ALIENS IN UNIFORMS AND CONTESTED NATIONALISMS: THE ROLE OF THE IRAQ LEVIES IN SHAPING ASPECTS OF IRAQI NATIONALISM UNDER THE BRITISH MANDATE OF IRAQ (1921-1933)

A thesis
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Science
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Arab Studies

By Sopanit Angsusingha, B.A.

Washington, DC
April 23, 2018
ALIENS IN UNIFORMS AND CONTESTED NATIONALISMS: THE ROLE OF THE IRAQ LEVIES IN SHAPING ASPECTS OF IRAQI NATIONALISM UNDER THE BRITISH MANDATE OF IRAQ (1921-1933)

Sopanit Angsusingha, B.A.

Thesis Advisor: Judith Tucker, Ph.D.

Abstract

The Iraq Levies were formed by the British authorities to secure imperial order and maintain stability in the British Mandate of Iraq (1921-1932). The social composition of the Iraq Levies which consisted mainly of Assyrian recruits and its association with the British not only generated competition with the Iraqi army, but also instigated communal tension between the Assyrians and the rest of the Iraqi population. Based on archival research, this study examines the recruitment and operations of the Iraq Levies in order to understand how they led to the Assyrian massacre in 1933 and shaped Iraqi nationalism as militant and exclusionary. The main research questions are: How did British colonial policy and the Iraq Levies alienate the Assyrians from the rest of the Iraqi population? How did the deployment of the Iraq Levies cause communal conflicts with other ethnic communities in Iraq? And how did the Iraq Levies promote an exclusive definition of Iraqi nationalism that led to the massacre of the Assyrians in 1933? I argue that British use of the Iraq Levies as a tool of “divide and rule” in Iraq shaped the role of the Iraq Levies in producing the Assyrian as “other,” causing communal conflicts and shaping aspects of Iraqi nationalism in the following ways. First, the “martial race theory” used to form an Assyrian Levy force made the Assyrians appear as alien in Iraqi society. Secondly, the class regimental system that deployed the Assyrian forces against Kurdish rebellions generated inter-communal conflicts and generated suspicion of the Assyrian community. Thirdly, a symbiotic relationship between the British and the Assyrians, through the Iraq Levies, promoted the Assyrian nationalist movement
that challenged the integrity of the Iraqi state. Consequently, the Iraq Levies aroused anger and hatred of the Iraqi state toward the Assyrians, and resulted in the 1933 Assyrian massacre by the Iraqi army that shaped Iraqi nationalism as exclusive, militaristic and anti-minority.

Keywords: Assyrians, The Iraq Levies, British Mandate of Iraq, Iraqi nationalism
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are several people who have supported and driven me in the past year towards the completion of this work. First and foremost, I am incredibly grateful to my thesis advisor, Dr. Judith Tucker, for her support and helpful advice on writing history, for introducing me to myriad themes of historical research, and for trusting my potential to succeed even at times of great challenge for me. I am also very grateful to Dr. Joseph Sassoon for his class on History and Politics of Iraq that allowed me to read, write and share my thoughts in class on the Assyrians. I also appreciate his continuous support, and insightful comments on Iraqi history and contemporary politics. I also extend special thanks to Dr. Noureddine Jebnoun for his class on Comparative Arab Civil-Military Relations in which I have learned multiple themes and conceptualization of military studies. I also thank Dr. Amir Khnifess for his class on Ethnic and Religious Minorities where I found various literatures and frameworks for analyzing state-minority relations in the Middle East. Lastly, I thank Dr. Yvonne Haddad for accepting me to be her research assistant and encouraging me to continue exploring the history of the Assyrians.

The day to day mental stress and challenging work of this thesis would have been untenable, without the warm support and constant feedback of Vicki Valosik and my thesis colloquium classmates Samah Asfour, Mahdi Zaidan, and Ada Mullol who showed invaluable solidarity throughout this process. I also owe an incredible thank you to Justin Dalrymple, Idun Hauge, Sarah Slingluff for reading my drafts and editing my thesis presentation.

Finally, to my mother and father, who never failed to be my moral support, my greatest encouragers, and above all my everlasting inspiration.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 1

Literature Review .......................................................................................................................... 12

Sources and Methodology ............................................................................................................ 34

  Sources ........................................................................................................................................ 34

  Methodology ............................................................................................................................... 38

  Textual and Discourse Analysis ............................................................................................... 41

  Theoretical Frameworks ........................................................................................................... 46

Chapter I: The Assyrians and Their Discontents ........................................................................... 49

  Who were the Assyrians? .............................................................................................................. 50

  The Assyrians under the Ottoman Empire .............................................................................. 52

  The Plight of the Assyrians in the First World War ................................................................. 55

  The Baqubah Refugee Camp: the Breakdown of the Assyrian Community ......................... 59

  From Versailles 1919 to Lausanne 1923: Unattainable Autonomy ........................................ 65

  The Arab and Kurdish Levies: Ethnicization and Discipline .................................................. 69

  The Birth of the Iraq Levies ....................................................................................................... 80

Chapter II: The Martial Race Theory and the Class Regimental System: The Otherizing of the Assyrians ........................................................................................................................................ 87

  Ethnicity and State Security .................................................................................................... 89

  The Martial Race Theory .......................................................................................................... 90

  The Class Regimental System .................................................................................................. 93

  The Martial Race Theory and the Class Regimental System in the Deployment of the Iraq Levies ........................................................................................................................................ 97

  The Otherizing of the Assyrians and Inter-Communal Tension and Conflicts ................. 100
Mosul and Kirkuk Disturbances 1923-24 .............................................................. 104

The Iraq Levies and the Barrier to the Assyrian Refugee Settlement ................. 110

The Assyrians in Turkey - Iraq’s Battle for Mosul ............................................. 112

The Emergence of a Minority Discourse ......................................................... 116

The Problem of Settling the Assyrians among the Kurds ................................. 119

Conclusion ........................................................................................................... 122

Chapter III: From the Assyrian Nationalist Movement to the 1933 Assyrian Massacre .. 124

Contested Nationalisms .................................................................................... 124

The Assyrians’ Concern at the End of the British Mandate ............................... 126

The Assyrian Nationalist Movement ............................................................... 128

The Assyrian Mutiny 1932 ................................................................................. 130

The Assyrian Community’s Internal Division ................................................... 132

British Reaction to the Petition ....................................................................... 133

The Final Attempt to Establish a Homogenous Homeland at the End of the Mandate ... 134

To Stay or To Leave .......................................................................................... 136

The Battles at Faishkhabur and Dairabun ....................................................... 141

The Rise of Iraqi Nationalism against the Assyrians .......................................... 145

The Exclusion of the Assyrian in Post-Independent Iraq .................................. 147

The Systematic and Indiscriminate Massacre .................................................. 151

The Simel Massacre on August 11, 1933 .......................................................... 152

The Popular Receptions of the Iraqi Troops ..................................................... 157

The Assyrian Massacre and its Implications for Iraqi Nationalism ................... 159

Conclusion ........................................................................................................... 161
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Map of the Assyrian Christians .................................................................51
Figure 2. Map of Baqubah Refugee Camp ..................................................................60
Figure 3. An autonomous Assyro-Chaldea as demanded by Agha Petros in 1923 ........68
Figure 4. Recruits’ rudimentary musketry training c.1918-1920 .................................74
Figure 5. Dr. William A. Wigram addressing Assyrian Levy officers in Mosul, Iraq ....82
Figure 6. British and Assyrian officers. Fourth Battalion, 1927 ..................................100
Figure 7. The Turkish-Iraqi Border Region ................................................................112
Figure 8. Sketch map of villages in which Assyrians were settled 1920-1933 ............119
Figure 9. Disposition of Army Pickets at Dairabun ..................................................141
Figure 10. Operations during the Simel massacre ......................................................153
Figure 11. Batarshah, approximately 15 miles northwest of Simele, reportedly attacked by Arab and Kurdish irregulars, 18 September 1933...............157
LIST OF KEY PERSONALITIES

Assyrians

- Mar Benyamin Shimun XXI - Catholicos Patriarch of the Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East.
- Mar Polos Shimun XXII - Catholicos Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East. He was elected on 23 March 1918 after his brother, Mar Shimun Benyamin, was murdered along with 150 of his followers by Simko (Ismail Agha Shikak), a Kurdish agha.
- Mar Eshai Shimun XXIII - Catholicos Patriarch of the Church of the East. At 11, Mar Eshai was chosen as patriarch after the death of his uncle during the Assyrian genocide.
- Lady Surma D'Bait Mar Shimun - the sister of the Catholicos Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East and leader of the Assyrians, Mar Shimun Benyamin and aunt of Mar Eshai Shimun. After the assassination of her brother by the Kurdish rebel Simko, Lady Surma practically became regent. In 1918 she was invited by British authorities to present the Assyrian question in London and also attended the Treaty of Versailles negotiations.
- General Agha Petros - Assyrian military leader during World War I. After the Russians entered Urmiya, Agha Petros was appointed as a general with a small Assyrian force under his command. After the war, he led the Assyrians from Urmiya to Iraq. He had some disagreements with Mar Shimun, the patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, and was often mistrusted by his family.
- Bishop Aphrem Barsoum - the 120th Syriac Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and head of the Syriac Orthodox Church. He defended the rights of the Assyrians and of the Arab nations at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919.
- Malik Koshaba - Assyrian leader (Malik') of the Tiyari tribe who led forces against the Ottoman Army and allied Kurdish troops during World War I. He was seen by many Assyrians as a divisive figure, particularly regarding undermining the cause of Assyrian autonomy within the newly created and Arab dominated state of Iraq in 1932.
- Yaqo Ismail - son of Malik Ismail, malik of the Upper Tiyari. He was an Assyrian officer at Diana for three years. In January 1933, he resigned from the Levies and left for Simel, a large village about ten miles from Dohuk.
- Malik Loko Shlimon d'bit Badawi - Assyrian officer and leader of the Tkhuma tribe of the Assyrians. He signed a petition for cessation of military service and emigrated to Syria along with Yaqo Ismail.
- Yusuf Malek - Assyrian from the Chaldean Catholic Church. He was born in 1899 in Baghdad, Iraq from a family from Telkaif. He worked as an Assyrian interpreter for the British during the British occupation of Basra in 1914. He also worked with other Assyrian leaders to establish an autonomous Assyrian country.

Iraqis

- King Faisal - King of Iraq, third son of Hussein ibn Ali.
- Jafar al-Askari – Prime Minister of Iraq (1923-1924, 1926-1927) and Minister of Defense.
- Abd al-Muhsin as-Sa'dun – a Sunni notable and landowner who was a member of the family of sayyids which had ruled the great Muntaqiq confederation of tribes on the lower Euphrates. He was regarded warily by the king, but the British saw him as someone with
sufficient personal authority and social standing to carry through the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1922 and the other measures required for the constitutional foundation of Iraq.

- Bekr Sidqi - Iraqi army officer in command of Mosul. He was known to hate the Assyrians. He led the Assyrian massacre in 1933.
- Rashid 'Ali al Gailani - Arab nationalist who was a member of Hizb al-ikha’ al-watani (The National Brotherhood Party).
- Hikmet Suleimnan - Minister of Interior who was instructed by Rashid 'Ali al Gailani to observe the aftermath of the Simel massacre.
- Yasin al-Hashimi – An ex-Ottoman officer who joined the Arab government of Faisal in Damascus. He later became minister and prime minister under Faisal in Iraq.
- Nuri al Sa'id – A former Ottoman officer who saw action in the First Balkan War. He was a member of the secret society al-‘Ahd and joined the Arab Revolt. He was a founder of the Iraqi army and later became minister and prime minister under Faisal.
- Khalil ‘Azmi Bey - The Acting Mutasarrif of Mosul liwa who led the meeting of the British, and two hundred Assyrian leaders in 1933 regarding the Iraqi government’s policy towards the Assyrian question.
- Qaimaqam of Zakho – provincial governor who led troops of the Iraqi soldiers to disarm the Assyrians in Simel villages in August 1933.
- Qaimaqam of Dohuk – provincial governor who disarmed the Assyrian villagers in Dohuk before the massacre in 1933.
- Hajji Ramadhan - Bekr Sidqi’s Second-in-Command in Baghdad.

British

- Lieutenant-Colonel R.S. Stafford - Administrative Inspector in Mosul who provided a firsthand account of the massacre of the Assyrians by the Iraqi military in 1933.
- Sir Percy Cox - High Commissioner in Iraq from 1920 to 1923.
- Sir Henry Dobbs – High Commissioner in Iraq from 1923-1929.
- Sir Francis Humphrys – High Commissioner in Iraq from 1929–1932.
- Brigadier General H. H. Austin - Commander of the Baqubah refugee camp that was built in Mesopotamia (now Iraq) to house the Assyrians and Armenians following the exodus from their homelands in Turkey and Persia in World War I.
- Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson – He helped raise money and awareness of the pitiful situation of the Assyrian refugee community in Iraq.
- Bishop William Temple – He helped raise money and awareness of the dire situation of the Assyrian refugee community in Iraq along with Archbishop Davidson.
- Captain George Gracey - British army officer who was sent to the area west of Lake Urmia, in north-west Persia to mobilize the Assyrian forces to defend part of the front between the Black Sea and Baghdad against the Turks in December 1917.
- Brigadier-General John Gilbert Browne - British army officer who served in the Middle East commanding the Iraq Levies from 1925 until he retired in 1933. His history of the Iraq Levies was published in 1932.
- Major John Inglis Eadie - British army of the Indian Army who recruited forty Mounted Arabs from the tribes round Nasiriayah, on the Euphrates, for duty under the Intelligence Department.
• Captain H.A. Foweraker – He commanded 2nd Battalion, Levies. He took charge of the Assyrian settlement called the Z-plan which planted the Assyrians among the Kurds.
• Major W.C.F.A. Wilson - Administrative Inspector in Mosul who took over the Assyrian settlement plan from Captain Foweraker in 1928.
• Major Douglas B. Thompson - The English expert for the Settlement of the Assyrians in 1933.
• Dr. W.A. Wigram - member of the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Mission to the Assyrians.
• A. M. Hamilton - a New Zealand-born civil engineer who took charge of a British-built strategic road across Iraqi Kurdistan, between 1928 and 1932.
• Major Sargon - the British Inspecting Officer of Police at Mosul, who motored up the right bank of the river to find out the true position of the Iraqi-Syrian frontier on July 28, 1933.
• Major Allfrey - a member of the British Military Mission and liaison officer to the column at Dairabun. He came across the bodies of fifteen Assyrians killed by the Iraqi army in 1933.

Turks

• Mustafa Kemal - Commander of Ottoman forces in Syria in the last stages of the war. Founder of the modern Republic of Turkey.
• Enver Pasha – one of the triumvirate that ruled the Ottoman Empire in its final years.
• Jamal Pasha – Supreme Commander of Ottoman forces in Syria for most of the First World War.
• Fethi Bey – representative in the negotiation over the Mosul issue.
• Wali of Hakkiari - Governor of Hakkiari who traveled to the northern frontier in August 1924 to survey the Assyrians’ opinions regarding their future under the Turkish authority. He was captured by the Assyrian tribesmen in Chal, fifty miles from Mosul, and was freed by one of the Tkhuma headmen, Malik Koshaba.

Kurds

• Bedr Khan Beg - the last Kurdish emir of the Bohtan Emirate, led a series of massacres of the Assyrians between 1843 and 1846.
• Simko Shikak (Ismail Agha Shikak) - a Kurdish agha who murdered Mar Polos Shimun XXII in 1918.
• Shaykh Mahmud Barzanji - leader of the Barzanji clan from the city of Sulaimaniyah. He led a series of Kurdish uprisings against the British Mandate of Iraq.
• Shaykh Ahmad Barzani - head of the Barzani tribe in Northern Iraq. He led several revolts the Iraqi government in the 1920s and 1930s.
INTRODUCTION

On August 15, 1933, Hikmet Beg Suleiman, the Minister of the Interior, came straight into the office room of Ronald Sempill Stafford, a British Army officer serving in Iraq, in a state of collapse after witnessing the horrors at Simel. Prime Minister Rashid Ali Gaylani instructed Hikmet Beg to visit Simel and report to him on the plight of the women there. Simel was the largest village located between Zakho and Dohuk in northern Iraq. It consisted of around 700 Assyrians, who mainly belonged to the Baz tribe, the Upper Tiyari and the Diz.¹ By the time the British and Iraqi statesmen knew of the massacre of Assyrian civilians there, the barbarous operations had been going on for seven days.

From August 8-10, 1933, the Qaimaqam of Zakho had appeared in the Simel villages with a lorry full of soldiers who told the Assyrians to surrender their rifles to the troops.² Moreover, he assured them that they would be safe under the protection of the Iraqi flag. On the contrary, the Assyrians continued to be disarmed while their village was looted by the Kurds and Arab tribes without any intervention by the police. The Assyrians were in a state of fear and spent that night in and around the police post in Simel.

On the night of August 11, the police ordered the Assyrians to return to their homes. As the Assyrians were reluctantly returning to their houses, they suddenly saw lorries of troops and armored cars arriving.

Looking round to the police post they saw a policeman pulling down the Iraqi flag, which until then had been flying, as it had flown for years, as a symbol of the law and order under which every inhabitant of Iraq could live in safety and security. Suddenly and without the

² In the Ottoman Empire the title of Qaimaqam or Kāʿim-maḳām served as deputy in the capital when the grand vizier had to leave for a military campaign. The term remained in common use until the 1930s, to be replaced then by that of yarbay. The governor of a sandjāk was equally called kāʿim-maḳām when the Ottoman civil administration was reorganized in the first years of the Tanzimat (Kuran, E. and P. M. Holt, “Kāʿim-Maḳām”, in: Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 27 November 2017 http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0419).
least warning the troops opened fire upon the defenceless Assyrians. Many fell, including some women and children, and the rest ran into the houses to take cover. Not a soul was to be seen in the streets.³

Knowing that the Assyrians were disarmed and helpless, the Iraqi army proceeded with the massacre according to plan.

Machine gunners set up their guns outside the windows of the houses in which the Assyrians had taken refuge, and having trained them on the terror-stricken wretches in the crowded rooms, fired among them until not a man left standing in the shambles. In some other instances the blood lust of the troops took a slightly more active form, and men were dragged out and shot or bludgeoned to death and their bodies thrown on a pile of dead.⁴

As depicted above, hundreds of Assyrians were killed indiscriminately by the Iraqi army, even though a large section of the Assyrian population was loyal to the Iraqi government.⁵ Rather than being condemned for their act of brutality, the Iraqi troops were acclaimed as conquering heroes when they returned to Mosul. On August 18, the troops were given an enthusiastic reception.

Triumphal arches had been erected. Some of the arches had been decorated with melons stained with blood and with daggers stuck into them. This in keeping with the prevailing sentiment in the town. There was no actual disorder, for the simple reason that the Christian population were careful to remain within their houses, but the Moslems were full of exultation. There was much firing of revolvers and rifles in the air to mark their joy at the deliverance from the menace of the Assyrians. There were loud cheers from the Army and Bekir Sidqi. On all hands one heard cries of “Long Live Iraq!” “Long Live Mustapha Kemal” “Long Live Hajji Ramadhan.”⁶

Why did the people of Mosul react with such violent nationalist sentiments? For several years, no fewer than 2,500 Assyrians had been living alongside the Iraqi Muslim population in

³ Stafford, 174.
⁴ Ibid., 175.
⁵ Ibid., 179.
⁶ Ibid., 201. Mustafa Kemal or Ataturk Kemal (1881–1938) was a Turkish leader and founder of modern Turkey. In 1923 Kemal was elected president of the new Turkish republic and set out on a program of internal reform and "Westernization." He also abolished (1924) the caliphate and crippled religious opposition to reform. Kemal’s nationalist and authoritarian systems and modernization reforms became a model of autocratic government for King Faisal and Nuri Pasha al-Said in the 1920s. Moreover, he was regarded as an influential figure among the post-1930 generation of Iraqi officers who advocated the role of military in politics and the streets of Baghdad. (“Atatürk, Kemal.” In The Columbia Encyclopedia, by Paul Lagasse, and Columbia University. 7th ed. Columbia University Press, 2017. https://proxy.library.georgetown.edu/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/columency/ataturk_kemal/0?institutionId=702; Ali Allawi, King Faisal I of Iraq (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2014), 528-529; Hajji Ramadhan was Bekr Sidqi’s Second-in-Command in Baghdad (Stafford, 201).
Mosul. The Assyrians were led by Mar Shimun, the religious and temporal leader of the Assyrian community, who resided there after completing his education in England. In addition, Mosul had been the headquarters of the Iraq Levies, the British auxiliary force comprised mainly of the Assyrians.7 Throughout the massacre, the Assyrian soldiers recruited into the Iraq Levies remained uninvolved in the conflict, however, because Mar Shimun instructed them to dissociate themselves from politics. They also feared the disbandment of all Assyrians in the Levies since they needed salaries from military service to provide for their families.8 The British found it inadvisable to remove the Assyrians from Mosul after the 1933 events for three reasons. First, the removal of Assyrians would give them the impression that they were not being trusted. Second, a large number of Assyrians situated in Mosul would become very anxious about their future in Iraq. Finally, removing the Assyrians would lead to the abandonment of the employment of the Assyrians in the Levies, placing more responsibilities on the Iraqi government to take 700 trained Assyrians and settling 3,000 refugees.9

The British and the Assyrians had formed a symbiotic relationship to govern and maintain law and order in Iraq (1921-1932). Nevertheless, such a tie made the Iraq Levies, a foreign military unit, become an object of suspicion that provoked anti-Assyrian and anti-British sentiments from Iraqi statesmen, the Iraqi army and the local population. The Iraq Levies contributed to multiple episodes of political and inter-communal conflicts, including the Simel massacre on August 11, 1933 as described above. The primary subject of this thesis will focus on two main topics. The first is the origin of this “forgotten” historical episode rooted in the recruitment and operations of

7 Stafford, 172.
9 Ibid.
the Iraq Levies. The second topic is the development of militant and exclusive Iraqi nationalism as manifested in the atrocities against the Assyrians.

To understand how the Iraq Levies shaped particular aspects of Iraqi nationalism, this study asks the following questions. How did British colonial policy and the model of Iraq Levies work to alienate the Assyrians from the rest of the local population in Iraq? How did the use of the Iraq Levies as a tool of “divide and rule” through military operations lead to communal tensions and conflicts with other ethnic communities in Iraq? And to what extent did the Iraq Levies promote an exclusive definition of Iraqi nationalism within the Iraqi state that ultimately lead to the massacre of the Assyrian community by the Iraqi army in 1933?

