territory to secure fair play for him in his relations alike with Persia and with Turkey.
>
> 'These close connections of treaty and friendship were an invaluable asset to us when the time came to contemplate the lively probability of Turkey's entry into the war against us; but if full advantage was to be taken of them, it was clearly of primary importance that we should demonstrate to our friends at the outset the circumstances in which war had been forced upon us and should take such prompt action as would convince them that we were alive to the danger in which they would be placed, as friends of ours, and intended to take adequate steps to safeguard their interests as well as our own. Accordingly, the moment news of the outbreak of war with Turkey was received I was instructed to issue a proclamation in the above sense, assuring our Arab friends at the same time that their liberty and religion would be scrupulously respected, and that all we asked of them was that they should preserve order in their own territories and ensure that their subjects indulged in no action calculated to injure British interests.
>
> 'This was followed by a further proclamation guaranteeing to them and to Islam in general that so far as we were concerned, the Holy Places in the area of war should have complete immunity from molestation. With these assurances, the Arab potentates were fully satisfied, and thus it was that the benevolent policy pursued by us for many years past in our dealings with them now found its reward in an unwavering friendship, which was of incalculable value to us throughout the campaign.

Cox's words show his own essential modesty. It was a result of his own endeavours in the Gulf for the previous fifteen years that all the Arab rulers of the area, without exception, were completely on the side of Britain when the war began. And it was as a result of his continuing endeavours during the war years that these rulers never wavered in their adherence to the British cause. This alone has to be

British soldiers marching into recaptured Kut, 1917 (Mary Evans Picture Library/Illustrated London News Ltd)

rated as a significant achievement; it is an achievement of which Cox was both the architect and the executant.

A high point in his Gulf diplomacy was a durbar in Kuwait in November 1916 to which the Emir Abdul Aziz bin Abdul Rahman Al Saud (Ibn Saud) was invited, along with the Shaikhs of Kuwait and Mohammera and other local leaders. This durbar followed the signing by Cox and the respective rulers of treaties between Britain and these rulers in December 1915. Afterwards, Abdul Aziz Al Saud was invited to Basra to see for himself the scope of the British military effort.

Gertrude Bell wrote to her family on 25 November of this visit to Basra by Ibn Saud:[54]

> I came back to great excitement here. Sir Percy has been holding a fine durbar of Arab Chiefs and Ibn Saud is to pay us a visit here. I knew what was coming and that's why I hurried back from Nasiriyah. The whole business is a tall feather in Sir Percy's cap.

Ibn Saud was in Basra on 27 November 1916. On 1 December, Gertrude wrote:[55]

> We had an extraordinarily interesting day with Ibn Saud who is one of the most striking personalities I've encountered. He is splendid to look at, well over 6ft. 3, with an immense amount of dignity and self-possession. We took him in trains and motors, showed him aeroplanes, high explosives, anti-aircraft guns, hospitals, base depots – everything. He was full of wonder but never agape. He asked innumerable questions and made intelligent comments. He's a big man. I wish we could expound to him the science of peace, but we've got to get through this war first and hope that the better things will come after.
>
> Will they? It's an open question whether we don't do these people more harm than good and one feels still more despairing about it now that our civilization has broken down so completely. But we can't leave them alone, they wouldn't be left alone anyway, and whatever you may feel the world moves on – even in Arabia.

Of the visit of Ibn Saud, Maude wrote in a letter to his family:[56]

> My chief political officer, Sir Percy Cox, has been off touring with a Potentate who lives some two hundred miles west from here, and whom we are anxious to get to help us in that direction. He has been presenting him with K.C.S.I.'s and things like that, and now he is bringing him to Basrah where we have got up a great programme for him. He is to have salutes fired for him (which those sort of people love), an aeroplane display, an artillery display, a tour to see the development of the Port of Basrah, etc., so that I think he will be impressed. I have sent him a personal message regretting my absence, and Cox wired yesterday to know whether he might present

> him with a jewelled sword from me, to which I replied "Certainly, provided that I do not have to pay for it." Such a funny thing to be able to produce at a few minutes' notice on active service; but I suppose that political officers are rather like the professional ladies who make long journeys on liners, and who produce the most elaborate fancy dresses for dances on board.

Gertrude Bell had been in Basra since March 1916. She had gone to Mesopotamia at the suggestion of Lord Hardinge who wrote later that he was impressed by the information on Arabia which she had been able to pass on to the Foreign Department of the government of India:[57]

> It was at this time that I heard that Miss Gertrude Bell, whom I had known many years before as the niece of Sir Frank Lascelles, and who was employed in the Military Intelligence Department at Cairo, was ill and unhappy on account of the death of a very great friend in the operations at Gallipoli. I asked her to come to pay me a visit at Delhi, where she would have an opportunity of studying the Arab information at the disposal of the Foreign Department. She came and stayed some weeks at Vice-regal Lodge, and being much impressed with the information on Arabia collected by the Foreign Department, I suggested to her, and she accepted the idea, that I should send her to Busra *(sic)* to join the staff of Sir Percy Cox, our High Commissioner *(sic)*. (At this time Cox was Chief Political Officer.)
>
> I warned her that being a woman her presence would be resented by Sir Percy, but that it rested with her by her tact and knowledge to make good her position. As I anticipated, there was serious opposition at Busra, but as is well known she, by her ability and her obvious good sense and tact, overcame it and remained there for some years, occupying an important Staff post until her death. She was a very nice and most remarkable woman.

She very clearly did "make good her position" and became a close and trusted assistant to Cox. He had sufficient confidence in her to invite her to meet Ibn Saud, who must have had some difficulty in accepting a woman in the role of confidential adviser to a man of Cox's reputation and seniority.

To arrange a formal transfer of Gertrude from the Military Intelligence department in Cairo to work as a member of his staff in Basra

(her initial weeks in Basra in the early part of 1916 were simply as a visitor) Cox arranged for Sir Percy Lake to telegraph Hardinge in India, who in turn telegraphed Cairo. Lake said in his telegram:[58]

> You are I think aware that Captain Lawrence was recently deputed here temporarily from Egypt in connection with certain projects of which the Arab Bureau was one. From conversation held with him it would appear that the fact that the conduct of it has been retained in hands of Director of Military Intelligence has given us a somewhat erroneous impression of the status and objects of the Bureau which we had regarded mainly as a war measure. In view of modified aspects in which it is presented to us by Lawrence I propose that Miss Gertrude Bell should act as corresponding officer for Mesopotamia. To this end I contemplate if there is no objection giving her definite official status by Force Routine Order and placing her services at Cox's disposal. Cox and Lawrence who discussed the suggestion are of opinion that Miss Bell is well qualified for the task.

Thus began a professional relationship which was to be of great depth and value to both Cox and Gertrude.

Gertrude Bell was born in 1868, the daughter of a wealthy industrialist. Her mother had died when she was a child; her father remarried and Gertrude became close to her step-mother. She took what was regarded as a brilliant first class honours degree in Modern History at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford. Subsequently she studied modern oriental languages and became proficient in both Arabic and Persian. Her father's wealth permitted her to travel widely in the Middle East, beginning in 1890 and continuing up to and including World War I.

In the summer of 1917, after the fall of Baghdad, Cox wrote that he:[59]

> ... began to feel the want of Gertrude Bell's indefatigable assistance and decided to bring her and one or two others up from the Basrah Office to form a nucleus for my Secretariat at Baghdad. All sheikhly visitors from the countryside had to be interviewed, entertained, given small presents and sent back to their homes with injunctions to keep the peace and get busy with their agriculture; so that a great proportion of my time during daylight was spent at these interviews and Miss Bell acted as the strainer through which the individuals filtered through to me, accompanied by a brief note as to what their tribe was, where they came from and what they

> wanted. I was thus saved endless time in getting to the point. I remember that when I told him that some of my office staff were coming up from Basrah, including Miss Bell, the G.O.C.-in-Chief, expressed considerable misgiving at the news, as he feared her arrival might form an inconvenient precedent for appeals from other ladies, but I reminded him that her services had been specifically offered to me by his predecessor as an ordinary member of my Secretariat; that I regarded her and treated her no differently from any male member of my Staff, and that her particular abilities could be very useful to me at the present moment. In due courses she arrived and was not long in establishing happy personal relations with Sir Stanley Maude.

Gertrude was then forty-eight, four years younger than Cox. The fact that Belle Cox stayed in Basrah when Gertrude went to Baghdad may have caused some tongues in frivolous and superficial heads in Mesopotamia at the time to wag but the fact is that Gertrude's presence in Baghdad seems not to have worried Belle. The Cox's marriage rested on a firm base of mutual trust and respect. Percy Cox and Gertrude Bell developed a powerful intellectual and spiritual relationship. Being the man and the woman that they were, in the time and in the circumstances, anything else would have been unthinkable.

A visitor to Baghdad in the summer of 1917 was Ronald Storrs, who saw a great deal of Cox and Gertrude during his stay. He kept a diary and the entries are invaluable in developing a picture of Cox the man as well as of Cox the diplomat. The entries give also something of the flavour of Cox's relationship with Gertrude:[60]

Storrs arrived in Baghdad on 8 May 1917 and dined with Cox and Gertrude that evening. The next day, Storrs wrote, Cox was called away to see the army commander, General Maude. Storrs continued:

> I had a rewarding talk with Gertrude Bell, who tells me Cox is almost *au bout de ses forces* [at the end of his tether] with [Maude]. After breakfast showed my papers to Cox, who suddenly threw off all externals and told me his position as High Commissioner Elect, with all officials to be, high and low, imposed upon him by H.M.G., with the manner of his future role [as High Commissioner] severely laid down and with an omnipotent and unworkable General, would be impossible; and that it would be better for him, as well as for the country, to resign now. ... He was tired; had meant to leave before the war; had only one life and owed a little amusement and civilization to his wife, who had endured with him Somaliland and the

> Gulf for a score of years. I told him that the premature withdrawal of his knowledge and prestige would gravely handicap any successor...

Storrs wrote in his diary that Cox's working day went from 6.00 a.m. to midnight, each day, seven days a week.

Perhaps the greatest measure of Cox's achievements as an administrator of the occupied areas of Mesopotamia was his power of delegation. His work load was enormous during the war years and he was forced to delegate, yet he never appeared to lose control. Effective delegation has three elements: the choice of competent subordinates, the setting of clear objectives for these subordinates, and personal communication with the subordinates to ensure that the delegated tasks are performed as wished. With some relatively minor exceptions, the occupied territories were adequately and peacefully administered.

As Cox wrote himself of the period from November 1914 up to the fall of Baghdad:[61]

> During this period steady progress continued to be made with the creation of administrative machinery in all its branches throughout the Basrah *Vilayet,* and Gertrude Bell worked devotedly as Oriental Secretary to myself or my deputy, Captain Wilson, in the Basrah Secretariat.

It should not be forgotten in reviewing the nature of the administration which Cox established, and especially the administration in the Basra province, that this administration would form the basis for an eventual permanent occupation. Naturally, even though the objective in the Baghdad province was an Arab state under close British control, the form of the administration was identical with that established for the Basra province.

Of the initial problems, Cox wrote:[62]

> ... it was our duty as far as military exigencies permitted, to enable the peaceable inhabitants of the territory gradually falling under our occupation to carry on their normal vocations; but the initial difficulties involved in setting up a civil administration with war in lively progress were naturally considerable, and were greatly enhanced in this case by the fact that, the Turkish regime having been almost entirely alien, all Turkish officials and those non-Turks who had been employed in the administration, fled with the retreating armies as each centre was evacuated, and we found no local material whatever with which to replace them. Consequently, for the time being, and indeed for the

On to Baghdad – British soldiers on the march in Mesopotamia (Mary Evans Picture Library)

> whole duration of the war, personnel for the administration had either to be recruited from the British and the British Indian material serving with the Army, or to be borrowed from India.
>
> A beginning was made towards the establishment of a system of government which would be consonant with the spirit of our announcements. For this branch of my duties I had separate Offices and Staff and divided my working hours between the Army G.H.Q., whether at the Base or in the Field, and my Civil Headquarters at Basrah.

The occupied territories were expected to contribute to their admin-

istration and for this purpose an Indian-style tax on agricultural production was imposed. Cox wrote:[63]

> I received a valuable reinforcement of Officers from the Government of India, including Mr Henry Dobbs, who later on, as Sir Henry Dobbs, was to succeed me as High Commissioner in Mesopotamia – a senior official of the Indian Civil Service, with mature experience in revenue and fiscal matters, who at once set himself to get the revenue administration on to an effective working basis.

Of Dobbs and his achievements, T.E. Lawrence, who was in general highly critical of what he found in Mesopotamia in April 1916, wrote:[64]

> Dobbs is one of the most interesting people I met in Mesopotamia. I think he is probably an Indian civilian. They made him Chief of the Revenue Department, as which he had to settle land disputes, and oversee the sub-letting of the Crown lands. The Turks left him vast confusion in the province. They got away most of the official registers: what they left were ill-kept, and their system had been to enter on paper enormous rents for the various estates, and in practice to hold in check the tribal leaders by the accumulation of unpayable arrears. Also they had an odd habit of entering the name of a dead man as formal tenant.

At this time, H. St J. B. Philby, who had then a reputation as a brilliant linguist but also as a man who could be overzealous, was also deputed from India to join Cox's staff. After various other appointments, Philby was given an appointment which brought him close to Cox. He wrote in his autobiography that Cox had decided to establish a finance branch in his own office and that:[65]

> ... to take charge of this I was appointed with the title of Financial Assistant to the Chief Political Officer. Dobbs, with some reason on his side, challenged this arrangement on the ground that the new branch should have been instituted as part of his own Revenue Office; but Cox insisted on retaining all matters of financial policy and the accounts of the administration under his direct control. So I remained where I was in constant and fruitful contact with a chief for whom I always maintained a profound regard, though at times we differed fundamentally on important issues. His impressive personality was only equalled by his indefatigable industry. He often had to

> sign letters drafted for him by others, but he never signed one without searching scrutiny.

A fourth member of Cox's administrative team in Basra, and later Baghdad, was A.T. (later Sir Arnold) Wilson, who had worked as Cox's assistant for some years in Bushire before the war *(see chapter 1)*. Wilson described in considerable detail[66] the establishment of the administration in the Basra *Vilayet,* and the immediate priorities of the administration. A police force had to be established, with Muslim Punjabi and Sudanese policemen, to maintain basic law and order. Health and sanitation were also urgent considerations, as were veterinary services for the large numbers of animals needed by both the army and the administration. Wilson gave a picture of the conditions in and around Basra in the first winter of the war:[67]

> In considering the very rapid growth of a somewhat elaborate form of administration at Basra, and later elsewhere, it must be borne in mind that the necessity of establishing a sanitary system approaching European standards was imperatively forced on us by military needs. The force arrived in winter, in a wet year; the desert was a sea of mud; the date-groves were fetid morasses; the few elevated areas were for the most part occupied by reed huts and surrounded by refuse heaps, which were tolerated by the local population, but which would have been fatal to raw troops. Billeting had to be resorted to on a large scale, which necessitated an elaborate sanitary organization.

Wilson describes Cox:[68]

> He knew, indeed, little or nothing at first hand of Turkish Arabia, but he could speak Arabic fluently, and read and if need be write it with sufficient ease. This extraordinary man, already in his fiftieth year when the war broke out, retired from Government service ten years later, with undiminished vigour and health and with a reputation, alike in Arabic-speaking countries and in South Persia, with no less than the prowess of British arms enhanced the prestige of the government he represented. By temperament he was ideally suited to face the problems that presented themselves daily: if he did not suffer fools gladly, they were seldom aware of the fact; he was a man of few words, but a good listener; he gave himself freely to all, but he never gave himself away. Patient to a fault, he could and did command loyalty, as well as exact obedience; he could

> work for months on end for twelve hours a day, in the gloomy squalor of a cellar in an Arab house, with unimpaired temper, though, as he once remarked to an inquiring lady, "he sometimes burned inwardly". He was methodical and his memory was good; slow to reach a decision but quick to give effect to it; very tenacious in pursuit of the aims to which he directed his efforts.

Gertrude Bell prepared a detailed review of "the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia" which was published by the British Government as a Parliamentary Paper in December 1920. Of Dobbs's work, she wrote:[69]

> The British military authorities had at first no leisure to make any arrangements with regard to fiscal and revenue matters except in respect of customs, but towards the middle of January [1915] a Revenue Commissioner, Mr Henry Dobbs, I.C.S., arrived in Basrah from India, and such records as had been left by the Turks were overhauled. They were mostly out of date and were lying mixed with masses of lumber on the floors of the Turkish offices, the only papers in any kind of order being the registers of title-deeds to land and registered documents. Their escape was fortunate, as their loss would have been a severe blow to landowners and traders of the province. The administration was confronted with the task of setting the whole of a strange and complicated system on its legs as quickly as possible without the aid of the most recent records or of the most experienced officials, while the remaining records took many weeks to reduce to order. At the same time the nearness of the enemy's forces caused a feeling of insecurity among the people, and made many of them hesitate to compromise themselves by helping the authorities and reluctant to pay their taxes.

As more and more territory was occupied, the fear of a return by the Turks tended to evaporate. The administration had to grow, of course, to meet the increasing complexities of the occupation. Gertrude Bell wrote that by the early summer of 1915 the advances up the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers:[70]

> ... had more than tripled the area under our control. Military Governors under the senior local military officer were appointed to Amarah and Nasiriyah, and Assistant Political Officers were placed in charge of the political

> and revenue administration of the districts. The Assistant Political Officers were responsible to the Chief Political Officer for purposes of civil administration, and worked directly under the local military authorities for the purchase of supplies and in measures connected with the safe preservation of the line of communication.

Education was one of Cox's early concerns. The system of Islamic schools around mosques was encouraged. As far as secular education was concerned, Gertrude Bell wrote that Cox's administration perceived that:[71]

> ... there was an urgent need of trained Arabs for Government service, and it was advisable from a political point of view that the British administration should not be open to the accusation of neglecting to further education. It was, however, necessary to proceed slowly, with the aim of getting a high standard of teachers, and of opening no school until suitable teachers could be found.
>
> All sections of the population wished their children to learn English for commercial purposes; indeed, if English had not been made a concurrent language from the lowest primary class, there would have been no bait to attract boys to the Government primary schools, since a purely Arabic education, sufficient to satisfy the meagre requirements of most parents, could be obtained in the schools of the mullahs. Any scheme of higher education, though it might have captivated the public imagination, would have been premature until a sound basis of primary education could be established.

There was already an American Mission school operating in Basra in 1914 and Cox arranged for a financial grant to be made to this school on condition that it provide immediately trained teachers for two new primary schools. There were also two "Oriental Catholic" Christian schools in Basra and these received financial support from Cox's administration on condition that they permitted British inspection and that they commenced teaching English.

A third new primary school was opened in Zubair, adjacent to Basra, in the spring of 1916. Later, during 1917 and 1918, new primary schools were opened in Nasiriyah, Suq al Shuyukh, Qal'at Salih, Ali Gharbi, Madinah on the Euphrates, and Ashar, a suburb of Basrah.[72] Later, five primary schools were opened in Baghdad and an additional two in rural areas.

Cox also ensured that teacher training and technical training schools were established. Other problems were also overcome. "Lack of school

furniture was a serious difficulty. With regard to books, an appeal for help was addressed to the Egyptian Government, which responded with a handsome gift of books sufficient to equip 20 primary schools and one secondary school."[73]

Concerning the administration of justice, Gertrude Bell wrote:[74]

> Outside the towns the tribal population had not been wont to resort to the Ottoman courts, in spite of all attempts on the Ottoman Government to induce or force them to do so. In point of fact, over the greater part of Mesopotamia it was not the Turkish judicial authorities who had regulated the relations between man and man or assigned the penalties for breaches in their observance all legal paraphernalia but the old sanctions, understood and respected because they were the natural outcome of social needs. The shaikh in his tent heard the plaint of petitioners seated around his coffee hearth and gave his verdict with what acumen he might possess, guided by a due regard for tribal custom; the local saiyid, strong in his reputation for a greater familiarity than that of other men with the revealed ordinances of the Almighty, and yet stronger in the wisdom brought by long experience in arbitration, delivered his awards on disputes grave or trivial, and the decisions thus reached were generally consonant with natural justice and always conformable with the habits of thought of the contending parties.
>
> This system of local justice was recognized by us to be a strong weapon on the side of order and good conduct. Just as it was the habit of the British Military Governors when hearing cases to call in the mukhtars, the headmen of the town quarters, and ask them to take part in the proceedings, so the Political Officers turned to the shaikhs of tribe and village and obtained their opinion. This practice was extended by an enactment called the Tribal Disputes Regulation, issued with the approval of the Army Commander in February 1916.
>
> It was laid down herein that when a dispute occurred in which either of the parties was a tribesman, the Political Officer might refer it to a majlis, or tribal court, consisting of shaikhs or arbiters selected according to tribal usage. Unless the findings of this body were manifestly unjust or at variance with the facts of the case, the Political Officer would pass judgment in general accordance with it.

Cox also was energetic in improving the civil medical facilities in the occupied territories. Of this, Gertrude Bell wrote:[75]

> It would be difficult to give too much credit to the medical officers engaged in these duties, not for their zeal only, but for the tact which they exercised towards their patients; and no less praise is due to the Indian dispensers and medical staff. A morning visit to a dispensary was enough to explain how the timidity of children and tribeswomen had been overcome, suspicion allayed and prejudice conciliated. The sanitary conditions of the towns made a notable advance during 1916. Latrines and incinerators were everywhere in use, butcheries and markets inspected, a successful campaign was carried on against flies and rats and infectious diseases checked.

Finally, there was the question of information. Again, Gertrude Bell is an invaluable source:[76]

> Medical facilities, integrity in the administration of justice, the gradual abolition of the tax-farmer, the stabilizing of taxation on a fair basis, the repairing of mosque and village, together with a sympathetic handling of the tribes, these were the most effective means of meeting Turkish and German propaganda, but steps were taken to provide the reading public, a very small portion of the community, with news from sources less tainted than those of the enemy. A Government press was instituted at Basrah, and when the great initial difficulties in procuring material had been surmounted, a vernacular paper, both in Arabic and Persian, was published daily.

Gertrude does not mention another remarkable Englishwoman who played an important part in getting a newspaper published and editing it in Basra, Mrs Lorimer, a journalist friend and the wife of Lieutenant-Colonel D.L.R. Lorimer, a political officer serving under Cox. Of the newspaper, *The Basra Times,* Wilson wrote: "Never was the paper better edited and less censored than under Mrs Lorimer's regime, never were translations into Arabic better supervised."[77]

Inevitably, as more territory was occupied, so did the problems of administration become more complex. This was especially so after the capture of Baghdad in March 1917. Gertrude Bell's Review treats these problems in considerable detail. Her account is honest and factual, if perhaps somewhat uncritical. She was, after all, writing of events to which she was still very close in time and in which she had played no small part herself.

British Indian soldiers marching through a damaged town on the way to Baghdad (Imperial War Museum Photographic Archives)

It would be misleading to suggest that the administration which Cox set up in Mesopotamia was Utopian. Compared to what had preceded it, this administration had a basic integrity and was high-minded. Paradoxically, it was often criticized for seeking to be too efficient. The inefficiency of the Turkish administration had its defenders among those who could benefit from such inefficiency. Not every Arab in Mesopotamia between 1915 and 1918 appreciated an administration which set out to be open and honest. Above all, an administration which was managed by British officials assisted by a small army of Indian clerks and technicians, no matter how honest and how efficient it was, was an alien administration. Whether intentionally or not, most British officials at the time were themselves under the impression, and hence gave others the impression, that the occupation was permanent. Not surprisingly, not all the people of Mesopotamia were enchanted with the prospect of changing one colonial administration, that of the Turks, who tended to a benign incompetence, for that of the British, who were efficiently benign, paternalistic and sometimes patronizing.

The critical questions to be asked of Cox's responsibility for the administration of those parts of Mesopotamia occupied by the British Army were, first, was this administration effective both from an immediate and a longer-term British point of view, and second, was it just? A corollary question is whether any other British official at the time could have done a better job than Cox?

The answers to both questions and to both parts of the first question have to be positive. And it is difficult to conceive of any other British official being capable of achieving more than Percy Cox did over those years. During the years of combat, to the end of October 1918, the rear areas and communications of the British Army in Mesopotamia were never seriously threatened by civil unrest. On the base of the administration established in the war years, a solid and reasonably effective Arab government was established in the decade following the end of the war.

Was Cox's administration just? Justice should be an absolute concept, but often is relative. Is justice strongly tinged with paternalism genuinely just? All that can be said is that in the years that Percy Cox governed Mesopotamia/Iraq in one guise or another, absolute standards of justice were considerably higher than they had ever been before and higher than they were to become under complete political independence.

Cox was under increasing personal pressure throughout the war years. There was no question of leave or of any opportunity to leave the war zone or the Gulf region. Cox wrote later[78] of an occasional couple of days in Basra "to see to the welfare of my wife, who at this time was engaged in good works among the troops in Basra".

His work load increased substantially after the fall of Baghdad.

Throughout the war years, Belle remained in Basra. The summer of 1917 was particularly hot, even by Baghdad standards.

Philby also moved to Baghdad after its capture. He and Gertrude were Cox's closest collaborators in those first months. Philby wrote:[79]

> [Cox] was the most conscientious worker I ever met, and would let nothing pass which he did not understand or approve of; but he was never, in the midst of all his work, too busy to discuss a point that needed full consideration. Working in such intimate and constant contact with him was an experience never to be forgotten.
>
> He admitted gratefully, and it was an undeniable fact, that I had greatly lightened the labours of his heavy responsibilities, and Gertrude Bell, who often came to my office to discuss the work of the day, was doubly grateful to me for so economizing the Chief's time that he was more free now than formerly to meet the Shaikhs and notables, who so often wanted to see the great man himself and had so often to be put off on the ground that he was too busy to see them. The three of us, working in complete harmony, made quite an effective trio for the work in hand, and I particularly enjoyed the fairly frequent occasions when we foregathered in Cox's room for a cup of tea in the afternoon, and discussed all manner of things on an informal basis.

In the late summer of 1917 Percy and Belle Cox heard that their only son, Derek Percy, had been shot down in aerial combat in France on 21 August and that he was missing. Eventually they learned that he had been killed.[80] They had seen very little of him as he was growing up. In August 1914 he had volunteered and had joined the 11th Hussars. In September, he went to the Royal Military College, Sandhurst and was commissioned in the Machine Gun Corps in December. He went to France in March 1915 and transferred to the Royal Flying Corps in 1916. He was invalided home in October 1916 and after four months convalescence, served in England until June 1917, when he was posted back to active service in France.[81] Derek and Ethel Ellington, of Orton Waterville, near Peterborough, were married on 4 October 1916. Their son, Derek Percy Zachariah Cox, was born on 25 February 1918. Ethel Cox lived only a short time after his birth, dying on 3 January 1920. Percy and Belle had been against the marriage on the grounds that Derek was too young and that the uncertainties of the war made marriage a more than usually uncertain undertaking. The parents who thought that, and the young people who married in spite of their parents' misgivings in those years, were legion.