I argue that British use of the Iraq Levies as a tool of divide and rule in Iraq shaped the role of the Iraq Levies by producing the Assyrian as “other,” causing communal conflicts and shaping aspects of Iraqi nationalism in three ways. First, the “martial race theory” used to recruit the Assyrians based on their military prowess and discipline to form an entirely Assyrian Levy force. This made the Assyrians appear as alien and separated from the rest of the local population. The British manipulation of ethnicity in military organization laid the foundation for the rivalry between the Iraq Levies and the Iraqi army. Secondly, the class regimental system formed the Iraq Levies based on ethnicity and deployed the Assyrian forces against Kurdish rebellions. This system generated communal conflicts that further alienated the Assyrian community from Iraqi society. The British association with the Assyrians in the Iraq Levies caused suspicion and hostility between the Assyrians and the Iraqi army and hindered Assyrian refugee settlement in northern Iraq. Thirdly, a symbiotic relationship between the British and the Assyrians through the Iraq Levies not only assured the Assyrians of British assistance in their struggle for autonomy and independence, but also promoted the Assyrian nationalist movement that challenged the integrity
of the Iraqi state by the termination of the British Mandate in 1932. Therefore, the British use of
the Iraq Levies as a device of divide and rule deprived the Assyrians of their chance to assimilate
into an Iraqi nation, and also shaped the Assyrians as an internal enemy of the state. Consequently,
the Iraq Levies aroused the anger and hatred of the Iraqi army toward the Assyrians, which resulted
in the 1933 Assyrian massacre that, in turn, helped shape Iraqi nationalism as exclusive, militaristic
and anti-minority.

During the Mandate Period of Iraq (1920-32), the British authorities formed Iraq’s armed
forces, comprised of the Iraqi Army, the Iraq Levies and the Royal Air Force (RAF), to secure
imperial order and maintain stability in the Mandate for Iraq. While the Iraqi army was undergoing
training to suppress any anti-government and anti-British activity in the country, the British formed
the Iraq Levies, the paramilitary troops which were to consist of Arabs, Kurds, Turkoman and
Assyrians, to fill the gap until the Iraqi army was ready to undertake these duties. At the Cairo
Conference in 1921, the British defined the missions of the Iraq Levies: to relieve the British and
Indian troops in Iraq, to ensure internal security in Mosul and Kurdistan, and to maintain its
1915 to 6,199 in May 1922, after which date the gradual cutting down units, or transfer to the Iraqi
army, began.\footnote{Browne, 1.} Seeing that a mixed troop was not militarily effective, the British preferred to keep
the Assyrians and Arabs separate, in the Levies and the Iraqi army respectively. To reduce defense
expenditure, the British turned to the Assyrians, the ethnic and religious minority which resided in
northern Iraq. Considered a martial race by their British masters for their fighting quality and
military discipline, much like Gurkhas and Sikhs in the British Indian Army, the Assyrian Levies
were not only deployed in suppressing tribal revolts but also assigned to guard the RAF bases in Iraq.\textsuperscript{12}

Most historical narratives on British imperial rule in Iraq focus on the symbiotic or patron-client relationship between the British, the monarchy, and the Iraqi tribes which led to the rise of authoritarian regimes in subsequent periods. Toby Dodge argues that the British perception of the legacy of the Ottoman Empire and their own understanding of the evolution of British society profoundly shaped their formation of an Iraqi state, interaction with Iraqi society and reform of its governmental structures based on class and urban-rural division.\textsuperscript{13} Similarly, assessing Anglo-Iraqi relations, Peter Sluglett demonstrates how the British authorities arranged Anglo-Iraqi relations and the various administrative institutions within Iraq to enable the government to be carried on in a way which would best serve British and imperial interests.\textsuperscript{14} According to Charles Tripp, British rule not only laid the institutional foundations of the Iraqi state and demarcated its territorial boundaries, but also made the state the principal arena for the multiple struggles that were to constitute distinctively Iraqi politics grounded in coercion and violence.\textsuperscript{15} While these historians have largely focused on institutional development of Mandatory Iraq, the Assyrians and the Levies have received a fair amount of attention in Iraqi historiography.

Examining the organization and recruitment of colonial armies under the British rule provides an understanding of the model of “divide and rule” that helped protect imperial interests. Adopting the military-political-economic matrices to describe the colonial military, Karl Hack and Tobias Rettig argue that colonial armies are not only part of complex and variegated systems of

\textsuperscript{12} Stafford, 63.
\textsuperscript{15} Charles Tripp, \textit{A History of Iraq} (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 4.
power, but also an essential component that sustains the domination of imperial power in terms of manpower and finances.\(^{16}\) From a historical perspective, the study of colonial armies can be categorized into two approaches. A micro-historical approach sees the colonial army as a microcosm of colonialism. It provides crucial details on the hierarchical nature of imperialism, and on how individual areas were governed.\(^{17}\) A macro-historical approach classifies different types of colonial forces and anti-colonial forces, and identifies the colonial armies’ relationships to larger regional, imperial and global systems.\(^{18}\) Moreover, the study of colonial armies focuses on three major themes. The first theme examines colonial armies as an imperial system of power. In this context, the colonial armies served complex and ambiguous roles in protecting the colonial masters’ internal and external security which reflected the concept of “divide and rule.”\(^{19}\) The second theme revolves around discourses of martial races, loyalty and revolt. In this context, the colonial armies not only shaped the lives of all the soldiers and civilians around them, but they also raised issues of domination, identity and the management of collaborative relationships. This colonial practice to induce loyalty and prevent defection translated into a divide and rule approach that produced mixed armed forces to rule over plural societies.\(^{20}\) The third theme focuses on the colonial armies’ role in shaping the postcolonial era. According to Karl Hack and David Omissi, some postcolonial states regarded colonial forces as nationalist icons, and also harnessed discourses of loyalty and martial tradition for nationalist reasons.\(^{21}\) On the contrary, Eric Storm and Ali Al Tuma argue that many European states connected the memories of colonial forces with


\(^{18}\) Ibid., 240.

\(^{19}\) Hack and Rettig, *Colonial Armies in Southeast Asia*, 10.

\(^{20}\) Ibid.

some of the most traumatic experiences of the wars, while their positive contribution toward state formation during the war was largely forgotten.22

The Iraqi military played a vital role in the process of state-building and the formation of national identity throughout the history of Iraq, and the Iraqi army has been a subject of numerous studies, most of them focused on its role in launching military coups and its increasing dominance over domestic politics from the 1930s to 1950s. According to Majid Khadduri, the multiple coups indicated that the Iraqi army was the only strong political force that could bring about political, social and economic reforms in the weak and unstable Iraqi state.23 Studying the development and role of the Iraqi army from 1932-1941, Mohammad Tarbush attributes the Assyrian massacre in 1933 to the entry of the Iraqi army into politics. However, he does not elaborate on the role of the Iraq Levies in shaping Iraqi nationalism.24 While both Peter Wien and Reeva Simon examine the relations between the Iraqi army and the rise of Iraqi nationalism, neither of them mentions the direct or indirect influence of the Iraq Levies in shaping Iraqi nationalism or forming part of Iraqi national identity.25

Most of the literature on the Assyrians in Iraq debates about who was to blame for the Assyrian massacre in 1933, rather than analyzing in detail its implications for the development of Iraqi national identity.26 Arab historian Khaldun Husry blamed the Assyrians for provoking the

---

conflict and downplayed the culpability of the Iraqi army. Meanwhile, Ronald Stafford, a British officer and liaison between the British and Iraqi governments, argued that both the Assyrians and the Iraqi army were responsible for the violence that took place as they had been mutually hostile. Seeking to restore significance and meaning to the Assyrians in Iraqi history, Sargon Donabed weaves the Assyrian experiences, including the 1933 massacre, into the power relations of the state formation of Iraq. Considering that none of these studies focus on the Iraq Levies in shaping Iraqi experience in particular, this study aims to address this lacuna by examining the role of Iraq Levies prior to, during, and after the Assyrian massacre in 1933 in order to understand how Iraqi nationalism emerged and identified with militarism and exclusivism.

My research draws on a dual approach: close textual and discourse analysis of primary and secondary source materials and interpretation of historical events with concepts of military organization and nationalism. These two approaches were used to derive information on the formation and military operations of the Iraq Levies, and perceptions of the British authorities, the Iraqi politicians and the Assyrians toward the Iraq Levies’ roles and activities in Iraqi politics and society, as well as the shaping of Iraqi nationalism by the Iraq Levies that explained the Assyrian massacre in 1933.

Textual and discourse analysis serves as a primary means to understand the perceptions regarding the Iraq Levies and the Assyrian massacre in 1933 of the three main political actors: the British, the Iraqis and the Assyrians. Analyzing a number of records and reports from the British archives, including Records of Iraq, 1914-1966, Iraq Administration Report 1914-1932, Iraq Defence Intelligence 1920-1973, Political Diaries of The Arab World and Minorities in the Middle East: Christian minorities 1838-1967, allows for an investigation of British defense policies in forming the Iraq Levies, in recruiting the Assyrians into the Iraq Levies and in using them as a tool
of divide and rule to preserve British imperial interests. Discourse analysis of memoirs and oral history interviews also highlights the views of British officers and Iraqi statesmen toward the Iraq Levies and the Assyrian community, as well as the motives of the Assyrians to join the Iraq Levies and to mobilize the Assyrian nationalist movement against the Iraqi state.

Interpretation of primary and secondary texts serves to contextualize communal conflicts between the Iraq Levies and other ethnic communities, and also to explain the role of the Iraq Levies in shaping aspects of Iraqi nationalism against the Assyrian community. To analyze how the Iraq Levies served to alienate the Assyrians from the larger Iraqi population, a number of theoretical frameworks are used to explain the process of otherizing the Assyrians and the development of deleterious relationships between the Assyrians and other ethnic communities in Iraq. The martial race theory that reflected the manipulation of ethnicity in military organization is used to analyze the recruitment of the Assyrians based on fighting quality and discipline. The class regimental system that reflected the divide and rule approach is used to analyze the deployment of the Assyrian forces against the Kurds that provoked hatred in Iraqi society against the British-Assyrian association. The British creation of a minority discourse is used to analyze the British reliance on a symbiotic relationship with the Assyrians and their claim to protect the Assyrian refugees with a goal of prolonging their imperial rule in Iraq. To examine the development of Iraqi nationalism against the Assyrians, I use a modernist narrative of nationalism to analyze the emergence and characteristics of Assyrian and Iraqi nationalisms from the causes and consequences of Iraqi-Assyrian conflicts. In addition, a primordialist narrative of nationalism is also used to find out how the Iraq Levies encouraged the Iraqi state and society to perceive the Assyrians as “other” and to analyze how this phenomenon explains aspects of Iraqi nationalism. This set of colonial policies and narratives of nationalism supported the argument that the Iraq
Levies alienated the Assyrians from the rest of the local population, brought them into hostile relationships with other ethnic communities and encouraged them to seek an autonomous homeland that challenged the integrity of the Iraqi state. Consequently, the 1933 Assyrian massacre led by the Iraqi army reflected how the Iraq Levies prevented the Assyrians from assimilating into an Iraqi nation and shaped Iraqi nationalism as militaristic and anti-minority.

This study is divided into three chapters. The first chapter provides a historical background of the Assyrians in Iraq from the Ottoman period until the aftermath of World War I. The second and third chapters contain the main arguments of this study. The second chapter addresses the demographic composition, organization and operations of the Iraq Levies, which generated and accumulated tension between the Assyrians and other ethnic communities in Iraq. It also explains the relationship between the Assyrians and the British, which shaped the Assyrians as British protégés that weakened and divided the Iraqi society. The third chapter addresses the Iraq Levies’ involvement in the Assyrian nationalist movement, which sought independence by the end of the Mandate. It also discusses the Assyrian massacre by the Iraqi army in 1933, which marked the climax of communal tension between the Assyrians and the Iraqis. Finally, it addresses a number of implications of the massacre that shaped Iraqi nationalism as violent, exclusive and anti-minority.
LITERATURE REVIEW

This research examines the role of the Iraq Levies, the paramilitary troops consisting mainly of the Assyrian minority, in shaping the Assyrians as an internal “other” in Iraq and in molding particular aspects of Iraqi nationalism under the British Mandate (1921-1932). By examining the recruitment and deployment of the Iraq Levies and their effects on the development of Iraqi nationalism, this study contributes to two principal fields of historical scholarship: colonialism and nationalism. By moving away from historians’ traditional focus on the issues of clientelistic networks, authoritarian regime, and violence, this research examines the development of Iraqi nationalism and national identity through the lens of the British-controlled Assyrian military unit. The British-Assyrian relations served not only to maintain imperial strategic interests in Iraq, but also to instill loyalty to the British and a nationalist sentiment among Assyrian soldiers. By exploring the interactions and conflicts between the Assyrians and the British, as well as those between the Assyrians and the Iraqi government, this study shows that a foreign colonial army contributed to competing visions of a nation and a state that shaped Iraqi nationalism as exclusive and militaristic.

In developing my own approach to the study of the Iraq Levies in Mandatory Iraq, I have drawn upon four bodies of work: the historiography of the British Mandate of Iraq, colonial armies, the Iraqi military under the British Mandate, and the Assyrian affair in Iraq. By synthesizing Mandatory Iraqi history, military studies, and Iraqi Assyrian minority history, I use the Iraq Levies to illustrate how the British colonial defense policies and the Assyrians in Iraq significantly shaped aspects of Iraqi nationalism.
The Historiography of the British Mandate of Iraq

Historians searching for the causes of the turbulent and unstable politics and society of Iraq under the British Mandate have long emphasized the significance of the divide and rule strategy. This concept not only mirrored the British’s own political structure based on aristocracy and feudalism, but also reflected their orientalist perception of Iraq’s highly stratified society along rural-urban and Sunni-Shi’a division.27 Recent scholarship has produced a number of important studies examining the role of British policies on the Mandate of Iraq in terms of administration, law, economy, and society of the Mandate of Iraq that exacerbated the fragile relationships among the British, urban landowners, and the tribesmen as well as among different sectors of the Iraqi population.

In Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation-Building and a History Denied, Toby Dodge studies the period between the creation of the Mandate at the San Remo Conference in 1920 and the admission of Iraq to the League of Nations in 1932. He demonstrates how historical factors during the Mandate period explain the breakdown of the American-led occupation of Iraq in 2003. Dodge argues that British rule in Iraq was not only imperialism that sought strategic interests in the Middle East, but also a model of divide and rule strategy, which established a Sunni minority as the ruling elite in a country divided by ethnicity (Arab-Kurd) and by religion (Sunni-Shi’a).28 According to Dodge, the British attempt to create a constitutional monarchy and prepare Iraq for independence indicates that the Mandate system was a compromise between traditional imperialism and Woodrow Wilson’s liberal international order.29 Nevertheless, state building in

28 Dodge, Inventing Iraq, 49.
29 Ibid., 11-15.
Iraq failed for two reasons. First, devolution of power to local shaykhs prevented the development of a strong and legitimate authority. Second, reliance on the Royal Air Force to suppress opposition created a precedent for maintaining order by force rather than through the process of developing institutions and procedures to resolve political conflict. Hence, the rule through local intermediaries, whose power relied less on legitimacy than on the application of brute force, undermined the development of civil society and created a foundation for the Ba'athist networks of patronage and violence that emerged a generation later.

Similar to Dodge, Peter Sluglett argues in *Britain in Iraq: Contriving King and Country, 1914-1932* that the circumstances of the Mandate based on a concept of divide and rule, propped up a Sunni minority and locked Britain with the Sunni ruling clique in an interdependent relationship that lasted through 1958. In Sluglett’s assessment of Anglo-Iraqi relations and British policies in various aspects, including administration, education, land and economy, Britain’s cheap and unobtrusive system of control led to a system based on a subtle mixture of promise, persuasion and deception. In these circumstances, the creation of a loyal but restive political authority in Iraq was vital. The development of defense policies demonstrated the political actors’ recognition of interdependence, which helped ensure the concentration of political power in the hands of a small class of officers and bureaucrats. At the same time, local tribal or rural leaders also gained power through grants of land and authority of jurisdiction over their tenants and followers.

Using a structure - agency analysis, Phebe Marr suggests that the authoritarian colonial regime established by Britain in the pre-1958 period contributed to the subsequent authoritarian

---

30 Dodge, 2.
31 Sluglett, 4.
32 Ibid., 5.
regimes. Although some progress had been made in building a unified Iraqi state, little had been done to improve the human condition or to develop a social or cultural basis for the Iraqi nation-state. Thus, the period of British rule manifested the kinds of problems that were to plague consecutive Iraqi governments, including ethnic and sectarian fragmentation, various strains of nationalism (pan-Arab as opposed to local and regional loyalties), and diverse ideological tendencies ranging from the extremes of communism on the one hand to highly traditional conservatism on the other.33

Similar to Marr, D. K. Fieldhouse argued that the British imperial system did not aim to undertake social or political construction of Iraq due to lack of time and resources. Therefore, the highly-stratified Iraqi society - dominated by tribal rulers and landowners, the urban official aristocracy - and the Islamic intelligentsia, was never altered by the British conquest and Mandate. The British could only adapt their policies to the basic social realities of Iraq with a goal to lead Iraq toward independence as soon as possible. Nevertheless, the only significant novelty after 1920 was the appointment of King Faisal and the influx of the ex-Sharifian officers who had served with Faisal during the Arab Revolt.34 These ex-officers came from the middle or lower middle class of Iraq. In the long term, they were to have a dynamic and largely disastrous effect on politics, leading to the political dominance of the army.35

34 In his short-lived rule in Syria, King Faisal formed a political elite of the officers who had fought with him in the revolt, the Sharifian officers. When he ascended the Iraqi throne, the officers accompanied him and brought along the strong awareness of a pan-Arab nationalist elite. As former Ottoman officers of Iraqi origin had received a high military education at the Ottoman Staff College in Istanbul and had learned Western languages, they had advantages over most Iraqis in dealing with Westerners during the mandate period. This linked their Arab nationalism to militarism and elitism when they took over crucial government posts (Peter Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism: Authoritarian, Totalitarian and Pro-Fascist Inclinations, 1932-1941* (London; New York: Routledge), 2006, 8).
Combining the concept of divide and rule and the logic of violence in Iraqi politics, Charles Tripp offers a historical account of Iraq by focusing on three themes: the importance of oil in strengthening the state and those in control of it; the patron-client relationship in politics; and the use of violence to suppress dissent. The British strategies of cooperation, subversion, and resistance gave rise to the “shadow state” - the web of associates, patrons, and power brokers which penetrates, underpins, and undermines public state institutions. The resilience and adaptability of the networks, and the often unspoken rules on which they were based, have defied and subverted various attempts at institutional reform, whether under monarchy, dictatorship, or in the brief periods of parliamentary life. Moreover, Tripp characterizes Iraq’s history of the Mandate period as one of many competing narratives of the state put forth by its diverse groups and communities. The clashing visions of the state and the assertion of Arab or Iraqi nationalism ultimately allowed a minority of Sunni Arabs to dominate the state apparatus.

All of these studies indicate that neither the British rule nor administrative, economic, education, land, or defense policies could transform the Iraqi state institutions into liberal and democratic entities. In addition, they demonstrate that the more public institutions that were transformed into agencies combating the political agendas of confessional or ethnic groups, such as the army and bureaucracy, the more these institutions raised the consciousness of communal and embryonic national groups. According to Dodge, Sluglett and Tripp, the emergence of army officers as significant political players in the 1930s helped shape the dominant position of the Sunnis through their interdependent relations with the British authority. Marr and Fieldhouse argue that the patronage networks between the British, tribal rulers, and urban landowners sustained the

---

36 Tripp, 4.
37 Ibid., 30.
38 Ibid.
authoritarian paradigm that described the nature of Iraqi politics and society in later periods. Rarely did these scholars mention the role of a foreign military unit such as the Iraq Levies that may have had an impact on the development of Iraqi politics and national identity. Examining the model of the Assyrian military unit allows us to understand another dimension of British imperial system that led to the turbulent power politics and multifaceted Iraqi national identity at present.

Colonial Armies: The Guardians of Empire

According to David Killingray and David Omissi, the functions of the colonial armies not only demonstrate the nature of imperial power, but also determined their size, deployment, training and funding.\(^{39}\) There were three roles of colonial armies: to ensure internal security, to guard colonial frontiers, and to aid the neighboring colonies when required. In line with the indirect approach, colonial armies serve as “guardians of empire” who were responsible for keeping watch and ward both on the frontiers and in the heartlands of imperial territories.\(^{40}\) For instance, in the nineteenth century, the British initially took an indirect approach, encouraging the cooperation of Kapitan China to secure Malaya and Singapore.\(^{41}\) On the other hand, in the mid-eighteenth century, the English East India Company on the Indian subcontinent took a direct approach, recruiting Indians as sepoys (soldiers) under British officers. Nevertheless, direct and indirect approaches were not mutually exclusive. Territories might employ a mix of both, typically beginning with indirect rule, and moving towards using more direct methods as the state became consolidated and tax revenues increased.


\(^{40}\) Ibid., VII.

\(^{41}\) Prominent Chinese allowed to hold sway over their own community in specified areas (Karl Hack and Tobias Rettig, *Colonial Armies in Southeast Asia*, 6).
Moreover, colonial armies’ different systems of recruitment and deployment were based on human resources and financial requirements. Examining the colonial military through the political, social, and economic lenses, Karl Hack and Tobias Rettig argue that colonial armies are not only part of complex and variegated systems of power, but also an essential component that sustains the domination of imperial power through manpower and finances. For the British and the French, colonial armies provide willing and expendable recruits and require cheaper salaries than those in metropolitan regions for a number of reasons.  

First, they are either raised from within colonial territories, or they are raised from non-metropolitan populations to dominate overseas territories. Second, they are partially funded by the territories in which such forces are raised or stationed. Third, they may or may not be necessarily indigenous to the country of recruitment or to the country of posting. For instance, the Malay Regiment was constituted from Malays from British Malaya and remained locally based. By contrast, the Algerian Zouaves for France and the Gurkhas for Britain were deployed outside their area of recruitment, notably in Indochina. In this way, the colonial forces in one colonial territory may recruit local conscripts, volunteers, militias drawn from indigenous peoples, settlers, immigrants, and recruits from other colonial territories. Evidently, the colonial armies serve as a strategic and practical solution for imperial powers to reduce defense cost while maintaining military presence in their colonies.

Due to flexible definitions and various functions of colonial armies, historians study them in two ways: micro-historical and macro-historical methods. According to a micro-historical approach, researchers look inward, seeing the colonial army and its actions as a microcosm of colonialism. The inward-looking approach provides important detail on the nature of imperialism,  

---

42 Killingray and Omissi, 9.  
43 Ibid., 4.  
44 Ibid., 5.  
18
and on how individual areas were governed. In many cases, such as India, Burma, and the Netherlands East Indies, colonial armies came to exemplify divide and rule strategies, with battalions broken up into companies from different areas and communities, or troops recruited from one area used to police another: Gurkhas in Burma; Burmese battalions in Malaya; and Christian Ambonese and others in Java.\textsuperscript{45}

As for a macro-historical approach, researchers look outward from the colonial armies to classify different types of colonial forces and anti-colonial forces. They also identify the colonial armies’ relationships to larger regional, imperial, and global systems. This approach locates colonial forces in a sphere that is overlapped by several historiographies: that of the metropolitan power and its world system of power; that of colonial armies per se; and that of the locality and region in which forces operated.\textsuperscript{46} According to David Killingray and David Omissi, the recruitment, maintenance, and deployment of colonial forces have to be interpreted not only in terms of the political, economic, and military history of imperialism, but also in the context of the distinctive social, cultural, intellectual, medical, and scientific formations of both metropolitan powers and colonial territories.\textsuperscript{47}

In addition to two different scholarly approaches, the study of colonial armies focuses on three major themes. With historians’ growing interest in global interactions and cross-cultural contacts, the number of studies of colonial armies began to increase in the last two decades. A growing number of scholars of colonial military have provided important insight into the colonial soldiers’ military role using case studies. Such case studies deal either with one group of colonial troops or with the role of indigenous soldiers in the French, British, or Spanish armies during one

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 240.
\textsuperscript{47} Killingray and Omissi, VII.
particular war. While there exists a myriad of research topics on colonial armies, three common themes emerge: imperial systems of power; discourse of martial races, loyalty, and revolt; and the impact of colonial armies in the postcolonial era.\textsuperscript{48}

The first theme examines colonial armies as an imperial system of power. In this context, the colonial armies serve complex and ambiguous roles in protecting both internal and external security as well as acting in support of imperial legislation. All empires wrestled with a similar problem: how to manage a very big system of power without overstretching and overperforming. In the inter-war years, the gradualist policies of running an empire at minimal cost and with minimal force were considered an achievement of many colonial powers. Forging alliances with local elites and building loyalty through propagating imperial ideologies represented good governance. While all the major European powers had their own traditions of imperial force, most of them encompassed the concept of “divide and rule” that was used to develop defense strategies to secure the metropole and colonial territories as economically as possible.\textsuperscript{49} Hence, the number of metropolitan soldiers in most colonial empires was small because internal defense and security rested on locally recruited forces.\textsuperscript{50} This technique of divide and rule led to the creation of plural colonial armies where men were either put into different units or treated differently according to race, and where men of different origins met on the parade ground but remained in socially separated castes.\textsuperscript{51} Studying the recruitment policies in developing armed forces in British Burma, Robert H. Taylor argues that the principles of ethnic differentiation that applied to the recruitment of troops in colonial India were also applied in Burma in the 1940s. In contrast to the high proportion of recruits from hill tribe groups, such as the Kachins and Karens, the proportion of

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{48} Hack and Rettig, 10.
\bibitem{49} Killingray and Omissi, 2.
\bibitem{50} Ibid., 7.
\bibitem{51} Ibid., 9.
\end{thebibliography}
Burmans recruited into the British Burma army was low.\textsuperscript{52} This was the result of a deliberate policy to not recruit and train infantrymen from the plains and delta because they were too expensive to maintain and less prepared to accept methods of discipline and training of the Indian army. As a result, the unwillingness of the British army to recruit Burmese men was interpreted by Burmese nationalists as part of the divide and rule strategy of the imperialists.\textsuperscript{53}

The second theme of the studies on colonial armies revolves around discourses of martial races, loyalty, and revolt. A mixture of European and indigenous forces acted as a powerful agent for social and cultural changes within empires. Not only did the colonial armies shape the lives of all the soldiers and civilians around them, but they also raised issues of domination, identity and the management of collaborative relationships. Fearing that the main populations the imperial power ruled might prove unreliable, such as Burmans, Javanese, Malays or Iraqis, every imperial power constructed knowledge about its populations and their martial qualities to underpin its control. This concept of martial races translated into a policy of divide and rule that produced mixed armed forces to rule over plural societies.\textsuperscript{54} For example, Charles Mangin, a French officer, applied the racial stereotypes of warlike people to form the African Tirailleurs Army (ATA), a part of France’s colonial military in the nineteenth century. He argued that the Black Force were the most disciplined, loyal, and warlike soldiers in the entirety of the French Empire. Hence, the diverse black ethnic groups, such as the Bambara and Mossi, were recruited into the rank and file.\textsuperscript{55}

In addition, Killingray and Omissi argue that the concept of martial race determined the colonial authorities’ strategic decision to ensure that most soldiers were deployed outside their

\textsuperscript{53} Taylor, “Colonial Forces in British Burma,” 198.
\textsuperscript{54} Hack and Rettig, 11.
home area. Sending alien colonial forces into another territory helped prevent the soldiers from defecting or establishing local allegiances.\textsuperscript{56} For instance, the British stationed constables of the Royal Irish Constabulary away from their original homes. In the Caribbean, policemen were recruited in Barbados for service in Trinidad. This differentiated patterns of deployment and also helped prevent the danger of using the native forces to suppress the local colonial subjects, which would later contribute to political and security issues.

However, the application of divide and rule based on martial race theory does not always yield the anticipated outcome. Sarah Womack examines the French practice of divide and rule to form a colonial military based on a concept of “martial races” applied to the British Indian Army at the outbreak of the Cambodian insurrection of 1885-1886. Through discussing the early evolution of the Garde indigène of Indochina, she explains that this experiment failed because it was built on a discourse of hierarchy, fear, and insecurity that discounted the martial qualities of Indochinese as well as other ethnic groups.\textsuperscript{57} Moreover, the refusal of the French to arm adequately, to advance equitably, or to pay sufficiently created a situation that prevented the peoples of Indochina from becoming martial races. She concludes that while the strategy of manipulating ethnic tension in Cambodia was believed to be successful, it could not simply be lifted from one context to another.\textsuperscript{58} Therefore, the method of divide and rule is not a modular technology that colonial administration can use in any situation. It was subject to the specificities of local landscapes as other forms of exploitation.

\textsuperscript{56} Killingray and Omissi, 15.
\textsuperscript{58} Womack, Ethnicity and Martial Races, 122.
The organization, recruitment, and maintenance of colonial armies were also related to social and economic factors. Colonial armies required a steady supply of recruits who would make loyal and malleable soldiers. Most men who voluntarily enlisted in the army saw distinct material advantages in military service. To induce loyalty and malleability, the imperial powers offered monthly pay, regular food, clothing, and welfare services for the recruits and their families. These rewards were considered new opportunities for social mobility as well as personal identities. In this respect, military service gave men new loyalties to officers and to regiments, as well as an identification with the colonial territory and with the colonial authority.  

Despite the precautions taken to ensure that the locally recruited colonial forces remained loyal, there was always the potential for disaffection in the ranks of the colonial army. Most mutinies among colonial forces were often smaller-scale protests, over conditions of pay and service, and easily contained. Associated with imperial powers, many colonial armies became suspected and denigrated by colonial citizens. The reliability of recruits was thus challenged by the rising level of anti-colonial nationalism within a colony. This situation is exemplified by the Gurkhas in India, the Assyrians in Iraq, and Ambonese ex-soldiers in Indonesia.  

The third and final theme of the studies on colonial armies focuses on their vital role in shaping the postcolonial era. Many postcolonial states regarded colonial forces as nationalist icons and as anti-independence fighters. They also harnessed discourses of loyalty and martial tradition for nationalist reasons. A number of historical works that cover the period of the First World War examine colonial armies as historical memories. David Omissi examines the letters of Indian soldiers in which they wrote about their experiences during combat in Europe. He argues that the Indian Army did not suffer a failure of morale on the Western front. Moreover, the Indian soldiers

---

59 Killingray and Omissi, 14.
60 Ibid., 17.
have been appreciated and appropriately commemorated in Britain for their service in both world wars. On the contrary, Eric Storm and Ali Al Tuma argue that history primarily connects colonial soldiers in the European imagination with some of the most traumatic experiences of the wars, whereas their positive contribution - especially the Allied victory - was largely forgotten.

The Iraq Levies reflects British gradualist policies of reducing defense expenditure and downsizing the armed forces to protect their strategic interests in the Iraqi Mandate. Applying the martial race theory, the British officers chose to recruit Assyrian refugees who fled to Iraq after World War I based on their military competence and discipline. From the imperial powers’ perspectives, such a colonial policy was good governance in the sense that it provided income and land to the Assyrians while the British managed to reduce defense cost. However, the Iraq Levies’ representation of the British imperial power provoked suspicion and hatred of the Iraqi population. Adopting the micro-historical approach and the themes of imperial system and martial race to examine the Iraq Levies, this research explains how the Assyrian soldiers of the Iraq Levies, and their association with the British, generated communal tension within the Iraqi society and shaped particular aspects of Iraqi nationalism.

The Iraqi Military under the British Mandate

Most of the scholarship on the Iraqi military during the Mandate Period focuses on its gradual rise to a dominant position in Iraqi domestic politics. Both Muhammad Tarbush and Majid Khadduri study not only the organization and operations of the Iraqi military, but also its interventions in domestic politics from the 1940s to the 1950s. Using a historical approach to provide empirical evidence of the role of the military in Iraqi politics, Tarbush describes the Iraqi

---

army’s organization and composition as well as its role in the operations against the Assyrians and the tribal uprisings of 1935-36. Through successful campaigns against the Assyrians in 1933 and against the tribal revolts in 1935-36, the army was able to establish its nationalist credentials and emerged as the arbiter in political conflicts.63 This phenomenon led to a series of military interventions in Iraqi politics from the first Bekr Sidqi coup of 1936 to the four officers’ coup of April 1, 1941 that imposed Rashid Ali al-Gaylani as prime minister.64 Similarly, Khadduri argued that the army was able to upset the political order and control politics because it was the only group strong enough to act and carry out social reforms. As the liberal politicians in the Iraqi cabinet and administration competed to secure their own strategic interests, they became too weak and disorganized, allowing the army to intervene in politics.65

Studying the Iraqi military from the British Mandate era to post-Ba‘thist Iraq based on Morris Janowitz’s typologies of civil-military relations, Ibrahim al-Marashi and Sammy Salama argue that the Iraqi military has been attempting to control the fate and identity of the nation since the creation of Iraq.66 While the military was one of Iraq’s oldest political institutions, it hardly contributed to its stability, interfering in its politics on numerous occasions by either dictating the formation of a government or overthrowing it altogether.67 The reasons for the threat of military intervention and unstable civil-military relations in Iraq were related to the politicized officers in the armed forces, namely ex-Ottoman officers. They were influenced by various ideological currents coursing throughout Europe, the Arab world and Iraq. For this reason, the Iraqi military

63 Tarbush, *The Role of the Military in Politics*, 98-100.
64 Ibid., 4.
67 Ibid., 3.
was never unified ideologically, but rather was divided by nodes of power based on personal ambitions and ideological or ethno-sectarian interests.

Several works study how the Iraqi military emerged as a site of tension between different and competing ideological currents within Iraqi society, such as local Iraqi nationalism and pan-Arabism. In *Iraq between the Two World Wars*, Reeva Simon studies the influence of political ideology on the Iraqi military. She asks why those who seized power in 1941 rejected British liberal democracy in favor of German militaristic nationalism. Using cultural determinism, Simon traces the influence of the school curricula and the role played by expatriate Arab teachers, particularly from Syria and Palestine, in the promotion of their distinct brand of Arab nationalism. She asserts that Iraq had rejected liberalism and adopted cultural nationalism and militarism because of the authoritarian system imposed by the British. Like Turkey and Japan, Iraq chose to emulate non-liberal European ideologies because they were compatible with Iraqi cultural traditions. According to Simon, this compatibility was discovered by Iraqis during their education at the military college in Istanbul. Between 1880 and World War I, this college was dominated by German instructors who were influenced by German propaganda during the 1930s. The implication of this phenomenon was that a pro-German sentiment and admiration lingered so long as to influence the thought and action of those army officers who came to dominate the politics of Iraq between 1921 and 1941.

Refuting the claim that conscription and education originated in German, Italian, French, or British thinking, Peter Wien argues that the radicalization of Iraqi Arab nationalism was the product of elite socialization, the youth movement, and ideas of masculinity and military

---

discipline. Examining a number of autobiographies composed by Iraqi intellectuals and contemporary debates on the Axis powers in the Iraqi press, Wien indicates generational conflicts between the new effendiyya, or younger activists, who were educated in state schools and universities, and the Sharifians, or the old social and political elites, who often maintained close relationships with British officials. One of his empirical evidence was the youth movement organizations such as al-Futuwa, which not only promoted militarism, but also created a gendered discourse about creating healthy male bodies in the service of the nation. In contrast to Simon, Wien asserts that the pro-German and pro-fascist sentiments were only a part of a much larger, more diverse political and social debate among Iraqi political activists and intellectuals. Therefore, Wien portrays the anti-Jewish riots (The farhud) in 1941 as a result of the struggle over power and the meaning of nationalism among the Iraqi elite, rather than the outcome of a growing pro-German propaganda in the state and the public sphere.

Other past works regarding the Iraqi armed forces under the Mandate period focus on the interaction between the military and society. According to Hannah Batatu and P. P. J. Hemphill, the Iraqi army was an instrument for forming national identity. P. P. J Hemphill states that the army was not an isolated and self-sufficient force, but reflected the influences and aspirations of the society. In addition, the Iraqi army espoused the martial spirit of Arab and Iraqi nationalism, which was a vital element in the consolidation of Sunni rule. The army was seen as a school for citizenship and became as much as Arab army as an Iraqi one. Similarly, employing a social class analysis and a modernization theory to study Iraqi politics and society from the late Mandate,

---

70 Ibid.
72 Ibid., 92.
monarchical and republican periods, Batatu suggests that the Iraqi army reflected the fragmented and multiple identities of Iraqi society. Regarding the military as a socializing agent, Batatu considers that the passing of the conscription law in 1934 transformed the military forces into an effective means for “the intermingling of tribesmen with townsmen and the breaking down of the hard and fast line between the tribes.” While Hemphill describes Iraqi nationalism as rooted in the Arab revolt, Batatu sees an Iraqi identity as a reaction to the British invasion in the 1920s. Nevertheless, neither of them mentions the role of the Assyrian community or that of the Iraq Levies in shaping a militant character of Iraqi nationalism.

Few studies on the British colonial armies focus on the minority military unit in the Middle East. Rarely do these works examine the relations between troops that consisted of officers and recruits who belonged to different ethnicities, religions and social classes. Moreover, much of the literature on the role of the Iraqi army in politics focuses on the causes of military coups and subsequent dominance of the army on the management of internal affairs and society. However, less attention has been paid to the function of the foreign colonial army in national identity formation. Although Simon examines the influence of a German nationalist ideology on the Iraqi army, she barely mentions other political and social forces that may have generated Iraqi militaristic nationalism among Iraqi officers. Furthermore, some studies that examine the impact of the Iraqi army on the sectarian relations in Iraq tend to focus on the Sunni-Shiʿa division among the officers and the rank and file within the Iraqi army rather than the Arab-Assyrian relations in the Iraq Levies. My research aims to address this gap by studying the role of the Iraq Levies as an agent that shaped aspects of Iraqi nationalism.

---

The Assyrian Affair in Iraq

Literature about the Assyrian community in Iraq revolves around the issue of the Assyrian massacre in 1933 in which the Iraqi army led by a Kurdish general Bakr Sidqi killed a number of Assyrians in Simel due to their dissidence and claim for independence from the Iraqi government. In *Reforging a Forgotten History: Iraq and the Assyrians in the Twentieth Century*, Sargon Donabed brings the Assyrians into the power relations of the formation and state-building process of the Iraqi state in the twentieth century. He asks the question: Why did not the Assyrians play a major role in the history of Iraq if they existed in Iraq? Weaving together British, Iraqi, and Assyrian accounts of the Simel massacres, he states that the incident of Simel was a defining moment of Iraqi nationhood. Donabed argues that the actions taken by the Iraqi army were a premeditated plan against the Assyrians, because they had been targeted and otherized as a Christian religious minority and for being ethnic Assyrians. Donabed adds that the Simel massacre of 1933 was not only the turning point in modern Assyrian history, but also served as a blueprint for succeeding Iraqi governments’ treatment of minorities. In this way, the massacre demonstrates the aspects of Iraqi nationalism within the Iraqi army that attempted to exclude and marginalize the Assyrian community.

On the other hand, Ernest Main depicts the massacre in 1933 in his article “Iraq and The Assyrians 1932-1933” as a straightforward example of Iraqi Arab and Kurdish brutality. Nevertheless, he considers the claim that the 1933 massacre was premeditated by the Iraqi army

---


75 Ibid., 4.

76 Ibid., 230.

77 Ibid., 124.
and the British officers as unfounded. The total number of Assyrians killed did not exceed 700 and the number of dead at Simel did not exceed 350. In “Iraq and The Problem of The Assyrians,” Stafford blames both sides for the conflict. He indicates that “the Assyrians were themselves largely responsible for the Iraqi officials’ state of mind. They had always adopted a most distant and truculent attitude towards Iraqi officials, who in turn became infuriated with the Assyrians. Although he does not confirm that the Simel massacre was premeditated, he suggests that the Iraqi ministers were likely to react to the Assyrian rebellion with violence.

On the contrary, Khaldun S. Husry does not challenge the fact that the Iraqi army was involved in the massacre. Drawing on the report by British acting inspector general of the Iraqi army, Brigadier General E. H. Headlam, Husry shows that Yaqu’s Assyrian forces bore the responsibility for starting the fight with the Iraqi army at Dairabun and Faishkhabur near the Syrian-Iraqi border in August 1933. He used official British reports to question whether the Assyrians had been disarmed before the events occurred. He also favors the account given to him in an interview with Tohalla, the officer in charge of the troops in Simel. In this account, while tribesmen were looting, the troops came to the village and joined in, culminating in the killings of the Assyrians. Husry’s account admits the culpability of the troops but exonerates Bakr Sidqi who was in Mosul. Moreover, Husry relates a conversation between an Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Said and a British diplomat in 1941, which reveals that the real responsibility for the 1933 massacre lay with King Faisal who gave the order for it.

Another narrative on the Assyrian community in Iraq deals with the relationship and interaction between the British and the Assyrian community, which became refugees and soldiers

---

79 Stafford, 70.
80 Husry, “The Assyrian Affair of 1933 (I)”, 349.
enlisted in the Levies after World War I. Examining the symbiotic relationship that developed between the Assyrian Levies and the imperial power, David Omissi argues that the mutual dependence between the British and the Assyrians indicates the dilemmas and weaknesses of British rule in Iraq. On the one hand, the British-Assyrian association suggests the nature of the Iraqi state based on patronage networks. On the other hand, such a relationship suggests that the Assyrian community was incohesive along class and tribal lines which partly explain its political behavior.  

Although service in the Iraq Levies provided a valuable source of income and temporary security for many Assyrians, they could not offer a permanent solution to the problem of the Assyrian settlement. As a result, by 1932 the Assyrians became an intricate minority problem which culminated in the 1933 massacre. The close military relationship, which developed under the Mandate, and continued into the period of independence, was more an expression of weakness than of strength of British rule.

Sami Zubaida and Kanan Makiya analyze the Assyrian struggle for independence from the Iraqi government through the framework of competitive nationalisms. According to Zubaida, the Assyrian episode, especially the Assyrian massacre in 1933, illustrated the political psychology of communitarianism in interaction with nationalism, complicated by religious identifications in a colonial context. Comparing the Assyrians to the Kurds, Zubaida sees that the Assyrian movement in Iraq under the British Mandate was not a nationalist cause, but a tribal sentiment. The Assyrian leader feared that their autonomy under the British Mandate would be restricted, if not ended, under the proposed nation-state. Therefore, the Assyrians sought to redefine

---

82 Ibid., 311.
83 Ibid.,” 318.
85 Ibid., 365
86 Ibid.
themselves as a nation, entitled to self-determination and a homeland. The new-found Assyrian identity and struggle for an autonomous homeland clashed with the nascent Iraqi nation-state and the national and religious sentiments of Arabs and Muslims. Since the army, which symbolized independence, was the focus of Iraqi and Arab nationalism, the Assyrian massacre of 1933 represented a communalist struggle against enemies of Muslims and Arabs. Likewise, in *Republic of Fear*, Kanan Makiya, presents the action of the army in 1933 and the popular sentiments which it aroused on that occasion as part of the genealogy of nationalist paranoia. In this context, the Assyrian events in the name of anti-imperialism in Iraq should be understood as a metaphor or a metaphor for mass psychological reaction which was to culminate in the Ba'thist state.

On the contrary, Sati al-Husri, the Syrian ideologue of Arab nationalism, rejects the significance of the 1933 Assyrian massacre on the development of Iraqi nationalist state altogether. Defining Arab nationalism as a cultural identity, al-Husri argues that what all Arabs have in common is language, not Islam. Therefore, he excludes the Assyrians from being part of Arab nation because they do not speak Arabic and do not consider themselves to be Arabs. His omission of the massacre from his memoirs may suggest that it was either irrelevant to Iraqi nationalism or highly critical to the stability of the state power structures.

While all studies depict the causes and implications of the Assyrian massacre in 1933 from different perspectives and political stances, none of them attribute the anti-Assyrian incident and the rise of Iraqi nationalism to the Iraq Levies. The scholarship on the relationship between the British and the Assyrian Levies reveals the strengths and weaknesses of the British imperial rule

---

87 Zubaida, 373.
which may have played a role in enhancing the Levies’ prestige and effectiveness. However, Omissi did not thoroughly examine the British military strategies in forming and organizing the Iraq Levies. Analyzing the relationship between the British and the Levies as well as the relationship between the Levies, the Iraqis and other ethnic communities, provides a clearer picture of the role and significance of the Iraq Levies in that period. In addition, Zubaida’s concept of contested nationalisms to study the Iraqi-Assyrian relationship provides a useful analytical framework to demonstrate how the Iraq Levies may have shaped the Assyrian nationalist sentiment that challenged Pan-Arab unity and generated the rise of Iraqi nationalism in the 1930s.