Philby wrote of Cox at the time of his son's death:[82]

> One day in the middle of August a telegram brought him the news of the death of his only son in France. He continued at work and, when I offered my condolences, all he said was: 'It makes me reproach myself bitterly that I was not a better father to him; you know, we really saw very little of him, and he was practically brought up by an aunt; my wife always stayed out with me in the hot weather and we seldom took leave. And now this happens.' Neither he nor Lady Cox had yet seen the boy's wife, who gave birth some months later to a posthumous son...

It has not been possible to find in any of Gertrude Bell's letters of about this time any reference to Derek Cox's death in action.

Cox himself wrote in a letter to Lord Hardinge in February 1918 commiserating with him that Hardinge's son Alec had been wounded in France and continued:[83]

> Our own poor boy – the Harrow boy whom I once worried you about [Hardinge was also an Old Harrovian] – was, to our great grief, killed flying in France at the end of August. He was first reported "missing" and from the flying reports first received we were in hopeful if anxious suspense for 6 weeks, but the "missing" was changed to "killed". I had done my best to get him to come to the R.F.C. out here, but he was not to be persuaded, and for pilots in France now the odds against must be tremendous. He was our only child and we looked forward so much if we both happily came well through the war, to contriving to be at home while he was at the University. He married when he came of age last year, a nice girl, my sisters tell me, and if as we hope we become grandparents in the near future, it will give us some consolation.

* * * *

Following a decision of the Eastern Committee of the War Cabinet early in 1918 *(see page 57)* Cox was summoned to Cairo and London for consultation. Belle remained in Basra.

He took with him letters from Gertrude Bell dated 22 February to her father and to Lord Hardinge, who was then Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office and a member of the Eastern Committee. The doubts about British policy for post-war Iraq following Lloyd George's speech of 5 January and President Wilson's fourteen

points was obviously worrying her; it is reasonable to assume that the apparent change of policy was also worrying Cox. To Lord Hardinge she wrote:[84]

> I must send a word of greeting to you by Sir Percy. It is an admirable plan to call him in to your councils and though we shall miss him very much during his absence I'm delighted he is going. He will give you such a vivid impression of our conditions and his tale will help you to stand out for us. Things look so black now that the fact that we cannot abandon this country to its fate needs insisting upon. You will hear from Sir Percy, but I should like also to tell you what amazing strides have been made towards ordered government since last March. Basrah *Vilayet* is, as far as administration is concerned, under peace conditions; we have had almost no trouble in Baghdad *Vilayet*.
>
> The frontier tribes, the people only half in occupied territory, have been a little tiresome, nothing to speak of, their position considered; and the rest have all come in to heel without a shot fired. There's no important element against us, above all no religious feeling; but this isn't the kind of success that can be achieved without compromising all that is best in the country, and the help that we have asked for and received places a heavy responsibility on us.
>
> The stronger the hold we are able to keep here the better the inhabitants will be pleased. What they dread is any half measure. They don't doubt that we shall treat them fairly, but they very much doubt whether they could hope for fair treatment from the Turks and they can't conceive an independent Arab government. Nor, I confess, can I. There is no one here who could run it. As far as you can get at public opinion – you can't get at it by any other means than personal intercourse and the impression derived therefrom – the guiding idea would be a general fear lest the equilibrium should be overturned once more and everybody obliged to trim their sails afresh – to a very tricky blast. If we are determined to hold on firmly, very well; that can be understood and accepted. If not, then the Turk or the German or anyone who will lay down clear lines of conduct, even if they are likely to be very uncomfortable lines. But they themselves can't lay down any lines at all, and they know it.

> If we wish to win their suffrages more completely during the long period which may elapse before the end of the war – or during the short period – we must do our utmost to leave administration unhampered. The political situation is, and is likely to remain, more important than the military, and the time has come for us to think first, or at any rate not second, of political considerations. Let us press the war in Syria and prepare for the peace here. Every relaxation of military rule which is not a positive danger should be admitted if it conduces to the prosperity and development of the country; that will be, incidentally, by far the best means of countering Turkish propaganda, better than blockades and internments and the rest.
>
> One other point which I've no doubt Sir Percy will develop: there must be no administrative distinction between the two *Vilayets*. On whatever terms we can hold the one, we must hold the other on the same. If we knew that when we first came to Baghdad, we are still more firmly convinced of it after eleven months' experience.

Cox delivered Gertrude's letter to her father, who wrote back to his daughter of his impressions. She replied on 5 June:[85]

> Yes, Sir Percy Cox is very shy and reserved, but he is a great person when you get to know him – a very real person too. I think he has rather suffered from having a wife who doesn't care a damn about anything at all. He doesn't expect ever to meet with sympathy or understanding.

It should be added that Elisabeth Burgoyne, Gertrude's biographer, comments on these words that "It is doubtful if Gertrude's estimation of Lady Cox was correct."[86]

As recounted in the previous chapter, after being in London and returning to Baghdad via Cairo and India, Cox was instructed to go on to Tehran as Acting British Minister. He passed through Basra to collect Belle, and went on to Baghdad and eventually, after a trying journey by road, arrived in Tehran.

The last word on Cox's departure from Baghdad is with Gertrude. Writing to her parents on 5 September, she said:[87]

> Sir Percy goes to Teheran in three days' time, taking Lady Cox with him – and the parrot, to give the touch of preposterousness which seems to be never lacking in

> Persia. Yes, it's opéra bouffe overlying what may well be tragedy – the whole thing, I mean, not his going.

And on 13 September:[88]

> Sir Percy has gone, alas. Before he left he came anxiously and asked me if I was properly looked after by everyone, and happy, and then he warmly embraced me which was very unusually outgoing. He's a dear, really – I do feel the deepest and warmest affection for him.

Chapter 4

Essay in Futility (I): Acting Minister to Persia, 1918–1920

> "It is so very difficult to carry through any measure in a country like Persia."
>
> Sir Percy Sykes in *A History of Persia* (published 1930)[1]

> "Cox, whose silence was considered to be golden among the Arabs, chilled the hearts of the Persians."
>
> Sir Percy Sykes in an *Obituary of Cox 1937*[2]

Sir Percy Cox went to Persia in September 1918 because Lord Curzon believed that he was the best man available to negotiate an Anglo-Persian treaty, a treaty to which Curzon had a passionate attachment. Curzon was almost certainly right in his judgment that only Cox could deliver what he wanted, but it is open to question whether British interests were best served by taking him away from Baghdad at such a critical time.

Curzon had had a deep interest in Persia for some thirty years. His book, *Persia and the Persian Question,* published in 1892, had been widely acclaimed. His biographer, Lord Ronaldshay, gave something of Curzon's emotional fervour when he wrote that, for Curzon, Persia was:[3]

> ... that magnetic land of mystery and romance over whose dusty plateaux and through whose ancient cities, crumbling uncared-for into inert but picturesque decay, he had travelled all but thirty years before. Persia that had provided him with material for the most monumental of all his books; the decrepit descendant of a mighty nation into whose veins he had striven so hard throughout the seven years of his Vice-royalty to infuse the blood of a new vitality. And, finding himself in a position not merely to formulate, but to enforce a policy, he was determined to make a supreme effort to drag her from the slough into which she had fallen, and to make of her what he had always dreamed that, with the benevolent co-operation of Great Britain, she might some day become a worthy successor to the kingdom of Cyrus and a strong link in a chain of friendly States, stretching from the confines of Europe to the frontiers of the Indian Empire.

Not, one would have thought, the hard-headed appraisal of a government seeking dispassionately to define its own strategic interests. It might be argued that Curzon was being particularly astute and far-seeing in that he recognized that Cox, who had stayed for a weekend with him in Hackwood, his country house, in May 1918, needed a break from Mesopotamia and the Gulf, and that a period in Tehran would refresh him and give him a perspective to face the trials in Iraq which would certainly come later. Such an argument might be made out as an exercise in post-event rationalization, but it would be difficult to make it convincing, even though something approaching that was the eventual reality.

Cox, the perfect diplomat, subsequently rationalized Curzon's choice:[4]

> I ventured to urge that having been with the Army in Mesopotamia from the commencement of the war I should much prefer to see the campaign through in my present post, but as it was considered that with British troops on the Bagdad-Enzeli line and questions for discussion continually arising between His Majesty's Minister and the G.O.C. in Mesopotamia, it was of great importance that the incumbent of the British Legation for the time being should be an officer with war-time experience of events and conditions in Mesopotamia and Persia, I did not feel justified in pressing my objections and left forthwith for Bagdad and Teheran.

Persia was in any case at that time a country in which the central government in Tehran had great difficulty in maintaining any semblance of authority. Poor communications would have made the task of an effective central political control difficult for even the strongest and most corruption-free government. A weak government, raddled with corruption, could command little respect anywhere in the land.

One consequence of the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 with its spheres of influence for Britain in the south and Russian in the north, was that both nations sought to defend their interests during the war years. Russian troops invaded large areas of the north, and British Indian troops large areas of the south. In neither case did the presence of foreign troops on Persian territory do very much for the credibility of the Persian government in the eyes of its own people.

In addition, German agents, and especially Wilhelm Wassmuss, who had been Vice-Consul in Bushire before the war, were effective in stirring up trouble for the British among the tribes of southern Persia. Wassmuss, a brave and resourceful man, became a particular enemy of the British forces in southern Persia during the war. At one stage,

tribesmen motivated by him captured and held prisoner a number of British personnel, including a Consul-General, Frederick (later Sir Frederick) O'Connor.

The Coxes journey from Baghdad to Tehran in September 1918 took almost a week over atrocious roads. There are two different views of the journey.

R.W. (later Sir Reader) Bullard accompanied Cox as Oriental Secretary and wrote:[5]

> It was now possible to get to Tehran by car in a few days instead of by horse or mule in several weeks. The Cox convoy, of one car and some T-model Ford vans, presented in an acute form the problem of the civilian VIP in war time. In order to "represent" properly the Coxes had to take a good deal of stuff to Tehran, but the caravan must have been a disheartening sight to troops on the road who for lack of transport had had no mail for two months.

Cox himself did not seem to think that he was taking "a good deal of stuff" with him. He wrote:[6]

> I halted at Baghdad only long enough to collect a convoy of cars for the conveyance of my wife and myself and our meagre war-scale belongings and we proceeded with all despatch to Teheran.

Cox's first months in Tehran were occupied in taking soundings of what was possible in a country where the combination of a weak ruler, a meddlesome parliament *(majles)* and a gaggle of intriguing officials made normal diplomatic exchanges problematical. In some ways, Persia seems not to have changed greatly over the space of the intervening ninety or so years.

By December 1918 he felt confident enough of his personal relationship with the Persian prime minister, Vossugh ed-Dowleh, to be able to outline to Curzon the sort of treaty which might be negotiated and eventually ratified by the Persian government. The principal elements in such a treaty would be an abrogation by the British government of the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, a guarantee by the British government of Persia's political independence and territorial integrity, and what in early twenty-first century parlance would be known as a "technical assistance package". This last involved the secondment of British experts to Persia, the key posts being a British general commanding the Persian army and a British expert as Financial Adviser to the Persian government.

Curzon secured Cabinet backing for the proposed treaty through a

meeting of the Eastern Committee on 30 December 1918. With this approval behind him, Cox began the process of detailed negotiation with the Persian prime minister.[7]

The negotiations were completed by April 1919. In May the British government offered a "sweetener" to the Persians in the form of a £2 million loan, half contributed by the British government itself, and half by the government of India. On 9 August 1919 Cox signed the treaty on behalf of the British government with the Persian prime minister.

The treaty was well-received by the British press, somewhat to the chagrin of Curzon, who wrote to his wife on 17 August:[8]

> The papers give a very good reception to my Persian Treaty, which I have been negotiating for the past year, and which is a great triumph, as I have done it all alone *(sic!)*. But not a single paper so much as mentions my name or has the dimmest perception that, had I not been at the Foreign Office, it would never have been done at all.

Curzon was being remarkably unjust to Cox in claiming that he, Curzon, had "done it all alone". But he was completely right to say that, had he not been at the Foreign Office, the treaty would never have seen the light of day. It can be thought that, maybe, British interests might have been better served had the treaty not been negotiated. Again it can be suggested that perhaps the greatest benefit to British interests in the region of process of negotiation of the treaty was that it gave Cox a break from the grind of Mesopotamia.

The treaty was never ratified by the Persian parliament. Vossugh ed-Dowleh was replaced as prime minister, and a succession of weak ministries followed until Reza Khan (later Shah Reza Pahlevi) seized power in a coup in February 1921. Curzon's Anglo-Persian treaty was formally annulled by the Persian government on 26 February 1921.

When, in the last months of 1920, it became apparent that the treaty was not going to be ratified, Curzon told the House of Lords on 16 November:[9]

> I thought myself that it was rather a pedantic and foolish policy on the part of the Persian Government to deny themselves the enormous advantages of the Agreement by which they had already begun to profit.

Cox had more to do in Tehran than merely negotiate Curzon's treaty. Philip Graves recounts two incidents, both of which must have caused Cox no little soul-searching.[10] The first was a trial for the murder of the British Military Attaché in Tehran by a member of the Legation's staff who had been held a prisoner by an unruly Persian band for several months. When this man was released, he found that, in his eyes at

least, the British Military Attaché had been paying far too much attention to his wife. Cox presided over the trial as British Minister. The man was found guilty, though with strong extenuating circumstances; Cox gave him a relatively light sentence of two years in prison. Curzon upheld Cox's judgment, saying that it gave: '... a most fair and lucid summary of the case... .'

The second affair concerned the eventual arrest by the Persians of the German ex-Vice-Consul, Wilhelm Wassmuss. Curzon had wished to put Wassmuss on trial in Bushire but Cox pointed out to him that, legally, Wassmuss could only be repatriated to Germany.

Cox arranged for Wassmuss and a colleague who had been arrested with him to be brought to the British Legation under guard. The intention was that the two men would be offered a conditional safe conduct back to Germany. On arrival at the British Legation, Wassmuss refused to get out of the carriage in which he had been brought and had to be manhandled out. He said that he was prepared to act like a gentleman if he was treated like a gentleman. Cox kept personally well clear of the ensuing fracas.

This incident reveals Cox's essentially warm and humane personality at conflict with his official self. His instinct was to help a man who had been a diplomatic colleague before the war in Bushire and for whom he had a considerable personal respect. His official position as British Minister precluded very much in the way of genuine help. His perhaps somewhat clumsy gesture in seeking to meet Wassmuss when the German was brought under guard to the British Legation backfired. Wassmuss, not unreasonably, seems to have regarded this gesture as disingenuous, if not hypocritical, and refused to play his assigned role. Cox was deeply distressed by the affair.

Wassmuss, after yet another escape from British custody, eventually made his way to the German Legation in Tehran and was repatriated without any British intervention, much to the annoyance of Cox. He and the British government had lost a certain amount of face over the incident.

Cox had also the responsibility of keeping an overall view of the extremely delicate security situation in Persian during his tenure. With the advantage of historical hindsight, this was probably more significant than his negotiation of the abortive Anglo-Persian treaty. For example, an Inter-Departmental Conference on Middle Eastern Affairs was held in the Foreign Office on 17 May 1920 with Curzon in the chair. Others in attendance included Edwin Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, Major-General Radcliffe, the Director of Military Operations at the War Office, and senior representatives of the Treasury, the Admiralty and the Air Ministry.

This conference reviewed the situation in Persia on the eve of Cox's departure and had in front of it a number of telegrams from Cox as well as communications from the War Office:[11]

> The situation in Persia was gravely affected by the Bolshevik menace and by the success which appeared to be attending the Bolshevik arms in the Caucasus. The Bolsheviks were established at Baku, or, at any rate, a government had come into power which was favourable to them. They were in occupation of the town, and presumably commanded the oil. From Baku they were pressing down towards Persia and contemplating a landing on Persian soil. The position at Tabriz was also disquieting. The British force there consisted of only two platoons, and was in a precarious position. They were threatened from the direction of Astara by a numerically superior force of Cossacks in Tabriz itself. If Tabriz went, Persian Azerbaijan, the present Persian Ministry, and with them the Anglo-Persian Agreement, would also go.

As far as his precious agreement was concerned, Curzon told the conference that:

> He had just received a private telegram from Sir Percy Cox reporting that the foreign editor of *The Times* had despatched a message to his correspondent at Teheran, in which he alleged that the Anglo-Persian Agreement had not been concurred in by the Government of India, that it was made solely with three Anglophile Persian Ministers, and that it was to all intents and purposes a dead letter. This was, in his opinion, a most mischievous communication, and of course totally inaccurate.

In fact, the report was substantially accurate.

Cox's problems at the time were not confined to difficulties with the Persian government. In Whitehall, Curzon was urging the War Office to retain the scattered British garrisons in Persia while at the same time the Treasury was insisting that expenditure should be cut down.

This last dilemma of the soldiers was almost an exact parallel to that in Iraq at that time: there was strong Treasury pressure for a major reduction in expenditure, but the opinion of the men on the spot was that an effective British military presence had to be maintained. The resolution of this dilemma, beginning on his return to Baghdad in October 1920, was an essential element in Cox's major achievement, the setting up of a viable government based on self-determination in Iraq.

Chapter 5

Essay in Futility (II): Military Government in Iraq, 1918–1920

> "In this regard and with my heart filled with sadness, I have to say that it is my belief that there is no Iraqi people inside Iraq. There are only diverse groups with no national sentiments. They are filled with superstitions and false religious traditions with no common grounds between them. They easily accept rumours and are prone to chaos, prepared always to revolt against any government. It is our responsibility to form out of this mass one people that we would then guide, train and educate. Any person who is aware of the difficult circumstances of this country would appreciate the efforts that have to be exerted to achieve these objectives."
>
> Faisal I, King of Iraq in 1932[1]

> "Colonel Wilson has recommended that he be given authority to announce the intended return of Sir P.Cox"
>
> Sir Arthur Hirtzel, India Office[2]

Faisal was proclaimed king of Iraq by Sir Percy Cox in 1921; the prime objective then was to create in Iraq over a period of time a national awareness and sentiment which would be greater than the fractious society over which Faisal had tried to exert a degree of authority for over a decade.

The administration of Iraq (as Mesopotamia was called from the moment the stirrings of nationalism became apparent) from Cox's departure for London at the end of February 1918 until his return as High Commissioner in October 1920 was that of a military government. No matter how benign and well-meaning a military government might be, it will inevitably, by its very nature, be unpopular. Further, what a populace might be prepared to accept under war-time conditions becomes rapidly unacceptable when the war is over. Finally, during the period of hostility in Iraq, the British Army spent a considerable amount of money, which spread throughout Iraqi society, causing many people to benefit. This expenditure was drastically reduced as soon as the fighting stopped, with inevitable unfortunate economic consequences.

It has to be recalled also that the British government itself was not altogether clear on what it expected its post-war relationship with Iraq to be. Formal annexation or a pre-1914 style protectorate seemed to be ruled out. Arab nationalism had to be accepted, but no one in authority had a firm and unambiguous idea of what the alternatives

might be, save that, in one way or another, vital British interests had to be defended. A broad, if somewhat ill-defined, objective existed; the means to this objective were undecided.

Sir Percy Cox's presence in Tehran did not mean that he had lost all contact with what was happening in Baghdad. Indeed, one of the original reasons for his posting to Tehran was that he would be able to ensure the co-ordination of British policy in two countries deemed to be of vital importance for British interests at that time.

Lieutenant-Colonel Arnold Wilson held overall responsibility for the administration of Iraq. His title remained Acting Civil Commissioner, however; he was never formally designated Civil Commissioner. Thus there had always been an implication that Cox would return to Baghdad.

Wilson, an enthusiastic imperialist, had no doubt that British interests in Iraq could only be defended by a firm, paternalistic, long-term British presence, backed up by a substantial financial investment and a strong military presence. An often-quoted comment of the time was that, whereas the British government spoke of an Arab government in Iraq with British advisers, the reality was a British government with very few Arab advisers.

S.H. Longrigg, himself a member of Arnold Wilson's administration, wrote of it:[3]

> The merits and shortcomings of this improvised Administration form a study of some interest. To an unusual extent its tone was determined by the high-minded, dominating character of A.T. Wilson, which imposed itself upon the small body of officers who essayed to carry out his policy: a policy of forthright, efficient, paternal Government in the interests of the masses – and especially of the tribesmen – but unsympathetic to local politics or nationalist aspirations. The problem created for his Administration by post-war demobilization and the claims of other services was solved by retaining some but not all of his best officers, and borrowing others from other Arabic-speaking territories, or from regiments leaving Iraq. The resulting standard, while not unmixed with inferior elements, was generally high in energy, personal integrity, and good intentions. The complexities of their tasks, and the deeper currents of opposition which developed, were commonly under-rated – often with immediately tragic results – by these light-hearted amateur administrators, and even by the few experienced veterans eminent among them. The day-by-day attitude of the Administration was neither illiberal nor repressive, the establishment of cordial

Turkish counter attack (Imperial War Museum Photographic Archives)

relations between governor and governed was habitual, and much admirable work was done by the departments.

Few indeed could deny the improvement in the honesty and justice of the Administration, its prevailing security, its achieved and expected progress in material matters, over the familiar Turkish standards. Nevertheless, the charge that the type or tone of this Administration were among the causes of the lawless outbreaks so soon and so disappointingly to follow cannot completely be denied.

It was, first, that of a Christian Power. To some indifferent, this fact was objectionable to many, and not least to the Shi'i hierarchy whose status and powers would be lost for ever if a foreign secular Power were to be installed. In Sunni minds a nostalgic feeling for the *Caliphate* as the true and sole legitimate source of power, even in its temporary defeat, was nearly allied to their religion; and the indulgence of such feelings was the easier, and the new regime must remain the more rootless and entrusted, while peace with Turkey was delayed. Religion and Ottoman loyalties apart, the British regime was foreign

> and unfamiliar. Its spokesmen, often weak in Arabic, differed from their predecessors, to the point of strangeness, in dress, manner, and social customs. The use of Indians as clerks and departmental subordinates was universal, and was resented. The efficiency at which the Administration aimed was no desideratum of the governed, and its ranking as a paramount objective has been alleged as a chief defect of the regime.
>
> The charge is doubtfully true; but in fact little was done to render the machinery of Government easy or acceptable to its public. It tended to rigidity of standard, mixed little tolerance with its uncomfortable and not always desired justice, and was pitiless to long-familiar laxities.

Cox described his own view of the situation in Iraq in November 1918:[4]

> By the end of the war the people of Mesopotamia had come to accept the fact of our occupation and were resigned to the prospect of a permanent British administration; some, especially in Basrah and the neighbourhood, even looked forward with satisfaction to a future in which they would be able to pursue their commerce and agriculture with a strong central authority to preserve peace and order. Throughout the country there was a conviction, which frequently found open expression, that the British meant well by the Arabs, and this was accompanied by a frank appreciation of the increased prosperity which had followed in the track of our armies and, no doubt, by a lively sense of favours to come, in the way of progress and reform. But with the Armistice, and the Anglo-French declaration by which it was immediately followed, a new turn was given to the native mind.
>
> In Bagdad, where political ambitions are more highly developed than elsewhere in Iraq, within a week of the publication of the Declaration the idea of an Arab Amir [prince] for Iraq was everywhere being discussed and in Mohammedan circles met with universal approval, though there was no consensus of opinion as to who should fill the role.

It might be argued that Cox's usually acute political antenna was

letting him down. Almost inevitably, he was hearing at that time the views of the Sunni majority.

Gertrude Bell wrote a lengthy memorandum entitled *Self-Determination in Mesopotamia* early in 1919. This memorandum might be called a defensive establishment view. It was sent on by Arnold Wilson to the India Office in London and to the government of India in Delhi. Gertrude's opening paragraphs read:[5]

> The publication of the Anglo-French declaration, whatever may have been its political significance elsewhere, was at best a regrettable necessity in the Iraq. Though it did little but reiterate the intentions which had already been announced on the occupation of Baghdad, it differed from the former pronouncement in one important particular, namely that whereas the Baghdad proclamation was issued while the upshot of the war was still extremely doubtful and for that reason was regarded mainly as a military expedient, the Anglo-French declaration was published after the victory of the Allies and commanded belief. Previous to its appearance the people of Mesopotamia, having witnessed the successful termination of the war, had taken it for granted that the country would remain under direct British control and were as a whole content to accept the decision of arms.
>
> The declaration opened up other possibilities which were regarded almost universally with anxiety, but gave opportunity to political intrigue to the less stable and more fanatical elements. It is indeed remarkable that it created so little stir. It must be remembered that its publication occurred very shortly after the return to Baghdad under the terms of the Armistice of a number of persons undesirable in the interests of public tranquility. Men of Arab race who had been in Turkish Civil or Military employment and had thrown in their lot with the Turks after the occupation, active members of the Committee of Union and Progress (the Party to whom the entrance of Turkey into the war against Great Britain was directly due) and others who had not ventured to remain in Baghdad on account of their well-known Turkish sympathies came back from Mosul early in November. Many of these engaged at once in anti-British propaganda.

Arnold Wilson himself sent a lengthy despatch to the India Office reflecting his own unhappiness with the declaration and the vistas which it opened. He wrote that the declaration:[6]

> ... bids fair to involve us ... in difficulties as grave as Sir H. McMahon's early assurances to the Sherif of Mecca. ... It is for the representatives of H.M.G. on the spot to make the best of the situation created by this Declaration ... but unless it is superseded by a pronouncement of the Peace Conference ... we shall be faced with the alternative of evading the spirit while perhaps keeping within the letter of this Declaration or of setting up a government which will be the negation of orderly progress and which will gravely embarrass the efforts of the European Powers to introduce stable institutions into the Middle East. The Declaration involves us here on the spot in diplomatic insincerities which we have hitherto successfully avoided and places a potent weapon in the hands of those least fitted to control a nation's destinies. ... If the future status of the country is to be dealt with successfully, it must be treated independently of Arab problems elsewhere. ... The average Arab, as opposed to the handful of amateur politicians in Baghdad, see the future as one of fair dealing and material and moral progress under the aegis of Great Britain. ... The country as a whole neither expects nor desires any such sweeping scheme of independence as is adumbrated, if not clearly denoted, in the Declaration. ... Our best course is to declare Mesopotamia to be a British Protectorate under which all races and classes will be given forthwith the maximum degree of liberty and self-rule compatible with good and safe government.

Cox, Wilson, Gertrude Bell and almost certainly a majority of senior British officials in Iraq during the war years had had in their minds that the British occupation would, in one way or another, be permanent. The apparent easy acceptance of British rule, especially in Basra, made these officials believe that such a conjuncture would be welcomed by a great majority of Iraqis. These officials had little understanding of, or sympathy for, expressions of Arab nationalism. Thus many of them had difficulty in accepting the major volte-face in the policy of the British government towards Iraq implicit in the Anglo-French declaration of November 1918, a volte-face inevitable once the British government admitted that Arab nationalism was a force it was not prepared to fight, regardless of the longer-term implications for the British Empire of an acceptance of the principle of political self-determination.

Being out of the immediate political turmoil in Baghdad, and in any case having substantial other preoccupations in Tehran, Cox was able to maintain a perspective. In any case, his maturity and experience

made it easier for him to make the necessary mental adjustment to a radically changed situation. Finally, he had benefitted, of course, both from personal contact with senior officials in London in the spring of 1918 and from a relatively lengthy period away from Baghdad.

Wilson was authorized to conduct a plebiscite in Iraq asking three questions of the people:

1) Did they favour a single Arab state under British tutelage stretching from the northern boundary of the province of Mosul (in other words, what was expected to be the frontier with Turkey) to the Persian Gulf?
2) If the people of Iraq wanted such a state, did they consider that it should have a titular Arab head?
3) If the answer to the second question was affirmative, then whom would the Iraqi people prefer as head of their state?

The plebiscite was held in January 1919. Gertrude Bell prepared a report on it which Wilson sent to the India Office and followed up by sending Gertrude herself to London. It was subsequently considered that the results of this plebiscite were largely meaningless. One fact which did emerge was that there was a solid consensus of Iraqi opinion favouring the uniting of the Mosul province with Baghdad and Basra. The implication of this was that relatively large areas inhabited by Kurds were also to be included in the new state.

Yet the very idea of such a plebiscite in a country like Iraq at that time seems naïve and ill-judged. A meaningful plebiscite implies the necessity of formulating a simple question to which an unambiguous "yes" or "no" answer can be given by the people. It is very easy for representatives of "advanced" political cultures, seeking to "do good" in countries with a substantially different political heritage, to assume that they know best, and to accept also that their political ideas, which may in theory be capable of translation, in fact are unlikely to be understood. A recognition that substantial cultural gaps exists between peoples implies no value judgment but unfortunately it often happens that "advisers" appear to be saying to the governments or rulers they purport to advise: "Why don't you be like us?", or, worse, "We know what is good for you!"

For the great majority of the people living in the three former Ottoman *Vilayets* of Basra, Baghdad and Mosul, government in the past had tended to be synonymous with long periods of indifference punctuated by occasional bursts of brutal repression. The essential relationship between governors and governed in those territories tended to be strongly marked by a mutual fear and threat of violence. The idea that the people themselves might have the power to decide

A casualty clearing station (Imperial War Museum Photographic Archives)

on their own political future was not easily understood, simply because there was nothing hitherto in the history of the people of Iraq to permit them to grasp the implications of what was being offered to them.

As the Naqib of Baghdad said to Gertrude Bell:[7]

> Where is our power? If I say that I wish for the rule of the English and the English do not consent to govern us, how can I force them? And if I wish for the rule of another, and the English resolve to remain, how can I eject them? I recognize your victory. You are the governors and I am the governed. And when I am asked what is my opinion as to the continuance of British rule, I reply that I am the subject of the victor.

In Iraq, almost from one day to the next, the erstwhile oppressor was driven out and a new government, initially backed up with bayonets as the previous government had been, installed itself. Then, one day, this new government began to talk of "self determination" and made it fairly clear that it did not have the iron will to enforce its wishes at bayonet point in the way in which people in Iraq had been accustomed for generations.

Wilson himself was absent from Baghdad attending meetings in Cairo, London, Paris and Damascus over the period end-February to

mid-May 1919. During this period, the Treaty of Versailles was being negotiated, drafted and re-drafted. The Treaty was eventually signed on 28 June 1919. Its Article 22 dealt with mandates and contained provisions which were relevant to Iraq:[8]

> Certain communities formerly belonging to the Turkish Empire have reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognized subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone. The wishes of these communities must be a principal consideration in the selection of the Mandatory.

At about the same time, the Amir Faisal, frustrated by the atmosphere of the Peace Conference in Paris, wrote a letter to Clayton, who at that time was still Chief Political Officer to the Egyptian Expeditionary Force in Palestine and Syria, in which he referred to the "severity" of the British authorities in Iraq.

According to Hubert (later Sir Hubert) Young, who had served under Cox in Mesopotamia and worked later with Lawrence and who at that time was secretary of the Inter-departmental Committee on Middle Eastern Affairs, chaired by Lord Curzon and responsible for the overall co-ordination of British policy in the region, this "severity":[9]

> ... had begun, though only gradually, to turn away the affection of the people. He said that there was a general feeling that the time had come for a change if the promises of the Anglo-French declaration were to be fulfilled. His Baghdadi officers, while well aware that it was not possible for Mesopotamia to stand alone for a considerable time, felt strongly the need for despatch in the constitution of a National Government, and perceived clearly that the longer it took to change the system the greater would be the difficulty in making the change. This letter was written in such excellent English that it did not read to me like a translation, and I thought that Lawrence had drafted it, while Lord Curzon, conscious of having gone into the whole question two months before, and of having approved what he felt to be the utmost degree of Arab self-government compatible with military occupation, thought that it savoured of impertinence.

The India Office was well aware that the world was changing rapidly and that pre-1914 Imperial ideas had become anachronistic. Sir Arthur Hirtzel wrote to Wilson in Baghdad on 16 July, 1919:[10]

> As regards Arab nationalism I think you will soon find yourself in pretty deep waters and, to be frank, I do not think you are going the right way to work with it. We have recently had two longish telegrams from you, one commenting on the memorial of the Mesopotamian officers and the other in which you speak of incurring the displeasure of H.M.G. In both of them, while it might perhaps be difficult to quarrel with the individual propositions laid down, I feel that the whole attitude is mistaken. You appear to be trying impossibly to turn the tide instead of guiding it into the channel that will suit you best. You are going to have an Arab state whether you like it or not, whether Mesopotamia wants it or not, and the constitution (which is not really a constitution at all because the vital part – the Central Government – is missing) accepted when you were over here can only be temporary for the duration of the British occupation. When we get our Mandate these *disiecta membra* will have to be coordinated into something organic. There is no getting out of it and it is much wiser to face the fact. Moreover, you are going to have a lot of people in Mesopotamia whose heads will be full of absurd ideas from Syria and Heaven knows where, and room and use must be found for them, and when you've got them you must not let them resign. Otherwise we shall have another Egypt on our hands.
>
> All these things are going to be contrary to our most cherished hopes, and nothing that you or I can say or do will alter them. I hoped you would have realized when you were over here that the idea of Mesopotamia as the model of an efficiently administered British dependency or protectorate is dead (the same thing is dying in India and decomposing in Egypt) and that an entirely new order of ideas reign. No doubt we must do what we can to put on the brakes. ... But it is of no use to shut one's eyes to the main facts. We must adapt ourselves and our methods to the new order of ideas and find a different way of getting what we want.

Throughout the rest of 1919 the situation in Iraq remained uneasy. On 10 November, an Inter-departmental Conference in London had agreed that Cox should return to Iraq. Curzon sent a telegram to Cox in Tehran on 14 November expressing his own unhappiness with the situation:[11]

> Present situation in Mesopotamia is causing us considerable anxiety. The existing military administration which has been necessitated by circumstances of war is rigid, costly, and hampering the development either of civil administration or whatever form of native government is decided in future. It is for the most part in the hands of young officers who are necessarily lacking in experience. The system of civil administration now being set up appears neither to fulfill joint declaration of November 1918 nor to satisfy local aspirations nor to proceed with sufficient responsibility. It is a system of British government advised by Arabs (and this only to a small extent) rather than that of an Arab government with British advisers and it appears in certain respects to be developing on familiar Indian lines. The French are insisting on the absolute parallelism of Mesopotamia and Syria and ask why we should do in Mesopotamia what we protest against their doing in Syria. Feisal is quite capable of embarrassing us by similar tactics. His officers are loud in their denunciation of the Baghdad administration and have now appealed to the Peace Conference for the immediate constitution of a national government. ... Finally, we receive very disquieting reports from some of our own officials who witness with growing anxiety the existing trend of administration.

Cox replied to Curzon on 23 November, a reply which suggests that he had himself not fully come to grips with the realities of the situation in Iraq at that time:[12]

> I agree that existing system of administration does not fulfill in all respects either the letter or the spirit of the Anglo-French Declaration but at all events up till recently no Arab material has been available which would have made it possible to form an administration strictly on these lines, and indeed I have always doubted whether that Declaration provided a practical basis for the administration of Mesopotamia ... I have kept in touch with the progress of the Baghdad administration ... I derived the impression that the general public and settled tribes were well content with their lot and I have heard nothing calculated to cause anxiety to H.M.G. ... Criticisms are mainly from outside and are connected with relations between Mesopotamia and neighbouring states rather than with the internal situation.

Turkish Prisoners of War (Imperial War Museum Photographic Archives)

At this time, Wilson in Baghdad seems to have lost his nerve. On 15 November he sent on to the India Office a report by Gertrude Bell on her recent visit to London, Cairo and Damascus entitled *Syria in October* with an accompanying note of his own in which he said:[13]

> The fundamental assumption throughout this note [Gertrude's report] is that an Arab state in Mesopotamia and elsewhere within a short period of years is a possibility and that the recognition or creation of a logical scheme of government on these lines, in supersession of those on which we are now working in Mesopotamia, would be practicable and popular. ... My observations in this country and elsewhere have forced me to the conclusion that this assumption is erroneous.
>
> ...For some time to come the appointment of Arab Governors or high officials, except in an advisory capacity, would involve the rapid decay of authority, law, and order, followed by anarchy and disorder, and the movement, once started, would not be checked; fanaticism, not nationalism, would become the ruling motive. We must therefore go slowly. Effective British administration is vital to the continued existence of Mesopotamia as an independent state or administrative entity.

Wilson may possibly have been logically correct in this conclusion, but he was being politically naive. The plain fact was that the British people collectively had neither the economic means nor the political will to impose an alien and unpopular government on the people of Iraq. Gertrude Bell had recognized this, long before Cox, and had begun to look for a viable alternative. It is possible to argue that Arnold Wilson never accepted the fact.

On 24 April 1920 in San Remo, the League of Nations awarded a Mandate for Iraq to Britain. The precise north-eastern (bordering Kurdistan), northern (bordering Turkey) and north-western (bordering Syria) frontiers of the new state were not defined. Nor was the lengthy south-east frontier bordering the Arabian peninsula. A public announcement of the acceptance by Britain of the Mandate was made on 3 May. By then it had been decided that Cox would return to Baghdad as soon as possible to take over from Wilson but Cox did not wish to return for as long as there was still a British military government in place. His political antennae were very much more acute than those of Wilson. It was not, therefore, until October 1920 that Sir Percy took up his new post of British High Commissioner in Iraq, though he did pass through Baghdad for a few days in June on his way home from Tehran.

Wilson was becoming increasingly worried – with some reason. On 15 May he telegraphed to the India Office[14] saying that in his opinion the situation in Iraq was dangerous and that the general commanding the British troops in Iraq, General Haldane, shared his view.

Shortly before Cox reached Baghdad in June, Wilson sent a further telegram to London which suggested that he himself had no longer the will to continue in Iraq. A key paragraph said:[15]

> Whilst acting in accordance with the spirit, and so far as may be with the letter of the mandate, we cannot retain our position as mandatory by a policy of conciliation of extremists. Having set our hand to the task of regenerating the internal Government, we must be prepared to furnish alike men and money and to maintain continuity of control for years to come. We must be prepared, regardless of the League of Nations, to go very slowly with constitutional or democratic institutions, the application of which to Eastern countries has been attempted of late years with such little degree of success. If His Majesty's Government regard such a policy as impracticable or beyond our strength (as well they may) I submit that they would do better to face the alternative, formidable and, from the local point of view, terrible as it is, and evacuate Mesopotamia.

Not surprisingly, this message did not go down very well in London. The British government did not have the men, and above all did not have the money, to permit it to begin to contemplate Wilson's first option. His second option, evacuation, was unthinkable. The government was confident that, if anyone could square the apparent circle, that individual would be Sir Percy Cox.

Of Cox's days in Baghdad en route to London, Gertrude Bell wrote to her family on 20 June:[16]

> Sir Percy came after dinner and I gave him what I believe to be the correct view of the whole Arab situation, and how badly it has been handled for the last eight months. He was most understanding. Being with him was like getting on to a rock, after the wild upheavals of the last fortnight.

On the same day that Gertrude wrote this letter, 20 June 1920, the British government issued a formal statement as to its intentions in Iraq:[17]

> His Majesty's Government having been entrusted with the Mandate for Mesopotamia, anticipate that the Mandate

> will constitute Mesopotamia an independent State under the guarantee of the League of Nations and subject to the mandate to Great Britain; that it will lay on them the responsibility for the maintenance of internal peace and external security, and will require them to formulate an Organic Law to be framed in consultation with the people of Mesopotamia, and with due regard to the rights, wishes and interests of all the communities of the country. The Mandate will contain provisions to facilitate the development of Mesopotamia as a self-governing State until such time as it can stand by itself, when the Mandate will come to an end.
>
> The inception of this task His Majesty's Government has decided to entrust to Sir Percy Cox, who will accordingly return to Baghdad in the autumn, and will resume his position on the termination of the existing military administration as Chief British Representative in Mesopotamia. Sir Percy Cox will be authorized to call into being, as provisional bodies, a Council of State under an Arab President, and a General Elective Assembly representative of and freely elected by the population of Mesopotamia, and it will be his duty to prepare, in consultation with the General Elective Assembly, the permanent Organic Law.

During the summer of 1920, from June to September, there was a serious outbreak of unrest among many of the tribes of Iraq, especially those of the region of the middle Euphrates. The tribes of the southern Euphrates and along the lower Tigris remained in general calm, as did certain key tribes of the northern region. It was as well that they did, for until the arrival of over 20,000 British troops in September as reinforcements for the garrison, thus permitting the situation to be restored, the problem of internal security was at times critical.

Yet this tribal uprising has to be seen for what it was. It was in no sense an Iraq-wide "struggle for national liberation", as some Iraqis subsequently liked to claim. The rebellious tribes were in general Shia and they had a long history of rebelling against the Turkish authorities. This is not to say that the rebellion was unavoidable. More tact, more experience, more political acumen and a gentler hand on the part of Arnold Wilson might have avoided the worst of the uprising. Had Cox stayed in Baghdad rather than move to Tehran at that critical time, the uprising might not have happened at all. Again it can be said that the "what ifs..." of history may be fascinating to think about but add little to a solid analysis of events.

The British Army enters Baghdad, March 1917 (Mary Evans Picture Library/AISA Media)

Chapter 6

Peace-making and Statecraft: High Commissioner in Iraq, 1920–1923

"Mesopotamia's real need is for a man of the type of Cromer, if such a man can be found. He should have sufficient strength of character to direct measures for the maintenance of security, but he must also have had experience of the complexities of an Oriental administration. He must be skilled in the art of making a little go a long way. He will doubtless have to be clothed with a great deal of personal authority."

Sir George Buchanan, in *The Times,* September 1919[1]

"... the time is passed when the people of this country will be prepared to play the fairy godmother to all undeveloped parts of the world, and to hold themselves responsible for introducing a higher standard of administration in uncivilized countries. We simply cannot afford it."

Marquess of Crewe, House of Lords, June 1920[2]

*

Cox returned to Iraq as British High Commissioner in October 1920, thus ending a period of almost six years of British military government.[3] Arnold Wilson[4] wrote that on 4 October 1920 he handed back the keys of the office of Civil Commissioner in Mesopotamia to the permanent incumbent, Sir Percy Cox, for whom he had acted for two and a half years.

The ensuing thirty-one months, to 5 May 1923, marked the climax of Cox's career, the achievement which gave him a dominant place in the history of British involvement in the Middle East in the twentieth century. He ensured that British interests were defended in a strategically vital territory, a territory in which it was known that there was a significant amount of oil, and at the same time established a viable Arab government in Iraq, thus honouring promises made by the British government. It is difficult to identify a contemporary compatriot who could have achieved what Cox achieved in Baghdad during those months.

There were four elements in this achievement. First, Cox recognized that an effective political consensus in Iraq could be built around no one but the Amir Faisal bin Hussain and lent the weight of his own

reputation to Faisal's candidature. Second, he, with others, ensured that both the British government and a great majority of the Iraqi people accepted Faisal as king. Third, he played a vital role in defining a stable frontier between the new state of Iraq and this state's aggressive neighbour to the south-west, Ibn Saud. Finally he negotiated and ensured the ratification of a treaty between Britain and Iraq which established the international legitimacy of the new state, and thus gave a degree at least of longevity to the British presence in Iraq.

In London in late July and early August 1920 he was occupied in ensuring that he would have a basic framework of support from the government for the enormous challenge which he had accepted. The first element in this preparation was to make certain that he would have complete authority in Iraq. This meant that the British military government had to end and that, as High Commissioner, his reporting link was direct to a minister in the British government.

This presented an immediate problem, in that the British government itself was undecided on exactly how it would exercise the essential overall control of the territories for which it had accepted a League of Nations Mandate. Both the Colonial Office and the India Office had some claim. Cox favoured a completely new ministry. On 5 August 1920 he submitted a note to the government in which he said:[5]

> In connection with the draft of the instructions to be issued to me on appointment as High Commissioner, Mesopotamia I was desired to record my views as to the Department of State which should in future be responsible for the handling of Mesopotamian affairs. Since the beginning of the War in Mesopotamia and our first occupation of Basra, I have many times participated in discussions on this subject and have always been very strongly of the opinion that the only satisfactory arrangement would be the creation of a separate Department of State composed in the first instance of experts selected from the circle of officials who during the first few years have served in or handled the affairs of the countries in this sphere of the Middle East.
>
> Both the "India Office" and the "Colonial Office" as such are clearly open to objection from the point of view of the amour propre of the States concerned. Apart from this there is a consensus of opinion that the India Office cannot expediently continue to deal with Mesopotamia, while it appears to me that the Colonial Office does not possess the right experience for handling the countries included in the Middle East. It is consequently my deliberate

> opinion that we should aim on the formation of a new and separate Ministry with its own Secretary of State.
>
> As regards the handling of Foreign Affairs I submit that there need be no difficulty in referring questions for the views of the Foreign Office and I am of opinion that until accommodation can be provided for the new Ministry, the personnel should be attached to the Foreign Office as being the Department of State most closely concerned with the work of the Ministry of the Near East.

Cox needed to recruit a small team of people on whom he could count to accompany him back to Iraq. This team included H. St J. B. Philby and C.C. Garbett, both of whom had served under him during the war years in Mesopotamia. Major R.E. Cheesman, his ornithologist friend, accompanied him as private secretary.

No one would have known better than Cox the enormity of the challenge facing him. It was not as though he was going off to govern some island set in a remote sea with a homogenous population, a population blessed with a common and coherent political consensus. The population of Iraq, at that time estimated to be just under three million people, was ethnically and confessionally heterogeneous. Arnold Wilson prepared a table of the estimated population of Iraq in 1919, based on a "very rough" census carried out in that year. This estimate excluded the population of the Kurdish district of Sulaimaniyah, but otherwise the numbers included about a quarter of a million Kurds. Wilson made no mention of the Turkish and Turkoman population; if there were a quarter of a million Kurds, there may well have been fifty thousand people speaking a Turkic language. The following table is a summary of Wilson's figures:[6]

ESTIMATED POPULATION OF IRAQ

	Vilayet of Baghdad	Basra	Mosul	Total
Sunni	524,414	42,558	425,813	992,785
Shia	750,421	721,414	22,180	1,494,015
Jewish	62,565	10,088	13,835	86,488
Christian	20,771	2,551	55,370	78,692
Other	2,133	8,989	31,180	42,302
TOTAL	1,360,304	785,600	548,378	2,694,282

Cox would have followed closely the drama of Faisal's ejection from Syria and he saw Arnold Wilson's telegram of 31 July suggesting that Faisal be offered the Amirate (principality) of Mesopotamia. He sent a response himself to this telegram on 3 August seeking to ascertain how

much local support Faisal would have. Wilson replied to Cox on 5 August:[7]

> I think that there is a fair prospect of obtaining spontaneous demand by fair proportion of representative opinion for Faisal as Amir. I would propose utilizing for the purpose the Committee of ex-Turkish deputies, first sitting of which at Bagdad to discuss passing a law is due to take place on 6th August. But it must be realized that if this demand is made, and if Faisal refuses to come on terms to us or if French objections are considered to preclude his nomination, position here will be more than ever difficult and we will probably be forced into supporting candidature of Abdulla, who would in my belief almost certainly be a failure. Moreover, by giving Faisal our support we may alienate Said *(sic)* Talib and his party.

The British Army had withdrawn from Syria on 1 November 1919, giving way to the French, in accordance with the broad details of the Sykes-Picot agreement. Throughout the early months of 1920 there had been considerable agitation on the part of what was called at the time the Sharifians (the Sharif Hussain and his sons) and their supporters, who included T.E. Lawrence and prominent Arab officers of Iraqi origin (for example, Nuri Said and Jaafar al Askari) who had served with distinction under Faisal in the Arab revolt.

In broad terms, this agitation had as its objective the maintenance, or rather, the enhancement, of the political power of the Hashemites in the Arab world. Playing the British off against the French was an important element in the Hashemite strategy as was engendering a fear in British hearts that people in Iraq would have preferred a Muslim Turkish government to a Christian British administration.

An Arab "Mesopotamian Congress" had met in Damascus in March, and had proclaimed Faisal king of Syria and his elder brother Abdullah king of Mesopotamia. Nuri Said, at the request of Hubert Young, had written a letter to Young dated 5 April 1920 "giving a hurried sketch of the facts of the situation ...". Concerning the situation in Iraq, Nuri wrote:[8]

> Soon after the Armistice Turkish propaganda became very active in the northern part of the country, and its emissaries, taking advantage of the vexed conditions arising from the unpopular military administration, succeeded by accusations against the British in influencing a small section of the people, alienating their sympathies and ranging them once more on their side.

> At some places it attained such dimensions as to give to some of the British Officials on the spot the wrong impression that there was a strong responsible party in the Arab countries desirous of reinstating the Turk. The people were certainly very much excited over the rumours disseminated broadcast that, after all the sacrifices made, Mesopotamia along with Syria was to be partitioned and colonized.

After harping again on the alleged severity and insensitivity of the British military administration in Iraq, and stating that the: "... Emir Abdullah, second son of His Majesty King Hussain, a strong anti-Turk and the leader of the Army against the Turks in the Hijaz, was proclaimed King of Mesopotamia" by the congress in Damascus, Nuri went on:

> ... the Proclamation of Emir Abdullah as King is, in my opinion, a justice done to the patriotic and religious sentiments of the whole people in town and country. The Sunnis will gladly hail him, the son of the Prophet, as ruler and king, and the Shiahs will be greatly gratified to become subjects of a true descendant of their chief Imam Ali Ibn Abu Taleb. This for them is a historical event that will range as the consummation of the long deferred hopes.

And finally Nuri touched on another sensitive issue:

> With regard to the Kurdish minority to the North-East of Mosul, who are Sunni Moslems by religion and a large part of whom use the Arabic as well as their native language, it is not expected that they will object to becoming subjects of a Sunni Moslem King. Moreover, their economical interests are essentially involved with those of Musul and Baghdad. And, as in the case of the Arab tribal area, it will be desirable to provide them with a special administration.

Young had minuted on Nuri's letter (which was circulated to the members of the Eastern Committee of the cabinet for a meeting on 12 April):[9]

> These are not the views of an anti-European extremist, though they are certainly those of a nationalist. They show a certain ignorance of events in Mesopotamia and have no real value as representing Mesopotamian opinion

> in the absence of names of the notables and chiefs concerned. I tried to get these out of Nuri, but he was clearly a little nervous of the use to which they might be put. At the same time, we should be unwise to disregard the views of the Mesopotamians in Damascus.

On 3 May, at the San Remo conference, Britain had accepted a Mandate for Iraq from the League of Nations. The same day in Baghdad A.T. Wilson had issued a communiqué on the proposed mandate without first clearing the text with London. On 8 May he had telegraphed:[10]

> I submit that it is for His Majesty's Government as Mandatory Power to prescribe what Government shall be engaged in the immediate future. To refer question afresh to divisional councils and to "local opinion" can have but one result. The extremists, who following the example of their colleagues in Syria, are demanding absolute independence for Mesopotamia with or without Abdullah, will by threats and by appeals during the coming month of Ramazan to religious fanaticism win over moderate men who have hitherto looked to His Majesty's Government for a scheme offering a reasonable chance of success and which they can support. The moderates cannot oppose extremists unless they know that His Majesty's Government is prepared to give them active support.

It is interesting, if pointless, to speculate on what might have happened in Mesopotamia if Faisal had not been ejected from Syria by the French army and the British government had decided to (or decided not to) back Abdullah. The fact was that, as of August 1920, Britain's protégé in Syria had lost his throne and the British government had either to ignore the fact or find him another job, ideally a better job. Ignoring the fact would have involved no little loss of face by Britain in the Arab world.

At a meeting of the Finance Committee of the cabinet on 3 August it was decided that Cox should prepare, in consultation with Curzon and Montagu, a draft of the formal instructions to be given to him on his appointment as High Commissioner. This draft includes:[11]

> ... [the idea that] Sherif Feisal should be offered the Amirate of Mesopotamia ... is favoured by His Majesty's Government in principle, provided that:
>
> i) A spontaneous demand for Feisal is forthcoming

from a sufficiently representative body of public opinion in Mesopotamia;

ii) Sherif Feisal is prepared in principle to accept Great Britain as Mandatory over and to agree a form of mandate on the lines already drafted for communication to the League of Nations, or such modification of it as His Majesty's Government can advisedly approve;

iii) French susceptibilities can be overcome.

Other conditions in Cox's draft included being certain that the new Iraqi government would have no control over British troops in Iraq, that Britain would conduct Iraq's foreign affairs during the period of the mandate and also would exercise "effective supervision over the finances of the country."

* *

Cox sailed from England on 20 August with Belle, Philby, Garbett and Cheesman on the P. & 0. liner *Delhi* for Bombay. On 1 September the ship was joined in Port Said by Major-General Sir Edmund Ironside, at that time the youngest major-general in the British Army. Ironside had commanded the unsuccessful British military expedition based on Archangel (today Murmansk) in north Russia with the objective of encouraging effective resistance to the Bolshevik revolution, an expedition backed enthusiastically by Winston Churchill. Ironside was the sort of bluff, fire-eating fighting man who fascinated Churchill.[12] That he had fought Churchill's most feared enemies, the Bolsheviks, was another point in his favour. Churchill was at that time Secretary of State for War.