The Arab-oriented accounts of the Assyrian question in Iraq by Khaldun al-Husry and Sati al-Husri also suggest the sensitive minority issue to which the Assyrians in general, and the Iraq Levies in particular, may have contributed. Hence, my research aims to foreground the role of the Assyrians in Iraqi state formation by investigating the British imperial policies of the Iraq Levies and analyzing how they shaped the Assyrian recruits as an internal other. The Iraqi state and the Iraqi population’s perception of the Iraq Levies as a British tool of division may have characterized Iraqi nationalism that excluded the Assyrian minority. Such a particularistic aspect of Iraqi nationalism may explain the causes and implications of the Assyrian massacre in 1933 to the Iraqi state formation and fragmented national identity.
SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

To address the research questions, I have relied on a variety of sources: archives, memoirs of Assyrian religious leaders and officers, written works and autobiographies of British officers, missionaries of British and American backgrounds, Iraqi newspapers, the League of Nations reports, and oral histories of British officers in the Iraq Levies. To analyze and synthesize these sources, I have drawn on a dual approach: close textual and discourse analysis of primary and secondary sources, and explanation of historical events with a set of theoretical frameworks. These two approaches were used to derive information from primary and secondary sources on the formation and military operations of the Iraq Levies, perceptions of the British authorities, the Iraqi politicians, and the Assyrians toward the Iraq Levies’ roles and activities in Iraqi politics and society, and also the shaping of Iraqi nationalism by the Iraq Levies that explained the Assyrian massacre in 1933.

Sources

British archives provide the primary sources of data, especially regarding British colonial policies in forming the Iraq Levies, the military operations in which the Iraq Levies engaged, and various perceptions of the Assyrian massacre in 1933 from the British, Iraqi and Assyrian sides. Collecting data from the archives allows me to answer the question of the impact of the British defense policy on the Assyrian community and its relations to the Iraqi state and other ethnic communities in Iraq. Diplomatic records and correspondences in the archives also provide the account of communal conflicts between the Assyrians and the Iraqi Muslim community as well as the British perceptions of the Assyrian massacre in 1933. The list of archives that I used can be found in the Lauinger Library and the Cambridge Archives Online database, including Records of
Iraq, 1914-1966, Iraq Administration Report 1914-1932, Iraq Defence Intelligence 1920-1973, Political Diaries of The Arab World, and Minorities in the Middle East: Christian Minorities 1838-1967. From these archives, I chose to examine the volumes which contain data on the period of study from 1920 to 1933.

Records of Iraq 1914-1966 is an extensive collection of primary documents for the study of the formation and development of the modern state of Iraq. The collection begins with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the creation of a new Iraqi monarchy, and the conduct of the British Mandate and ends with the rise to power of the Ba‘thist regime. This publication provides scholars, diplomatic personnel, and political analysts with a comprehensive vision of Iraqi history, based on the evidence of authentic papers from British Government archives. For my research, I chose to examine Volume 2 (1918-1921) to Volume 7 (1932-1936). In each volume, I investigated a number of sub-headings, including “defense affairs” which contain telegrams regarding the Assyrian Levies, “the minorities” which concerns the Assyrian question in Iraq and “Iraq’s army” which encloses reports on the composition of the Iraqi army, and the military situation in that period. This collection of data provides me with the historical details on the origin of the Assyrian community in Iraq, the purposes and organization of the Iraq Levies, the chronological events of the military operations of the Levies, and the events leading up to and following the 1933 Assyrian massacre.

Iraq Administration Report 1914-1932 is a comprehensive series of British administration reports for Iraq from the outset of World War I up to the independence of Iraq. It includes the series of administration reports under the British Mandate of Iraq (1920-1932), including a broad political survey of the period, internal administration, finance, the Iraqi army, the administration of justice, and education. For the purpose of my research, I chose to examine official reports on
the formation, recruitment, and operations of the Iraq Levies from Volume 5 (1920) to Volume 10 (1930-1932). In so doing, I was able to trace the development of the Levies alongside the Iraqi army, particularly in the aspects of social composition, functions, budget allocation, and political and strategic significance of the British and the Iraqi state. Analyzing this information allows me to identify several political, social, and economic factors that constituted the tension between these two military units, leading to political and ethnic conflicts, shaping a particular form of Iraqi nationalism, and culminating in the Assyrian massacre in 1933.

*Iraq Defence Intelligence 1920-1973* provides a selection of British government records, covering the history of Iraq from its establishment as the British Mandate of Iraq in 1920 to the year 1973. Each volume consists of a series of intelligence documents and supporting maps which were created by the Air Ministry and the War Office. However, these selected papers cover defense and security issues rather than the general political history of Iraq. They reflect political events and watersheds only in so far as they are perceived to be a threat to the status quo or to British interest. From Volume 1 (1920-1925) to Volume 3 (1933-1941), I chose to investigate documents regarding planning, evaluating strategy, and training troops in the face of internal and external threats facing the Iraqi government, including the Kurdish revolts and tribal uprisings, from the beginning of the British Mandate in 1920 through independence in 1932. By examining the deployment and performance of the Iraq Levies against other ethnic and religious communities in each conflict, I was able to understand how such operations may have generated communal tension in those periods.

*Political Diaries of The Arab World: Iraq* comprises the periodical political reports, intelligence summaries and annual reviews prepared by British political officers stationed in Iraq from 1920-1965. The *Diaries* provide an on-the-spot account of local events in the detailed format
demanded by the British Foreign Office, and cover political activities in Iraq, including diplomatic analysis and interpretation, foreign relations, home affairs, civil administration and development, tribal affairs, economic affairs and local personalities. It also digests the Iraqi press and public opinion regarding important political events. The value of *Diaries* lies in their frequency and their detailed reports drawn from the Colonial Office archives (CO 730), the Foreign Office archives (FO 371), the India Office archives (L/PCS), and the archives of the British Residency in Aden (R/20). I chose to investigate Volume 1 (1920-1921) to Volume 6 (1932-1947) regarding the organization and operations of the Iraq Levies, the Assyrian question, and the Assyrian massacre. In so doing, I was able to examine the British and Iraqi perceptions of the political and communal tension that constituted the onset and the implications of the Assyrian massacre in 1933.

*Minorities in the Middle East: Christian Minorities 1838-1967* is a large collection of primary source material, drawn from British Government files. It consists of original political despatches, correspondence and reports covering Christian communities in the Levant from 1838 to 1955, and the affairs of the Assyrian communities from 1880 to 1951. To address my research question, I examined telegrams, reports, and letters written by the British officers regarding the Assyrians’ political and social conditions, the Iraq Levies, and the Assyrian massacre in 1933. Moreover, I examined a number of documents that contain the comments of the Assyrian leaders, such as Agha Petros and Lady Surma d’Mar Shimun, on the Assyrian recruitment into the Levies, the Kirkuk disturbance in 1923, the Assyrian refugee settlement, the Assyrian nationalist project, and the Assyrian massacre in 1933. To complement the British and the Assyrian viewpoints, I examined reports and letters written by Archbishop of Canterbury concerning the Christian minorities in Iraq and their relations to Turkey, France, Russia, the United States and the League of Nations. These sources not only provided me with insight into the perspectives of the Assyrian
leaders and officers on the Iraq Levies and the massacre, but also the involvement of foreign powers and the religious establishment in the Assyrian affair, including the refugee settlement, the protection of minorities and the military operations against the Assyrians in Iraq.

To contribute to the scholarship on the Assyrians in Iraq under the British Mandate, I used these archival sources differently from other scholars by choosing to focus primarily on the narratives of the formation, organization and deployment of the Iraq Levies. Rather than separately examine the issues of the Assyrian settlement after World War I, the Assyrian nationalist movement, and the Assyrian massacre in 1933, I chose the Iraq Levies as a unit of analysis that linked the issues of refugee settlement, minority nationalist movement and the massacre of Assyrians to the development of Iraqi nationalism. By examining how the minority military unit produced the Assyrians as an internal other and cultivated a nationalist sentiment among the Assyrian soldiers, I showcased how the Iraq Levies may have provoked an anti-Assyrian sentiment from the Iraqi state, leading to the Assyrian massacre in 1933.

Methodology

Despite the availability of a significant number of documents, using archival sources to understand the Mandate period yield some limitations. First, British sources tended to dominate scholarly research on the colonial period. Although the British materials provide diplomatic records and defense intelligence reports regarding official and unofficial activities, these sources often reflect colonial fears of threats that the colonized may have posed to their strategic interests. As a result, the British perceptions of Iraqi society may have been distorted, limiting the value of
some of the observations made by British officials. Second, the role of the colonial power is a major obstacle to a normalized writing on the political, economic and social developments during the Mandate period. It is difficult to describe the relationship between Iraqi actors and British representatives in a state-building process during the Mandate years and until the revolt of 1958. Did British officials favor the construction of the Iraqi state and bring about modernity to the Iraqi society? Or, on the contrary, did they act as an obstacle to its completion?

In *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, Laura Ann Stoler offers a methodological and analytic critique to the subjective registers of imperial governance and the political content of archival forms. She identifies the social epistemologies that guided perception and practice and constituted colonial common sense in a changing imperial order. Considering archival production as an act of governance, Stoler argues that archives are repositories that can reveal the truth-claims of a moment in time. The process of archiving functions as “a force field that animates political energies and expertise, that pulls on some social facts and converts them into qualified knowledge, that attends to some ways of knowing while repelling and refusing others.”

In a similar vein, Antoinette Burton argues in *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* that archives do not simply arrive fully formed. Rather, all archives emerge as a result of specific political, cultural, and socioeconomic pressures that leave traces for historians to investigate and interpret. In postcolonial studies, archives are not only sources or repositories

---

92 Ibid., 22.
but also constitute historical actors and “monuments to particular configurations of power.” Since the colonial archives served as technologies of imperial power and conquest, it is necessary for scholars and historians to unpack how the archives are constructed and manipulated in order to address the presumptions about the archives’ claims to objectivity and reliability.\textsuperscript{94}

Therefore, writing history based on archives is not merely a project of fact-retrieval, but also a set of complex processes of selection, interpretation and creative invention. One’s personal encounter with the archive, what archives hold and what they do not, and the contemporary moment on one’s reading of archives have implications not only for the writing of history, but also for the political fortunes of both minority and dominant communities.\textsuperscript{95} Since history writing contains the multiple contingencies, Burton suggests a number of tasks for historians: historicizing the emergence of state and local archives; interrogating what subjects archives produce and which they silence in historical contexts; identifying the ways in which archival work is shaped as much by national identity, gender, race, and class as by professional training or credentials; and imagining counter-histories of the archive in a variety of times and places.\textsuperscript{96}

Historians relying on archives are always engaging in a process of reconstruction through scrutinizing a colonial discourse that may have obscured the voices of the oppressed or marginalized communities. To decipher the clipped language of the colonial power and the strategic impacts of the colonial documents, it is necessary to look at other sources and search for intertextuality.\textsuperscript{97} Thus, in addition to archives, I explored diverse types of sources including memoirs, press, and oral histories to gain different historical narratives of the pivotal events such

\textsuperscript{94} Burton, “Archive Fever, Archive Stories,” 7.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 8.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 9.
as the formation of the Iraq Levies, the communal tension between the Assyrians and Iraqis, and the 1933 massacre. Combining official records with personal accounts may shed light on the British, the Iraqis and the Assyrians’ different historical experiences of the period under study (1920-1933).

Textual and Discourse Analysis

Textual and discourse analysis allows me to understand the perceptions of the three main political actors - the British, the Iraqis, and the Assyrians - regarding the formation of the Iraq Levies, the Assyrian-Iraqi conflicts, and the Assyrian massacre in 1933. According to Edward Said, archivists must be aware both of the metropolitan history and of those other histories against which the dominating discourse acts. This means attending to the voices that are distorted or are rendered silent in any trove of documents. Such an approach attempts to draw out articulations of power in the constitution of the archive. Similarly, Michel Foucault proposes a concept of genealogies of power/knowledge which refers to the “historical knowledge of struggles” between the erudite knowledge and the disqualified knowledge. This genealogical process seeks to recover subjugated knowledges and eliminate the globalizing discourses. It attends to “local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges against the claims of a unitary body of theory which would filter, hierarchize and order them in the name of some true knowledge and some arbitrary idea of what constitutes a science and its objects.” In this respect, Said and Foucault used a critical discourse analysis to analyze written or oral texts and their power to shape situations, objects of knowledge, social identities, and the relationships between people and groups of

---

people. This approach involves a close analysis of texts for the devices they employ, and the conditions around their production and consumption. It enables researchers to expose assumptions, contradictions and silences within a text, and understand what kinds of social and political effects they produce and legitimize.

Discourse analysis of the published materials, memoirs and oral interviews of the British officers allow me to observe their perceptions of the Iraqi society, the Assyrian community, and their methods to recruit, organize, and deploy the Iraq Levies as a tool of divide and rule. I primarily relied on three written works concerning the Iraq Levies by British officers: Lieutenant-Colonel Ronald Semphill Stafford’s *The Tragedy of the Assyrian Minority in Iraq*, Brigadier-General John Gilbert Browne’s *The Iraq Levies 1915-1932*, and A.M. Hamilton’s *Road Through Kurdistan*. Lt. Col. Stafford was the British Administrative Inspector in Mosul from 1926 to 1933. After the 1933 Assyrian massacre, he returned to England and wrote *The Tragedy of the Assyrian* which provides several important background issues: how and why the Assyrians from Turkey, Iran, and Syria ended up as refugees in Iraq; how their expectations to return to their original homelands were frustrated; and how the modern nation-state of Iraq was formed with its inherent weaknesses in failing to protect the indigenous Assyrians. Brigadier Browne served in the Middle East commanding the Iraq Levies from 1925 to 1933. Tracing the evolution from the mixed troop of the Arab and Kurdish Levies to the Assyrian Levies, Browne provides a chronological history of recruitment, training and operations of the Iraq Levies from 1915 to 1932 in detail. A.M. Hamilton was a British civil engineer who had been commissioned to build a strategic road across Iraqi Kurdistan, which ran from Arbil, through Rowanduz, to the Iranian border, between 1928-1932. In his autobiography, he gives an invaluable portrayal of the Iraqi Kurds and Kurdish regions.

---

in Iraq throughout his four years there. His book allows me to investigate the relationship between the Kurds and the Assyrians, who were both mountaineers and shared the same territory in northern Iraq. With these British authors’ different roles and experiences with the Iraq Levies and the Assyrians, I was not only able to gain their perspectives of the Assyrians, but also to analyze their relationships with the Assyrian officers through different phases of Iraq’s history.

To gain insight into an Iraqi perspective, I analyzed the discourses within memoirs and speeches written by the Iraqis who dealt with military affairs, diplomatic, and international issues, including Jafar al-Askari’s memoir titled *A Soldier’s Story: From Ottoman Rule to Independent Iraq* and Tawfiq al-Suwaydi’s *My Memoirs: Half a Century of the History of Iraq and the Arab Cause*. Al-Askari was the Minister of Defense and served as Prime Minister under King Faisal two times (1923-1924, 1926-1928). He also formed the Iraqi army by recruiting ex-Ottoman officers during the Mandate period and aimed to impose compulsory military service to expand and consolidate the Iraqi army. In al-Askari’s “Notes on the Current Situation in Iraq” on January 15, 1932, al-Askari indicated that Iraq lacked an ideology of Iraqi nationhood due to external political forces, ethnic and religious influences, tribal divisions and the existence of minorities. He suggested education and army recruitment as solutions to confront the challenges.101 His desire to include the minorities as part of the Iraqi population by providing them with education and proper treatment connoted his leniency and tolerance toward the Assyrian minorities. On the other hand, Tawfiq al-Suwaïdi, a prominent Iraqi diplomat who also served as Prime Minister under the Hashemite monarchy on three separate occasions between 1929 and 1950, disliked the Assyrians. Due to their military service in Britain’s Iraq Levies, al-Suwaïdi considered them mercenaries and

traitors and accused them of both “foolishness” and “wickedness.” Their different opinions regarding the Assyrians provided contrasting points of view to analyze Iraqi politicians’ stances on minorities as well as on different meanings and characteristics of Iraqi nationalism.

Discourse and textual analysis also reveals the Assyrians’ motives to join the Iraq Levies and mobilize the Assyrian nationalist movement against the Iraqi state. Regarding the works written by Assyrian leaders and Levy officers, I examined three Assyrian sources which were vital to the early historiographical record of Iraq and served as counterarguments to the British colonial historical narrative: Mar Eshai Shimun’s *The Assyrian Tragedy*, Yūsuf Malik’s *The British Betrayal of the Assyrians* and Malik Loko Shlimon d'bit Badawi’s *Assyrian Struggle for National Survival in the 20th and 21st Century*. Mar Eshai Shimun’s *The Assyrian Tragedy* is a documentary on the national struggle of the Assyrian nation prior to, during and after World War I. Mar Eshai Shimun was the Catholicos Patriarch of the Church of the East and his book contained his personal letters to the various heads of Governments and officials and their replies to the letters. His letters not only provided the Assyrian side regarding the settlement of Assyrian refugees after World War I, but also debunked some of the British claims regarding the 1933 massacre.

In addition to Mar Eshai Shimun’s letters, Yusuf Malek’s *The British Betrayal of the Assyrians* provides a historical account of events leading up to the atrocities committed by the regular armed forces of the Iraqi government against the Assyrian population in August 1933. As an Assyro-Chaldean by nationality and an indigenous inhabitant from Mosul, Malik claimed to represent the Assyrians in providing the accounts on the 1933 events from the Assyrian perspective. While containing biases and polemical views against the British and the Iraqi

---

government, *the British Betrayal* retains an inclusive narrative filtered through the perspective of a native Assyrian who served the Iraqi government and the British officials for thirteen years.  

Malik Loko Shlimon d'bit Badawi’s *Assyrian Struggle for National Survival in the 20th and 21st Century* gives an eyewitness account of the events leading up to the Simel massacre. His work also examines the internal politics of the Assyrians within the patriarchal family, which included Patriarch Mar Eshai Shimun, his aunt, Lady Surma, and his father, Rab Tremma David. Malik Loko Shlimon was involved in the settlement of the Hakkiari Assyrians and was one of those who decided to leave for Syria. Thus, his work was of great relevance to the debates on the causes and consequences of the Assyrian massacre and its impact on the Assyrian community as a whole. Since it contains original letters from the 1920s and 1930s that convey a different and complex story of the internal politics of the Assyrian community, this book is useful for understanding the divisive characteristic of the Assyrian community and for scrutinizing the Assyrian perspective regarding the events before and during the 1933 massacre.

Although discourse analysis of historical accounts, autobiographies and memoirs provides first-hand information on the contentious relations between the Iraq Levies and the Iraqi state and also the Assyrian community’s internal politics, these sources yield some limitations for they are narratives with no direct claim to truth. Every statement was subject to the authors’ personal attitudes of the events, which were made in the framework of contemporary discourse. To resolve

---

103 Yusuf Malek, *The British Betrayal of the Assyrians*, http://www.aina.org/books/bbota.htm.; Yusuf Malek worked in the region as an interpreter for the British and their Indian regiments during the failed Battle of Ctesiphon in 1915. Following the defeat of the British garrison to the Ottoman forces in the siege of Kut al-Amara in 1916, Malek, along with other prisoners, was sent to Aleppo to be pressed into work. He escaped two months later and was employed by the British in the Iraq civil service (Sargon Donabed, *Reforging a Forgotten History: Iraq and the Assyrians in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 36).


105 Ibid., 39.
this issue, their statements must be interpreted and contextualized in light of the social and political circumstances.

Theoretical Frameworks

To complement the textual and discourse analysis of archives and memoirs, interpretation and theoretical reflection of significant historical events that appeared in primary and secondary texts were used for three objectives. First, it critically articulates both dominant and minority discourses concerning specific historical events. Second, it contextualizes communal conflicts between the Iraq Levies and other ethnic communities that alienated the Assyrians. Finally, it explains the role of the Iraq Levies that shaped an exclusive definition of Iraqi nationalism.

To analyze how the Iraq Levies served to alienate the Assyrians from Iraqi population, I have used three theoretical frameworks to explain the process of otherizing the Assyrians and the development of deleterious relationships between the Assyrians and other ethnic communities in Iraq: the martial race theory, the class regimental system, and a minority discourse. The martial race theory reflected British manipulation of ethnicity to form and organize the colonial military in British India. I used this concept to analyze the recruitment of the Assyrians based on their fighting quality and discipline into the Iraq Levies. The class regimental system is the way in which the British organized the battalion into units based on the recruits’ ethnicity. This means one battalion consists of several units; each unit consists of a single ethnicity or race. For example, in the Indian army, there were units of Sikhs, Punjabis and Jat. In the Irish armed forces, there were units of Scottish Highlanders, lowlanders and Welsh. This theory was used to analyze the deployment of the Assyrian forces against the Kurds, which provoked hatred in Iraqi society against the British-Assyrian association. Finally, the British creation of a minority discourse was
used to analyze the British exploitation of the Assyrians and to analyze their claim to protect the Assyrian refugees with a purpose of prolonging their imperial rule in Iraq.

To examine the aspects of Iraqi nationalism that excluded the Assyrians, I used both modernist and primordialist narratives of nationalism to explain the development of Iraqi national identity. Regarding the modernist discourse, I used an empirical historical approach employed by Liora Lukitz who studies Iraqi nationalism as a modern construction shaped by the process of social changes. According to Lukitz, the definition and categorization of Iraqi identity is difficult and complex as many variants co-exist. The divisions of its population and the dynamics of its politics were explained not only in terms of ethnic, sectarian, religious and linguistic categories, but also in terms of economic interests and class affiliation. To assess the fluidity of identities (ethnic/communal and others) and each group’s particular vision of the national process, Lukitz suggests a historical approach to discover how communal identities were shaped by internal factors such as ethnicity, Islam, and class, and were reinforced by opposition to the other communities and to the state. For my research, I use Lukitz’ empirical historical approach to analyze and interpret the causes and consequences of each conflict between the Iraqis and the Assyrians and how they shaped Iraqi national identity and nationalism.

In addition to Lukitz’ modernist approach to examine an Iraqi identity over a period of time, I use a primordialist narrative to understand the perceptions of the Iraqis and the Assyrians toward the Iraq Levies, and their competitive nationalisms in pre- and post-independence eras. According to Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, a primordialist or perennialist paradigm views modern nations as inevitable outcomes of existing ethnic communities or *ethnies*. Comparing

---

107 Ibid., 8.
108 Jankowski and Gershoni, eds, *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*, x.
a primordialist approach to archaeology, Anthony D. Smith states that the primordialist model sees nationalisms as the excavation of successive layers from the past that form the basis for collective identity in the present. Ethnic bonds and traditions are essential in the construction of modern nations and for forming competing narratives of nationalism within the body of a single nation.\footnote{Anthony D. Smith, “The Myth of the Modern Nation and the Myths of Nations,” Ethnic and Racial Studies 11:1 (January 1988), 1-26.} Sami Zubaida argues that the modern Iraqi state was a weak formation since its inception as the state structure and institution were externally imposed by colonial powers. The socio-economic and cultural processes of modernity under the nation-state had only limited effects on removing the communal and tribal identities.\footnote{Sami Zubaida, “Community, Class and Minorities in Iraqi Politics,” in The Iraqi Revolution of 1958: The Old Social Classes Revisited, eds. Robert A. Fernea and Wm. Roger Louis (London/New York: Tauris, 1991), 207.} In this respect, a primordialist framework may still be useful to analyze multi-ethnic and multi-sectarian identities that remained in existence in Iraq. Since the Iraqi society is defined by mosaic identities along ethnic, religious and class lines, it is important to consider both socioeconomic processes as well as communal affiliations that played a role in constructing national identity. For my research, I explored how the Iraq Levies transformed the Assyrians as an internal other as regarded by other ethnic communities, and analyzed how this phenomenon shaped an exclusive definition of Iraqi nationalism. A combination of primordialist and modernist approaches allows me to identify the causes of an inter-ethnic hostility that evolved into a contest between Iraqi and Assyrian nationalisms. This battle of identities served to characterize a militant and exclusive form of Iraqi nationalism that led to the Assyrian massacre in 1933.
CHAPTER I: THE ASSYRIANS AND THEIR DISCONTENTS

The position of the Assyrians resembled that of a small boat, ready to be lashed by the mighty waves of an angry sea. They found themselves surrounded on all sides by at least fifty millions of Moslems, with Russia gone to pieces, and more than 600 miles of almost impassable mountains intervening between them and the British expeditionary forces in Mesopotamia. It was a terrible plight. The whole situation presented the outlook of a sweeping catastrophe. It spelled a disaster that meant to Mar Shimun and his people the eradication of a Christian race from the face of the earth!

- Joel Werda, *The Flickering Light of Asia*, 1924

The period from the late Ottoman period in the mid-nineteenth century to the British Mandate years in the twentieth century is a crucial starting point for the study of the Assyrians during the transition from the Ottoman Empire to nation-states in the Middle East. In this historical context, the Assyrians were not only subjugated by the Turkish and Kurdish powers in a series of massacres, but their encounter with the Western powers also laid the foundation for their early phase of nationalist movement and internal division along ecclesiastical, social and political lines. According to Charles Tripp, the British invasion and occupation of three Ottoman provinces of Basra, Baghdad and Mosul and their subsequent consolidation into a new state of Iraq under British rule changed the politics and society of the inhabitants of these territories. Those who found themselves drawn into the new regime demanded new forms of political arrangements and identities, and employed strategies to exploit any opportunities that presented themselves. The Assyrians fled World War I from the region of Hakkiari in southeastern Turkey and Urmia in northwestern Iran to reside in northern Iraq in 1919. They constituted one of the minority groups that aspired to different kinds of social and political order within the Iraqi state in order to preserve their Christian identity and return to their homeland in the Hakkiari mountains.

---

However, the pattern of politics under the Mandate based on a hierarchical and authoritarian rule by the British, the Sunni-dominated Iraqi government, and the tribal leaders prevented any dissenting voices that would deflect the state from its course.\textsuperscript{112} Although the Assyrians’ military service in the Iraq Levies enhanced their cohesion and tightened their association with the British, their demand for national independence posed a threat to the emerging Iraqi state. Consequently, the Iraq Levies were one of the factors that provoked communal tension and conflicts in the Iraqi mandate as they brought about the rise of Iraqi nationalism that excluded minorities, including the Assyrians. The tension that emerged in the relationship between the Iraq Levies and the British and between the Iraq Levies and the Iraqi state explained not only the fragmented nature of the Iraqi national identity, but also the failure of the Assyrian nationalist aspiration that sought an independent entity within the British Mandate governance structure.

Who Were the Assyrians?

The Assyrians are a non-Arab, Semitic, and Christian people who settled in eastern Turkey, northwestern Iran, and northern Iraq during the Mongol invasion in the thirteenth century.\textsuperscript{113} Based on social and geographical categories, the Assyrians can be distinguished into two major groups. The first group comprised those centered in and around the cities of Mosul, Arbil, Kirkuk, Zakho and Dohuk in modern-day Iraq. In Mosul, a great variety of Christians: Assyrians, Jacobites, Chaldeans and Syrian Catholics dwelled among the Arab and Kurdish majorities. Due to the advantages which Rome had to offer in the form of financial support, education and European protection through the French Consulate, some of the Assyrians in Mosul and the villages of the

\textsuperscript{112} Tripp, \textit{A History of Iraq}, 31.

\textsuperscript{113} Stafford, 18; The terms “Assyrians,” “Nestorians,” “Syrians” have been used interchangeably in various kinds of texts. To avoid confusion in terminology, this thesis uses the term Assyrians throughout.
plain converted from the Church of the East/Nestorianism to Chaldean Catholicism in the sixteenth century and afterwards.\textsuperscript{114} Refraining from politics, the Chaldean Church was also different from the Assyrians in that it had been loyal to the British and Iraqi governments.\textsuperscript{115} The minority, comprised of Jews, Armenians, Mandaeans and Yezidis, was scattered in city, plain and mountain.\textsuperscript{116} Some Jews, especially in Zakho, spoke Syriac like any Assyrian, and the Yezidis were considered allies of the Assyrians.\textsuperscript{117} Some Assyrians were urban dwellers who lost their native Assyrian-Aramaic language to Arabic and were Arabized. Others were semi-rural peasants who still retained their mother tongue. The second group hailed from the region of Hakkiari in today’s southeastern Turkey and Urmia in northwestern Iran. They fled during the Great War into Iraq and were typically of rural background. The Hakkiari Assyrians were predominantly Nestorian with some Uniate Catholics while the Urmia Assyrians were Protestants, Catholics and Russian Orthodox. Unlike the Urmian Assyrians who were cultivators in the plains of Urmia and Salamas, the Hakkiari segment made up the bulk of the Iraq Levies alongside Assyrians of Barwar and Sapna.\textsuperscript{118}

Fig. 1 Map of the Assyrian Christians. From: Assyrians Information Management, http://www.atour.com/maps/ (accessed March 1, 2018)

\textsuperscript{115} Vahram Petrosian, “Assyrians in Iraq” \textit{Caucasian Center for Iranian Studies} (2006), 125.
\textsuperscript{116} Luke, 15.
\textsuperscript{117} Malek.
\textsuperscript{118} Donabed, 55.
The Assyrians under the Ottoman Empire

Under the Ottoman Empire, the Assyrians were part of the Nestorian millet, or a religious community, a category officially recognized by the sultan in 1845.\textsuperscript{119} Unlike some other ethno-religious groups, the Assyrians were able to maintain an identity separate from that of the Arab-Muslim majority due to their mountaineers’ characteristics, language, and strong Christian identity. According to John Joseph, the Assyrians were molded together into a nationality through common cultural ties of language and church membership.\textsuperscript{120} Writing in 1820, Claudius J. Rich observed that the Hakkiari Assyrians were the only Christians in the East that had maintained independence against the Muslims and were “feared and respected” by their neighbors until the second quarter of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{121} According to Stafford, they were divided into clans, their life was hard, and they were “naturally independent and resentful of control.”\textsuperscript{122} Their ruler, temporal as well as religious, was Mar Shimun. The title of Mar Shimun is hereditary and generally passed from uncle to nephew, never from father to son, as the holder of the title was not permitted to marry.\textsuperscript{123} The temporal power of Mar Shimun waxed and waned through the years, depending largely on the personality and holder of the title, but his religious authority was never challenged.\textsuperscript{124}

\textsuperscript{119} Nestorian or the Church of the East practiced theological philosophy and doctrines that are Orthodox. Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, found that Mary was called both Mother of God and Mother of man. He attempted to unify the two sides by suggesting a title Mother of Christ, having Christ representing God and man. This gave his enemies an opportunity to attack him, including Cyril, bishop of Alexandria. At the Council of Ephesus of 431, Nestorius was condemned and excommunicated from the Eastern Orthodox Church. The Assyrians still follow this belief, and are sometimes known as Nestorians (Frederick A. Aprim, \textit{Assyrians: The Continuous Saga}, Indiana: Xlibris publishing, 2004).


\textsuperscript{122} Ronald Semphill Stafford, “Iraq and the Problem of the Assyrians,” \textit{International Affairs} 13.2 (March-April 1934), 159.

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 163.

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 160.
According to Ida Staudt, the Assyrians formed a group set off distinctly from all the other Christian minorities of the region. They claimed to be the lineal descendants of the ancient Assyrians - the proud, warlike, and conquering race whose mighty kings created a vast empire and built for themselves great palaces in Ashur, Nineveh, and Khorsabad.\footnote{Ida Staudt, \textit{Living in Romantic Baghdad: An American Memoir of Teaching and Travel in Iraq, 1924-1947} (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2012), 169.} This deeply-ingrained Assyrian identity that can be traced back to the ancient period of Assyria may have enabled them to resist assimilation into the broader Muslim society.\footnote{Walid Phares, “Middle East Christians: The Captive Nations,” in \textit{The Forgotten Millions: The Modern Jewish Exodus from Arab Lands}, ed. Malka Hillel Shulewitz (London: Continuum, 1999), 15.} Nevertheless, the Assyrians were surrounded by and intermingled with Kurds, who were different from them by race and religion.\footnote{Stafford, 160.} Many rural Assyrians lived in close proximity to their Kurdish neighbors in similar tribal and social formations and in relative autonomy from most state influence. Of the Christians in Kurdistan, the Kurds had the closest relations with the Assyrians to whom they were at times related through intermarriage. In fact, the relations between the Assyrians and Kurds were less affected by religion than tribal alliance.\footnote{Joseph, 37.} Their feuds were considered “sporting” but were apt to follow the line of religious cleavage.\footnote{William Wigram, \textit{The Assyrians and Their Neighbours} (London, G. Bell & sons, 1929), 82.} This cordial relationship and relative independence came to an end with the rise of a powerful Kurdish chieftain, Bedr Khan Beg, who targeted the Assyrians in his consolidation of power during his campaign against the Ottoman Empire. In 1842, Bedr Khan massacred approximately 10,000 Assyrians in the Bohtan and Hakkari regions.\footnote{Donabed, 55.} This led to a permanent rift in relations between the Kurds and Assyrians.

The relationship between the rural Hakkari Assyrians and the British authorities affected their identification both internally within the larger Assyrian community and externally with Iraqi...
Arabs and Kurds, among others. As mentioned earlier, there were two groups of the Assyrians. However, usually the term “Assyrian” in British archival documents refer to those Assyrian highlanders of Hakkiari in present-day Turkey who lived as independent tribes prior to the First World War.\footnote{Donabed, 59.} The existence of this Christian remnant in the Hakkiari mountains was hardly known in England until the Archbishop of Canterbury sent a mission, officially named “The Archbishop’s Mission to the Assyrian [Nestorian] Church” to investigate these people in the area in 1886.\footnote{Eleanor H. Teijirian, Reeva Spector Simon, “The Imperialist Moment: From the Congress of Berlin to World War I” in \textit{Conflict, Conquest, and Conversion: Two Thousand Years of Christian Missions in the Middle East} (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 130.} Afterwards, the Archbishop’s Mission of Inquiry made its report and wrote that the people were “abysmally ignorant, and that even the bishops could hardly read or write. They appeared to be better judges of a rifle than a doctrine.” In consequence of this report, Reverend Henry William Browne, a member of the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Mission, came to Qudshanis, a village in the province of Hakkiari, to establish a mission. For more than thirty years Rev. Browne lived in the household of Mar Shimun, an Assyrian patriarch, and was the tutor of Mar Shimun’s aunt, Lady Surma.\footnote{Staudt, \textit{Living in Romantic Baghdad}, 170.}

The British became interested in the highlanders of Hakkiari due to their martial spirit which the British found strategically beneficial, especially the skills of the independent tribes of Tiyari, Tkhuma, Jilu, Diz and Baz.\footnote{Donabed, 59.} This interest led to their commodification in the period prior to the First World War:

\begin{quote}
The Ashiret can furnish 13,000 able-bodied men, all armed with good muskets...The knowledge of their strength, their poverty, and the nonfulfillment of lavish promises made to them by the Turks subsequent to Bedr Khan Beg’s massacre of the Nestorians, together with constant skirmishes with the Moslem Koords, keep up that martial spirit, unfavorable to entire submission, inclining them in consequence to warlike rather than
peaceful pursuits.\textsuperscript{135}

The British military would use this intelligence to their advantage in the near future as they armed these Assyrians and recruited them into the imperial force. The incorporation of the Assyrians into the imperial troops as well as their Christian religious affiliation made Iraqi people regard the Assyrians in general and the Levies’ soldiers in particular as British protégés.\textsuperscript{136}

By the turn of the century those Assyrians of the regions of Urmia and Haggiari amounted to more than 450 villages and between 18,000 and 20,000 families, totaling 126,000-140,000 people in 1902-1903. At the onset of war there were estimated to be, overall, 80,000 Assyrians in the Tigris valley from Mosul to the villages of the Bohtan region, 35,000 in seventy villages in Urmia and Salamas, and 100,000 in Haggiari.\textsuperscript{137}

The Plight of the Assyrians in the First World War

The First World War represented the period of an imperial quest for power that dispossessed the Assyrians of their homes and cost numerous lives. In 1914, Turkish military forces formed their military bases in Assyrian regions of Haggiari. Between Turkey’s entrance into the First World War in November of 1914 and March 1915, both Russian and Turkish leaders courted the Assyrians to be on their sides. The Turks promised Mar Shimun, their patriarch, arms, schools, and salaries to be paid to their religious and tribal leaders; the Russians promised arms and other material assistance. Fearful that they might side with the Russians, the Wali of Julamerk

\textsuperscript{136} Stafford, \textit{The Tragedy of the Assyrian Minority in Iraq}, 163.
\textsuperscript{137} Donabed, 61.
preemptively struck the Assyrians in the region of Albaq in 1915.\footnote{Donabed, 61.} This attack pushed the Assyrians to declare war against Turkey in May 1915.\footnote{Brigadier-General J. G. Browne, “1937: The Assyrians: A Debt of Honour,” \textit{The Geographical Magazine} 4.6 (November 1936 - April 1937): 40-42.}

Ultimately, the patriarch’s decision to favor Russia exasperated the Turks, who retaliated against the Assyrians by mercilessly ravaging the country.\footnote{Staudt, 171.} In January, Enver Pasha brought two corps to cut the Russian lines south of Kars in northwest Turkey, capturing the city as well as Sarikamish. Hard-pressed in Poland, the Russians decided to withdraw their forces and left the Assyrians to face the Turks and Kurds alone.\footnote{Browne, 40.} Since it was impossible to hold off their enemies and protect the besieged villages in the arctic winter of Kurdistan, an evacuation of Assyrian inhabitants began to take place.\footnote{Donabed, 61.}

From March to May 1915, more than 100 Assyrian villages in the Hakkiari mountains were destroyed by the Ottoman forces while 12,000 refugees fled to the Caucasus and more than 27,000 men, women and children were butchered in the Urmia region. Meanwhile, Kurdish forces urged on by Ottoman promises massacred the entire male population and carried away its young women in the village of Gulpashan, a town located on the western shore of Lake Urmia. After these attacks, the mountaineer Assyrians were forced into the fray and surrounded by Kurdish Ottoman troops. They moved from their homes to the mountains and survived on fruit alone. Realizing the plight of the Assyrians, Mar Shimun called a war council in mid-July where he and the tribal chieftains decided to approach the Russians for support in escaping the Kurdish Ottoman troops.\footnote{Ibid., 62.}

Breaking through the enemy lines, the Assyrian forces under General Dawid, the patriarch’s brother, crossed over the mountains of Urmia and fought alongside the Russian troops.
which virtually controlled northern Persia before the war. Three Assyrian Battalions were formed, one led by Mar Shimun himself, the other two being commanded by Russian officers, with Assyrian officers as interpreters.\(^{144}\) Under the aegis of Russia in Urmia, the Christians saw an opportunity to take revenge on their Muslim neighbors by domineering over them arrogantly and inconsiderately as the Muslims had previously lorded it over them. Consequently, antagonism among the Muslims was stored up against the Assyrians for the days that were to come.\(^{145}\)

In 1917, the Bolshevik revolution not only marked a period of anarchy on the battlefront as soldiers decided to whom allegiance was owed, but also ended Russian aid and support to the Assyrians. Northwest Persia and Urmia, which were under heavy Russian influence paid a high price as the Assyrians were left under the vengeful and infuriated Muslim inhabitants there. To make matter worse, Mar Shimun Benyamin had been treacherously killed by a Kurd named Simko.\(^{146}\) When the Bolsheviks ordered the return of Russian troops from the Caucasus front, incidents of Muslim-on-Christian violence occurred as retribution for acts committed by the failing Russian forces.\(^{147}\)

As the Russians withdrew from the battlefront, the Allies approached the Assyrians for aid in holding the eastern front alongside Georgian and Armenian companies. Early in 1918 the British, who had by then extended their lines from Baghdad across Persia to the Caspian, through Kermanshah, Hamadan and Kazvin, made contact with the Assyrians. A British airman landed at Urmia and brought back news that the Assyrians needed arms and ammunition, and arrangements

\(^{144}\) Browne, 40.
\(^{145}\) Staudt, 171.
\(^{146}\) A Kurdish chief, Ismail Agha of Shekak, called Simko, received the patriarch at his house, and had him shot down as he left, apparently thinking he would please the Persians by so doing. He gained nothing by his act. The Persians repudiated him, the Turks wished to execute him. The Assyrians, to avenge their patriarch, marched against Simko, seized his town and burnt it. He escaped, but lived as a hunted man for twelve years and was finally shot by Persians in 1930 (J. G. Browne, “1937: The Assyrians: A Debt of Honour,” 40).
\(^{147}\) Donabed, 63.
were made to send them a convoy. Dr. W.A. Wigram, a member of the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Mission to the Assyrians, provided a summary of this situation before the Royal Central Asian Society on October 23, 1933:

To begin with, this nation was our ally in the war. There was no formal treaty made with them by us, but when they and the Russians were both fighting the Turk in the north and we in the south of the same strategic field, we sent up officers to them, Captain G.F. Gracey was one, to arrange a joint plan of action with them, a plan that they followed to their loss. This they rightly took as constituting an alliance…

This wartime alliance was the first contact between the Assyrians and the British military.

Captain George Gracey, a British army officer, was sent to the area west of Lake Urmia, in north-west Persia to mobilize the Assyrian forces to defend part of the front between the Black Sea and Baghdad against the Turks in December 1917. It is claimed that Gracey made a pledge to the Assyrians that the British would, in return for their military service, repatriate them to their homeland in the Hakkari mountains and provide support for their autonomy after the end of war.

This historical episode became the reference point for the Assyrians to recall British promises to their wartime allies when the Assyrians demanded their independence rights to the League of Nations from the 1920s to 1930s.

Although the Assyrians achieved a number of remarkable victories over the Persians at Urmia, the legions made up of German, Kurdish, and Turkish troops and the Turks at Ushnu, the lack of unity and the absence of strong leadership ruined the Assyrians. Eventually, the Ottoman advance into an Assyrian territory instigated the major flight to the south in July-August 1918.

American Protestant missionaries William Ambrose Shedd and Mary Lewis Shedd observed

---

149 Not only did Gracey refute this claim, but the Foreign Office also admitted that the Assyrians had been led to believe, and not necessarily as a result of explicit pledges from Gracey, that they would be returned to the Hakkari district (John Fisher, “Man on the Spot: Captain George Gracey and British Policy Towards the Assyrians, 1917-45,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 2 (2008): 215-235).
relentless combat, killing, forced expulsion and loss of home during their time of residence. British Brigadier-General J. G. Browne also depicted the plight of the Assyrians during the Turkish attack in Urmia:

Having made no arrangements, the Assyrians seized food in the villages through which they passed. The villagers attacked the stragglers. Typhus and dysentery broke out. An eyewitness gives a ghastly picture of how the exhausted people dropped where they could for the night, how they struggled up in the morning to continue the march, leaving dead, dying and those too weak to move behind them, while the enemy swept down on the helpless people to rob and murder.  

The Assyrians of Urmia referred to this time as “Raqa raqa” or the “Flight” or the “Escape” as a mass exodus of 30,000 men and women, themselves and their Hakkiari brethren traveled more than 600 kilometers to Hamadan, where they were evacuated to Baqubah, a refugee camp 30-40 miles northeast of Baghdad.  

The Baqubah Refugee Camp: The Breakdown of the Assyrian Community

British colonial policies of divide and rule and dependence on local leaders fragmented the Assyrian identity along geographical and ecclesiastical lines in the camp of Baqubah. This camp was not only the beginning of the Assyrian connection with Iraq, but also the beginning of the development of refugee mentality which can be said to be “the curse of the Assyrian people.”  

Run as a military base that cost the British taxpayers upwards of £2,000,000 in the year between August 31, 1918 and September 30, 1919, the Baqubah refugee camp first became operational in late November 1918. Since the Assyrians constituted part of the force that had helped the British and French armies to defeat the Ottoman Empire during World War I, the British and the League

---

151 Browne, 40.
152 Donabed, 64.
154 Ibid.
of Nations officials helped them flee the persecution by the Turkish army and Kurdish tribes in northwest Persia in 1918. Thousands of Assyrian refugees reached safety in Baqubah with the assistance of British, Canadian, and Australian officers. The camp also served to receive and hold the refugees while the armistice between Britain and Turkey was still being concluded.