Ironside was himself travelling to Iraq to take up a subordinate command under the General Officer Commanding in Iraq, Sir Aylmer Haldane. Ironside recorded:[13]

> I found Sir Percy Cox a passenger in the Delta *(sic)*. He was going out to take over the High Commissionership in Mesopotamia. He had been the Chief Political Officer with the Indian Expeditionary Force in the latter half *(sic)* of the campaign against the Turks and knew the country well. He had spent most of his career in the Persian Gulf, where he was familiarly known as "Cokkus" *[see Preface]*. I had never met him before but had heard a good deal of his prestige amongst the Arabs, but I found him curiously reticent with strangers. Indeed he hardly spoke to anyone on board. He did ask me when I first met him, whether I was going out to succeed General Haldane. When I told

> him I was going out to take over a subordinate command under the General, but did not know what it was going to be, he looked at me very suspiciously. From that moment he never addressed another word to me. I think he thought that I was being sent out by Mr Churchill to report on his affairs. I could only think that a lifetime spent in the Persian Gulf had made him adopt the suspicions of the Arabs.

From Bombay Cox went up to Poona to see the Governor, Sir George Lloyd, before embarking in the Persian Gulf despatch vessel which he knew so well, *R.I.M.S. Lawrence,* to sail to the Gulf. In Bahrain he stayed long enough to take a steam launch across to the Arabian mainland to see Ibn Saud in Uqair before proceeding on to Basra where the party was welcomed by Arnold Wilson.

Ibn Saud was well-informed on British intentions. Cox stayed two days with him at Uqair, during which time:[14]

> ... Ibn Saud expressed his concern over rumours that Husayn's son Faysal was going to be given the throne of Iraq. To extend Hashimite influence into Mesopotamia was clearly not in his best interests.

Cox was able to reassure him to a certain extent, largely on the strength of his own personality and the depth of the relationship between the two men.

After a couple of days in Basra, where he renewed his acquaintance with Shaikh Khazal of Mohammera, Cox and his party, joined by Sayyid Talib, embarked on a paddle steamer for the slow journey up the Tigris to Kut and thence by rail to Baghdad.

Philby was keeping a detailed diary at this stage. He paid a generous tribute to Arnold Wilson, who left Basra, via Bushire, on *R.I.M.S. Lawrence* to return to India as Cox and his party went upstream to Baghdad:[15]

> ... [Wilson] can look back with pride and satisfaction to a long and strenuous connection with the Gulf and to years of magnificent effort in Mesopotamia where he has left his mark. The only matter for regret is his whole policy has been oriented towards a dead ideal and for that reason has merely created hiatus between the old order and the new instead of paving the way for solution on natural lines, the great structure he has spent so much energy in building up has now been scrapped and is to be demolished. The Arab state will be built up on different designs and of different materials but use will

> doubtlessly be made of some part of the scrapped material of the old order. He has fought strenuously against acceptance of the new policy, whose adoption by HMG carries with it a sufficient condemnation of the Wilsonian regime without however any slur on A.T.W. himself whose energy and ability were worthy of a better cause. It is a pity too that his inability to work with and retain the services of many officers of experience has condemned him always to work with young and inexperienced men, some of whom modelling themselves on him without the same claim to ability and efficiency have not added to the lustre of the administration.

Cox arrived at Baghdad railway station on 11 October 1920 to an enthusiastic welcome from a large crowd, led by the senior British expatriates, with Gertrude Bell, according to Philby "in a new Paris frock dropping the deepest of curtseys."[16]

Gertrude herself wrote of Cox's arrival:[17]

> I thought as he stood there in his white and gold lace, with his air of fine and simple dignity, that there had never been an arrival more momentous – never anyone on whom more conflicting emotions were centred, hopes and doubts and fears, but above all confidence in his personal integrity and wisdom. It was all I could do not to cry.

In the chapter he contributed after Gertrude's death to a published collection of her letters edited by her step-mother, Cox described the challenge ahead of him:[18]

> The task before me was by no means an easy or attractive one. The new line of policy which I had come to inaugurate involved a complete and necessarily rapid transformation of the façade of the existing administration from British to Arab and, in the process, a wholesale reduction in the numbers of British and British-Indian personnel employed. Many of the individuals affected had served with the utmost devotion during most difficult times and some had even abandoned all idea of returning to their pre-war posts in the hope of making a career in Iraq.
>
> Added to that, not a few of the British element were skeptical – and one could not blame them for their misgivings – as to the likelihood of the new enterprise

> succeeding, and did not disguise their feelings. But fortifying myself with the conviction that the project had at least an even chance of success, and was at any rate the only alternative to evacuation, I took heart of grace. My position, however, was a very solitary one to begin with and the presence of Gertrude Bell and of Mr Philby and Mr C.C. Garbett, both of the I.C.S. whom I had brought out with me from home, was a great asset to me at this time.

Gertrude wrote on 17 October that:[19]

> Sir Percy was interviewing Evelyn Howell and Colonel Slater who are wholly concerned with the future and status of the British personnel, matters which appear to me to be quite unimportant compared with the future of Mesopotamia, which last depends entirely on the temper of the people of the country. So I decided at once to invest myself with the duties of Oriental Secretary.

Of Howell and Slater, Philby wrote in his diary[20] that they were:

> ... utterly reactionary in their views, Slater less so than Howell, who last night and today made it clear that he regarded the idea of an Arab government as Utopian in the last degree.

Gertrude, with Philby's help, made out a list of over a hundred notables whom Sir Percy ought to receive, and a second list of those to whom he ought to give a private interview.[21] She continued that the next priorities were:[22]

> ... a) To get in some of the big sheikhs who have stood by us on the Euphrates and b) to send Sir Percy up to Mosul, otherwise there would have been great dissatisfaction there. Sir Percy agreed to both. We telegraphed for the four most important sheikhs ... and I drafted a telegram for Mr Cheesman [Cox's private secretary] to send to Colonel Nalder announcing Sir Percy's arrival and saying that he wanted to meet the notables. He flew there yesterday morning and returns tonight. 'I'm telling you this fantastic story just as it happened. I shan't go on running the affairs of Mesopotamia, but for the moment there wasn't anyone else to do it and as there wasn't a second to lose I just upped and did it.

A scheme for Sir Percy's private secretariat is the most thorny of all questions because it is the personal one. The trouble is that he is bringing out Mr. Garbett as his Civil Secretary. It's not a very important post and Mr. Garbett will fill it well enough, but Evelyn [Howell], and oddly enough Colonel Slater, are afraid that the Civil Secretary will prevent the advisers to Arab ministers – among whom they would naturally be – from having direct access to the High Commissioner. It's the purest folly, I think, but I have kept religiously out of the controversy. They were as bitterly opposed to an Arab Cabinet but Sir Percy has gone straight through. In my heart I sing hymns of praise the whole day long. I feel equally certain that when it comes to dealing with the tribal insurgents on the Euphrates he will drop all the silly ideas of revenge and punishment that have been current outside my political circle.

How are you going to punish people for rebellion against the British Military Government when that no longer exists? You can punish them for the damage they have done to their own country but even there you're not on very sure ground because most of the damage has been done by British troops. Therefore when military operations are over, there's nothing left but a universal pardon, the only possible exceptions being persons who are known to have committed murder.

Meantime the setting up of a provincial cabinet is an extremely difficult matter. Sir Percy has fully recognized the strength of feeling there is against Talib. The question is whom to call on to form a cabinet? Most of the people he has seen have suggested the Naqib. I am convinced that not only will the Naqib refuse for himself, but that he will also refuse to recommend anyone. His religious position is more to him than anything in the world and he thinks he would jeopardize it by taking a direct part in public affairs. But I'm all in favour of Sir Percy's approaching him and if I am wrong in my anticipation of his answer, so much the better. But if I'm right, what is the alternative? I believe, and Sir Percy now thinks, that to call on S. Talib would be an almost fatal error, but you can't pass him over and call on someone else. In spite of all our warnings to him that he must make his own position, and that we can't help him to make it, he thinks we

> ought to back him and force him on the country. He is now pulling every string he can think of to make himself acceptable.
>
> If he genuinely could make himself acceptable, nothing from our point of view, would be more heaven-sent, but I know he can't. It isn't for nothing that my office has been flooded with people of every political opinion for the last week.

Gertrude had addressed the problem of the Shia community (the largest single community in Iraq) before Cox's arrival in Baghdad in letter dated 3 October 1920:[23]

> If you're going to have anything like really representative institutions you would have a majority of Shi'ahs. For that reason you can never have three completely autonomous provinces. Sunni Mosul must be retained as part of the Mesopotamian state in order to adjust the balance. To my mind it's one of the main arguments for giving Mesopotamia responsible government. We as outsiders can't differentiate between Sunni and Shi'ah; but leave it to them and they'll get over the difficulty by some kind of hanky-panky, just as the Turks did, and for the present it's the only way of getting over it. The final authority must be in the hands of the Sunnis, in spite of their numerical inferiority; otherwise you will have a mujtahid-run state, which is the very devil. There are two favourable considerations: one is that the failure of the rising, which as far as the tribes are concerned was all due directly to mujtahid incitement, may considerably discredit those worthies as temporal guides; and the second that the present premier mujtahid is tottering into his grave – he was most regrettably prevented from falling in to it a year ago when he was saved by our medical officer at Naj'f – and he may be succeeded by someone more enlightened. There are such, even among mujtahids. If only we could manage to install a native head of state. I agree ... that Talib is out of the question and there's no possible alternative but a son of the Sharif.

Of his own immediate priorities, Cox himself wrote:[24]

> Though ... the back of the rebellion was practically broken by the time I reached Basrah, a good many sections of the tribes in the Bagdad *Vilayet* were still "out",

> and it was not until February that the rising could be said to have been finally cleared up. Meanwhile, it did not take me long after my arrival at Bagdad to realize that I was being confronted at every turn with questions of policy affecting the future of Iraq which I did not feel justified in disposing of myself without consultation with the representatives of the people. As an immediate expedient, therefore, I determined to institute at once a Provisional Government which, under my control and supervision, should be responsible for the administration and political guidance of the country until the general situation had returned to normal and a start could be made with the creation of national institutions. It was here that I felt that my venerable friend the Naqib, who had given me such friendly co-operation on our first occupation of Baghdad, could now – if he would – render great and patriotic service, and I decided to appeal to him to preside over the proposed Council of State.

Cox appealed to the Naqib on 23 October, using all the force of his own diplomacy and personality to impress on the old man that only he could undertake such a vital task in the work of nation building. With the greatest reluctance the Naqib accepted.

Gertrude wrote on 24 October:[25]

> Sir Percy carried his scheme through with unimportant alterations [in a presentation to his British colleagues], and announced that he was going to lay it before the Naqib. On Friday nothing further happened. Saturday began with a visit from Ja'afar Pasha [al Askari] in order to ask me – what do you think? – whether it would ruin his reputation as a Nationalist to take a place in the provisional government on the ground that it would be looked upon as a British subterfuge! I took him metaphorically by the throat and shook him. The confidence of those who fought in Syria has been profoundly shaken by what they consider to be (not without some justice) our abandonment of Faisal, and we start in Mesopotamia at a disadvantage. Ja'afar is the first of the Mesopotamians to return from Syria, and on his attitude much will depend. I told him that it was my private conviction that we should never come to a point of rest here until Mesopotamia agreed in selecting as an Amir one of the sons of the Sharif; and that the British Government would not and could not oppose the choice.

> 'This produced an instant effect. He at once began to discuss the respective merits of Zaid and Abdullah; but it was a point on which I refused to be drawn on the grounds that it was a matter which did not concern us and our one desire was to leave the people of Mesopotamia a free choice as to the form of government they preferred.

Cox had to project his personality with all the strength and subtlety of his character over the course of the ensuing days and weeks to ensure that the provisional government began to function and to acquire some credibility. His own description is characteristically modest. He wrote:[26]

> Under the Naqib's wise direction the Council carried on their work with surprising efficiency and absence of friction; and in the meanwhile many other Iraqis of experience and education who had held civil or military appointments under the Turks, as well as private individuals, were streaming back to their country and becoming available for employment under the new regime. It was in fact the advent of this contingent from Syria, who had mostly been enthusiastic adherents of Amir Faisal's cause, which started, or revived, the demand for him in Iraq, and of course at this time the question of the new ruler and the character of the permanent government which was to succeed the present provisional regime was being discussed in every coffee-shop.

Gertrude underlined Cox's achievement:[27]

> The Naqib stands out solidly against letting the leaders of the revolt back until the Arab Government is firmly established. Isn't it all the comfort in the world that it should come from the Nagib and not from us! Long live the Arab Government! Give them responsibility and make them settle their own affairs and they'll do it a thousand times better than we can. Moreover, once they've got responsibility they'll realize the needs and the difficulties of government and they'll eliminate hot air in favour of good sense.

She wrote to Valentine Chirol, her journalist friend, on 3 November:[28]

> The Naqib's Council of State met for the first time yesterday but do not seem to have come to any salient

> conclusions, except that they should invite Sir Percy to explain to them the nature and power of the British advisers. After the meeting, however, they sent for Fahad Beg ibn Hadhdhal, paramount chief of the Anizah, who is at present in Baghdad, and asked him whether he would undertake a mission of pacification to the insurgent tribes. He came flying in to me to ask if that would meet the views of Kokus. "Kokus, I know, and you Khatun [lady, as Gertrude was known], I know, but of Arab Governments I have no knowledge. Whatever Kokus orders me to do, that I will do, but it must be by his orders and with his approval." Meantime the latest news is that the tribes are tumbling over one another to make submission, and on the whole I think it is more salutary that they should submit to the force of British arms than to the prayers and persuasions of the Arab Council. The Shi'ahs complain that they are not sufficiently represented on the Council, wholly overlooking the fact that nearly all their leading men are Persian subjects and must change their nationality before they can hold office in the Mesopotamian State. They are the most difficult element in the country, frondeur almost to a man, and entirely indifferent to public interests.

Of the choice of a ruler, Gertrude wrote to her father on 7 November:[29]

> As soon as we can we must proceed to the election of a National Assembly, no matter how inadequate and even farcical the election may be. I shall be very much mistaken (but then I often am) if they don't ask for a son of the Sharif as Amir. I regard that as the only solution. The Nagib himself is a respectable head of the state, but he is a very sick man. His sons are one and all worthless. Even in Baghdad, where the moral tone is negligible, they are noted for personal depravity. In the East, relations with women don't count, but there are one or two things which Islam can't openly wink at, and boys and wine are among them. It's revolting, but it's true. Now Faisal, at any rate (I know nothing about Abdullah) is a man of exceptionally high moral character.

While Cox was exerting all his very considerable energy in Baghdad, with a very great amount of moral support as well as informed, intelligent and practical assistance from Gertrude, the British government was coming to a decision on the overall ministerial control of the

mandated territories in the Middle East (Palestine was the second) and other areas, such as the Arabian peninsula, considered important for British interests. A new Middle Eastern department was to be set up in the Colonial Office and Winston Churchill was to move from the War Office to be Secretary of State for the Colonies.

Naturally, Cox was kept informed of developments and, equally naturally, he kept Gertrude informed.

At the same time, the Allied governments were having considerable difficulty in coming to any sort of peace settlement with Turkey. On 10 August 1920, ten days before Cox left England for Iraq, Britain, France and Italy had jointly signed the Treaty of Sèvres, a treaty designed as a "peace treaty" but which caused great popular discontent in Turkey itself.[30] The Turkish government, in response to popular outrage, initially refused to sign this treaty. Under its terms Turkey was to give up its Arab lands, a new state of Armenia was to be created in the east, the Kurds were to have an autonomous state and there was an ambiguous reference to international rights in Constantinople and the Straits.

Many Turks were prepared to accept these terms with a characteristic fatalistic shrug. They would not accept, however, that Greece should have a large slice of Western Anatolia, including Smyrna (Izmir in Turkish) and the Gallipoli peninsula. A weak Turkish government in Constantinople eventually ratified the treaty, but it was still not accepted by a very large number of Turks and a national struggle against the Greek occupation of eastern Anatolia became a rallying cause for Kemal Ataturk and the Turkish nationalist movement. A cruel and untidy war between the Greek army and Turkish nationalist forces began in Anatolia.

The British prime minister, Lloyd George, strongly pro-Greek, and against much rational advice from cabinet colleagues such as Curzon, called a conference of both Turkish factions and the Greek government in London to discuss the Treaty of Sèvres and to try to make it more palatable to Kemal and the Turkish nationalists. The conference began on 23 February 1921 and went on until 12 March. The British government (or, rather, Lloyd George) was looking for negotiating chips to offer the Turkish nationalists in exchange for Turkish acceptance of a permanent Greek occupation of Smyrna and its hinterland. Some sort of deal on Mesopotamia, even a Turkish prince as a ruler, were loose and ill-thought through ideas bandied about. Lloyd George appears to have regarded Kemal Ataturk rather as Anthony Eden regarded Nasser in 1956: an upstart of no account who could be toppled by a demonstration of firmness. Not surprisingly, the conference failed and the Turco-Greek war in Anatolia intensified.

None of this helped Cox. Gertrude put an enclosure marked "Very confidential" in a letter dated 7 February 1921 in which she wrote:[31]

> Our prospects are again very black. A conference is to be held either in London or Paris on February 21st to decide on the revision of the Treaty of Sèvres. The home authorities foreshadow that in order to placate Turkey without too much annoying Greece (i.e. I take it, to make a new treaty which shall leave Greece in Smyrna in some form) the throne of Mesopotamia may be offered to a Turkish prince. Meantime Winston is not coming here but after the conference he will probably meet Cox, Samuel and Allenby at some convenient place (Egypt?). He thinks he could get the British public to give five millions a year to Mesopotamia for the next year or two, but not more.

My comments on this are:

1) It is quite useless to try to placate Turkey without going back on the Smyrna decision. Economically as well as sentimentally the Turks are right in their demand for Smyrna. No other port will serve the needs of Asia Minor and to give it to the Greeks was from the first contrary to all reasonable statecraft. This is what we said in Paris two years ago.
2) I would accept a Turkish prince, just as I would accept anything which would be for the lasting good of this country, but I think a) that it would be very difficult to work a British mandate under him and b) that this country could not by any possibility be worked under a Turkish mandate. Turkey is exhausted; they are calling out infants and doctors to serve in the Anatolian army, and not getting them at that. Mesopotamia had reached the limit of disorder compatible with civilized existence under the old order; the new Turkey could not prevent her from overstepping it, and at once.

> Of course the British taxpayer doesn't care whether she relapses into chaos or not, but I can't regard the matter in the same light. The one hope is that the Allies may really mend their ways and make such new arrangements with Turkey as will satisfy the Nationalist Party and Mustafa Kamal. That would at once remove the threat on our northern frontier and stay the flood of Turkish propaganda which is coming down into this country. Advanced nationalists here, who don't want the Turk but are not satisfied with their present prospects, use the Turkish bogy in the hope that they may turn us out with

> it and then themselves turn out the Turk. People of their way of thinking form a small but vociferous group. Their organ is a paper called *Istiglal*.
>
> Most of the writers and their followers are people whom no government can employ and if we went they would be out against our successors. At the same time there are grievances. The punishment dealt out to the Euphrates tribes by our troops has, I understand, been severe. The tribes are indignant, not so much against us, as with the Baghdadi agitator who, they say, led them astray and has gone unpunished. Meanwhile, the Baghdadi agitator makes capital out of their losses to provoke fresh agitations.

The new Middle East department of the British government was officially born on 21 February 1921 as part of the Colonial Office with terms of reference "... to deal with mandated and other territories in the Middle East". There was a proviso: the new organization: "... involved no modification of the present arrangements, under which the revenues of the Government of India bore a portion of Middle East expenditure."[32]

At the same time as it approved the establishment of the new department, the cabinet also approved that Churchill should: "... visit Egypt in the early part of March for the purpose of consulting with the British authorities in Palestine and Arabia".

Of Churchill's appointment as Colonial Secretary, Robert Rhodes James wrote:[33]

> [He] apparently had no qualms in moving into a complex field of political activity of which he had no experience and on which his personal knowledge was extremely limited. ... In his attitudes to Middle East matters he was strongly under the influence of T.E. Lawrence; he was also determined to reduce the number of British forces in the area, and to replace them by the use of aircraft and the establishment of rulers congenial to British interests. The appointment of Feisal as ruler of Iraq and the acknowledgement of Abdullah as ruler of Transjordan emphasized the second part of his policy; the complete withdrawal of British forces from Iraq between 1921 and 1928 showed the effects of the former. Henry Wilson's scathing description of Churchill's Middle East policies as "hot air, aeroplanes and Arabs" was perhaps too severe, but it contained a strong element of the truth.

Churchill, in accordance with his instructions from the cabinet, called a conference to meet in Cairo from 12 March. His own advisers for the conference included Lawrence and Hubert Young. Cox took a considerable delegation with him from Baghdad. He wrote:[34]

> Thanks to the satisfactory working of the Provisional Government, I was able to leave Bagdad at the end of February in R.I.M.S. *Hardinge* in company with Sir Aylmer Haldane, G.O.C. in Mesopotamia, taking with me Sasun Effendi, Minister of Finance, and Jaafar Pasha, Minister of Defence in the Provisional Iraq Government; and among the British Staff, Major-General E.H. Atkinson, Adviser to the Ministry of Works; Lieut.-Col S. Slater, I.C.S., Financial Adviser; and Miss Gertrude Bell, Oriental Secretary. Major-General Sir Edmund Ironside, commanding the troops in Persia, was also a member of the party, while Sir Edgar Bonham-Carter, Judicial Adviser, held charge during my absence.

The two Iraqi members of the delegation had very different backgrounds. Sasun Effendi (Sasun Hasqail), was a financier and the leader of the Iraqi Jewish community. He had been a member of the Ottoman parliament and had held important posts in Constantinople. Jaafar Pasha (Jaafar al Askari) had been an officer in the Ottoman army who had received his military training in Germany and who had held high rank under Faisal in the Arab army during the Arab revolt.

By this time, Nuri Said had returned to Baghdad. Gertrude, in a letter written before she left for Cairo, described a discussion she had had with him concerning a future ruler for Iraq:[35]

> He ... said he didn't want to express an opinion for fear of getting opposing forces aroused (a covert allusion to Saiyid Talib); he thought it must be left to the Assembly. I said: "You know well enough it is such as we, you and I, who will decide the composition of the Assembly. I am ready to tell you my opinion – give me yours." Then rather reluctantly he said that no one but Faisal could be ruler of Iraq. I told him he would find a good deal of opposition and a great deal of uncertainty – pro-Turkish sentiments or leanings towards a Turkish prince under a British mandate. He asked me what I thought was the best way of overcoming these difficulties and I answered that the only way was to go ahead and set up an Arab government under an Arab prince. As for the prince, he must be one of the sons of the Sharif, in my opinion.

> Therewith we sent him up to Sir Percy who spoke frankly and openly with him, assuring him that his only desire was to ensure a stable government, but that until the Cairo Conference had taken place he could give his approval to no definite scheme, and begging Nuri not to press any particular propaganda until after his return from Cairo. To this Nuri readily agreed and undertook further to keep the Young Arab party quiet and reassure the men who during our absence might return from Syria, so that all political activity should be suspended.

The candidature of Faisal was being pushed strongly in London by T.E. Lawrence, who began work in the Colonial Office on 18 February 1921 as an adviser to Churchill as soon as the new Middle East department was formed. Lawrence and Hubert Young together drafted the agenda for the proposed Cairo conference:[36]

They saw to it that the agenda was framed in such a way that the conference would arrive at the desired conclusions. Some years afterwards, Lawrence told his biographer Liddell Hart that everything had been staged before the meetings began. He had settled not only the questions to be considered, but the decisions to be reached: 'Talk of leaving things to the man on the spot – we left nothing'.

Lawrence's words to Liddell Hart smack of classic Lawrentian hyperbole. The "Memorandum Drawn Up in London by Middle East Department Prior to Cairo Conference"[37] by Lawrence and Young is clear and firm in its recommendations, but Cox was consulted on at least part of its drafting, as its own wording makes clear.

The overall objective was unambiguous:

> We regard the selection of an Arab ruler for Mesopotamia as an essential preliminary to the establishment of satisfactory permanent conditions in that country. This should not await the convening of the Assembly, but should be carried out by the Council of State, subject to confirmation by the Assembly when elected. We consider that Feisal should be the ruler, and that the first step is to ascertain from Sir P. Cox that he can ensure the Council of State selecting him.

As was the role proposed for British political officers:

> These will consist of the High Commissioner and his personal staff, the Advisers to Arab Ministers and the Divisional Advisers and Assistant Divisional Advisers recommended by Sir P. Cox in his telegram ... of the 17th February.

And on Kurdistan, the Memorandum said:

> We are strongly of opinion that purely Kurdish areas should not be included in the Arab State of Mesopotamia, but that the principles of Kurdish unity and nationality should be promoted as far as possible by His Majesty's Government. The extent of the area within which it will be possible for His Majesty's Government to carry out this policy must necessarily depend on the final terms of the peace settlement with Turkey.

Churchill made the political preoccupations of the British government very clear:[38]

> The first consideration is the immediate reduction of British military commitments in Mesopotamia. No local interest can be allowed to stand in the way of an immediate programme for reducing the British Army of Occupation. Whatever may be the political status of the country under the mandate, it is out of the question that forces of anything approaching the present dimensions should be supported in Mesopotamia by the British tax-payer.

And again:

> The second consideration is the further substantial reduction during the present financial year of the British forces in Mesopotamia. This cannot well be considered independently of the political future of the country, as the garrison so reduced would be dangerously small unless satisfactory conditions had been, or were in the process of being, established at the time. It is generally agreed that no satisfactory conditions can be established in Mesopotamia without the prior formation of a local Government of real prestige and authority.

Churchill, Cox, Gertrude Bell, Lawrence and Hubert Young constituted a political committee to draw together all the threads concerning Iraq. Cox described to the committee the steps he had taken since his return to Iraq the previous October to establish a provisional government. He emphasized the provisional nature of this government and the need for a ruler. He touched on the qualifications of six possible rulers: the Naqib of Baghdad, Sayyid Taleb, the Shaikh of Mohammerah, Ibn Saud, the Aga Khan and a Turkish prince, Burhan ed-Din.[39]

Trying to look over Cox's shoulder, as it were, and to understand his own thinking, it would have been difficult to build any sort of political consensus in Iraq around any one of these six, given the disparate and heterogeneous nature of the Iraqi constituency. Historically, there had been two dominant political influences in Iraq, the one Turkish and Sunni, the second Persian and Shia. Loose ideas about some form of republic could only have favoured the Shia elements (who made up the majority of the population, of course), but this would have been an early version of an Islamic republic, and hence completely unacceptable to the Sunni, Christian and Jewish populations of Iraq, to say nothing of the Kurds (who were at that stage, in theory at least, excluded from the new state) and the Turkomans and other Turkic-speaking peoples, whose existence was not officially acknowledged. Nor was there any official recognition of the tribes which migrated freely through the territory which was to become the new state of Iraq.

But even if the Iraqi people had been confessionally and ethnically homogeneous, a republic at that stage would not have been a viable political form. The word "republic" could be translated into impeccable Arabic, but it would still have very little meaning to the great majority of Iraqis, because the basic concept of a *res publicus* lay completely outside their political experience and political history. Any serious proposition for a republic at that stage would have had to be imposed from outside, which, of course, would have meant a logical contradiction. In any case, it is virtually unthinkable that the British people, a singularly unrepublican polity, could seriously think of imposing a republican form of government on another people.