The vast majority of the refugees arrived in the early months of 1919. The Assyrians of the Hakkiari were the largest population to settle in Baqubah at the conclusion of World War I. The first wave of refugees to settle in the camp were those who had reached Iraq as part of the Assyrian military contingent that fought with the Russians, and later British forces, in the Hakkiari


---


156 Malek, *The British Betrayal of the Assyrians*.

mountains and the western regions of Iran. They arrived in the camp with their tribal and religious leaders, who functioned as the intermediaries between the population and the colonial officials.\textsuperscript{158}

To avoid inter-communal tension within the camp and to facilitate monitoring of the residents, the camp was divided into three sections: A, B and C based on the ethnicity of refugees. Armenians were settled in Section A, the majority of the Assyrians from Hakkari and a small number of Armenians in Section B, and a mix of Assyrians from Urmia and a small number of Hakkari Assyrians in Section C. Being aware of their social and cultural differences, the British separated the Assyrians from the Armenian population to prevent any antagonism between the two groups that would have posed a security threat to the British.\textsuperscript{159} Each of these sections was administered by a senior British officer who was in charge of keeping its residents within the confines of their respective area, and overseeing their welfare, cleanliness, and discipline. This division of the refugee camp corresponded to the British policy of divide and rule to manage the law and order within the area under its control.

The internal tension of the Assyrian community was not only caused by British policies, but also by the Assyrians who belonged to different regional and political factions. According to the memoir of Brigadier General H. H. Austin, the commander of the camp, the Assyrians faced the intra-community obstacles between those who had fought in the war and those who had remained neutral. Due to their different sectarian identities, some of the Catholic Assyrians who came from Urmia received poor treatment by the Chaldeans though they belonged to the “same race and blood.”\textsuperscript{160} This issue subverted the assumption that the Assyrian community was cohesive

\textsuperscript{159} Ibid.
and monolithic. In fact, the Assyrian community was fragmented and divided along ecclesiastical, regional and political lines.

Nevertheless, the British reliance on the local tribal chiefs split the leadership inside the camp and the Assyrian community as a whole. Believing that devolution of power to the tribal leadership would make it easier to control the camp, the British allowed the Assyrians to keep their traditional social and political structures intact in Baqubah. Mar Polos Shimun, the patriarch of the Assyrian Church and a resident of the camp, continued to function as the political and religious head of the Assyrian tribal council and applied the legal practices and code of the Church of the East in line with the millet system. ¹⁶¹ General Aghas Petros and his troops, who fought with British officers during the summer and autumn of 1918, also commanded a number of Hakkiari Assyrians. ¹⁶² Allowing these tribal chiefs to carry out administrative duties, the British managed to retain considerable influence over the daily lives of the refugee population.

The sudden death of Mar Polos Shimun in May 1920, and the ascendency of Eshai - a 12-year-old boy - to the role of Mar Shimun led to political contest among tribal and religious leaders who claimed their rights to act as representatives of the refugee population. ¹⁶³ The aunt of the young patriarch Surma Mar Shimun, who was in London promoting the cause of Assyrian independence in the autumn of 1921, returned to Baqubah in the hope of preserving her family’s role among the refugees. ¹⁶⁴ Meanwhile, General Agha Petros, the military leader who had led the Assyrians from Urmia to Iraq, joined forces with a number of Assyrian military leaders belonging to tribes such as the Jeloo, Bazi and Tiyari and emerged as the chief political rival to Mar Shimun.

¹⁶¹ Dawood, 36.
¹⁶² Ibid., 33.
¹⁶³ Ibid., 40.
¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 39-40.
and his family.\textsuperscript{165} Under the National Assyrian Committee, an organization that countered the Assyrian tribal council gathered around Mar Shimun, the supporters of Agha Petros claimed responsibility for managing Assyrian affairs and sole authority to deal with the British administration.\textsuperscript{166}

In response, Surma Mar Shimun decided to take her case to the Anglican church in London in order to counter the claims of Agha Petros and his followers. She met with various government and church leaders and asked for the removal of Agha Petros from the Baqubah refugee camp. Hoping that Surma would be able to spread Anglicanism in the Middle East through the Assyrian community, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson, together with the Bishop of Manchester, William Temple, and several members of the British Parliament, helped to organize a number of social gatherings and fundraising campaigns to raise money and awareness of the pitiful situation of the Assyrian refugee community in Iraq. Surma’s campaign against Petros accentuated the personal conflict between the two leaders and polarized opinion inside Baqubah.\textsuperscript{167}

The internal division of the Assyrian community caused by British policy of segregation suggested British intention to subjugate the Assyrian refugees and exploit the minority question to maintain its imperial rule in Iraq. According to Sam Parhad, a prominent Assyrian and community historian, the split in political leadership of the Assyrian community in the 1920s demonstrated

\textsuperscript{165} Dawood, 40.

\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., 41.

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., 42. In late 1920 and early 1921, a third Assyrian political faction emerged led by Malik Kambar of the Jeloo tribe. Kambar was a member of the French military forces in the Syrian Jazira region who had been employed as the leader of an Assyrian force to help pacify the region during the early years of the French military occupation. In return for their military service, General Henri Joseph Eugene Gouraud of the French Fourth Army promised Malik Kambar Warda of Jilu the establishment of a protectorate in the Syrian Jazira region. Having won a number of important battles in Deir ez-Zor, Raqqa, Abu-Kamal and Hasakah, Kambar claimed to be the rightful leader of the Assyrian population, in both Iraq and Syria in 1921. In 1922, Kambar sent letters to the various Assyrian tribal leaders, asking for help in recruiting men for his military effort in Syria. Calculating joining Kambar in Syria would allow him to consolidate his leadership among the displaced Assyrian population of Iraq, Agha Petros accepted his invitation. A few weeks afterwards, the British administration, which had become suspicious of his motives and militaristic and violent approach to politics, exiled Petros to India.
the British fear of a united Assyrian force and underlying motives to use Assyrian military contingents to advance their own interests in Iraq. The Assyrian question developed into a minority discourse that allowed the British to maintain its power in Iraq by claiming to resolve the refugee settlement. This issue became the lingering domestic and international problem for the Iraqi state throughout the Mandate years.

More importantly, British colonial policy in organizing the Baqubah camp also created a landscape in which the Assyrians constituted a separate political and geographical entity. The British division of the refugee camp into sections along ethnic lines created an atmosphere of exclusivity among the refugees. The confinement of the refugee camp in which the refugees’ movement and activities were constantly monitored also alienated the Assyrians from the Iraqi community altogether. Remarkably, the British organization of the Baqubah camp not only reflected their subsequent colonial state formation in Iraq, but also was manifested in their policies of recruiting the Assyrians into the Iraq Levies, Britain’s colonial army in Mandatory Iraq.

Since the Baqubah refugee camp formed a conspicuous block of Assyrians, it provided a fertile ground for the development of the Assyrian nationalist movement. According to Fadi Dawood, the establishment of the camp and isolation of Assyrian and Armenian minorities from the remainder of Iraqi society gave rise to nationalist sentiments within the Assyrian community. The British promise of independence stirred the political debates and provoked the rise of nationalist discourses in the Assyrian community. Accordingly, Assyrian nationalism became a tool for Assyrian leaders to claim an autonomous territory and to distance the Assyrian community

168 Dawood, 43.
From the emerging Iraqi state. It can be argued that the British colonial policy in the camp not only divided the internal Assyrian community, but also disrupted state-society relations in Iraq.

From Versailles 1919 to Lausanne 1923: Unattainable Autonomy

After the First World War, Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points concerning the rights to self-determination and autonomy encouraged some of the Assyrians to form delegations and attend the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. Inspired by Point Twelve which stated that other nationalities under Turkish rule should be assured an autonomy, Assyrian leaders prepared to argue for the creation of an independent Assyrian state. Three main Assyrian groups were scheduled to participate in the Paris Conference: Iranian, Mesopotamian and American. Concerned that the Iranian delegation would jeopardize its control over the Assyrians, the British forced the Assyrian Iranian delegates to leave Paris. Although the Mesopotamian Assyrians received conditional permission to travel to the Paris Peace Conference, their efforts were deliberately hampered by the British authority. Not only did the British delay the delegation’s journey to Paris, they also placed a condition on Lady Surma, head of the delegation and sister of the assassinated Mar Benyamin Shimun, to stop in London and kept her there until the conference ended.

As the Paris Peace Conference failed to settle the issue of the partition of the Ottoman Empire, nor did it succeed in resolving the minority question, the Great Powers gathered again in April 1920 at San Remo for further deliberations. The conference resulted in Turkey’s giving up its rights in all the regions it had dominated, including Mesopotamia. The Assyrian delegation

---

170 Robson, 45.
172 Donabed, 70.
led by Bishop Aphrem Barsoum, addressed the delegates through his memorandum, mentioning the sufferings and the wishes of an ancient Assyrian nation that resided mostly in the upper valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates in Mesopotamia. The bishop also asked for the emancipation of the vilayets of Diyarbekir, Bitlis, Kharput, and Urfa from the Turkish yoke, and protested against any plans to establish a Kurdish authority or state. Addressing the conference by letter again a month later, Bishop Barsoum argued that the 1915 massacres were not against the Armenians alone; “but against all Christians, and that half of the Assyrian people were victims of the Turkish sword and Kurdish dagger.”

Although the Treaty of Sèvres, signed in August 1920, contained several articles that mentioned concerns regarding racial and religious minorities, the bishop’s demands were put aside for subsequent settlement. Article 62 declared that the Assyro-Chaldeans were confined under the larger section on Kurdistan:

The Scheme shall contain full safeguards for the protection of the Assyro-Chaldeans and other racial or religious minorities within these areas, and with this object a commission composed of British, French, Italian, Persian and Kurdish representatives shall visit the spot to examine and decide what rectifications, if any, should be made in the Turkish frontier where, under the provisions of the present Treaty, that frontier coincides with that of Persia.

Although this statement recommended a commission to examine the status of minorities in the Turkish frontier, the Assyrian question was absorbed into the Kurdish issue in Mosul, which

---

175 Aprim, “Assyrians in the World War I Treaties.”
176 Treaty of Sèvres (Aug. 10, 1920) was a post-World War I pact between the victorious Allied powers and representatives of the government of Ottoman Turkey. The treaty abolished the Ottoman Empire and obliged Turkey to renounce all rights over Arab Asia and North Africa. The pact also provided for an independent Armenia, for an autonomous Kurdistan, and for a Greek presence in eastern Thrace and on the Anatolian west coast, as well as Greek control over the Aegean islands commanding the Dardanelles (“Treaty of Sevres,” Encyclopedia Britannica, Encyclopaedia Britannica, inc., June 6, 2014, accessed November 3, 2017, https://www.britannica.com/event/Treaty-of-Sevres).
177 Aprim, “Assyrians in the World War I Treaties.”
became a recurring problem between Iraq and Turkey in subsequent decades. According to the Treaty of Sèvres, the Fertile Crescent came under British and French mandate. Mosul was awarded to the British Mandate in Mesopotamia and made part of the new Iraq in keeping with the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916.\textsuperscript{178} France was willing to give up its interest in Mosul in exchange for a twenty-five percent share in Mosul’s oil and a free hand in the whole of Syria.

Although another opportunity for the Assyrian delegation emerged during the deliberations on the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne on November 20, 1922, the Assyrians’ efforts remained futile. After the military and political success of the Kemalist movement in establishing Ankara as the new capital of the Turkish Republic, Turkey demanded reconsideration of the Mosul frontiers and amendment of certain articles in the Treaty of Sèvres. During negotiations for this second treaty, the issue of the many national minorities in Turkey, addressed in the Treaty of Sèvres, remained unresolved. The Lausanne Treaty under Section III - Protection of Minorities, Articles 37 - 44 contained many stipulations with regard to “the protection of minorities.” Notwithstanding, the Turkish government never respected those provisions. Having traveled to the region, Dr. Fridtjof Nansen, Director of the League of Nations High Commission for Refugees, raised the issue of the minorities in Turkey to the League of Nations on December 1, 1922. In response, the League of Nations formed a sub-committee to ask for written guarantees for the protection of minorities in Turkey. However, facing strong Turkish opposition, the sub-committee submitted a revised report on minorities which gave Turkey the upper hand on January 9, 1923.

report provided guarantees by treaty, but abandoned the plan for “an international commission... under supervision by the League of Nations.”

Not only were the minorities’ rights ignored by the Turkish government, the discourse of majority-minority was employed by the British to impede the Assyrian nationalist delegation. On October 26, 1923, Agha Petros tried submitting a letter to the British authorities, suggesting the founding of an Assyrian enclave in the land between the Rivers Tigris and Zab, and Mount Sinjar (Figure 3). Both Britain and the U.S. rejected the plan as they agreed on sharing profits from the oil fields in Mosul. In this regard, the British managed to gain Mosul back from Turkey by claiming to save this region as the future home for the Assyrians and Kurds. This development marked the emergence of the minority discourse, in which the minorities, such as Assyrians or Kurds, became an excuse in the Turkish-Iraqi frontiers (Mosul Vilayet) negotiations to cover British desire to

---

180 Eastern Conference Lausanne, Autonomy for Assyrian Christians, FO 839/23.
control Iraq’s oil fields. However, final agreement was not reached. Yusuf Malek described this recurring frontier issue as follows:

…The long delay was fatal and the blunder colossal, and has been the cause of many other tragedies besides this Assyrian one; but when the peace was made at last, the question of the frontier between Turkey and the new state of Iraq, in which was included the settlement of these Assyrians, was still left open and referred for decision to the League of Nations. That body sent out a commission for the purpose and gave a ruling that its members now admit to have been a huge wrong. (Admission made personally to me at Geneva) It gave the province of Hakkiari (the Assyrian home) to Turkey and left the Assyrians in Iraq where they did not wish to be and the Arabs did not want to have them…

This statement suggests that the Assyrian nationalist movement encountered obstacles from various sides. Their nationalist efforts to seek autonomy were hindered by the British, who had promised the Assyrians support in finding their homogenous home and had claimed their authority over them in Mosul. Since the Iraqi government became a new ally of the British after the establishment of Mandatory Iraq in 1920, the British feared that such a separate Assyrian enclave would harm the relationship between the Assyrians and the remainder of the Iraqi population. The Assyrians’ attempt to emigrate to the Hakkiari mountains, under the authority of Turkey since 1923, was also thwarted by the Turkish government which refused to accept them. The Assyrians became the lingering minority problem that affected the border and human rights issues of regional states like Iraq, Turkey and Syria as well as the Great Powers like Britain and France for several years.

The Arab and Kurdish Levies: Ethnicization and Discipline

Under an uncertain political situation and amidst the ethnic complexity of northern Iraq, the British formed a militia that originally consisted of Arabs and Kurds to police the region. In

---

181 Aprim, “Assyrians in the World War I Treaties.”
182 Malek, British Betrayal of the Assyrians.
1915 Major John Inglis Eadie of the Indian Army recruited forty mounted Arabs from the tribes around Nasiriyah, on the Euphrates, for duty under the Intelligence Department. Consisting solely of Arabs during recruitment in 1915, the levies were thought of as a colonial police force for British authority. After the occupation of Mosul on November 6, 1918, the indigenous manpower situation in the Levies began to change. The new British territorial commitment of Kurdistan entailed the employment of Kurds, as well as other ethnic minority groups, such as the Assyrians from the Hakkiari mountains and Urmia. In July 1919, the militia was to be known as the “Arab and Kurdish Levies” which were to relieve the military of patrols, guards and escort duties. The change of the Levy designation was important in that it marked a move towards a military force by dividing the Levies into a striking force of 3,075 men and district police of 1,786 men. The total authorized strength was to be 5,965, excluding British officers and NCOs.\(^\text{183}\)

The Striking Forces were separated into five units: 2nd Euphrates Levy, the Diala Levy at Baqubah, the Sulaimaniyah Levy, the Rowanduz Levy and the Mosul Gendarmerie. The duties of the Striking Forces were to suppress disturbances and undertake small military operations which, in the opinion of the Political Officers, were “beyond the scope of the district police and yet not sufficiently serious for the employment of regular troops.”\(^\text{184}\) Moreover, they were to act as a first line reconnaissance and auxiliary arm to the regular forces in major operations.\(^\text{185}\) Considering each Levy’s demographic composition, recruitment, training and military barracks, the Arab and Kurdish Levies signified not only British expediency in exploiting local tribesmen and townsmen to reduce defense cost, but also showed British manipulation of ethnic identities that fostered communal disparity within the heterogenous troops.

\(^{183}\) L/P&S/10/621, F.372.
\(^{185}\) Ibid., 219.
The ethnic composition of each unit of the Levies consisted of recruits of different races and religions. According to Major C.A. Boyle, a mixed troop of tribal men could foster esprit de corps and diminish tribal sentiment among recruits.186 The 2nd Euphrates Levy and the Baqubah Levy consisted of Arab townsmen and tribesmen as well as Kurds. The Sulaimaniyah Levy consisted of Kurds and Turkomans while the Rowanduz Levy consisted of Arabs, Kurds, Turkomans, Persians and Christians. The Mosul Gendarmerie also combined Muslim Arabs with Christian Assyrians. Nevertheless, Major Boyle accepted that a unit of tribesmen might incur tribal spirit, a disadvantage that needed to be overcome. Although the Levies at Sulaimaniyah and Rowanduz consisted of Kurds and Turkomans, the British officer stated that “both classes dislike and would not work well with the Arabs.”187 To solve this issue, Brigade General A. G. Wauchope suggested that the units of Arabs and Kurds in the 2nd Euphrates Levy at Diwaniyah needed to be kept separate:

In the squadrons at Hillah and Abu Sukhair Tribesmen are mixed but the Kurds are organized in separate troops. At Diwaniyah the 30 Kurds are mixed among the Arab troops. They seemed to be on a thoroughly friendly relations, but I think the advantage of having several units of Sunnis of men free from all local influence, religious or tribal, is a standing advantage to the Levy, and is easily gained by having the Kurds in separate troops.188

The organization of the mixed squadrons reflects the British policy of divide and rule as well as British caution that mixing different ethnic and religious groups within the same military unit may risk provoking intercommunal conflict and undermining discipline of the officers and recruits.

In line with the British colonial policy of indirect rule, the process of recruitment relied on the influence of local leaders and the Levy officers as well as social and economic inducements to draw potential recruits. In his report on the 2nd Euphrates Levy, Wauchope recommended that

---

186 Wauchope, 222.
187 Ibid., 235.
188 Ibid., 229.
Political Officers might help increase the number of recruits by persuading the leading men of their districts to announce “the advantages offered to young Arabs in joining the Levies, and the probabilities of rapid promotion open to young men of character and intelligence.”

Inducing influential men to join the Levy could accomplish several objectives: to raise prestige, facilitate recruiting men suitable for promotion, bring the 2nd Euphrates Levy to establishment, and increase the number of rank and file. This strategy worked effectively in drawing a high proportion of “the best type of men in the Hillah Levy” through the personal influence of one Arab officer, Said Ja’ad, who had great influence in the district between Hillah and Jarbuiyah. By relying on local chiefs and tribal leaders to establish local patronage networks and propagate the functions and benefits of serving in the Levies, the British managed to exercise indirect approach to maintain internal security and preserve imperial strategic interests.

With regards to the recruitment of native officers, the British authorities selected those who had served under the Ottoman or Turkish military to draw and train the rank and file. Since the beginning of the occupation of southern Iraq in late 1914, the British had cultivated key local allies including King Faisal and his Sharifian officers, townsmen, and religious and tribal leaders. The British gave the ex-Turkish or ex-Ottoman officers positions of dominance in new state institutions, such as the central government and the military, in order to prevent them from joining in an anti-colonial movement. Therefore, the Iraqi army as well as the Arab and Kurdish Levies served as a post-war employment agency for ex-Ottoman officers. According to the report, ten out of eleven Kurds and Turkoman officers in the Sulaimaniyah Levy had served in the Turkish

---

190 Ibid.
191 Ibid., 222.
army. Kurdish Officers were from high social class, had leadership skills and military knowledge. Similarly, in the Rowanduz Levy, all five officers had served as officers in the Turkish army. The Yuzbashi (captain) Sabri, a Kurd from Koi Sanjak, spent five years in a military school in Turkey and served first in the Turkish and later in the Hejaz army. Not only could he read and write English, but he also had a very good word of command and thorough control of his men. In the Mosul Gendarmerie, twenty-two Arab officers were well educated, most of which spoke Arabic, Turkish and some Kurdish, and could all read and write in Turkish. A number of them went through the war school at Istanbul. It is evident that the ex-Turkish officers did not only serve as “collaborators” of the British, but also displayed intelligence and discipline that helped improve tremendously the competence and esprit de corps of the Arab and Kurdish Levies.

However, the recruitment process of the Arab and Kurdish Levies faced a number of obstacles, ranging from the personal to the economic issues of soldiers. Captain Gowan provided a number of causes that most hindered recruiting as follows: no financial advantage to join; dislike of military service; dread of military drill and discipline; and dislike of leaving their homes. In Sulaimaniyah, some recruits enlisted for the sake of getting employment having failed to make a living. Others became disenchanted with the small pay and allowances on offer. Several shaykhs looked upon the men of the Levies as “prisoners,” who were compelled to work twice as arduously for the same wage as those men who did not join. Married men preferred living with their wives and found it difficult to find a safe and suitable home for them when they separated. During the harvest month, most tribesmen sought to cultivate the land rather than join the Levy. The lack

197 Ibid.
of financial incentives and popularity of the Levies suggested not only the difficulty of recruiting Arab tribesmen, but also reflected British budget constraint to provide greater amount of rewards.

The military training of each unit was intended not only to instill discipline of the body and mind of recruits, but also to enhance cohesion among soldiers of different ethnicities. In the report on the Striking Force of the 2nd Euphrates Levy, Wauchope indicated that the British established the Levies as a modern military institution that emphasized the significance of recruit selection and military education:

Schools of instruction are greatly needed to develop their character and something further than knowledge, leadership and capacity for training are needed. I do not suggest any lack of discrimination in the selection, but I suggest it is necessary to enlist a higher proportion of recruits of such a class and intelligence as will enable the Commandant to select for promotion even more fitted to lead and train others.\(^{200}\)

This statement indicates that the core of having an efficient military lies in the selection of the right type of recruit and the quality of training that will develop both physical and mental features of

\(^{200}\) “Report on the Arab and Kurd Levies,” 221.
officers and the rank and file. At another level, the subjectivation of the soldier can be explored in relation to the emergence of disciplinary power. The methods and techniques of transforming a soldier into a subject at the service of government also indicates the emergence of biopower, according to Foucault, a power that has taken control of both the body and life of the soldier and the life of the population as a whole.\textsuperscript{201} In this context, the government of groups of individuals began with the concentration on disciplining their micro behavior. The military drill that determined and altered specific movements, postures, and bodies not only served as a means of turning the individuals into collective entities but also a method of governing the masses in society.\textsuperscript{202} According to Brigade General Wauchope, the rank and file were of good quality and would make excellent soldiers with further training. All the units of the Arab and Kurdish Levies underwent a set of exercises including march past, close order drill, the marksmanship range practice, musketry training, and horsemastership. Despite a short amount of time for training, the march pasts of the 2nd Euphrates Levy and the Baqubah unit were considered well-done and the close order drill “showed great promise.”\textsuperscript{203} Such an outcome reflected not only the intelligence and discipline of the recruits in obeying orders, but also the quality and competence of British and Arab officers and drill instructors in giving commands.