To revert to the Cairo political committee's deliberations, Churchill wanted to know whether it was really necessary for elections in Iraq to precede the selection of a ruler. Also, the British government could not be expected to sustain Iraq financially if an elected assembly chose as a ruler someone who would not be acceptable to Britain.

Replying to a question from Lawrence, Cox said that the selection of a ruler would undoubtedly become an election issue in Iraq. It was common knowledge in Iraq that British approval of any nominee was essential; the Iraqi people wanted a lead from Britain.

Churchill asked Cox to explain the reasons why Faisal was preferable to his elder brother Abdullah from an Iraqi point of view. Cox replied that he considered Faisal's wartime experience had put him in the best position to raise an army quickly, and his experience with the Allies during the war had made him a better qualified as a ruler than his brothers.

This does not come across as a powerful argument for Faisal. Lawrence possibly thought so, for he said that he supported Faisal's candidature not only from his personal knowledge and friendship for the individual, but also because the first ruler of Iraq should be an

A new beginning. Winston Churchill, as Secretary of State for the Colonies, with Sir Percy Cox (High Commissioner in Iraq) and Sir Herbert Samuel (High Commissioner in Palestine) at the Cairo Conference in 1921. Gertrude Bell is on the left of the photograph and T.E. Lawrence is on Churchill's right behind Cox. (Mary Evan Picture Library)

active and inspiring personality. Lawrence added that Faisal's elder brother, Abdullah [the future king of Jordan] was "lazy, and by no means dominating". (It should be recalled that Lawrence wrote of Faisal in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* that he was: "... a brave, weak, ignorant spirit, trying to do work for which only a genius, a prophet or a great criminal, was fitted. I served him out of pity, a motive which degraded us both."[40]

According to the report of the conference, Churchill:[41]

> ... pointed out that a strong argument in favour of Sherifian policy was that it enabled His Majesty's Government to bring pressure to bear on one Arab sphere in order to attain their own ends in another. If Faisal knew that not only his father's subsidy and the protection of the Holy Places from Wahabi attack, but also the position of his brother in Trans-Jordan was dependent upon his own good behaviour, he would be much easier to deal with. The same argument applied mutatis mutandis to King Hussain and Amir Abdullah.

Gertrude Bell pointed out that the only pan-Arab propaganda which was at all likely to make headway at that time was the Sherifian propaganda. There is no mention in the report of the conference on the likely reaction of Ibn Saud to a Hashemite ruler in Iraq. Had the question been raised, Cox might have said: "leave that to me." It would have been a fair response, and a response which history would have justified.

Eventually, the Iraqis present at the conference were consulted. Sasun Effendi said that he felt that the Shia population of Iraq would support Faisal's candidature and both he and Jaafar Pasha agreed that there was no case for Ibn Saud. They were jointly of the opinion that of the three men whom they considered as the most prominent candidates, namely, Sayyid Taleb, the Nagib of Baghdad and Faisal, Faisal would be the most welcome in the country at large.

With the advantage of historical hindsight, there was really no other candidate than Faisal (which does not imply that he was an especially strong or ideal candidate). Later claims by enthusiasts for Lawrence or for Gertrude Bell that either one of these remarkable characters "put Faisal on the throne of Iraq" are not really valid, though the efforts of both to do so were considerable. In crude political terms, there was likely to be less opposition in Iraq to Faisal than to anyone else. The British government knew Faisal, he was a man British officials could work with. Britain owed him something because of the failure in Damascus; if he was put on the throne in Baghdad, he would owe Britain something.

It is very likely that Cox's own reasoning had gone something along

these lines. After all, he was the man who had to make it happen, he was the British official charged with installing an Arab ruler in Baghdad in such a way that British promises to the Arabs were seen to be honoured and that vital British interests were not harmed. As has been seen, Cox had been against a Sherifian solution for Iraq throughout the war years and had been no great believer in the ability of the Arabs of Iraq to rule themselves, basically because he believed that it was not in Britain's interests (and the interests of the Indian Empire) to encourage such concepts. It is a measure of the man that, once he realized that some form of Arab self-government was inevitable, not to fight against the tide (as Arnold Wilson had tried to do), but to ensure that British interests were defended in the new order of things in the region of the Persian Gulf. Faisal as king in Iraq was the best (but by no means ideal) way to safeguard the British position.

It is unlikely that there was any dramatic moment on the road to Damascus, as it were, of Cox's personal acceptance of the fact that the stream of nationalism could not be stemmed. His conversion probably began in London in April and May 1918, and continued through his sojourn in Persia.

An element in his acceptance of the fact of Arab nationalism and hence of the need to work with this force which could neither be denied nor subverted was almost certainly the fact that Gertrude Bell had also come to the same conclusion, changing previous fervently held ideas. Sometime in 1919, Gertrude, almost certainly as a result of a visit London and Paris for the Peace Conference and thence to Damascus, (when she met and talked with Faisal) recognized that there were "new forces" abroad in the Arab world, forces spawned during a war "fought in the interests of national liberty".[42]

Churchill had to obtain cabinet approval for the choice of Faisal as ruler of Iraq, and this was to be an early priority following his return to London. In the meantime, the conclusions of the Cairo conference were to be kept secret. However, in the Arab world there are no secrets, and soon Iraq was full of rumour that Faisal was to become king.

But before that, Gertrude, who was very happy with the results of the Cairo conference, wrote in ecstatic terms to Colonel Frank Balfour in Baghdad on 25 March:[43]

> I'll tell you about our Conference. It has been wonderful. We covered more work in a fortnight than has ever before been got through in a year. Mr Churchill was admirable, most ready to meet everyone halfway and masterly alike in guiding a big political meeting and in conducting the small political committees into which we broke up. Not the least favourable circumstance was that Sir Percy and I, coming out with a definite programme, found when we

> came to open our packets that it coincided exactly with that which the Secretary of State had brought with him. We are now going back to Baghdad to square the Naqib and to convince Saiyid Talib, if he is convincible, that his hopes are doomed to a disappointment which will be confined to himself. I feel certain that we shall have the current of nationalist opinion in our favour and I've no doubt of success.

But it was not all plain sailing. Gertrude wrote to her father from *R.I.M.S. Hardinge* on the way back to Basra:[44]

> Everyone is in a much more cheerful frame of mind than on the outward journey. The only thing that disturbs me is that my Chief and General Ironside don't seem to be coming together. Now General Ironside is essential for the vital part of our programme, namely our promise to take over in two months' time the Mosul outposts – north and east of Mosul in the hills – with Kurdish levies which are nonexistent until General Ironside creates them. If it weren't he I should say out of hand that the task is impossible; but to do it even he must be given a straight run and that's what Sir Percy shows no sign of doing. He is a difficult man to tackle, is my Chief. He won't stand opposition unless it's very cleverly veiled and he likes to direct things he doesn't know about just as much as things he knows about. I expect there will be some pretty hard knocks between the two but I hope that General Ironside will get his way. If he talks to me about things, as he did yesterday, I can smooth matters over a little; but he is not a man who will talk unless he feels inclined and I was surprised when he opened out. Sir Percy will have to give way but I fear he will wriggle under it and it's not an attitude in which he or anyone else appears at their best.

Of Gertrude, General Ironside had written in his diary before the Cairo conference:[45]

> ... I sometimes wondered if her enthusiasm for the Arab race did not somewhat blind her to the difficulties of the British Government, which had to deal with the world of Islam as a whole. She was a strong advocate of the setting up of an Arab Kingdom in Iraq, as I found Mesopotamia was now to be called. This was, she thought, the government most suited to the Arab brain. She was fully

> aware of the jealousies which existed between the ruling families in Arabia, but she had her own candidate for the new throne – the Emir Feisal. She thought the honour was due to him not only for his personal qualities, but for the work he had done in the war. She realized fully that he would have to be elected by the people whom he was to rule, and that he could not be forced upon them. But she had already prepared a scheme for presenting him to the people in the most favourable possible way.

Ironside simply could not communicate with Cox. Of the voyage to Egypt on board *R.I.M.S. Hardinge* he wrote:[46]

> The High Commissioner, Sir Percy Cox, I found as inaccessible as ever. He held no conferences and did not discuss the affairs of Iraq with the soldiers. There would certainly be no combined plan to present to the Colonial Secretary. He did not even discuss the situation in Persia with me...

And of the journey back, when Gertrude wrote of her worry about Cox and Ironside being able to work together, Ironside recorded:[47]

> On board the ship, the atmosphere was not wholly a happy one. The High Commissioner held no meetings and he seemed a man ill at ease. I had many conversations with Jafar Pasha and Gertrude Bell, both of whom were optimistic and pretty sure that all would be well under such a king as Feisal. I found that it was now no secret that he would soon arrive in Iraq.

The plan at that time was that Ironside would replace General Haldane. However, on a tour of inspection shortly after he arrived in Iraq, Ironside was badly injured in an air crash. Haldane thus stayed on and was with Cox on the dais when Faisal was proclaimed king on 23 August 1921.

* * *

The story of Sir Percy Cox's achievements in Iraq from his return from the Cairo conference in April 1921 to his final departure in May 1923 can be told almost as a duet from the letters of Gertrude Bell and Cox's own account, written for the publication of Gertrude's collected letters several years later. Her account is fresh and passionate in a confusion of understanding, his considered and dispassionate in an understanding of confusion. She was, he did. Together they formed a

remarkable team, with a particularly strong spiritual and intellectual bond between them. The new nation of Iraq was the product of their work together.

There was no shortage of problems. The first task was to ensure that Faisal was made genuinely welcome in Iraq. Many of the older generation of Iraqi notables, those who had tended to favour the Naqib of Baghdad as ruler, in spite of his age, made their feelings known. Gertrude wrote from Baghdad on 12 April:[48]

> The notables, who are extremely exclusive, don't like the idea that the young men – mostly of no family – who dominated Syria under Faisal may possibly dominate Iraq. Their ideas don't accord with those of the young men, who are very progressive and apt to talk too loudly and continuously of the need of getting the old fogies out and the new lights in – there's a great deal of truth in it but it doesn't make them popular. The notables therefore jump at the possibility of putting in the Naqib and shut their eyes to the possibility of Talib's succeeding him.

Sayyid Talib could have been a problem for Cox, but Talib played into Cox's hands by a singularly impolitic indiscretion. He had drunk rather more than was wise in a public gathering and made what amounted to a disloyal and threatening speech rejecting Faisal. Cox stemmed the spring of Talib's opposition by a twig of firmness: Talib was arrested on 17 April 1921 and deported to Ceylon. He played no further part in Iraq's political development. He was a man in the Saddam Hussain mould, both ruthless and charming, his ruthlessness not stopping at the murder of his political opponents and his charm ensuring him a strong political following.

Gertrude wrote in a letter on the day of Talib's arrest:[49]

> Didn't I tell you there was no one like Sir Percy in the handling of a delicate political problem?

And a few days later, on 25 April:[50]

> Not a voice has been raised against Sir Percy's great coup, on the contrary the whole country is immensely relieved at S. Talib's disappearance. It was strange the *succès de crime* which he attained. The chief sentiment is admiration at Sir Percy's courage. Hercules destroying monsters never got more kudos. It's absurd that Talib should have loomed so black and heavy. He wasn't nearly so formidable as they thought. His silly vanity made him

King Faisal (Mary Evans Picture Library/Rue des Archives/ Tallandier)

> always so vulnerable. All the same, he was a live man, in spite of enfeebling vices, drink and drugs and what not. Since his fall we've traced the network of intrigue and blackmailing, a restless activity in roping in immediate financial support and ultimate political support – he pocketed and spent the cash, so there was some gain there; the promises for the future weren't worth the air they were breathed with and those who gave them hasten to deny them. Poor Talib! perhaps even he, after these months of feverish scheming may find some relief in the enforced quiet of Ceylon. I think I never came across anyone whose world centred so completely in himself. Not a suspicion of an ideal in him, not a thought but of his own advancement. He was his own unique preoccupation.
>
> I can scarcely understand how Mr Philby, who was his Adviser, could have had any illusions about him; but he was – and indeed is – much distressed at what has happened. He boudéd me for a week until I forced a heart-to-heart talk upon him and made him admit that at any rate I had done nothing but what was obviously incumbent upon me. He won't quarrel with Sir Percy and I won't let him quarrel with me – I think I've prevented that – though whether he will stay here if they choose Faisal as Amir I don't know.

The British government, faced with some major domestic problems, as well as the ongoing international problem of the undeclared war between Greece and Turkey, and directed by a Prime Minister, who was rapidly losing his political credibility, was remarkably slow in giving Cox the necessary green light. Faisal had signalled his acceptance but was not demonstrating any sense of urgency as far as actually arriving in Iraq was concerned.

Gertrude wrote on 8 May:[51]

> There have been many delays and Faisal, who should have been here in the middle of May, has not yet left Mecca. The League of Nations is holding up the mandate in deference to American prejudices, and Mr. Churchill's statement in the House, which ought to have taken place on June 2nd, is again postponed. Sir Percy has urged that we should drop the mandate altogether and go for a treaty with the Arab state when it is constituted. It would be a magnificent move if we're bold enough to do it.

The idea of dropping the proposal for a mandate and instead simply cementing the relationship between Iraq and Britain by an appropriate treaty was undoubtedly "a magnificent move" on Cox's part, but it was to be almost another two years to the day before he actually signed such a treaty as his last act before leaving Baghdad.

Philby, originally a trusted and valued colleague of both Cox and Gertrude, was becoming a problem. The delight in being combative and "difficult", which had marked Philby's earlier years, was becoming more pronounced. In addition, he had been a strong supporter of Sayyid Talib (whose adviser he had been in the Iraqi Interior ministry) and was determinedly anti-Faisal. His political thinking seems to have been confused: he spoke in terms of a republic for Iraq, but was also a great admirer of Ibn Saud. He had no doubt that the British government was making a mistake in backing the Hashemites rather than Ibn Saud in the Arabian peninsula. It is interesting to speculate on how he might have explained his republican ideas to Ibn Saud.

In any event, Cox offered him a rope with which he proceeded to hang himself in so far as his role in Iraq was concerned. Some ninety years later, it is fascinating to observe Philby's step-by-step path to his own destruction.

First, Gertrude tried to start a newspaper in Baghdad and wrote on 8 May of the difficulties:[52]

> One of the difficulties is Mr. Philby. He has a strong prejudice against Faisal and as he is running the Ministry of the Interior he is in a position to make a passive resistance of a very effective kind. We can't get a nationalist paper started because it has to be registered in the Interior and all kinds of legal quibbles are invented to delay it. In the same way under Turkish law (which is ours) a political party has to be registered by that Ministry and we anticipate that similar delays will occur. However, Sir Percy is so warned and will take steps to facilitate matters. It is very provoking about Mr. Philby; it seems most unnecessary that your official policy should be in any way hindered by one of your own officials. He never comes to see me so I suppose he looks on me as the arch enemy – or not far from it. And I can't give him a friendly word of warning. But he is spinning a bad cotton for he is earning a name as an opponent. I'm very sorry, but I've done my best to make a bridge and if he won't walk over it I can't help him.

Eventually the British government approved the decisions taken at the Cairo conference and Faisal left Jeddah for Basra on a British warship. Gertrude wrote on 23 June:[53]

> Faisal arrives in Basrah today. We've thrown our die and the next few days will show whether it's a winning number.

And on 26 June:[54]

> Yesterday we had news of Faisal's arrival in Basrah and an excellent reception, heaven be praised. The news came from Mr. Philby whom by a master stroke of policy Sir Percy sent down to Basrah to meet Faisal. I can't help hoping that Faisal will make a conquest and that Mr. Philby will come back an ardent Sharifian.

But it did not work out like that. Philby was undiplomatically and excessively frank with Faisal when he met him, making him feel that he would not really be welcomed by the people of Iraq. (Faisal had been accompanied by Kinahan Cornwallis, who was to play a significant role in Iraq himself later as, first, High Commissioner, and later still, as British Ambassador).

A day or two after Faisal's arrival in Basra, Philby had an attack of malaria, which meant that he could not accompany Faisal all the way to Baghdad. Gertrude wrote on 7 July of what happened when Philby did eventually reach Baghdad:55

> Mr. Philby came back on Sunday night and interviewed Sir Percy the following morning. Sir Percy told him to hand over to Mr. Thompson. It's a real tragedy, his dismissal, but he has himself to thank. Sir Percy has given him a very long rope. He sent him down to Basrah to meet Faisal in the hope that the two would come to terms. Mr. Philby did nothing but insist on the merits of Ibn Saud and on his own conviction that a republic was what Iraq wanted. He told the adviser at Hillah, Major Dickson, to carry on with a projected tour, so that Major Dickson was not at Hillah when Faisal passed through. Major Dickson has been here since and has made his peace with Faisal. Sir Percy, who never hesitates in what he thinks to be his duty, has cut the knot in the only possible way. I am, nevertheless, very sorry. On Tuesday I went to see them in order to tell them so and had a most painful interview. Mrs. Philby burst into tears, accused me of having been the cause of her husband's dismissal, and went out of the room. I then reminded him of our long friendship and asked him to believe that I had done all I could to persuade him that no government servant can profit by running counter to orders. How he

> could embrace the cause of that rogue Talib passes all belief, but he had identified himself with him.

Cox wrote of Philby's dismissal:[56]

> A year later I had to part company with Mr. Philby because at the stage of development at which we had then arrived his conception of the policy of H.M.'s Government began to diverge too much from mine, but I none the less readily recognize the great value he was to me in the early days.

Cox said nothing of the sequel in his contribution to the collected volume of Gertrude's letters. Philby left Baghdad for three months' leave in Persia, where he saw much of *The Times's* correspondent, Arthur Moore. Moore eventually wrote three articles for *The Times,* which were published on 27, 28 and 29 December 1921. These articles, to which Philby had obviously contributed substantially, were highly critical of what was being done in Iraq. Philby's wife Dora, who was expecting a baby the following November, stayed in Baghdad, where Cox was very solicitous about her welfare. He eventually arranged for Philby to work with Faisal's elder brother, Abdullah, in Trans-Jordan.

Cox's next task was to ensure that Faisal was seen by all (and felt by himself to be) really wanted by Iraqis as king. Any suggestion of a rigged election would be anathema and wholly counter-productive. Cox proceeded with enormous subtlety. Gertrude wrote on 6 August:[57]

> I couldn't rest in the afternoon because of my appointment with the Naqib. I never loved the old man more than that day, though it took him an hour and a half to say his say. He was in the highest spirits and tremendously pleased with the part he has played. "Khatun", he said, "you are my daughter, I will tell you all that has passed through my mind. I have never since the coming of Sir Percy Cox acted contrary to his advice or to the wish of the British government. When I saw that Faisal was fit to be King and knew that the great Government favoured him, I determined that I must avoid all talk and gossip by rising myself in the Council and pronouncing him King. I thought: Shall I consult Sir Percy Cox? and my own thoughts answered me. I had made up my mind – if he disagreed with me I could not change it. Therefore I consulted no one".

Cox himself wrote, in his dry and matter-of-fact way:[58]

> It was as a result of the popular tributes that [Faisal] received during the first fortnight of his presence in Iraq that His Highness the Naqib, without any consultation with me, proposed to the Council on July 11th a resolution, which was unanimously approved, that the Amir Faisal should be declared King, on condition that his government should be a constitutional, representative and democratic one.
>
> On receiving a copy of the resolution according to the usual routine, I replied that before concurring in or confirming it I felt it necessary to fortify myself with direct evidence of the choice of the people by means of a referendum, and the task of carrying out the measure was at once put in hand.
>
> The people of the Sulaimaniyeh District of Southern Kurdistan decided to abstain, as they were at liberty to do, from taking any part in the election of a King for the Iraq; with this exception the referendum was applied throughout the country and the results showed 96 per cent. of the votes to be in favour of the Amir Faisal's election, the remaining 4 per cent. coming mainly from the Turcoman and Kurdish communities of Kirkuk. On 18th August the Ministry of the Interior informed His Highness the Naqib, as President of the Council, that an overwhelming majority of the people supported the Amir Faisal's election, and accordingly on 23rd August in the presence of representatives of all local communities and deputations from every Liwa and Iraq, except Sulaimaniyeh and Kirkuk, I proclaimed His Highness the Amir Faisal to have been duly elected King of Iraq and at the same time announced his recognition as King by His Britannic Majesty's Government.

The figure of "96 per cent. of the votes to be in favour" could be argued as showing a lack of subtlety uncharacteristic of Cox, but this did not really matter, save to a few carping souls. The important thing was that, without any possible doubt, a great majority of Iraqis were happy with Faisal as their king, as, as Cox wrote, he was duly proclaimed king by Cox himself on 23 August 1921.

Of the situation in Kirkuk and Kurdistan, Gertrude wrote:[59]

> The town population of Kirkuk is Turcoman and the village population Kurd. Neither want Arab rule. Two of the quarters of Kirkuk town have asked for a Turkish ruler. The Kurds are not anti-British; they want a Kurdish independent state under our protection, but what they mean by that neither they nor anyone else knows. They refuse to be connected in any way with the Kurdish province of Sulaimani, which before the coming of Faisal had already voted itself out of the Iraq state. So much for Kurdish nationalism of which you may possibly hear a lot of tosh talked in the next few months, unless Sir Percy succeeds in inducing Kirkuk to listen to reason. Arbil and all the Kurdish districts round Mosul have come in, realizing that their political and economic welfare is bound up with Mosul. They have bargained for and will obtain certain privileges, such as Kurdish officials. Some ask that all the teaching in the schools should be in Kurdish, a reasonable request if it weren't for the fact that Kurdish can barely be called a written language and that there aren't any Kurdish teachers, and those can only be trained in Arabic for there are no Kurdish books.

The Political Officer in Sulaimaniyeh, Major E.B. Soane, had reported twelve months previously that the last thing the Kurds wanted was to be governed by Arabs.[60] Unfortunately, no one seemed to be able to offer any other alternative.

There had almost been a slip two days before Cox's proclamation of Faisal as king. Gertrude wrote on 21 August:[61]

> The Colonial Office has sent us a most red-tapey cable saying that Faisal, in his coronation speech, must announce that the ultimate authority in the land is the High Commissioner. Faisal refuses, and he is quite right. He says that from the first we must recognize that he is an independent sovereign in treaty with us, otherwise he can't hold his extremists. Sir Percy, bless him, wobbled a little; but my view was that it came to the same either way in the end, and there was no point in claiming an authority we could not enforce. Faisal drafted an admirable statement which was telegraphed home and Sir Percy a still better one, which accompanied Faisal's.

Faisal once installed as king, the next task was to form a government. Gertrude wrote on 11 September:[62]

> Over Cabinet making this week, I've got more deeply in the minds of Faisal's devoted followers than I've ever got before. There are not many of them, the fervent patriots whose personal devotion to Faisal is enhanced by the conviction that he alone has the qualities out of which an Arab King can be made, a King who will unite the Arabs and take his place among the rulers of the world. Ja'far and Nuri Sa'id are to my mind the most striking examples. What they fear is the return of the Turks by intrigue rather than by arms.

The highest hopes had not been realized, Arab unity remained a dream, but the plain fact was that Iraq did have its own Arab government. That part at least of Cox's objectives had been met.

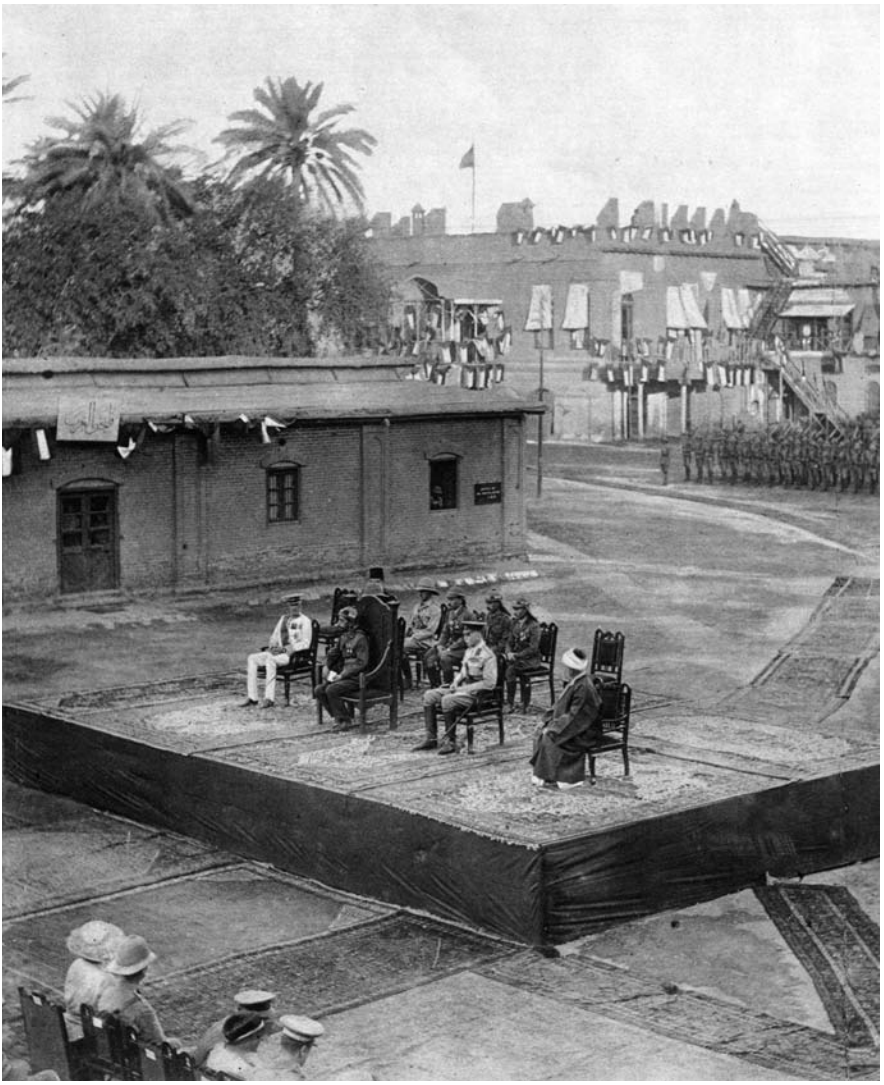
* * * *

A next task for Cox was Iraq's external relations, which were still, nominally at least, under direct British control. In November 1921 Ibn Saud launched the campaign, which eventually was to unite the Arabian Peninsula under his rule as Saudi Arabia, by defeating his long-time enemy Ibn Rashid and by capturing the Rashidi capital of Hail. This success of Ibn Saud was seen by Faisal, not unnaturally, as a threat to the as yet undefined territorial integrity of the new state of Iraq. Gertrude wrote to Frank Balfour on 17 December:[63]

> ... to the south the Ibn Saud business is fortunately in the hands of Sir Percy, not of H.M.G. I haven't any doubt that the capture of Ha'il will have far reaching consequences. Ibn Saud has stepped therewith on to the Syrian and Palestine scene, not to speak of Transjordania and the whole L. of C. [lines of communication] to the Hejaz. Faisal takes a gloomy view; but on the whole I think that as our influence alone can keep Ibn Saud from eating up the Hejaz or even Transjordania, it's on the whole an advantage that the British representative there should be on good terms with him. Ibn Saud has so far adhered consistently to his agreements with us, though the underlying bitterness between him and the Sharifian family baffles description.

Cox himself summed up the situation on Iraq's still not finally agreed south west frontier:[64]

> It was an insecure and troubled heritage on which the new King of Iraq had entered.... on the desert frontier of



The proclamation of Faisal as King of Iraq, Baghdad, 23 August 1921 (Mary Evans Picture Library/Illustrated London News Ltd)

> Iraq to the south-west, the Bedouin tribes had since the early part of 1921 been in a continual state of unrest as a result of the operations of the Sultan of Nejd against his enemy Ibn Rashid and the Shammar tribes of Hayil. In consequence a large influx into Iraq of fugitive Shammar went on through the year 1921 and naturally had a deplorable effect on the relations between Iraq and Nejd, which was aggravated when, exalted by his capture of Hayil in November, Ibn Saud claimed allegiance from the eastern Anizah tribe which had always been attached to Iraq.
>
> In the following March a serious attack took place by a strong raiding party of Ibn Saud's "Akhwan", as the Wahabis now style themselves, upon a harmless encampment of pastoral nomads guarded by a detachment of the Iraq Camel Corps, some 30 miles south of the railway line and near the provisional frontier. It could be taken for granted that the Sultan [Ibn Saud], at his distant capital, would repudiate the hostile action of his hot-headed tribesmen, and for us to have taken measures of retaliation without first communicating with the responsible Ruler, might have resulted in a state of war between the Sultan of Nejd and Iraq, which would have been a calamity from all points of view; nevertheless, some aeroplanes which were sent to obtain news, having been fired on, were obliged to reply and a grave warning was immediately addressed by me to Ibn Saud, remonstrating with him for this unprovoked raid by his tribesmen; reminding him of the provisional frontier which had been agreed upon and urging him to concert with me arrangements for its formal settlement.

Cox had drafted and agreed with Faisal the proposed Anglo-Iraqi treaty which was intended to replace the mandate. The draft was sent to London for approval. That became a long drawn out process which eventually led Cox to a major crisis, a crisis which he defused coolly and competently. Gertrude told Valentine Chirol of some of her worries just after the draft had been sent to London in December 1921:[65]

> 'I fear,' said Sir Percy today, 'that at home they don't quite realize our atmosphere.' They have gone so far in Egypt in a senseless non-realization of atmosphere that I tremble at the prospect of what they will do with us. So does Faisal. The treaty is now drafted, and, as drafted here, he is completely satisfied with it. Yet I fear that at

> home they will boggle over phrases, scrape here, whittle down there, till the panache is gone – just a little bit of bombast, perhaps, which will help Faisal to carry the day, the rather childish (if you like) insistence on an agreement between free peoples, the one offering help which the other accepts without dishonour, just that, the atmosphere, the enormous phrase, however you like to think of it.

Nothing was heard from the Colonial Office for some six months, but when eventually, at the end of June, the approved treaty arrived back in Baghdad from London, Gertrude was greatly relieved:[66]

> Well, it's all right, reasonable and generous and accompanied by a sympathetic private telegram to H.M. from Mr. Churchill.

However, what looked straightforward and acceptable had become far more complicated than Gertrude perceived during the six months' delay while the Colonial Office thought about the proposed treaty. Cox described a "serious divergence of view" existing between the British and Iraq governments:

> ... as to the precise nature of their relations with one another. It was extraordinary with what aversion the mandatory idea had always been regarded in Iraq. The mere terms "Mandatory" and "Mandate" were anathema to them from the first, for the simple reason, I am convinced, that the words translate badly into Arabic, or rather were wrongly rendered in the Arabic Press when they first emerged from the Peace Conference. I assume the term mandatory to have been introduced by its sponsor, President Wilson, in the particular and recognized sense of "one who undertakes to do service for another with regard to property placed in his hands by the other"; the "other" in this case being the League of Nations, while the "mandate" is the contract under which service is performed. But it was taken in Iraq in its other sense, of "an authoritative requirement, as by a sovereign"; and the "mandatory" as one who exercised the authority. Two widely differing conceptions. Misunderstanding their meaning, as they did, there was always an intense eagerness on the part of those in authority in Iraq to get rid of the hated expressions, as defining their relations with us, and much needless controversy was the result.

The problem had been exacerbated by the very great publicity given in the Arab world to the terms of the proposed British mandate for Palestine.

That wise old man, the Naqib, did his best to point out to Cox the inherent problem. Cox reported to Churchill on 18 May 1922[67] that Faisal:

> ... by signing the treaty placing a Muslim state under the mandate of a Christian state he thereby incurs great risk of damaging his spiritual prestige and influence in Islam without standing to gain anything...

Gertrude wrote early in August:[68]

> This is very secret. Sir Percy told me that Mr Churchill had turned down his urgent proposals that a compromise should be arrived at over the mandate question and instead had proposed that he and the King should come to England at once. My heart died within me. It was obvious that no good could result. H.M.G. are certain to hold firm about the mandate; if they did not, our iniquitous mandate in Palestine, and the still more iniquitous mandate of the French in Syria would be undermined.
>
> The High Commissioner has telegraphed home that he doesn't see any advantage in Faisal's going to England. He recommends that we should publish the treaty, say that we are all agreed on it and that the sole point of difference is the mandate. On that point, the electors of Iraq must decide; if they decide against we will evacuate tomorrow.
>
> The King is delighted with this proposed solution and says it will be easy for him to explain that he has got the best terms he could and the people must accept them or resign themselves to anarchy. But will our Government accept this suggestion? That's what we want to know, for being all away grouse shooting we can get no answer to any telegrams, however urgent.
>
> We are playing a difficult game. We assure the King and our nationalist friends of our good intentions, and then come the Palestine mandate, which is worse than we could have anticipated in our wildest dreams. How can we feel certain that our lying scoundrel Govt. won't play

> us the same trick and, while signing a treaty with the King, present to the League of Nations a mandate wholly incompatible with the terms of the treaty? That's where we are so dreadfully let down. We have embarked on a path in Palestine which can lead to nothing but revolution and the League of Nations is for ever damned for having passed the Palestine and Syrian mandates. Shall we ever get the High and Mighty to understand that oriental nationalism, as represented by Faisal and the Mufti of Jerusalem, is not a thing to be played with?

On 23 August 1922, on the first anniversary of Faisal's accession, the crisis came to a head. Cox wrote:[69]

> It was in such a highly charged atmosphere that on a stifling day in August, the 23rd to be precise, I proceeded officially to the Palace to offer my congratulations to His Majesty on this the first anniversary of his accession, and just before entering the building was treated to an anti-mandate demonstration by what proved to be a small packed crowd. I took immediate steps to demand an apology, which was accorded, but at the same moment it was announced that King Faisal had been struck down by a sudden and dangerous attack of appendicitis, necessitating an immediate operation and involving his complete insulation from the affairs of state for some time to come. I was thus faced with a unique if critical situation. The Cabinet had resigned; the King was incapacitated; the Baghdad Vilayet and the Euphrates tribes were on the verge of rebellion to all appearances likely to be not less serious than that of 1920 and organized by the same elements. The Turks at the same moment, with their prestige greatly increased by their defeat of the Greeks, were in Rowanduz and Rania and were threatening Sulaimaniyeh. No authority was in fact left in the country except my own as High Commissioner and I felt bound to use it to the full. Accordingly a proclamation was at once issued explaining the situation and stating that the emergent measures which were being taken did not portend any change in the settled policy of H.M.'s Government.
>
> At the same time all friendly and moderate persons who had the welfare of their country at heart were called upon to rally to the side of the High Commissioner and resist irresponsible agitators.

Gertrude, who had been at Cox's side all that morning, wrote immediately afterwards her view of what happened that day:[70]

> When we got to the palace the courtyard was packed with people, and a number of white-robed persons on the balcony apparently addressing them. The police had to clear a way for the High Commissioner's car. As he walked up the stair a voice in the crowd called out something which he did not hear and I did not catch, after which came a storm of clapping. Much perplexed we went into the audience room. The King seemed rather nervous but the conversation quickly got into easy channels – the morning's review and so forth – and after a quarter of an hour we came away. The court was empty. As soon as we were back in the office Sir Percy told me to get on to it at once and find out what had happened. Within an hour, I had the information we wanted. It was a demonstration on the part of the two extremist parties, and the sentence which had provoked applause was: "Down with the mandate".

And the next day, Gertrude wrote:[71]

> We had troops and armoured cars waiting outside the town gates, but they were not needed. That which we had always predicted to the King had happened. The extremists collapsed. In the evening an admirable communiqué in English and Arabic was published. It is Sir Percy at his best and you can't beat him. Its effect was instantaneous – we already knew it would be for Mr. Cornwallis had summoned some thirty of the notables in the afternoon and read it to them. They were delighted with the action that had been taken, and not least delighted were Nuri and Ja'far, those ardent nationalists.
>
> 'Since the King couldn't summon up courage to come out into the open, his illness was beyond words fortunate. But Providence deserves comparatively little of the credit. Sir Percy has never made a mistake, either in resolution or in formulating his resolution. If the Arab states get themselves moulded into a country, it's he above all others whom they will have to thank.

Cox described what happened subsequently:[72]

> With the restoration of the King's health the moment had

> come for the instalment of a new Cabinet, which the Naqib had succeeded in forming by the end of September 1922. Difficulties with regard to the Treaty and the Mandate had by now been cleared away in correspondence with the Secretary of State, and on October 10th His Highness the Naqib and I signed the Treaty of Alliance between Great Britain and Iraq, which was published on 13th October, together with a Proclamation by His Majesty King Faisal to his people expressing his profound satisfaction with the event. The period for which this, the original Treaty, was to run was twenty years, and during the long negotiations which led up to it nothing less than fifteen years was ever discussed, but, as the sequel shows, the period was destined to be considerably curtailed.

There is no more powerful example of Cox's outstanding qualities than his actions in Iraq between 23 August, the day of the anti-mandate demonstration, through the period of Faisal's illness, to the signature of the draft treaty on 13 October. If there were nothing else, these actions would qualify him for the description: "A great man". Weaker men would have quailed at the prospect of being the sole authority in a leaderless country on the point, perhaps, of insurrection.

Lesser men would have cried for help. Not Cox; not the late Victorian English gentleman trained in the school of the Indian Empire, trained to take energetic action to prevent problems getting out of hand and having an unquestioned belief in British infallibility.

Before looking at the sequel Cox mentioned, it is necessary to stand back and look at the situation in Britain itself. When he accepted the post of High Commissioner, Cox had known that he could be effective for just as long as he had the support of the British government behind him. This was not a new situation to him. In Muscat over twenty years previously he had worried that all his effort at a local level might be invalidated by changes in London over which he had no control.

So it was in Baghdad during 1922. Perhaps the beginning of the erosion of support in Britain was started by Arthur Moore's three articles in *The Times* at the end of December 1921 *(see page 182)*, perhaps it was the increasing incapacity of the British government to resolve the crisis caused by the undeclared war between Greece and Turkey, perhaps it was the worsening economic position in Britain, with unemployment rising alarmingly, perhaps it was that the strong national sense of unity and purpose of the war years had evaporated, perhaps it was a combination of all these factors. The fact was that by 13 October, when the draft Anglo-Iraqi treaty was signed by Cox and the Iraqi prime minister, a major political crisis was developing in

Britain which made the whole question of British ratification of the treaty highly problematical.

Even before the Moore/Philby articles appeared in December 1921, the British position in Iraq was being criticized and attacked in Britain by the Northcliffe press, specifically *The Times* and The *Daily Mail*. A principal reason for this was that Lord Northcliffe had mounted a personal vendetta against Lloyd George and his coalition government. Northcliffe, then in an advanced stage of megalomania, died on 14 August 1922 but there was no immediate or dramatic change in the policies of the newspapers he had controlled. Any weapon with which an attack could be made on the prime minister was welcome to Northcliffe. The British taxpayer was being asked to contribute what seemed to be substantial sums of money to maintain a British presence in a country which few knew about and even fewer cared about.

An erstwhile journalist friend of Cox, Sir Stanley Reed, had written a long letter to *The Times* on 1 July 1921 which was published on the leader page under the title "A Bootless Venture". Reed wrote that "the burden on overtaxed British industry" could be cut immediately by getting out of Iraq. He continued that Faisal would have "little authority other than he derives from British bayonets".

The Moore/Philby articles, published on 27, 28 and 29 December 1921, traced the history of the British commitment in Iraq and were highly critical of the Hashemites (Philby had by then begun his long attachment to Ibn Saud) and of British policy generally. The articles maintained that the hope of oil did not justify the cost of the operation in Iraq and concluded that: "here remains only one policy. We must evacuate Mesopotamia while we can, and now is the moment."

In June 1922 the British government published a White Paper on its proposals for the Palestine mandate. These proposals created a considerable controversy, not least in the Arab world.

At the same time, throughout the early months of 1922 the British government had been trying unsuccessfully to save the Greek position in Asia Minor, specifically around Smyrna. This was unavailing and in September Kemal Ataturk's nationalist army drove the Greeks into the sea under the guns of the Royal Navy. British ships were involved in rescuing refugees but offered no other support to the Greeks. This sparked what became known as the Chanak crisis of the last week of September 1922, when Lloyd George and Churchill together almost took Britain to war against the Turkish nationalists, led by Kemal Ataturk, in the firm belief that a threat of force would topple him. Eventually a truce was arranged at a small town on the Sea of Marmora, Mudania, which came into force at midnight on 15 October, two days after Cox had signed the draft treaty with the Iraqi prime minister. The effect of the Mudania truce was to topple the Turkish government in Constantinople (henceforth Istanbul) and to confirm Kemal's authority as the real ruler of Turkey.

Britain had been humiliated by Kemal. There followed a revolt in the Conservative party, the withdrawal of Conservative support for the Lloyd George coalition government, the resignation of Lloyd George and a general election in Britain on Wednesday 15 November. Winston Churchill lost his seat in Dundee; the vote against him was massive and unambiguous.

A peace conference was convened in Lausanne on 20 November to discuss peace with Turkey. Curzon represented the new British government (Andrew Bonar Law was Prime Minister) as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, thus providing some continuity. Curzon had been consistently unhappy with Lloyd George's strong pro-Hellenic stance. At this conference the Turkish government demanded the return to Turkey of the *Vilayet* of Mosul. Clearly, the British government could not at one and the same time concede the Turkish claim to Mosul and ratify Cox's draft Anglo-Iraqi treaty.

In addition, the Northcliffe press (in spite of Northcliffe's death) continued its attack on the British presence in Iraq. On Saturday 18 November the *Daily Mail* published a sensational attack which included sentences such as "public funds are being poured into the desert at the rate of nearly eight millions a year", and "The High Commissioner is established in a new Residency which has cost the British taxpayer up to date nearly £160,000" and that in Iraq "both civil and military organizations are busy building up permanent establishments on a scale that would be unjustifiable even in a new British protectorate."

Against this background, the new British government, in the classic manner, appointed a cabinet committee to decide on the future of British relations with Iraq. Cox had to fight hard in London for his treaty. A lesser man might have resigned on the spot, but he fought for a compromise and was eventually able to sign a revised treaty with the Iraqi prime minister on 20 April 1923, knowing that the treaty would be ratified by the British government. This was, as he says, his last official act in Iraq as High Commissioner.

Cox's own words describe those months, which must have been trying for him in the extreme:[73]

> At this juncture a change of Government took place in England which profoundly affected the future of Iraq. The Coalition Government under which the Iraq Treaty had been framed and signed had resigned on 23rd October, ten days after its signature, and the question of Iraq became a prominent plank in the course of the general election which followed; a fierce newspaper campaign being conducted against the expenditure of British money in the country and several members of the new House of Commons pledging themselves to work for its evacuation

> by the British at the earliest moment. As a consequence, a Cabinet Committee was set up in London in December 1922 to decide upon the future of Iraq.
>
> Meanwhile the Treaty lately signed, with its twenty years duration clause, had not been ratified, while at the first Lausanne Conference the Turkish delegates had resolutely refused to entertain any idea of the Mosul *Vilayet* remaining with Iraq, or to refer the Turco-Iraq frontier question to the League. It was of course open to Britain to refuse to ratify the Treaty and thus for four months Iraq remained in dire suspense (flooded all the time with Turkish propaganda) as to whether she would not after all be handed back to Turkey.
>
> I was called home to attend the deliberations of this Conference, and Sir Henry Dobbs having in the meanwhile arrived, on appointment as Counsellor to the High Commissioner, with the prospect of succeeding me at the end of my term, I left for London on 19th January 1923 leaving him in charge, and though he was no stranger to the country, having served with me for two years, early in the war, the situation which he had to take over was full of awkward possibilities.
>
> I returned from my mission on 31st March, bringing with me the results of the deliberations of H.M.'s new Government. They were in the shape of a draft Protocol to the Treaty of Alliance, reducing the duration of the treaty from twenty years to four (the period to commence on the date of the ratification of the Treaty of Peace by Turkey), but concluding with a consoling provision that "Nothing in this Protocol shall prevent a fresh agreement from being concluded, with a view to regulate the subsequent relations between the High Contracting Parties; and negotiations shall be entered into between them before the expiration of the above period." This document was signed by the Prime Minister of Iraq and myself on the 20th April 1923 and may be said to have been my last official act as High Commissioner.

The Lausanne conference dragged on into the summer of 1923 and eventually produced a peace treaty between Britain, France and Italy (the allies of the First World War; the United States had not been at war with Turkey) and Kemal's Turkey which was signed on 24 July 1923. This Treaty confirmed Turkey's frontiers as they are today, with the

exception of Alexandretta (Iskenderun), which was then under French control in the Syrian mandate but which was ceded to Turkey in 1939. The *Vilayet* of Mosul remained part of Iraq; in return, the Allies abandoned the provisions of the Treaty of Sèvres for an independent Armenia and an autonomous Kurdistan.

* * * * *

Concurrently with the taking over the government of Iraq for those few critical weeks in August and September when Faisal was ill, and the saga of the Anglo-Iraqi treaty, Cox had another major achievement to his credit during his last months as High Commissioner. Britain had a responsibility for Iraq's external relations for as long as the Anglo-Iraqi treaty had not been ratified. There were few such external relations more sensitive than that with Iraq's neighbour to the south west, Ibn Saud.

Ibn Saud feared the Hashemites as much as they feared him. He saw himself being encircled by Hashemite governments in the Hedjaz, in Trans-Jordan and in Iraq. Yet if there was one man he trusted to maintain the balance, that man was Sir Percy Cox. Cox had promised Ibn Saud that he would come to Arabia to meet him and discuss the frontier question, but, understandably, affairs in Iraq had delayed him.

Major H.R.P. Dickson, the British Political Agent in Bahrain at that time, sent a trusted emissary to Ibn Saud at the end of September 1922, a man whom, Dickson said,[74] had a "cheerful and entertaining disposition" and to whom Ibn Saud was likely to talk freely. According to Dickson, his emissary reported that:

> Bin Saud ... was very anxiously awaiting the arrival of Sir Percy Cox. He appeared very excited and somewhat irritated that the High Commissioner had delayed his promised coming so long. ... he was convinced King Faisal was doing all he could to prevent Sir Percy coming down, this being part of the latter's whole policy which was to create friction and misunderstanding between the English and himself, Bin Saud. That there was a deliberate plot afoot to prevent the High Commissioner seeing and holding personal interview with himself appeared to have completely taken hold of Bin Saud.
>
> Bin Saud appeared to be fully aware of the fact that Sir Percy Cox intended retiring early next year. This fact seemed to worry him in a curious manner. He repeatedly ... [said] that Sir Percy Cox was the one Englishman who had made him and who he trusted. "Many private agreements exist between us which I can divulge to no

> man," he said. Bin Saud expressed anxiety as to who would succeed Sir Percy Cox. "So long as the latter is in Baghdad", he continued, "my affairs will not be lost sight of and my interests will be safeguarded; after he goes I fear a stranger will come who not only will not know me, but will certainly be imbued with Shareefian ideas, and will therefore work against me. ..."
>
> Bin Saud then further criticized British Policy in Iraq. He put down our troubles there to the Turkish policy of Mr Lloyd George. Sir Percy Cox knew, he said, that this policy was all wrong but because he was retiring next spring he was not worrying.

Eventually Cox did meet Ibn Saud a few weeks later at Uqair, where he decided the boundary between Iraq and what was to become Saudi Arabia. Dickson is the only source telling exactly how Cox fixed the line of the frontier, a frontier which exists still today. Iraqi and Saudi delegates had, Dickson wrote, argued for five days on where the frontier should run, without reaching any conclusion.

On the sixth day, Dickson continued:[75]

> ... Sir Percy entered the lists. He told both sides that, at the rate they were going, nothing would be settled for a year. At a private meeting at which only he, Ibn Saud and I were present, he lost all patience over what he called the childish attitude of Ibn Saud in his tribal-boundary idea. ... It was astonishing to see the Sultan of Nejd being reprimanded like a naughty schoolboy by H.M. High Commissioner, and being told sharply that he, Sir Percy Cox, would himself decide on the type and general line of the frontier. This ended the impasse.
>
> Ibn Saud almost broke down, and pathetically remarked that Sir Percy was his father and mother, who had made him and raised him from nothing to the position he held, and that he would surrender half his kingdom, nay the whole, if Sir Percy ordered. As far as I can remember, Ibn Saud took little further part in the frontier discussions, leaving it to Sir Percy to decide for him this vexed question. At a general meeting of the conference, Sir Percy took a red pencil and very carefully drew in on the map of Arabia a boundary line from the Persian Gulf to Jabal 'Anaiza, close to the Transjordan frontier. This gave Iraq a large area of the territory claimed by Nejd.

Although there is no independent confirmation of Dickson's account, his words are in keeping with the character of Cox. Having such enormous and unique prestige in Ibn Saud's eyes, only Cox could have settled the frontier question in this way. Again, he demonstrated the basic philosophy of British India, the legend of infallibility (otherwise bluff) and the need to take bold action rapidly before a potentially dangerous situation got out of hand.

* * * * * *

Postscript: Cox's Family Affairs and Relaxation

Sir Percy Cox had very little relaxation from the time he took up his duties as Secretary to the Foreign Department of the government of India in April 1914 to his retirement in May 1923. He had a few free days in the spring and early summer of 1918 when he was called to England for consultation. Philip Graves says that he spent much of this time with his sisters in Somerset and Devon.[76] Belle stayed on in Basra during this time.

He presumably at this time also saw his grandson, Derek Percy Zachariah Cox, who was born on 25 February 1918, and his daughter-in-law. It would have been for the first and the last time, for Ethel Cox was to die of miliary tuberculosis on 3 January 1920.

The Coxes agreed to the inclusion of their son's name in the Harrow School War Memorial Roll of Honour. This Roll gives their address as "Linn House, Hamilton, Lanarkshire." Cox never lived in Linn House, though his brother Edward Henry Cox lived there in 1919 and 1920 and his occupation was listed as "colonel, retired". Coincidently, Linn House was adjacent to Hamilton Barracks, which was the Regimental Depot of The Cameronians. It is possible to speculate that Edward Cox had had some sort of job with The Cameronians (and/or the Highland Light Infantry, who shared the same barracks) but it has not been possible to find any evidence of this.

Percy Cox had been interested in birds all his life. This interest was very much more than a general one. Major R. E. Cheesman, who was private secretary to Cox in Baghdad from 1920 to 1923, made, with Cox's encouragement and support, a lengthy journey through the Arabian peninsula in the 1920s. He described this journey in *Unknown Arabia*,[77] a book to which Cox contributed a Foreword:

> On the outbreak of the Great War the author of this intensely human tale of desert travel, impatient, like other patriotic young Britons, to play his part in the struggle, and anxious to avoid the inevitable delay involved in qualifying for a Commission, enlisted in the 5th Buffs, and it was as

> Lance-Corporal Cheesman of that Battalion that in the summer of 1916 he discovered himself to me at Basra, bearing a line of introduction from an old Service friend.
>
> That particular juncture, at the headquarters of Indian Expeditionary Force "D", was one of strenuous preparation for the coming winter's advance up the Tigris, destined, under Sir Stanley Maude's brilliant leadership, to retrieve the disaster of Kut and put us in possession of Baghdad, and the Army machine was working at high pressure for every member of G.H.Q.; but the busiest of us had our occasional hours off, and it needed but the briefest association for the Lance-Corporal and myself to discover a strong bond of sympathy and interest, in the keen love of nature which we both possessed and which even the more serious preoccupations of the moment could not entirely banish from our daily life. It was a link, at any rate, which served to keep us in close touch for the next seven years, during the last three of which, Captain Cheesman, having in the meanwhile obtained his Commission, was a valued member of my personal Staff as High Commissioner of Iraq. Throughout this latter period we continued to develop, as opportunity offered, and under the easier conditions of peace, the natural history collections of which the foundations had been fitfully laid during the vicissitudes of the War.

Cheesman wrote of Cox:[78]

> It was in the early summer of 1916 that I first met Lieutenant-Colonel *(sic)* Sir Percy Cox in Basra. He was Chief Political Officer of the Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force... I had risen to be a Lance-Corporal, and was attached to General Headquarters, 3rd Echelon, in Basra. The birds in Mesopotamia were entirely new to me, and Sir Percy was the first ornithologist I had met in the country. Although he had the advantage of a long acquaintance with the birds of the Persian Gulf, his knowledge of the Iraq species was as scanty as mine; but he shared with me the desire to know them better, and we began that summer the collection which has now reached several thousand skins. During the period of the war he lent me a gun, my 12-bore, which I had brought out disguised and concealed in a kitbag, having been lost in the battle of Shaikh Saad. He also had access to literature,

"Oh, to be in England... ..." Cox having left Baghdad, Gertrude Bell hosted a picnic for King Faisal (Mary Evans Picture Library)

so that we were able to identify specimens as additions were made, and Captain N.B. Kinnear of the Bombay Natural History Society, in addition to his military duties, was always ready to identify specimens sent by post.

The end of the War saw me returning to Baghdad in August, 1920, as Private Secretary to Sir Percy Cox, the first High Commissioner for Iraq. During the next three years, the foundation of the young kingdom of Iraq left His Excellency and his staff little time. The day's work monopolized most of the daylight and often lasted far into the night. Sir Percy Cox, however, brought out at his own expense an Anglo-Indian skinner who had been trained by the Bombay Natural History Society, and during those three years at Baghdad this professional was sent on excursions which we were unable to undertake ourselves, into the farthest regions of King Faisal's territories and among the islands of the Persian Gulf, while we contributed such species as were within the reach of short journeys, and many were sent in by local enthusiasts and sportsmen. The skins were sent in batches to the British Museum (Natural History), where the authorities kindly stored them.