To establish the corporate identity and pride of the Levies, the British provided uniform and rank insignia to the officers and the rank and file. External signs such as military uniforms, rank insignia and ways of speaking and personal bearing signify a social position assigned by the institution, that is, institutional identity.\textsuperscript{204} This institutional identity helps strengthen unit

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Foucault2} Michel Foucault, “Panopticism” in \textit{Discipline and Punish} (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 211.
\end{thebibliography}
cohesion, solidarity, military discipline and boost morale of individual recruits. In the report on
the Arab and Kurdish Levies, the British officer describes the uniform as “smart, soldierly and
practical.”\textsuperscript{205} The Levies soldiers appreciated the smart appearance of their uniforms and became
proud to wear them. This suggests that the military uniforms not only served a functional purpose,
particularly when they performed in different kinds of geographical terrains and weather, but also
played a symbolic role in increasing their sense of pride and motivations to fulfill their duties.
When the clothing and equipment became deficient, the British officer remarked in the report that
these shortages “act as an encouragement to be slack as regards detail in dress and this reacts on
their exactness in drill and discipline.”\textsuperscript{206} It is evident that the British officers emphasized the value
of military uniform as it helps inculcate discipline and hygiene among the soldiers. Similarly,
medal and insignia also played a symbolic role that represented military honors and achievements.
To induce the officers and NCOs to perform their duties and enhance their recognition within the
unit and ranks, the British officer suggests that “a good service medal should be given to those
Arab officers and NCOs who have assisted the force by example and influence, success in training,
bringing in good recruits, etc.”\textsuperscript{207} In this way, both uniform and medal served a practical purpose
in the line of duty and in the hierarchical organization of the military. They also served a
ceremonial purpose in elevating their renown and prestige in the eyes of others.

The settings of the military barracks not only aimed to accommodate the needs and well-
being of the officers and recruits of the Arab and Kurdish Levies, but also aimed to instill discipline
in them. Like military training, the compartmentalization of military space, such as military
barrack, is one of a wide array of governmental technologies to “shape the mental, physical and

\textsuperscript{206} Wauchope, “Report of Sulaimaniyah Levy,” 238.
conceptual space in which those subjects find themselves.” In this context, discipline exists not in the imposition of an officer’s will over his soldiers, but in the way those soldiers are organized. The organization of the military barracks as described in the report illustrates British colonial policy of segregation and control to govern a mass of multi-ethnic and multi-religious recruits. The officers and men in the 2nd Euphrates Levy all lived in the camp half a mile from the town while thirty married families built a small Arab village near the camp but “a little further from the lines.” Similarly, the officers and men in the Sulaimanîyah Levy lived in a large building in the town. But the Political Officer arranged for the construction of new barracks in the town which were located half a mile further from the bazaar in order to maintain military discipline. In the Rowanduz Levy, all officers and men, except about thirty married men who lived with their wives in Rowanduz, lived in camp on a hill about ten minutes-walk from the town. Since the recruits in the Baqubah Levy lived close to the main bazaar, the British suggested it needed to be “more free from bazaar influences” to increase discipline and esprit de corps. Remarkably, to maintain organization and discipline of the military unit, the British considered that the military barrack needed to be far away from the bazaar where recruits could wander off and where military discipline cannot be enforced. Likewise, while some recruits were allowed to live with their families, some distance needed to be kept between their residence and the base to avoid distraction among recruits.

Since it is necessary for the military barrack to be far from the bazaar, the military base was designed to provide all kinds of daily needs and social services to the recruits. In the 2nd Euphrates Levy, “a contractor ran a small restaurant in the camp. The men obtained their meal at the same prices as in the bazaar, including bread, meat, rice, etc. The men also used a small coffee

---

shop which kept them out of the bazaar.” In the Rowanduz camp, a tea shop, a tailor’s and a bootmaker’s were located to offer services to the soldiers. Since the military camp provided all types of daily needs for officers and rank and file, they would not see it necessary to leave the camp to shop in the bazaar where their activities could not be monitored and regulations could not be enforced. By restricting the movement of recruits, limiting the communication with family members and banning them from interacting with other townsmen outside the barrack, the British managed to discipline and monitor all kinds of their soldiers’ activities that occurred within the confines of the barracks.

The restaurant contractors within the military barracks became a source of fund for the British officers to invest in games and sports for their recruits. Seeing that the contractor of a restaurant paid no rent but earned approximately Rs. 6,000 per month from selling to two hundred customers daily at bazaar prices, the British officer suggested collecting tax from the contractors at Diwaniyah and Sulaimaniyah at a rate of “half an anna per man per day.” As a result, the Officer Commanding would have a fund of Rs. 100 per month and prevent the growth of monopoly power among the contractors. This policy of taxation demonstrates the British strategy to raise funds for the comfort and well-being of their men as well as the way to lessen defense expenditure within the barracks.

Although the British officials were aware of Iraq’s diverse ethnic communities, their method of recruitment, training and facilities did not appear to dissolve tribal sentiment and to foster cohesion among heterogenous soldiers within the mixed units. According to Major C.K.

---

211 An anna was a currency unit formerly used in India and Pakistan, equal to 1/16 rupee. The Anna is not commonly used since India decimalized its currency in 1957 (www.rbi.org.in); Wauchope, “Some observations on Methods for Improving the Recruiting of Officers and Men of the Arab and Kurd Levies,” Iraq Administration Reports: 1919, V.III, 252.
212 Wauchope, 252.
Daly, the Levies were “bad soldiers and worse policemen.”\textsuperscript{213} It appeared that recruits of the “right stamp” would not enlist because the terms of engagement were not sufficiently attractive. Compared with the wages obtainable in other walks of life, Levy pay was not sufficient for these men. With regard to training, Captain G.H. Salmon found it impossible to expect a single body of men, with a simple training program, to perform incompatible duties. The Kirkuk Levy performed as police, messengers, escorts, bailiffs and soldiers. These manifold duties interfered with the levies’ training as a military Striking Force.\textsuperscript{214} Moreover, a diverse mass of soldiers used different languages, possessed divergent skills, and level of performance due to previous experiences and background. The language of command used by the British instructors during the training could not be wholly understood by recruits who had variable levels of command of English, Turkish or Kurdish. Since many of the Turkomans had previous military or gendarmeries training under the Turks, they were better material by far than the Arabs, and readier to be trained than the Kurds.\textsuperscript{215} On the other hand, while the Kurds and Arabs were excellent horsemen, the Assyrians made better machine-gunners and artillery men.\textsuperscript{216} Old feuds among recruits of different religions and tribes could in some cases cause friction within the same unit.

Due to British economic strain and policy to reduce defense cost, the creation of the Arab and Kurdish Levies could be described as an ad hoc affair with varied tasks and diverse recruits. Not only did the British officers fail to enlist enough number of soldiers to meet the expected demand, they also failed to develop the Levy into the Arab Force to take on duties from the imperial garrison and support the Arab power in the future. It can be argued that since the end of

\textsuperscript{213} L/P&S/10/622, F.454.
\textsuperscript{214} L/P&S/10/621, F.92.
\textsuperscript{215} L/P&S/10/621, F.92.
the First World War, the Arab and Kurdish Levies had been disorganized without an organization based on parent units of regiments or battalions to enable the creation of a command structure. For the Levies to function as a military force, a new set of strategies and a new group of recruits had to be found.

The Birth of the Iraq Levies

After receiving the Mandate for Iraq in 1920, the British motives to cheaply govern the new Iraqi state led them to recruit the Assyrian refugees into the British colonial army, namely the Iraq Levies. At the Cairo conference in 1921, it was decided that the existing Arab Levies should be expanded by adding Kurdish and Assyrian units. The levy establishment was to raise to 60 officers, and 7,500 men at an estimated cost of £1 million per annum. The suggested distribution of these troops was: (a) Euphrates (Nasiriyeh to Hit) 3,150. (b) Mosul out-posts 2,400. (c) Kirkuk area 950. (d) Sulaimaniyah area 1,000.217 By this means, the British intended to withdraw the imperial garrisons in Kirkuk and other frontier districts. Regarding possible Levy manpower resources, the Conference decided to enlist Assyrians because they had shown good fighting qualities on many occasions. The British began to take an interest in the Assyrians after perceiving small Assyrian battalions’ military prowess against the Barwari, Goyan and Guli Kurdish tribes in Amadiya on August 8, 1919. Moreover, during the Iraqi revolt in 1920, the Assyrians were able to suppress six hundred Kurds who attacked the repatriation camp at Baquba.218 In 1921, the Assyrians represented the best possible manpower pool for the British imperial government.

Whether the British officials had sympathy for the Assyrians at the individual level, their reliance on the Assyrian troops was based on political and economic expediency. As Winston

218 Browne, 7.
Churchill remarked in 1920, “The fate of the province depends … entirely upon whether a reasonable scheme for maintaining order can be devised at a cost which is not ruinous.”\textsuperscript{219} Some British governmental officials saw the Assyrians as chess pieces to be utilized. Recruiting the Assyrians into the Levies was the most practical and expedient way to increase British military strength and expand the force to occupy the Turkish-Iraqi frontier territory.\textsuperscript{220} Others felt compelled to honor previous promises to the Assyrians to fulfill a sense of military honor and loyalty: \textsuperscript{221}

The Assyrians deserve well of us. They have had less than justice at our hands. They can expect it from no other Government, and care for their interests is, in my humble view, one of our major obligations in Iraq.\textsuperscript{222}

Whether the British truly sought to fulfill their wartime promise to the Assyrians, it appeared that British recruitment of the Assyrians coincided with the change of colonial policy to indirect rule in Iraq after the tumultuous year of 1920.

\textsuperscript{219} Keith Jeffery, \textit{The British Army and the Crisis of Empire} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 149.
\textsuperscript{220} Badawi, \textit{Assyrian Struggle for National Survival}, 270.
\textsuperscript{221} Donabed, 72.
\textsuperscript{222} Arnold T. Wilson, “The Middle East,” \textit{Journal of the British Institute of International Affairs} 5.2 (1926), 96-110.
The initial recruitment of the Assyrians at Mindan camp in 1921 suggests the British view of refugees as a potential pool for colonial armed forces. During the financial year 1921-22, the Assyrians were regarded as “unproductive refugees” as no funds were available for their maintenance after the refugee camps would be closed down on April 1, 1921.\textsuperscript{223} During 1919-20, a number of schemes for settling the Assyrians as a national unit in lands then vacant in the northern and northeastern boundaries of Iraq had been prepared. The most promising scheme suggested settlement in an enclave in the Amadiya district in Kurdistan.\textsuperscript{224} However, the plan failed as the British government was unable to reach a decision, pending the conclusion of peace with Turkey.\textsuperscript{225} Another scheme provided for the creation of an Assyrian buffer state on the Turco-Persian border where the Assyrians from the Urmia and Hakkiari districts could be resettled. Despite the assistance and protection provided by British officers, the scheme collapsed partly due

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{223} Young, 144.
\item \textsuperscript{224} Mar Eshai Shimun, \textit{The Assyrian Tragedy} (Illinois: Assyrian International News Agency, 1934), 18.
\item \textsuperscript{225} Shimun, 18.
\end{itemize}
to bad weather, and partly due to defective organization of the settlement in which most of the Assyrians “cared only for their own clan or village.” 226 A new settlement plan was implemented in the middle of October in which the Assyrians marched from the Aqra Dagh into Barzan territory. 227 Yet again, the scheme failed as hostilities broke out immediately with the Kurds, and the Tkhuma and Tiyaris broke away from the main body and pillaged Kurdish villages. Since neither of these refugee operations succeeded and the evictions of Kurds became impossible, the British turned to a strategic solution by forming a militia from among the Assyrian refugees.

At first, the endeavors of recruiting officers in to the Levies met with reluctance by the Assyrians. According to Browne, many recruitment meetings were held, but the men would not come forward. All they wanted was that the British should send them back to their country, which they had lost through joining the Allies. 228 To persuade Assyrian men to join the Iraq Levies force, the British used nationalist rhetoric, promising to establish the autonomous national homeland for the Assyrian refugees in Iraq in return for their military service. 229 Believing that the British would help repatriate them to Hakkiari in return for their military service, fifty Assyrian men conceded and were recruited into the British ranks. 230 Two leading British officers took the new troops and some of their family members in two groups. The first headed towards Nabi Yunis and the second towards Aqra. Among the first Levy officers were Rab-Khamshi Yusuf Yokhanna I and Daniel Ismael, the son of Malik Ismael, leader of the Assyrians of Upper Tiyari. 231 The British also entrusted the patriarchal family with responsibility for the enlistment of Assyrians. 232 In this way,

---

226 Shimun, 19.
227 Ibid.
228 Browne, 14-15.
229 Badawi, 270.
230 Ibid., 15.
231 Rab is reflective of an ancient Assyrian title for soldiers of rank. In this instance, rab-khamshi denotes that Yokhanna was the commander of fifty men (Donabed, 90).
232 Draft by Mr Ward for the High Commissioner, Baghdad in 1933, “Historical summary of development of the Assyrian question, Part I, 1914-1925” [FO 371/16894].
rather than removing their attachment to an Assyrian identity by keeping them away from their community and cultural source, military recruitment served to reinforce a sense of cultural survival and tribal characteristics that had been preserved for centuries in their mountainous enclaves.

The British recruitment of the Assyrians fit into a much broader history of coercing marginal ethno-national groups to serve the colonial state. The British sensitivity to ethnicities and religions in organizing the armed forces demonstrates the British perception that ethnoreligious identities could signify individuals’ military performance, loyalty and discipline. In this way, British reliance on the Assyrians was similar to the way they relied on the natives in India to serve as a local security force. The militia was subjected to training and deployment under a British officer, centering on military execution and loyalty. On the one hand, the Assyrians profited greatly from receiving good pay and prestige for their service. In fact, the major part of Assyrian income was derived from this source. On the other hand, the British benefited from this strategy by securing their oil reserves, airbases and the territorial integrity of both Turkey and Iraq with lesser expenses. The recruitment of the Iraq Levies thus deepened the symbiotic relationship between the British and the Assyrians.

Despite applying lessons learned from the Arab and Kurdish Levies, the British selective recruitment and training of the new Iraq Levies were not a smooth and tidy process. According to Malik Loko Shlimon d'bit Badawi, an Assyrian officer in the Levy force, the organization of the Levies, including the hiring, the conferring of military ranks, granting of promotions, awards and medals of valor was not on a merit-based system. Some Assyrian soldiers refused to re-engage until they received better terms of engagement and higher financial rewards. The system of

234 Donabed, 72.
235 Young, 225.
recruitment was perceived to be rampant with nepotism and cronyism. Not all the high-ranking officers deserved their ranks. Few officers attained the highest ranks through their own efforts and skills. Moreover, a large body of Assyrian recruits brought a problem of language for communication in training. Newly-appointed Assyrian officers and NCOs had no knowledge of English, and the British officers and British NCO instructors had no knowledge of Syriac. Although the British army managed to train many men in so little time, this condition hindered clear communication and undermined organization and discipline during training. A number of problems that emerged in the early years of the Iraq Levies suggested the difficulty of implementing the proposed defense policy in a multi-ethnic and turbulent society like Iraq during the Mandate years.

Although the recruitment of the Assyrians showed British competence in exploiting local human resources to govern the Mandate on the cheap, the pragmatic approach toward military organization brought about further intercommunal tension and conflict in a heterogenous Iraq society. Indeed, the Assyrians performed excellent service for the British and protected national security of Iraq. But their association with the British made Iraqis perceive them as an internal enemy that undermined the Iraqi unity. Instead of pursuing a policy that encouraged the assimilation of the Assyrians into an Iraqi state, the British chose to persuade a large body of the Assyrian mountaineers to enroll in the Levies to fill holes in their operations left by departing British and Indian troops. The roles of the Assyrians in the Levy ranged from spearheading attacks, defending military camps, protecting British airbases to suppressing rebellions and uprisings in Kurdistan. Like the Kurds, Arabs and Turkomans, the Assyrians worked with the British to secure

236 Badawi, 271.
237 Young, 166.
the newly formed Iraqi state and suppress various sectarian revolts and movements.\textsuperscript{238} However, rather than being appreciated for their service, the Iraq Levies were singled out as an object of suspicion amidst the widespread anti-British and anti-Western sentiments among Iraqi population. This growing tension between the Assyrian soldiers in the Levies and Iraqi population is the subject that the next chapter will address.

\textsuperscript{238} Donabed, 74.
CHAPTER II: THE MARTIAL RACE THEORY AND THE CLASS REGIMENTAL SYSTEM: THE OTHERIZING OF THE ASSYRIANS

A perennial theme running throughout Britain’s imperial experience has been the relationship between ideas about the ordering of society at home and ideas about the ordering of the empire overseas. For all the obvious difficulties involved in applying the same precepts to societies that are likely to have been fundamentally different, generations of British people have tried to do precisely this. British models [have] usually been projected on to the empire; less frequently what have been taken to be the lessons of Empire have been beamed back at Britain.


One of important features of the administrative systems established in the colonial period in the Middle East was their particular emphasis on police and security. In the case of the colonial powers, it was considered to be the key to continued political control. Small military formations of a few thousand men or so were organized in all colonial states and were used mainly for internal security. Patterns of recruitment and politicization of the security system were to play a significant role from the colonial to the immediate post-independence period. Two typical colonial practices underlaid the creation of the colonial security state. One was the attempt to create an alliance with the large landowners and the tribal shaykhs who controlled much of the rural areas and supported the colonial position by recruiting local men. A second feature of colonial practice was the attention paid to sectarian, ethnic and tribal divisions to devise a strategy of “divide and rule,” which served to counter the centralizing, homogenizing processes from other parts of the colonial system.

The colonial project of the British Empire was heavily dependent on the participation and cooperation of local allies and the strategy of divide and rule. This was apparent in British India, where the mobilization and recruitment of Indian communities into the imperial forces gave rise

240 Ibid., 13.
to a multiplicity of discourses, traditions and identities reflecting the peculiar relationship between colonial power and the indigenous military force. In terms of military recruitment, the British colonial authorities used the discourse of “martiality” to divide their subject people into “warlike” and “non-warlike” races. This martial race theory meant that some “races” from Nepal and the North Indian provinces – particularly Punjab – were more likely to be recruited to fight as they were considered inherently more “manly” and warlike than men from other parts of India. The recruitment of the local natives into the Indian army based on the martial race theory thus not only demonstrates the relationship between colonial rule and ethnographic and anthropological knowledge, but also the ambiguous interdependent relationship of the British colonial power and Indian martial subjects.

Similar to the formation and organization of the Indian army, the recruitment of the Assyrians into the Iraq Levies indicates the British manipulation of ethnic identities that operated at an epistemological level as well as served the practical and strategic purposes. This chapter examines the British employment of the martial race theory to recruit the “warlike” Assyrians to protect internal security and the strategic interests of British rule in Iraq. In addition, it examines the “class regimental system” that was used to structure an ethnically- or religiously- homogenous unit within the army. Analyzing both the method of recruit selection and the system of unit organization, this chapter demonstrates how the British colonial policies worked to alienate the Assyrians in Iraq and sow the seeds of communal tension between the Assyrian soldiers and Iraqi population. The demographic composition of the Iraq Levies, comprised mainly of Assyrians, created a separate sense of identity among the Assyrian soldiers from the rest of the local

---

population. This condition not only laid the foundation for the rivalry between the Iraq Levies and the Iraqi army, but also perpetuated Iraq’s minority question that interfered with Iraqi nationalists’ Arab unity project.

Ethnicity and State Security

According to Cynthia Enloe, a scholar of gender and militarism, studying the role and impact of ethnicity can help us understand its political ramifications in state security.\(^{242}\) First, an ascriptive approach sees ethnically distinct regiments, such as in the army, as a governmental response to existing sub-state allegiances. Second, the situational approach presumes that ethnicity is open to “changing collective definitions and fluctuating emotional intensities.” \(^{243}\) Both analytical approaches view the military either as an agent shaping ethnic attachments or a space for ethnic dilution.\(^{244}\) Many countries used the “ethnic factor” in their armed forces for military and political objectives. On the one hand, a polyethnic armed force can be an instrument of racial or ethnic segregation and/or oppression. On the other hand, the ethnic factor in armed forces can be used to appease a particular ethnic group or promote national integration and unity.\(^{245}\) The formation and structure of the Iraq Levies that consisted entirely of Assyrians provides a case study that demonstrates the impact of ethnicity on the security and stability of Mandatory Iraq. Both the martial race discourse and the class regimental structure designate the British attempt to construct and subjugate the warlike Assyrians based on their static perception of race. The impression of the

\(^{243}\) Enloe, 2.
\(^{244}\) Ibid., 3.
Assyrian soldiers as a conspicuous “other” within the Arab-majority society in Iraq led to damaging consequence from politicizing ethnicity within the armed forces.