Epilogue

The Last Years, 1923–1937

"And all the courses of my life do show
I am not in the roll of common men."
Henry IV, Part 1

"Huntsman, rest! thy chase is done."
Sir Walter Scott

Honoured Retirement

Sir Percy Cox was aged fifty-eight when he retired from the post of High Commissioner in Iraq in May 1923. The normal age of retirement for members of the Indian Political Service was fifty-five. He was never given full time employment by the British or the Indian governments again, though he represented the British government in Istanbul as Plenipotentiary in negotiations with the Turkish government on the frontier between Iraq and Turkey. He also represented the government of India at a conference in Geneva in 1925 which produced a convention for the control of trade in arms and weapons.

Honours and decorations were (as they are still) an important element in the rewarding of its more distinguished servants by the British government. Cox collected his share; he was made a Commander of the Order of the Indian Empire (C.E.I.) in the Edward VII Durbar honours in 1903, Commander of the Order of the Star of India (C.S.I.) in 1909, knighted (as Knight Commander of the Order of the India Empire, K.C.I.E.) at the George V Coronation Durbar in 1911, received a second knighthood in 1915 (K.C.S.I.), a G.C.I.E in 1917, Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George (K.C.M.G.) in 1920, and a G.C.M.G. in 1922. He was awarded an honorary Doctorate by the University of Oxford in 1925 and by the University of Manchester in 1929.

Senior military commanders, Haig, Rawlinson, Allenby and others, were awarded peerages at the end of the war and very substantial gratuities. Haig, for example, was voted £100,000 by Parliament. It seems likely that the public perception at the time of what was due to "conquering heroes" demanded such an honour for military commanders whose achievements had inevitably considerable attendant publicity. Cox never sought the limelight, his achievements rarely, if ever, made headlines. The fact is that no special honour was accorded to him by the British government on his retirement, though he was voted a gratuity of £5,000 by Parliament.[1]

Speculation ninety years after the event as to why the official recognition of Cox may seem paltry is idle. Cox's friends appear to have considered that the British government could have done more for a man whose achievements were undoubtedly significant and which were to prove more lasting than those of many others. It cannot be overlooked that Cox, as a member of the Indian Political Service, was an outsider in Whitehall. In addition to being an outsider, he was something of a loner; loners are always suspect in bureaucratic hierarchies.

In any case, the British government in 1923 had major domestic problems. The economy was ailing and the political consensus in the country was changing rapidly. James Ramsay Macdonald became the first Labour prime minister in January 1924. As was seen in chapter 6, British policy in Iraq, even the fact of Britain staying in Iraq, was not supported by many members of parliament and much of the British press.

In 1924 Cox sought to renew his roots in England by taking a house, *Woodlands,* at Clapham, just north of Bedford[2] and thus resume the life of an English country gentleman, the life which his father, his grandfather and other ancestors had enjoyed and which he had tasted briefly before leaving for India forty years previously. He hunted and shot and became a Deputy Lieutenant of the County, just as his father had done over half a century beforehand in Essex.

He became a clubman, joining or maintaining his membership in such establishment haunts as the Athenaeum, the Carlton Club, the Naval and Military Club and the United Services Club. He was elected a member of the British Ornithologists' Union in 1922, joined the British Ornithologists' Club and became Vice-President in 1927.

He became also an active member of the Royal Geographical Society (he had been a Fellow since Curzon proposed him in 1895) and was elected to the Council in 1925. He was Chairman of the Society's Mount Everest Committee in the 1930s and President of the Society from 1933 to 1936. His obituary in The *Geographical Journal* (Volume XC No. 1, July 1937) says of the period of his Presidency:

> During this time he was diligent in the affairs of the Society, attending the Society's House almost every day and presiding at the meetings of Council and the various committees as well as the evening meetings with unfailing regularity and great dignity. With his striking upright carriage and youthful figure he made a most impressive figure as President, and advanced the interests of the Society in every way.

Wilfred Thesiger, then a young man of twenty-four, gives in his autobiography *The Life of my Choice*[3] a charming picture of Cox at seventy,

as President of the Royal Geographical Society and in the twilight of his years. Thesiger had been invited by the Society to speak about a recent journey he had made and wrote:[3]

> In those days (1934), a lecture at the Geographical Society was a formal occasion, with the President, Council and lecturer in white tie and tailcoat, and the audience in dinner jackets. The lecture was preceded by a dinner with the Society's dining club. Sir Percy Cox, an awe-inspiring man renowned for his ability to keep silent in a dozen languages, was the President and I sat next to him. After checking a few facts with me he lapsed into silence, while I in my confusion ate a plateful of mushrooms, even though on two previous occasions mushrooms had made me violently ill. I had never spoken in public before and was feeling sick with apprehension anyway: now, I thought, I really will be sick in the middle of my lecture. However, all went well, and when he closed the meeting Sir Percy was complimentary about my journey.

Percy and Belle Cox shared for the first time in over thirty years of marriage a life together in English surroundings. Belle had been made a Dame of the Order of the British Empire in her own right in 1923, after they had left Baghdad, in official recognition of the hardships she had endured at Percy's side in Somaliland, in the Persian Gulf and in Iraq.

They had their orphaned grandson, Derek Percy Zachariah Cox, to care for. The boy was sent to a preparatory school at the age of ten in 1928 where a fellow pupil was Stewart Lawrence Newcombe, T.E. Lawrence's godson.

In 1931, Derek Cox followed in his father's and his grandfather's footsteps and went to Harrow. On leaving Harrow he joined the Royal Air Force and subsequently transferred to the Fleet Air Arm. He was killed in November 1942 when *H.M.S. Avenger,* an escort carrier, was torpedoed and blew up.[4] His name appears on the Fleet Air Arm Memorial at Lee-on-the-Solent.

In the years of his retirement Cox enjoyed to the full his passion for hunting. He was an enthusiastic follower of the Oakley Foxhounds in Bedfordshire. *Woodlands* was to prove too much for the Coxes; it can be imagined that Belle found more to occupy herself in London than in rural Bedfordshire. Percy too, had major interests in the learned societies and clubs of London. In any case, the life of an English country gentleman in late Victorian England, that which Cox had known as a boy and a young man growing up, was difficult to emulate in post-war Britain with its major social changes. Whatever the reason, the fact is that they moved to London in 1928 and took a flat in Kens-

ington. Cox kept his hunters in Bedfordshire and retained the shooting on the estate.

From London he would often on a Saturday in the hunting season take the noon train from St Pancras, arriving at Bedford at 1.15 p.m. and spend the afternoon hunting.

He took an earlier train on Saturday 20 February 1937 and spent the whole of that morning in the hunting field with Lord Luke of Pavenham. A cold east wind was blowing and Sir Percy had had considerable trouble with his horse during the morning. Shortly after 1.15 p.m., he collapsed and died. Had he been given the power to choose the manner of his parting, it seems not unlikely that he would have chosen to end his life on the hunting field.

On Monday, 22 February, *The Times,* in addition to the usual obituary notice, ran a leader headed The Man on the Spot:

> The value of personality in diplomacy and administration has seldom been better illustrated in British history than by the career of Sir Percy Cox ... No British representative, even in the great training ground in the Near and Middle East, ever bore heavier responsibilities than the former political resident in the Persian Gulf, Minister in Tehran and High Commissioner in Iraq. Few, indeed, possessed his intuitive understanding of the peoples or leaders with whom he had to deal, his thoroughness in method and his power of commanding the admiring respect of even his most convinced opponents.

The obituary of Cox in *The Times,* the style of which suggests that it was written by his biographer, Philip Graves, outlined his career and character and wrote that his reputation:

> ... owed nothing to publicity or the expenditure of public money. It was derived solely from his personality, the strength of his character, and his imperturbability and tenacity of purpose as administrator, negotiator, and as peacemaker. Part of his success was, however, due to the steady, passionless, methodical energy with which he addressed himself to each successive problem which came before him. His standard of accuracy was high. His dispatches and telegrams were written or rewritten until they expressed his meaning exactly. He was loath to deal with any question until he had before him all the relevant facts on which he would base his decision or his recommendation. To his staff, British, Persian, Arab and Indian, he was bound by ties of mutual loyalty in a common cause. A good scholar, both in Persian and in

> Arabic, he was also a skilled ornithologist and a fine horseman.
>
> His dignified voice and presence, his memory for names and faces of Persians and Arabs with whom he had at any time come in contact and his good temper combined to make him an ideal intermediary between East and West, whether at Eastern courts or in nomad camps, whether exhorting princes to moderation or pirates to repentance. As such, "Cokkus" will be remembered long after the policies, of which he was the instrument, and their authors have been forgotten in the torrid land in which he and his wife, ever by his side, spent over 30 years in the harness of a succession of arduous offices.

There were many obituaries and tributes to a remarkable, if perhaps enigmatic, man. An obituary written by Sir Percy Sykes, a noted authority on Persia, appeared in the Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society (now the Royal Society for Asian Affairs):[5]

> Cox negotiated the Anglo-Persian Agreement, in which Lord Curzon insisted on taking over practically every department of the Persian Government and thereby naturally aroused the strongest opposition alike from patriotic Persians and from vested interests. The final result was failure. Cox, whose silence was considered to be golden among the Arabs, chilled the hearts of the Persians, to use their own expression. He won their esteem, but, as ever, he felt that his work lay in Arab-speaking countries, and he was glad to return to Iraq. Cox received various decorations, but his extraordinary services were not adequately recognized by Government. He certainly never pressed his own claims to recognition.

The obituary in the *Geographical Journal* already referred to says that Cox was "naturally modest and self-effacing" and that his reputation:

> ... was earned unostentatiously by the inspiration of high example and a sympathy that enabled him to see the other man's point of view, combined with a strong personality, a dignified bearing, and an honesty of purpose that was never doubted.

Cox's remains were cremated at the Golder's Green Crematorium and his ashes were subsequently placed in the Upminster Parish

Church, where he had been baptized and near to Herongate, where he had been born and spent his childhood.

His will was dated 22 November 1936 and probate was granted on 9 May 1939. His estate was valued at some £27,300. The gross value of settled land on the probate certificate is shown as "nil". Principal beneficiaries were Belle and his one surviving sister Mary Helen.

Belle lived for another nineteen years. She died in Oxford on 30 August, 1956, aged ninety, leaving an estate with a net value marginally in excess of £30,000.

Assessment

In the portrait of a man, or of a woman, formal obituaries inevitably tend to bring out the highlights. But shadows, if they exist, are also important if the portrait is to be more than a two-dimensional likeness. Cox's achievements speak for themselves, but recounting them leaves one with a feeling of being unsatisfied. Many people wear a mask on the face they show to the world, and few men more so than Cox.

In 1922, as British High Commissioner in Iraq, he touched the peak of his career. Against a background of best part of a quarter of a century's solid achievement in the region of the Persian Gulf, his actions in, first, taking into his own hands for a few critical hours in August the government of Iraq and thus avoiding a major crisis, and second, in ending fruitless debate on the location of the Iraq-Nejd border by simply making a decision, must rank as outstanding. Few men would have had the courage and the coolness to do what Cox did at that time. Both actions were of the classic "deeds which won the Empire" model, and took place at a time when the British people collectively were rapidly losing both the political will and the economic means to sustain an empire.

But it would be completely wrong to regard Cox as a reactionary, blindly seeking to hold on to the threads of empire against forces which could not be controlled. Arnold Wilson was perhaps such a man; Churchill's verbal defence of the Indian Empire in the 1930s suggests that he too at that time was something of a reactionary.

Cox was above all a realist, with a finely developed and sensitive political perception; in other words, he knew instinctively what could be made effective in a specific situation. In Baghdad in August 1922 he knew that he would prevail, simply because there was no strong and co-ordinated opposition. He took the decision that Faisal could have taken but was afraid to take. Similarly at Uqair in November, he knew that Abdul Aziz Al Saud would have to accept his decision on the delimitation of the frontier with Iraq because the Saudi leader respected him as a man. Lesser men would have quailed at the enormity of the risk in each case.

Cox's attitude to both these crises and his response in each case

were an ultimate expression of the philosophy of the men who ruled India during Queen Victoria's reign, an expression of the illusion of infallibility, or of what Philip Mason calls "the best of British bluff".[6] His actions were in keeping with the philosophy of stopping a spring with a twig before it swelled into a river which an elephant could not cross.

Sir Percy Cox was in his later years greatly respected by all who knew him. Yet how well did any one the people with whom he mixed really get to know him? His reputation as a man who could keep silent in a dozen languages suggests a man to whom many of his contemporaries could not get close.

Gertrude Bell wrote of him being locked up in himself.[7]

Photographs of him at various stages of his life show a strong but kindly and sensitive face. The corners of his mouth turn up slightly, the sure sign of a man who is easy in himself and who laughs readily.

His reputation in the Persian Gulf as "a great man" was to last for as long as there was a permanent British presence in the region, that is, until the dawn of the oil age in 1971. Sir Olaf Caroe, who himself had been briefly Acting Resident in the Gulf in the 1930s, wrote that Cox was "one of that band of Englishmen able to interpret to other men something imperishable in the British name."[8]

Caroe's words provide a glimmer of light in the quest for Cox-the-man rather than Cox-the-effective-servant-of-government. In contemporary Britain, many, perhaps a majority, of successful men have a ruthless drive for power or for money, or for both. Cox's motivation, pursued ruthlessly, was for service to an ideal. His aspirations were very high, his personal ambition much less so.

Cox was a product of the oligarchy of late Victorian England, an England in which individual members of the small group of men who governed regarded themselves as "gentlemen". A great majority of these men were protestant and active, if habitual, churchgoers, often looking askance at Rome and generally regarding nonconformism as something for the servants. A substantial number of these men were, or aspired to be, landowners, country gentlemen engaging in the pursuits deemed fitting for a country gentleman, of which riding to hounds was paramount. There was no precise definition of a "gentleman", but it was often said that everyone recognized one when they saw him.

Victorian England grafted on to this basic concept an ideal. In Philip Mason's words:[9]

> ... for most of the 19th century and until the Second World War [the ideal of the English gentleman] provided the English with a second religion, one less demanding than Christianity. It influenced their politics. It influenced their system of education; it made them endow new public schools and raise the status of old grammar schools. It

> inspired the lesser landed gentry as well as the professional and middle classes to make great sacrifices to give their children an upbringing of which the object was to make them ladies and gentlemen...

Percy Cox was born at the time of the high noon of empire into a society which believed itself to be a divinely sponsored élite, an élite which had the right, indeed the mission, to rule "lesser breeds without the law" for their own good. This elite had a very clear idea of Britain's vital interests (as perceived at that time) and would fight without question for these interests. Cox's upbringing and education took this belief for granted; it was something men of his background "imbibed with their mother's milk". One did not question a creed which was regarded as axiomatic.

As a child, his passions were riding, cricket, collecting, pursuits which tend to favour individual rather than group activity and which he tackled with boyish enthusiasm He was not gregarious, being happy in his own company.

At his preparatory school and at Harrow, the inculcation of the ideal of the English gentleman was an inherent part of the unwritten curriculum. Many of his contemporaries wore this ideal on their sleeve, paying lip service to it when appropriate. Not so Percy Cox. He believed fervently in the ideal and set himself the task of living to it. It is possible that the example of his eldest brother Arthur (who seems to have lost a substantial fortune betting on horses) would have underlined his determination. A gentleman was a conservative, who defended his property. Arthur Cox had dissipated his inheritance in an ungentlemanly way, a factor which may have made his youngest brother even more determined to play the role of paragon.

Philip Graves wrote that as a child Percy Cox was solitary, happy with his head in a book, or collecting bird's eggs. The loss of his father at the age of five must have touched him. He was last-but-one in a family of seven children of whom the first three were girls. He was always very close to his sisters; it would seem very likely that his elder sisters "mothered" him when he was a small boy.

All his life he remained at heart a hunter and a collector. He had tasted on the Somali coast the ultimate twin excitements of a true hunter: a lion hunt and a man hunt, where the only rule is kill or be killed. Philip Graves quotes a Major Temple who wrote to *The Times* after Cox's death saying that:[10]

> ... dominance lay rooted in the man. It had nothing to do with ... physical force... . Dominance with him was moral or nothing. ... Always he mastered because nothing less than mastery could appease his resolute spirit.

The collector side of his personality shows in his reports, and especially his early reports. These read as the reports of a man who has painstakingly collected every possible scrap of relevant information and arrayed this information to make a coherent picture.

As a child he was shy and as he grew up, he tended to remain solitary. His crooked nose must have been a source of embarrassment to him as a child and as a young man, enhancing any tendency to hide his true self from the world. (Bullard wrote that it had been caused by a football accident as a child).[11] His legendary silences were in part those of an essentially shy personality, but were also in part due to his innate humility. As he matured, he almost certainly would have realized that a reputation for silence was a useful weapon in the multifarious challenges which he had to face. In his final years, silence would have almost certainly become a habit.

His postings in India, in Somaliland, in the Gulf and in Iraq were almost always ones in which he was largely on his own (even if he had a subordinate staff). His sporting interests, hunting, cricket, tennis, golf, would bring him in contact with others but would not make great demands on his inner self. In other words, he seldom had any need to be outgoing, his official life tended always to be solitary, and he seems to have been not unhappy in this relative solitude.

It might be countered that active membership of London clubs and societies does not suggest a solitary man. Possibly, but London clubs have a tradition of not being places where men of Cox's generation went for scintillating conversation.

His achievements suggest that he was strongly intuitive. There were no rules, there was no case book of examples, to tell him what to do in the challenging situations in which he found himself. When Curzon asked him to go to Muscat in 1899, the Foreign Department of the government of India suggested that he should study their files. He declined, saying that he preferred to trust his own judgment. He had perception and a vision of the future; there is no better example of this than his early recognition of the potential of Ibn Saud.

He was seldom, if ever, emotional in his decision-making. His reputation was that of a man who, coldly and dispassionately, would consider all the aspects of a problem or of a situation before coming to a decision. His decisions were impersonal, never based on feeling.

Having made a decision, he was at rest with himself. He seems never to have suffered the agonies of post-decision doubt. For him, his work, his duty, came before all else, even his marriage and his family.

In summary, he was playing a role and playing it very well, but this playing of a role could not disguise his basic temperament. He was an introvert, he was intuitive, unemotional and calm within himself.

This outline of his temperament can lead to a character assessment. Inevitably, such an assessment is both somewhat general and superficial, and has to be treated with consequent care. Using some of the

methods developed by personnel consultants in later years, people who match broadly the characteristics of Percy Cox's temperament are said:[12]

> ... [to be] characterized by decisiveness in practical affairs, are the guardians of time-honoured institutions, and, if only one adjective could be selected, dependable would best describe this type ... The word of [this type] is their bond, and they experience great uneasiness by thoughts of a bankrupt nation, state, institution or family. Whether at home or at work, this type is rather quiet and serious. [People of this type] are extraordinarily persevering and dependable. ... They perform their duties without flourish or fanfare; therefore, the dedication they bring to their work can go unnoticed and unappreciated.
>
> ... [People of this type] communicate a message of reliability or stability ... [People of this type] are patient with their work and with procedures within an institution, although not always patient with the individual goals of people in that institution ... As a husband or wife [a person of this type] is a pillar of strength. Just as this type honors business contracts, so do they honour the marriage contract. Loyal and faithful mates, they take responsibilities to children and mate seriously, giving lifelong commitment to these. Duty is a word the [person of this type] understands.

There are obvious dangers in using such an analysis over a time gap of almost a century and at second hand. For all that, the analysis provides a profile that is not far removed from the portrait of Cox-the-man which emerges from a study of the history of the times through which Sir Percy Cox lived and of the role he played in shaping this history.

He was himself playing the role of the ideal English gentleman, and playing it very effectively with a quiet determination. Yet this ideal had major inherent contradictions. Lord Annan calls it "The Insufferable Ideal":[13]

> The ideal that Our Age was taught to admire when they were children was the ideal of the English gentleman. The ideal of those pre-1914 days has been caricatured for so long, and sometimes so amusingly, that one forgets this was the ethos that Churchill invoked in 1940. It went back to the eighteenth century. Wellington embodied it, Waterloo exhibited it. According to this code an

> Englishman should be guided by an overpowering sense of civic duty and diligence. Every man's first loyalty should be to the country of his birth and the institution in which he served. Loyalty to institutions came before loyalty to people. Individuals should sacrifice their careers, their family, and certainly their personal happiness or whims, to the regiment, the college, the school, the services, the ministry, the profession or the firm. Service was an acknowledgement that there are other communities or territories which it was now the duty of the British to rule. Ruling other men and other races did not mean discovering and complying with their wishes. ...While the rest of the world feared the will to power that was behind the missionary force of the Empire, the British ... could never be brought to admit they were in danger.

These words could well described Percy Cox. His was not the will to power, but the will to serve and sustain the missionary force of the Empire. That this ideal is today seen as anachronistic and patronizing takes away nothing from the fervour with which it was upheld by men like Cox, or the essential integrity of such men. Yet the ideal was insufferable. In a more irreverent age, men like Cox can be considered somewhat stuffy. Cox himself can be seen as a man who took himself very seriously and played the role of the ideal English gentleman almost to a fault.

It is tempting to leave it at that, but it has to be recognized that in other societies in other ages there were élites who took the unquestioning concept of service to what they believed to be an ideal to extremes. The problem with men and women who need to serve an ideal, is that they tend never to question the rightness of the cause which they serve with such devotion. The cause of the English gentleman serving the perceived greatness of Britain as a divinely inspired duty may be judged anachronistic, even somewhat absurd, from the distance of a man's lifespan later. Cox and the legion like him were fortunate that the cause they served was not ignoble.

Every man is influenced by the women in his life, even if the only woman is his mother. For Cox, there were three who mattered: his mother, his wife and Gertrude Bell.

With his mother, Percy Cox seems to have had a normal relationship. His father's death when he was a small boy of five left his mother in a difficult situation, a situation from which her father rescued her. She seems to have been possessive, but it was Cox's eldest sister, Emily Button, who bore the brunt of this possessiveness. Cox's mother demonstrated what might be called the Queen Alexandra syndrome and seems to have used considerable emotional pressure to oblige a

daughter to stay at home and look after "dear Mama". In any event, Emily Button never married and entered the Roman Catholic Church before she died.

If Cox's mother had been possessive toward her three sons, Edward and Percy escaped into the army. The eldest son, Arthur, found his escape in a lifestyle which could not have pleased his mother but which may have started at Oxford as a form of rebellion. This is largely speculation; what is certain is that Arthur Cox died on 16 December 1920, leaving personal effects valued at £25 and nothing else, having spent the substantial capital sum he received when he decided to bar the entail of his father's estate. He married later in his life and it has not been possible to find a record of any children.

As far as is known, Edward Cox, Percy's second brother, did not marry. He died on 28 July 1925 and left all his real and personal property to his brother Percy. The net value of Edward's personal estate on his death was some £5,500.

There is no evidence to suggest that Percy Cox's marriage to Belle was other than a normal marriage. She gave him over forty-seven years' loyalty and devotion, putting her marriage before her son. The few images of her which appear (mostly from Arnold Wilson, but also from Gertrude Bell) are of a motherly woman with a happy disposition who loved to dance. She followed Percy to Basra as soon as she reasonably could early in 1915, but had to stay in Basra (apart from a brief sojourn in Baghdad in the late summer of 1917 when the Coxes got confirmation of their son's death) until they left together for Persia in September 1918. She had a female companion, a Miss Fowler (who attended Cox's Memorial Service in March 1937 in London) for most of the years she was in Bushire.

One wonders how much spiritual comfort and intellectual companionship Belle gave Percy. The answer would probably be "not much". Against that, Cox and men like him of his age and generation, did not look for spiritual or intellectual communion in marriage, (or, it must be said, from a woman in any case).

The Percy Cox–Gertrude Bell relationship gave to both a considerable spiritual and intellectual balm. Yet it would be completely wrong to suggest that there was even a hint of anything more, even verbal intimacies, in their sharing together. Gertrude wrote in her letters of discussing the day's events with Percy over a cup of tea in the late afternoon of most days in Baghdad. One wonders how they addressed each other and whether the formality and conventions of their age and generation were always maintained.

Strangely, it has not been possible to find in any of the published letters of Gertrude any reference to those days in August and September 1917 when Cox knew that his son was missing after an operation over enemy lines, and eventually that he had been killed in aerial combat.

Their work together in Basra and Baghdad from 1916 to 1923 was of great importance to the British presence in Iraq. It was also of considerable significance to each of them personally. Again one wonders whether either of them ever thought about its importance to the other and about the importance personally to each of them of the spiritual and intellectual sharing with the other. Probably not; to have done so consciously would have been to display an un-English sentiment. Gertrude wrote of a transient moment of tenderness between them when Cox passed rapidly through Baghdad in September 1918 on his way to Tehran, when, she said, he warmly embraced her and was unusually outgoing, and asked her "anxiously" whether she was being properly looked after.

Gertrude, a passionate and romantic woman in the Beethoven tradition had, in her past, loved unattainable men. The man for whom she cared most had died a hero's death on the Gallipoli peninsula in 1915 when she was forty-seven. Her spirit was badly bruised and she sought solace and escape in devoting, even sublimating, her life to the cause of Iraq. Many people disliked her because she was always telling them what they ought to do. Her reputation was that of a woman who always appeared to know was best for others.

If to think of Gertrude is to think of Beethoven, then the same imagery brings Johann Sebastian Bach to mind in considering Percy Cox. He was precise, controlled, balanced. Dispassionate? Yes, but not cold; feeling was never allowed to take over, his heart was never allowed to even begin to influence his head.

After Sir Percy Cox's death a memorial service was held for him in London at St Paul's church, Knightsbridge on 2 March 1937, His widow and his surviving sister attended of course, as did Belle's surviving relatives. His grandson, Derek Percy Zachariah Cox, was not listed[14] as being among those present. Speculation as to why this might have been is idle.

The Minister and the Counsellor of the Iraqi Legation in London were present, as was the Saudi Arabian Chargé d'Affaires. The largest single contingent was of the men who had ruled India during Cox's years in the Persian Gulf: Sir Hugh Barnes, Sir Louis Dane, Sir Henry McMahon, Sir Michael O'Dwyer. Colleagues from Iraq included Colonel Frank Balfour and Colonel Daly, as well as Bertram Thomas, and the eminent civil engineers Sir William Willcocks and Sir George Buchanan. Major Sir Hubert Young and his wife were also present.

Yet the British establishment was prominent by its absence. The Secretary of State for the Colonies was represented, as was the Colonial Office and the Air Ministry. There was no formal representation of the Foreign Office or the India Office, though Sir Arthur Hirtzel's widow and daughter were present; Hirtzel himself had died on 2 January 1937. Neither Winston Churchill nor Arnold Wilson attended; there may have been an excellent reason in each case.

Yet as far as the Foreign Office was concerned, Cox had not been officially invited to be present during the State Visit of Faisal to Britain in June and July 1933. He made no public comment on this fact at the time, yet many of his friends did. The question remained, and remains, unanswered.

It would seem that by the mid-1930s in Britain all that Cox stood for and had striven for throughout his career was generally regarded as being anachronistic, even rather bad form. The British people collectively had lost the will to empire and the very idea of empire, of the divine right of one race to impose its will on another, was increasingly seen as being immoral, as, indeed, it is. Thus a man who had served the cause of empire with strength, courage, integrity and effectiveness could not be seen to be a national hero.

Yet Percy Cox was a great man, a man who has earned an honoured place in the history of British involvement in the Persian Gulf and Iraq. He was as greatly respected by the Arab leaders with whom he worked as he was by his British peers and colleagues. He had, as Gertrude Bell said, a fine and simple dignity.

> His life was gentle, and the elements so mix'd in him that Nature might stand up And say to all the world, "This was a man!"

Endnotes

Prologue

1. Report of the Commission Appointed by Act of Parliament to Enquire into the Operations of War in Mesopotamia. Cd 8610, 1917, page 12 paragraph 1; Henceforth Mesopotamia Commission.
2. idem. page 11 paragraph 23.

Chapter 1

1. Philip Graves, *The Life of Sir Percy Cox, Hutchinson,* London. 1941, page 22, (henceforth *Graves*). The Graves biography is an invaluable source of detail about Cox's life. Graves knew Cox and the biography relies on information in Cox's personal files and from family sources, especially Lady Cox.
2. *Graves,* page 23.
3. Quoted by Sir Michael O'Dwyer in *India as I knew It, 1885–1925,* Constable, London, 1925, page 34.
4. *Graves,* page 31 et seq.
5. *Graves,* page 34.
6. *Annual Administration Report for the Somali Coast, 1893–1994.* (No. 662 of 1894) dated 25 June 1894. Paragraph 64. India Office Records.
7. idem. (No. 821 of 1895) dated 13 September 1895.
8. *Parliamentary Debates,* 4th series, 121 (1903) 1348.
9. *Elizabeth Monroe, Britain's Moment in the Middle East 1914–1971,* Chatto & Windus, London, 1981, page 11. Elizabeth Monroe quotes Lord Hankey and the first report of the Committee for Imperial Defence as the source of this statement.
10. idem. page 24.
11. Lovat Fraser, *Some Problems of the Persian Gulf.* Paper read to the Central Asian Society (now the Royal Society for Asian Affairs) 8 January 1908.
12. Curzon to Lord George Hamilton, Secretary of State for India, 19 September 1899. Cited by Lovat Fraser, *India Under Curzon and After,* Heinemann, London, 1911, page 89.
13. Quoted in Ronaldshay, *Lord Curzon,* Ernest Benn, London 1928, page 317; also Graves, page 63.
14. Sir Arthur Godley private to Lord Curzon, 6 January 1899. Quoted in *B.C. Busch, Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1894–1914,* University of California Press, 1967, page 18 (henceforth Busch).

15. *Busch,* page 225.
16. *Busch,* pages 398/309.
17. *Report of the Committee on Asiatic Turkey, National Archives CAB. 27/1.* Appendix VI, page 91.
18. *Busch,* page 339.
19. idem. page 346.
20. idem. page 347.
21. *India Office records,* L/P & S/437.
22. *Busch,* page 341.
23. Quoted in Gary Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia, Frank Cass, London, 1976,* pages 27/28.
24. Sir Arnold Wilson, S.W. Persia: *A Political Officer's Diary, 1907–1914,* OUP, 1941, pages 92/93; (henceforth Wilson).
25. *Graves,* pages 125/126.
26. *Wilson,* pages 92/93.
27. *Graves,* pages 172/73.

Chapter 2

1. Quoted in Gary Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia, Frank Cass, London, 1976,* pages 47/48.
2. The Anglo-French Declaration has been widely quoted. The full text is:
   The end which France and Great Britain have in view in prosecuting in the East the war let loose by German ambition is the complete and final liberation of the peoples long oppressed by the Turks and the establishment of national governments and administrations deriving their authority from the initiative and free choice of the native populations. In order to give effect to these intentions, France and Great Britain have agreed to encourage and assist the establishment of native governments in Syria and Mesopotamia, already liberated by the Allies, and in the territories which they are proceeding to liberate, and they have agreed to recognize such governments as soon as they are effectively established. So far from desiring to impose specific institutions upon the populations of these regions, their sole object is to ensure, by their support and effective assistance, that the governments and administrations adopted by these regions of their own free will shall be exercised in the normal way. The function which the two Allied governments claim for themselves in the liberated territories is to ensure impartial and equal justice for all; to facilitate the economic development of the country by encouraging local initiative; to promote the diffusion of education; and to put an end to the divisions too long exploited by Turkish policy.

3. For example:
   Elie Kedourie, In the *Anglo-Arab Labyrinth*. Cambridge University Press, 1976.
   J. de V. Loder, *The Truth About Mesopotamia, Palestine and Syria*. George Allen & Unwin, London, 1923.
   Sir Hubert Young, *The Independent Arab*. John Murray, London, 1933.
4. Secretary's notes, *Meeting of the War Council, 19 March 1915.* National Archives CAB22/1 fos. 5–6. Quoted by Jeremy Wilson in *Lawrence of Arabia*. Heinemann, London, 1989, page 180.
5. *Report of the Committee on Asiatic Turkey CAB. 27/1.* Henceforth de Bunsen Committee report.
6. Sir William Willcocks, The Garden of Eden and Its Restoration, *The Geographical Journal,* Vol. XL No. 2, August 1912. See also S.H. Longrigg's *IRAQ: 1900–1950,* page 63.
7. *de Bunsen Committee report.*
8. Shane Leslie, M*ark Sykes: His Life and Letters*. London, 1923. Introduction, pages v/vi.
9. T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom,* Jonathan Cape, London, 1935 page 58.
10. Quoted in Sir Ronald Storrs, O*rientations,* Nicholson and Watson, London, 1937, page 149.
11. Kedurie (In the *Anglo-Arab Labyrinth*) quotes FO 371/2139 65589/44923. Grey telegram No. 303 of 31 Oct. 1914.
12. Kedurie quotes FO 371/1973. 87396 Annex; Cheetham despatch 204 13 Dec. 1914 for what was actually said in the message as transmitted from Cairo.
13. Storrs, op. cit. page 15.
14. D. Garnett (ed.) *The Letters of T.E. Lawrence*. Jonathan Cape, London, 1938, pages 195/196.
15. National Archives FO 371/2486 163832/34982. McMahon Despatch 131. (Quoted in Cmd. 5957 *Correspondence between Sir Henry McMahon and the Sherif Hussain of Mecca in 1915 and 1916.* Vol. XXVII, 1938–1939).
16. IOR L/P & S/10/523 P. 3935/1915 minute by Hirtzel 27 Oct. 1915.
17. National Archives FO 371/2486, 165415/34982, copy of Viceroy's telegram, 4 Nov. 1915.
18. National Archives FO 371/2486, 171826/34982 Copy of Nixon's telegram.
19. Quoted War Cabinet, Middle East Committee, *"Mesopotamia: British Engagements as to Future Status",* prepared by India Office, 30 January 1918. National Archives CAB 27/23.
20. idem.
21. idem.
22. idem.
23. idem.

24. idem.
25. idem.
26. idem.
27. idem.
28. idem.
29. idem.
30. Wingate note in CAB 27/23.
31. Cornwallis note in CAB 27/23.
32. *The Geographical Journal,* Vol. LXIII, No. 3 March, 1929.
33. Telegram from Cox to Government of India dated 14 January 1918 repeated to Secretary of State for India, London. Copy in CAB 27/23.
34. Note by Major K. Cornwallis, D.S.O., of his conversation with the Emir Abdullah in CAB 27/23.
35. Wingate telegram in CAB 27/23.
36. Telegram from Cox to Government of India, repeated to Secretary of State for India and Cairo, 25 January 1918. in CAB 27/23.
37. Telegram from Viceroy dated 28 January 1918 in CAB 27/23.
38. CAB 27/23.
39. Lady Bell (ed.) *The Letters of Gertrude Bell,* Ernest Benn, London, 1947 (hereafter Cox/Bell) page 421.
40. Minutes in *Wingate Papers.* Durham University Library, ref. 168/1/137.
41. *Wingate Papers, Durham University,* ref. 169/1/103.
42. V. H. Rothwell, Mesopotamia in British War Aims, 1914–1918, in *Historical Journal XIII (1970),* page 281. Rothwell quotes a memorandum on "Peace Negotiations with Turkey" dated 16 November 1917 in National Archives 24/32.
43. *Wingate Papers,* ref. 169/1/103.
44. Cox/Bell, page 422.
45. idem.
46. Rothwell (note 42), page 289, quotes National Archives FO 800/204 Hankey to Balfour, 1 August 1918.

Chapter 3

1. Cox/Bell, page 410.
2. Note by Lord Hardinge on memorandum from Maude as G.O.C., Mesopotamia to Sir William Robertson as C.I.G.S. dated 24 June 1917. F0371/3056 No. 126945.
3. Quoted in *Graves,* page 182.
4. *Mesopotamia Commission Report* (chapter 6, Note 9), Cd 8610, 1917, page 16. Henceforth Commission.
5. Viceroy telegram to Cox, 10 April 1915. *Hardinge Papers,* Cambridge University Library.

6. Cox telegram to Viceroy, 13 April 1915. *Hardinge Papers,* Cambridge University Library.
7. S.H. Longrigg, *IRAQ, 1900–1950,* OUP, London, 1953, page 78.
8. Sir C.V.F. Townshend, *My Campaign in Mesopotamia.* Thornton Butterworth, London, 1920, pages 91/92.
9. idem. page 151.
10. Cox/Bell, page 413.
11. Townshend, op. cit., page 217.
12. Cox personal and private letter to Hardinge dated 7 December 1915, *Hardinge Papers,* Cambridge University Library.
13. *Mesopotamia Commission,* page 111.
14. idem. page 32. Also Townshend, op. cit. pages 227/228. Townshend wrote:
" ... in my defence orders ... I had ordered all the inhabitants to be turned out of the town, but, on the intercession of Sir Percy Cox on behalf of the women and children, who, he declared, would perish in the desert from hunger and the bullet of the desert Arab, I changed my mind."
15. Copy of Russell's report in F0371/2140.
16. Copy of Clayton's Report in idem.
17. Copy of Graves' report in idem.
18. Quoted by Kedourie, *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth,* page 21, Note 3. (FO 371/2140).
19. Quoted in Jeremy Wilson, *Lawrence of Arabia,* page 162/163.
20. Lord Birdwood, in *Nuri As-Said: A Study in Arab Leadership* (Cassell, London, 1959) confirms that Cox arranged a passage to Bombay for Nuri.
21. Longrigg, op.cit. page 43.
22. idem. page 45.
23. idem. page 79.
24. Telegram in FO 371/2486, quoted in Jeremy Wilson, op.cit. page 222.
25. Copy of Cox's report in FO 882/8; quoted in Kedourie, op. cit. page 51.
26. Lawrence's comments in Cairo Intelligence Bulletin of 10 February 1916 in WO 157/751; quoted in Jeremy Wilson, op.cit. page 249.
27. Cox's letter to Beach quoted in Graves, pages 200/201.
28. Copy telegram in FO 371/2768; quoted in Jeremy Wilson, op.cit., page 260.
29. Jeremy Wilson, op. cit. page 259.
30. Copy of Lake's telegram on FO 371/2768; quoted by Jeremy Wilson, op. cit. pages 262/263.
31. T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom,* page 59.
32. Sir Reader Bullard, *The Camels Must Go,* Faber and Faber, London, 1961, page 122.

33. Quoted by Elizabeth Burgoyne, *Gertrude Bell: From Her Personal Papers, 1889–1926,* Ernest Benn, London, 1961, pages 110/111. Henceforth Burgoyne.
34. P.W. Ireland, *IRAQ: A Study in Political Development,* Jonathan Cape, London, 1937, pages 104–106. Ireland acknowledges "the valuable assistance" that he received from Cox in writing his book. He was also given access to Foreign Office papers.
35. Quoted by Jeremy Wilson, op. cit. page 267.
36. Jeremy Wilson, op. cit. page 265/266.
37. Lawrence's report quoted by Jeremy Wilson, op. cit. page 954. (Appendix III).
38. idem. pages 953/954.
39. Graves, page 203.
40. C.E. Callwell, *The Life of Sir Stanley Maude,* page 237.
41. idem. page 238.
42. idem. page 239.
43. Cox/Bell, page 414.
44. idem. pages 417/418.
45. Copy of Maude telegram to Robertson on FO 371/3056.
46. Sir W.R. Marshall, *Memories of Four Fronts,* Ernest Benn, London, 1929, pages 249/250. Henceforth Marshall.
47. Graves quotes Gertrude's letter to Hirtzel, pages 226/227.
48. The Cox-Maude controversy is well documented. The quotations are taken from the India Office's file, L/P & S/10/666.
49. Personal and private letter from Cox to Hardinge dated 9 February 1918 in Hardinge Papers, Cambridge University Library.
50. Burgoyne, op. cit. Vol. II, page 68.
51. Marshall, op. cit. pages 268/269.
52. Cox/Bell, pages 416/417.
53. Cox/Bell, page 411.
54. Burgoyne, Vol. II, page 47.
55. idem. page 48.
56. Callwell, page 251.
57. Lord Hardinge of Penshurst, *My Indian Years,* John Murray, London, 1948, page 136.
58. Copy of Lake's telegram (G.O.C. Force "D" telegram I.G. 2857 of 22 May 1916) in IOR L/P & S/10/576.
59. *Cox/Bell,* page 417.
60. Sir Ronald Storrs, *Orientations.* Nicholson and Watson, London, 1937, page 217 et seq.
61. Cox/Bell, page 413.
62. idem. page 412.
63. idem. page 412.
64. Lawrence's report is quoted by Jeremy Wilson, op. cit., in an Appendix (III); the reference to Dobbs is in page 954 of Wilson's work.

65. H. St J. B. Philby, *Arabian Days.* Robert Hale Limited, London, 1948. page 94. Henceforth Philby.
66. Sir Arnold Wilson, *Loyalties: Mesopotamia 1914–1917.* OUP, 1930. Chapter V, page 64 et. seq. Henceforth Wilson II.
67. idem. page 14.
68. idem. page 65.
69. *Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia,* CMD 1061, 1920. page 5. Henceforth Review.
70. idem. page 6.
71. idem. page 11.
72. idem. page 12.
73. idem. page 13.
74. idem. page 15.
75. idem. page 18.
76. idem. page 19.
77. Wilson II, page 73.
78. *Cox/Bell,* page 414.
79. Philby, page 135.
80. Derek Cox was a member of No. 27 Squadron, Royal Flying Corps, flying Martynside aircraft. His death is recounted in a history of this squadron, *The Flying Elephants,* by Chaz Bowy (Macdonald, London, 1972):
"...on August 21, 27 Squadron lost three more pilots in a sprawling dogfight which took place just east of Seclin. Engaged by a mixed bunch of Albatros scouts, Captain G.K. Smith and 2/Lt. D.P. Cox (in Martynside A 3992) were both shot down and killed."
The Commonwealth War Graves Commission confirms that 2/Lieutenant Derek Percy Cox, 27 Squadron, Royal Flying Corps, was killed in aerial combat in France on 21 August, 1917. He is buried in the Cabaret Rouge British Military Cemetery, north of Arras: Plot 8, Row J, Grave No. 29.
81. *Harrow Memorials of the Great War,* Vol. 5, 1920.
82. Philby, page 139.
83. Cox, personal and private to Hardinge, 9 February 1918, *Hardinge Papers,* Cambridge University Library.
84. Burgoyne, Vol. II, pages 78/79.
85. Burgoyne, Vol. II, page 89.
86. idem.
87. Burgoyne, Vol. II, page 95.
88. idem.

Chapter 4

1. Sir Percy Sykes, *A History of Persia,* 2 Volumes, Revised Edition, Macmillan, London, 1930, Vol. II, page 522.

2. Obituary published in *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society,* 1937.
3. Lord Ronaldshay, *The Life of Lord Curzon.* 3 Volumes, Ernest Benn, London, 1928. Vol. III pages 208/209. Henceforth Ronaldshay.
4. Cox/Bell, page 422.
5. Bullard, The Camels Must Go, Faber and Faber, London, 1961, page 101.
6. Cox/Bell, page 422.
7. There is a comprehensive record of Cox's negotiations in Persia (Iran) in National Archives FO 608/101.
8. *Ronaldshay,* page 217.
9. idem. page 222.
10. Both incidents are described fully in *Graves,* Chapter XIX, "Persian Interlude", pages 248/264.
11. Minutes of meeting in National Archives F0 371/5226.

Chapter 5

1. Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War and Losing the Peace,* London 2007, page 17.
2. Letter from Sir Arthur Hirtzel, India Office to the Under Secretary of State in the Foreign Office, 20 May 1917 in National Archives F0371/5226. Hirtzel's letter says:
   'Colonel Wilson states that the situation is in his opinion, dangerous, and that the General Officer Commanding in Chief shares his view. On his western frontier he has to meet not only anti-European propaganda but also repeated and organized attacks from raiding Arabs under the nominal control of the Government at Damascus. On the North he has to counter active Turkish intrigue, and this he must expect, will increase in volume and bitterness as soon as the knowledge of the terms of the Treaty is spread through Turkey.
   'On the North-East is the peril of a form of Bolshevism dressed in a Pan-islamic garb and possible *(sic)* engineered from Berlin. The hot weather with its trying conditions and the season of Ramadhan when the Moslem is most susceptible to fanatical preaching has already commenced. In aggravation of these difficulties the Shah of Persia is to visit the Holy Places, an unfortunate reminder at this juncture that they are not in Mahommedan hands.
   'Simultaneously Colonel Wilson reports that the garrison is below strength, particularly in aeroplanes.
   'Colonel Wilson has recommended that he be given authority to announce the intended return of Sir P. Cox and in the meantime to institute a more liberal Constitution.'

3. Longrigg, op. cit. pages 112/113.
4. Cox/Bell, page 424.
5. Quoted in *Burgoyne,* op. cit. Vol. II, page 105.67.
6. Sir Arnold T. Wilson, *Mesopotamia, 1917–1920: A Clash of Loyalties.* OUP, 1931, page 306. Henceforth Wilson III
7. Quoted in *Wilson III,* page 208.
8. *Wilson III.*
9. Sir Hubert Young, *The Independent Arab,* John Murray, London, 1933, pages 286/287.
10. Quoted in John Marlowe, *Late Victorian,* Cresset Press, London, 1967, page 165.
11. Marlowe, op. cit. page 158.
12. idem. pages 158/159.
13. idem. page 170.
14. See Note 2 for text.
15. Quoted in Young, op. cit. page 316.
16. Burgoyne, Vol II, page 142/143.
17. Wilson III, page 263.

Chapter 6

1. Sir George Buchanan, a well-known civil engineer, wrote a series of articles in *The Times,* beginning 23 September 1919. Buchanan's theme was that the economic potential of Iraq had been greatly exaggerated. The citation is taken from Wilson III, page 163.
2. House of Lords Debates, 5S, Vol. XL. col. 890. Quoted in Elie Kedourie, *England and the Middle East: The Destruction of the Ottoman Empire, 1914–1921,* Bowes & Bowes, London, 1956.
3. Cox himself said (Cox/Bell, page 427) that he arrived in Basra on 1 October 1920 and Baghdad on 5 October. Philby, who travelled with him, and who was keeping a diary at this time (diary in the Middle East Centre, St Antony's College, Oxford) says that the party left Basra on 5 October. Gertrude Bell (Burgoyne II, page 172) and Philby agree that the date of arrival in Baghdad was 11 October.
4. *Wilson III,* page 321.
5. Copy in *Philby Papers,* Middle East Centre, St Antony's College, Oxford.
7. Copy of Wilson's telegram in *Philby Papers,* as Note 5.
8. Nuri Said's letter, dated 5th April 1920, and a follow-up note received on 13 April are in F0371/5226.
9. Young's minute is attached to Nuri's letter.
10. Copy of Wilson's telegram on F0371/5226.
11. A copy of Cox's draft is in the *Philby Papers,* as Note 5.
12. Another soldier not unlike Ironside was Freyberg, who won a VC in World War I and who commanded the New Zealand

Division in the Middle East and Italy in World War II. Both Freyberg and Ironside were promoted beyond their ability. Ironside was a failure as Chief of the Imperial General Staff in 1939/1940. Freyberg Let Churchill down in Crete in 1941.

13. Lord Ironside (ed.), *The Diaries of Major General Sir Edmond Ironside, 1920–1922.* Leo Cooper, London, 1972. page 123. Henceforth Ironside.
14. Robert O. Collins (ed.), *An Arabian Diary: Sir Gilbert Falkingham Clayton.* University of California Press, Berkeley, 1989, page 28.
15. Philby Diary in Philby Papers, as Note 5.
16. H. St J. B. Philby, *Arabian Days,* Robert Hale Limited, London, 1948, page 189.
17. Burgoyne II, pages 172/173.
18. Cox/Bell, pages 427/428.
19. Burgoyne II, page 173.
20. Philby Diary, as Note 5.
21. Burgoyne II, page 173.
22. idem. pages 173/174.
23. idem. page 169.
24. Cox/Bell, pages 428/429.
25. Burgoyne II, pages 175/176.
26. Cox/Bell, pages 429/430.
27. Burgoyne II, page 178.
28. idem. page 179.
29. idem. pages 180/624.
30. David Walder, *The Chanak Affair,* Hutchinson, London, 1969, pages 79/81.
31. Burgoyne II, pages 204/205.
32. See, for example, Penelope Tuson, *The Records of the British Residency and Agencies in the Persian Gulf,* India Office Library and Records, London, 1979, pages 28/34 for the text of the report of the Inter-departmental Committee set up to make recommendations as to the formation of a new department under the Colonial Office.
33. Robert Rhodes James, *Churchill: A Study in Failure 1900–1939,* Penguin Books, London, 1973, page 172.
34. Cox/Bell, page 430.
35. Burgoyne II, page 210.
36. Jeremy Wilson, *Lawrence,* page 646.
37. Report on Middle East Conference Held in Cairo and Jerusalem, 12–30 March 1921. C0935/1. Appendix 2. Henceforth Cairo Conference.
38. idem. Appendix 5.
39. idem. Appendix 6: Mesopotamia, Political.
40. T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom,* page 565.

41. Cairo Conference Appendix 6, page 40.
42. Elizabeth Burgoyne (Volume II, page 168) writes of Gertrude's "conversion" and describes her:
'... complete volte-face in favour of a purely Arab administration under an Amir of the Sharif's family, without control from Whitehall, and with Sir Percy Cox and the advisers merely giving advice and assistance. Having declared this to be impossible, she now adopted the scheme with enthusiasm and played a leading part in bringing it to fruition. In this period, until constitutional government with Ministers responsible to Parliament took shape, she exerted most influence and had her greatest moments.'
Gertrude was a highly intelligent and perceptive woman with finely developed political antennae. In London and Paris in the early part of 1919, she would have realized that the British nation had neither the political will nor the economic resources to impose on the people of Iraq the sort of administration that she had hitherto contemplated. It followed that a "Sharifian solution" was the one most likely to permit an effective British presence to be maintained in Iraq.
43. Burgoyne II, page 211.
44. idem. page 212.
45. Ironside, page 186.
46. idem. page 187.
47. idem. page 197.
48. Burgoyne II, pages 212/213.
49. idem. page 214.
50. idem. pages 214/215.
51. idem. page 218.
52. idem. page 219.
53. idem. page 221.
54. idem. page 221.
55. idem. page 224.
56. Cox/Bell, page 428.
57. Burgoyne II, page 231.
58. Cox/Bell, page 432.
59. Burgoyne II, page 234.
60. Major Soane had reported on 28 July 1920 (F0371/5286) that he had:
'...been at great pains, by personally touring, through A.P.O.'s [Assistant Political Officers], through every class, to ascertain the thoughts of these inarticulate people [the 94 per cent of Kurds who were "free and independent peasant-farmers"]. It was not unreasonable to assume that there was no reason for the people – this year more prosperous and independent than ever before – to desire any change. In every case I found this

confirmed. Some had heard rumours of Arab Government from Iraq and their fears had certainly been roused. When it was suggested that possibly Kurdistan might have a form of Council of its own, the dismay was no less. "Why" they said "during the past year, have You rescued us from the notable, the Agha, the priest, if you intend to reinstate him? Why should you act in such bad faith to us?" '

61. Burgoyne II, pages 237/238.
62. idem. page 244.
63. idem. page 254.
64. Cox/Bell, page 433.
65. Burgoyne II, page 257.
66. idem. page 275.
67. CO 730/15/6.
68. Burgoyne II, pages 288/289.
69. Cox/Bell, page 435.
70. Burgoyne II, page 292.
71. idem. page 293.
72. Cox/Bell, page 437.
73. idem. page 437.
74. *The Papers of Major H.R.P.Dickson,* Diary entry for week ending 9 October 1922. Middle East Centre, St Antony's College, Oxford.
75. H.R.P. Dickson, *Kuwait and Her Neighbours,* George Allen and Unwin, London, 1956, page 274.
76. Graves, page 245.
77. R.E. Cheesman, *In Unknown Arabia,* Macmillan, London, 1926, Foreword, page vii.
78. idem. Introduction, pages xii/xiii.

Epilogue

1. Graves, page 331.
2. Woodlands became a hotel. The village of Clapham is on the A6 trunk road, just north of Bedford.
3. Wilfred Thesiger, *The Life of My Choice,* Collins, London, 1987.
4. *H.M.S. Avenger* was an escort carrier operating 12 "Sea Hurricane" aircraft. She was torpedoed by U-155. See Geoffrey Jones, U-Boat Aces and Their Fates, William Kimber, London, 1988.
5. *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society,* Vol. XXX, 1937.
6. Letter to author dated 20 January 1993. Mr Mason was referring to an article he had written some years previously.
7. *Burgoyne II,* page 89.
8. Sir Olaf Caroe, *Wells of Power,* London,
9. Philip Mason, *The English Gentleman,* Andre Deutsch, London, 1982, page 12.

10. Graves, page 337.
11. Sir Reader Bullard, *The Camels Must Go,* Faber and Faber, London, 1961, page 200.
12. David Keirsey and Marilyn Bates, *Please Understand Me: Character and Temperament Types.* Prometheus Nemesis Book Company, Del Mar, California. 1978. pages 189/190.
13. Noel Annan, *Our Age,* Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1990, page 19.
14. *The Times,* 3 March 1937.

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The Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst: Register of Gentlemen Cadets.
Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Paris: Archives de Guerre, 1914–1918.

Private Papers, etc

India Office Library and Records:
The Papers of Lord Curzon of Kedleston.
The Middle East Centre, St Antony's College, Oxford:
The Diary of H.E. Bowman, Iraq 1918–1920.
The Papers of Sir Reader Bullard.
The Papers of H.R.P. Dickson.
The Diary of Lieutenant-Colonel G.E. Leachman.
The Diary and Papers of H. St J.B. Philby.
Cambridge University Library:
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