The Martial Race Theory

The mobilization and recruitment of Assyrians based on their physical attributes and discipline resonated with the racialized discourse namely the “martial race” theory. Developed by Lord Roberts, who served as commander-in-chief of the Indian Army from 1885 to 1893, the concept of martial race meant that only certain native communities were deemed to possess the spirit necessary for military service.246 The markers of martial identity are physical qualifications, bravery and amenability to discipline. Recruits’ outlook and attitude towards soldiering were also important characteristics suitable for recruitment.247 The adoption of the martial race theory was manifested in British recruitment of the Assyrians into the Iraq Levies based on their fighting quality and steadfast loyalty to the British. According to Stafford, the Assyrian troops were a most noteworthy feature of northern Iraq in the years of the Mandate. They had a smart appearance and were as good as any troops in Asia including the Sikhs and the Gurkhas.248 He also provided a description of the physical characteristics of the Assyrians in detail;

The skin and complexion of the Assyrians resemble those of the Southern Italian and in many cases are much lighter. The men, though not all, are generally of good physique, the weaklings having died during infancy. Fair hair and blue eyes are often seen. The women are darker than the men and are seldom good-looking. They possess great fortitude and remarkable powers of recovery. The life which led before the war and the hardships which they have undergone since, are not likely to have made them soft...The standard of morality among the Assyrians has always been high.249

248 Stafford, 63.
249 Ibid., 14-15.
The above statement demonstrates the British view that strong physiques and durable mentality of the Assyrians seemed to fit the qualifications of the martial race. It also constructs Assyrian masculinity in contrast with the inferior femininity of Assyrian women. These characteristics implied that they could be trained and equipped with modern military weapons and form a highly disciplined force to secure British strategic interests in Iraq efficiently. This notion also indicates the British employment of ethnicity as an instrument to choose whom to recruit and whom to exempt, whom to channel into front-line combat units and whom to concentrate in technical jobs. In this way, state policy decisions to enlist certain groups for military service hinged on ethnic stereotypes and calculations.\textsuperscript{250}

The genesis of the martial army can be understood in the context of two strategic pressures that threatened British imperial rule in Iraq. First, the 1920 Iraqi revolt against the British marked out the Iraqis as threats while identifying the Assyrians as militarily competent and loyal to the British under duress. Therefore, the Assyrians were extolled as exemplary soldiers whose martial qualities were attributed to their ethnicities. In July 1920, the Arab rebellion broke out and upset the arrangements to move the first section of the Assyrian families from the Baqubah refugee camp to a new location at Mindan, a small village some thirty miles north-east of Mosul. The uprising cut the railway lines in several places and disrupted further arrangements for an advance camp at Aqra at the foot of the mountains. To make matter worse, the camps at Baqubah and Mindan were attacked by the Arabs and Kurds. Despite inadequate rifle power, the Assyrians at Mindan successfully defended the village and even pursued and punished their attackers.\textsuperscript{251} According to Brigadier-General John Gilbert Browne, a British Army officer who served in the Middle East commanding the Iraq Levies from 1925 to 1933, although this incident dispersed the Assyrian

\textsuperscript{250} Enloe, 10.
\textsuperscript{251} Stafford, 42.
refugees from their homeland in the Hakkiai mountains, “it showed a useful crowd of good fighting men who were ready at hand with nothing to occupy them.”252 This agility and readiness of the Assyrian refugees thus made them qualified to be the martial race.

Moreover, during the Arab rebellion of 1920 the Assyrians displayed, under conditions of the greatest trial, steadfast loyalty to their British officers. When the evacuation of the refugee camp was complete by the end of September, a number of armed men had been employed by the British military authorities as tribal levies in the mountains north-east of Mosul. Reportedly, some of them had some idea of discipline and had done good service, others had little or none.253 Similar to the unceasing violence they encountered during the Great War, the Assyrians faced the worst forms of persecution by Iraqis to persuade them to change sides. The Levies and their female relations were faced with intensive propaganda generated by the Iraqi population. The Assyrians were insulted and called infidels in the streets and coffee shops while their women were assaulted and killed.254 Relying heavily on the British for security as stateless refugees in a foreign land, few Assyrian recruits deserted from the Iraq Levies in the face of all these trials.

The second strategic factor that influenced the British recruitment of the Assyrians was the advance of Turkish force in the Mandate territories. This situation encouraged the British military to reorganize their forces and enhance their effectiveness with a view to future engagements along the northwestern frontier. Turkey, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal, had emerged victorious from its war with Greece and laid claim to the former province of Mosul, a city situated within the Iraqi-Turkish frontier. Realizing that the Assyrian mountaineers were great fighters in rugged, mountainous terrain in northern Iraq, the British considered that they were best suited to fill the

252 Browne, 15.
253 Ibid.
254 Ibid.
British forces to protect the frontier. The deployment of the Iraq Levies along the Iraqi-Turkish border complicated an already complex situation in the north of Iraq regarding Kurdish uprisings and Assyrian refugee settlement for years to come, a topic which will be elaborated below.\textsuperscript{255} In 1924, when the Turks had evicted the Assyrian settlers from the Hakkiari mountains and had pursued them into Iraqi territory, the Turkish forces were repulsed by the Assyrian irregulars who had been hastily collected. The regular Assyrian troops on this occasion displayed the finest discipline under the most trying circumstances.\textsuperscript{256} “They could see their homes going up in flames and they didn’t know if their relatives and families were safe. But they carried out their orders under the British officers without question.”\textsuperscript{257} These two main events, the Iraqi Revolt and the battle for Mosul, represented two tests of discipline and loyalty of the Assyrians that explain why the British may have considered the Assyrians perfect candidates for the martial race in the British imperial forces.

The Class Regimental System

In addition to the martial race theory, the British introduced the “class regimental system,” a managerial mechanism that enabled the British to structure a combat-effective and loyal colonial army from the subcontinent’s manpower. In the early nineteenth century, the British formed class company units, where each company or group of companies were drawn from a different community.\textsuperscript{258} The term “class” in this context was not used in the sense of social level but referred to one particular ethnic group or caste which was recruited to the army. This system brought

\textsuperscript{255} Tripp, 54.
\textsuperscript{256} Omissi, “Britain, the Assyrians and the Iraq Levies,” 66.
\textsuperscript{257} Browne, 42.
\textsuperscript{258} Stephen P. Cohen, \textit{The Indian Army: Its Contribution to The Development of A Nation} (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), 42.
together men of various ethnicities and religions to constitute a company of a single ethnicity, religion, caste or region. In the British Indian army, many battalions and regiments consisted of companies that contained one class of men or were ethnically homogenous. For example, of the eight troops forming one of the cavalry regiments, three troops were composed of Sikhs, one of Dogras, two of Rajput Mohammedans and Hindus, one of Pathans and one of Punjabi Mohammedans. In British perspective, grouping natives of the same race in the same companies helped facilitate recruiting and the development of esprit de corps.

Emulating the Indian army model, the British introduced the class regimental system to the recruitment and organization of the Iraq Levies to enhance military effectiveness and social cohesion within the armed forces. According to Brigadier-General Browne, the Assyrians became the preferred fighting force of the British RAF even though they had not been part of the original levies, which were referred to as the “Arab and Kurdish Levies.” Considering the inter-communal tension between the Iraqis and the Assyrians during the Iraqi Revolt in 1920, the British saw that mixing Arabs and Assyrians in the same company would not only generate inter-ethnic tension in the Levies, but also cause external strife with the Arabs in the Iraqi army. When the Iraqi army was formed in 1921, the British issued orders in which the Arabs and other Muslim peoples were required to join the newly-formed Iraqi army rather than to go to the Levies, and those serving could not re-enlist. The Mar Shimun family which led the Assyrian community in Iraq, specifically Surma Khanum and her brother Dawid, were recommended by Dr. William

261 Herron, Colonial Army Systems of the Netherlands, Great Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, Italy, and Belgium, 48.
262 Stafford, 70.
263 Browne, 4. See more details on the Arab and Kurdish Levies in Chapter 1.
Wigram, an Anglican priest and member of the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Mission to the Assyrians, to take up positions as de-facto contractors for the British with regard to the enlistment of the Iraq Levies. In choosing the native officers, the British recruited the sons of the shaykhs of various tribes to head each company. According to General Kenneth Frank Mackay Lewis, a British officer commanding the Second Battalion of the Iraq Levies from 1923-25, a senior native officer who served with him in the Second Battalion was Rab Trema (Commander of two hundred) Yaqo Ismail, the son of the head of the Upper Tiyaris. This reliance on local chiefs helped foster discipline as the Assyrian soldiers owed their personal allegiance to the shaykhs’ sons long before they joined the army. Thus, the Assyrians who belonged to different tribes were separated in one company supervised by their local headmen. Moreover, the British assigned Assyrian officers the task of touring the Assyrian villages and recruiting potential soldiers. With the implementation of the class regimental system and reliance on the local Assyrian leaders, the British managed to recruit incomparable Assyrian men and establish highly disciplined Assyrian forces in defense of British interests in Iraq.

Furthermore, the British structuring of the Levy forces based on the class regimental system was determined by the fact that a regiment of mixed composition did not perform as well as the class regiment consisting entirely of the Assyrians. Prior to the Mandate period, the British attempted to use a mixed companies of Kurds and Assyrians but they failed to realize military objectives and the units were broken due to lack of discipline. According to Browne, the mixed No. 7 Company, half Assyrian and half Kurd, and “other Moslem races proved unsatisfactory.”

265 Badawi, 271.
267 Badawi, 271.
268 Browne, 15.
the words of Stafford, a British officer and liaison between the British and Iraqi governments, the Chaldeans and the Yezidis (“Devil-worshippers”) had proved unsuitable as soldiers. This number was duly enlisted, but the recruits suffered much from the lack of discipline and effectiveness as did the Iraqi Army in the early days of the war.269

Besides the practical purposes, the application of the class regimental system was meant to serve strategic and security imperatives. Jafar al-Askari, an Iraqi Prime Minister, opposed the possibility of transferring whole units of the Levies to the Iraqi army or of absorbing individuals of the Levies into the Iraqi army due to security issues. According to a correspondence from Acting High Commissioner Henry Dobbs to Colonial Secretary Victor Cavendish on June 20, 1923 regarding the expansion of the Iraqi army, King Faisal thought the proposal to integrate the Iraq Levies into the Iraqi army was feasible. By contrast, the Prime Minister opposed it strongly because “it would be impossible for a Mohammedan Government to employ an organized body of Christians for the suppression of disorders among Mohammedan populations, whether Kurds or Arabs.” Instead, he suggested that the only possible means of absorbing the Assyrian Levies would be to mix them up thoroughly with Muslims. However, the British considered this view impossible for fear of provoking religious tension within the military units.270 It also contradicted the British policy of a class regimental system that sought to distribute different ethnicities into separate regiments. In any case, the Prime Minister’s intention of keeping the Iraqi and Assyrian units separate suggests that the state elite in a plural society had a clear idea of designing the military in such a fashion that was consonant with a pattern of inter-ethnic relations that ensured the state’s survival.271 In this context, the Iraqi ruling elite would rely on Muslim Arab troops to protect law

269 Stafford, 65.
270 Acting High Commissioner, Baghdad, to Colonial Secretary, London, June 20, 1923, reply to previous item [CO730/40], in Records of Iraq, 1921-1924, 451.
271 Enloe, 15.
and order rather than the Assyrian military units. In a similar vein, aware of domestic ethnic patterns in Iraq, the British Acting High Commissioner feared that mixing Assyrians with Muslim Arabs within a single unit would undermine state internal security and external defense.

The Martial Race Theory and the Class Regimental System in the Deployment of the Iraq Levies

The martial natives complemented the class regiment effectively as their military competence, reinforced by training and disciplining in the military organization, would markedly enhance military cohesion and integration. Therefore, both concepts were also used by the British to determine the deployment of forces in local disputes to prevent desertion and an outbreak of communal antagonism. In Ireland, locally recruited men were never employed in local disputes, such as the recurring riots between Protestants and Catholics in Belfast. Similarly in India, Pathan regiments or companies were seldom employed on the Afghan frontier, for fear they should have sympathy with the tribesmen and desert to them. Evidently, an ethnic factor was an essential element of the British officers’ decision to differentiate the deployment of ethnically-defined forces.

In addition to ethnicity, the British considered geography to achieve strategic objectives when engaging in local warfare in the peripheries. To defend Iraq from different types of organized invasion, ranging from “disturbances on the frontiers either among the Kurdish tribes in the hill country or with attacks by Bedouin raiders in the desert” to “small disturbances among the tribes in the river valleys of the south or in the towns,” the British suggested providing forces according to their familiarity with various kinds of geographical terrains:

For work in the Kurdish Hills, the troops had to be recruited from hillmen such as the Kurds or Assyrians, or, if drawn from the Plains, they must be taken on a sufficiently long

---

272 “Suggested Remedy, Class Composition,” in Records of Iraq V.IV, 1925-27, 140.
engagement to enable them to be trained in hill work... five years' colour service is required for this and certainly not less than four... In Baghdad, where the guard duties are heavy and where it is desirable to have troops available to aid the civil power, a cavalry regiment and three battalions should be quartered. For the defense of the desert, troops with special characteristics were required and needed to be supplemented with aircraft and armored cars.²⁷³

This statement indicates that the British organization and deployment of military units corresponded to the discourse of martial race and the class regimental system. It considered the physical abilities of various types of ethnic soldiers and distributed them with regard to their geographical origins, duration of training and battle experiences in given geographical terrains.

According to Brigadier-General H.H. Austin, the British commandant of the Baqubah refugee camp in Iraq, the Assyrians fought well along with Indian troops not only because of their knowledge of terrain but also because of their attire:

The Assyrians were extraordinarily good in the hills, and as every man had a pair of their native rope shoes they were enabled to move about under better conditions than the Indian troops. They were especially good at picketing work and generally showed much natural knowledge of the guerilla fighting necessary in this type of very mountainous country.²⁷⁴

Due to their fighting ability in a guerrilla warfare in the mountainous terrain, the Iraq Levies were chosen to engage in various operations against Kurdish rebellions. In the summer of 1924, the Assyrian Levies fought in operations against Shaykh Mahmud of Sulaimaniyah and his tribesmen in support of the Iraqi army in Kurdistan. At that time, the Iraqi army was only three years old and did not have much experience fighting on the Kurdish hills. For this reason, the 3rd battalion of the Iraq Levies were sent to the Amadiya district to help the Iraqi army fight against the Kurds.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁵ Stafford, 69.
Captain Clark, British Administrative Inspector of Arbil, commented on efforts to suppress Shaykh Mahmud’s rebellions against the Baghdad government:

The Iraq army was ordered to occupy the district of Sulaimaniyah but at once these Arab plainsmen were outmaneuvered by the mobile hillmen. The Assyrian Levies, who are as much at home in mountain warfare as the Kurds themselves, were called upon and with the RAF to help, the outcome of the rebellion could not be in doubt.²⁷⁶

On the one hand, this remark indicates that the martial race theory served as an operational device to recruit the Hakkiari Assyrians who were great fighters in rugged, mountainous terrain. On the other hand, the class regimental system served as a functional tool to deploy the Assyrian regiment, which was ethnically and religiously different from the rest of the Iraqi population, to guarantee military success in Kurdistan.

Nevertheless, the frequent use of the Assyrian forces against Kurdish tribes entrenched and perpetuated inter-communal conflicts between the Assyrians and the Kurds. Although both the Kurds and the Assyrians were mountaineers living together in Kurdistan, tensions and conflicts occurred between the two tribes due to political and territorial issues. After World War I, the Assyrian-Kurdish relations became more tense and complicated due to their aspirations for autonomy over disputed territories. The British formation of Assyrian armed factions caused a greater deal of concern among the Kurds as the British deployed the Assyrian units specifically against them.²⁷⁷ The British selective employment of an Assyrian force to suppress the Kurdish uprisings and the establishment of the Levies bases in several areas eventually generated backlash against the Assyrian community as a whole which will be discussed in the following section.

²⁷⁷ Some of these operations included suppressing Kurdish rebel tribes of Agra and Arbil-Batas areas in 1922 and engaging against the Sheik of Barzan in 1923 (Yusuf Malek, British Betrayal of the Assyrians).
Both the martial race theory and the class regimental system reflected the British’s aim to downplay the religious identities of soldiers by stressing occupational and class (ethnic) characteristics of the native soldiers. However, reinforcing a sense of ethnic identity in the military actually fostered tensions with other indigenous communities. The martial discourse and the class regimental organization distanced the Assyrians from the newly created Iraqi polity and gave the impression that the Assyrians were alien to Iraq. This situation comports with Cynthia Enloe’s concept of the “Gurkha syndrome,” in which a martial ethnic group was co-opted by the colonial power to provide security for another ethnic majority and secure imperial interests. Like Gurkhas in India, the Assyrians came to play military roles that far exceeded the influence they

---

279 Ibid.
280 N. F. Dreisziger, Ethnic Armies, 3. Cynthia Enloe’s work Ethnic Soldiers: State Security in Divided Societies identifies a series of connections between ethnicity and military policy in a variety of historical contexts, highlighting the ‘Gurkha Syndrome’ as an example of the way in which ethnic identities were manipulated by the state (Gavin Rand and Kim A. Wagner, “Recruiting the ‘martial races’: identities and military service in colonial India” in Racializing the Soldier, ed. Gavin Schaffer (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 27).
commanded within their state. The Iraq Levies demonstrated that in certain cases the situation of an ethnic group in society was not reflected in its position in the armed forces. Unsurprisingly, the elevated political position of a minority like the Assyrians within the British imperial forces generated tension with the Iraqi Arab population under their control. Despite the Levies’ contribution to the maintenance of the security of Iraq and to services in suppressing the Kurdish revolt, political reasons intervened and disrupted the prospect of peaceful relations between the Assyrians and the Iraqi government as well as the Assyrians and local Iraqi population.281

The British formation of the Iraq Levies to secure their interests not only prevented the Assyrians from assimilating into the Iraqi state, but the rewards for military service in the forms of the social and economic privileges given to the Assyrian recruits also caused jealousy and suspicion among Iraqi nationalists. The Levies received the better rates of pay than the Iraqi army. A private in the Iraq Levies was earning almost double that of his counterpart in the Iraqi army. In January 1922, the British authorities decided to equalize the rates of pay in the Levies with those of the army and to restrict recruitment to the Levies to non-Arabs. The rate of payment for the Iraqi army would be increased on the voluntary system from Rs 2,000 to 4,500 by April. The Levies would similarly be increased from Rs 4,500 to 5,500.282 Despite a pay raise, the Iraq Levies still received higher wages than the Iraqi army. This state policy suggests that not only did the social composition begin to be mutually exclusive, the different rates of payment also widened the gap between both units. This income inequality demonstrates the British discriminatory treatment of the armed forces that further generated antagonism between the Assyrian-dominant Levies and the Arab Iraqi army.

281 Stafford, 73.
282 Tarbush, 84.
As a consequence of this ethnic and socio-economic stratification, both the officers in the Iraqi Army and politicians in the Nuri al-Said government regarded these Christian colonial soldiers as the associates of the British imperial rule. According to the diplomatic record, the privileges granted to the Assyrians in the way of high wages, accommodation, remission of taxation, and etc., though necessary at first, tended to hinder their absorption into the body politic:

The Iraqi Moslem has resented the privileged treatment accorded to his “foreign” Christian neighbor, while the Assyrians are apt to regard themselves as a privileged race under British protection and to complain when their privileges are removed. Funds for the development of the Assyrian settlements can be most usefully employed, but the Assyrians will never live again in harmony with their Kurdish and Arab neighbours or receive fair treatment as “Iraqi subjects” if political and religious prejudices are once aroused.  

In this regard, social and economic advantages that the Assyrian soldiers received from their military service caused a process of social differentiation that exacerbated already existing social contradictions in the Iraqi society. Such privileges also served to provoke hostility from the Iraqi army, not only in terms of their alliance with the British, but also their role in upsetting the socio-economic balance within the Iraqi state. Remarkably, the tension between the Assyrians and the Iraqi army unfolded in the aspects of identity and socio-economic status.

However, these socio-economic rewards that strengthened ethnic cohesion within the Assyrian levy force instilled arrogance in the Assyrian officers and recruits who expressed contempt toward the Iraqi army and local population. According to General Kenneth Lewis, a British officer who served with the second battalion of the Iraq Levies, the Assyrians looked down on the Iraqi army as the way “mountaineers always looked down on the plainsmen.” Thus, not only the British discriminatory policy, but also the Assyrians’ behaviors and attitude towards other ethnicities served to provoke hatred and jealousy from Iraqi nationalist officers and politicians.

---

284 Lewis, Interview.
Hence, the isolation of the Assyrians not only resulted from the hands of the Iraqi government, but also the relentless defiance on the part of the Assyrians. In spite of these privileges, the Assyrians refused to acquire Iraqi citizenship, scarcely learnt Arabic, and remained tactless and aloof in their dealing with the Iraqis. According to a diplomatic record to the High Commissioner Sir Francis Humphrys on the Assyrian question, there was a new and increasing antipathy developed between the Assyrians and the Arab Muslim population in the years 1923-24. In the opinion of the League Commission of 1924-25, this hostility was due partly to the lack of tact displayed by the Assyrians, who regarded themselves as British protégés. In a similar vein, Brigadier-General Browne stated that the Assyrians were not popular in Iraq and they did not try to cultivate friendly relations with the Iraqis. Unlike some of the tribes who had lived for centuries in the Sapna area, and the men of the Baz and Jilu tribes who often came into Mosul and other towns for employment, the mountaineers of Hakkari acted like “complete strangers.” The antipathy between the Assyrian mountaineers and the Iraqi town and plain dwellers which was accentuated by different religions made the inter-communal relations very fragile. In time, these attitudes, combined with the Assyrians’ close economic and military association with Britain, gave rise to an atmosphere of mutual distrust and antagonism between the Iraqis and Assyrians, with the latter being increasingly regarded as a symbol of foreign domination. As Khaldun Husry, an Arab historian, expressed it:

The swaggering Assyrian levies with their slouch hats and red or white hackles, who stood guard at the Homes of the High Commissioner, and Hinaidi, the British Air Force Headquarters, situated in a suburb of Baghdad, became the symbol of British domination.

285 Draft by Mr Ward for the High Commissioner, Baghdad in 1933, “Historical summary of development of the Assyrian question, Part I, 1914-1925” [FO 371/16894].
287 Browne, 34.
The Iraqi army and the Sunni intelligentsia fostered and promoted rumors that the British harbored co-religionists sympathies for the Assyrians and used these minority protégés as an instrument against them. Indeed, their close association with the British facilitated the common perception that this constituted aggressive Christian solidarity against the Muslims.\textsuperscript{289} The Assyrians were represented in the Iraqi press as a threat to the national integrity of Iraq, and it was hinted that it was part of a sinister design by Great Britain to re-establish control over the northern part of the country.\textsuperscript{290} This perception began to filter down through the general population, widening the gap between the Assyrians and other communities of Iraq.\textsuperscript{291} However, the ethnic factor in forming the colonial army had more to do with political incentives than communal affinity. Rather than being a way to protect Christian subjects, the British recruitment policy should be regarded as an imperial pattern that reflects the divide and rule strategy by recruiting troops from a different ethnic community to police another within the same mandate territory.

Mosul and Kirkuk Disturbances 1923-24

The Iraq Levies’ military bases in several regions such as Diana, Hinaidi, Arbil, and Rowanduz, created communal tensions among local residents. The most notable and vicious incidents occurred in Mosul and Kirkuk, in which the Assyrians’ prestige diminished and the Iraq Levies became subject to contempt from other ethnic communities in Iraq. A bitter feeling between the Assyrians and the local Iraqi population led to an extensive brawl in the Mosul bazaar which nearly caused a serious outbreak between men of the Assyrian Levies and the townspeople on

\textsuperscript{289}Stafford, 163.  
\textsuperscript{290}Tripp, 80.  
\textsuperscript{291}Donabed, 72.
August 5, 1923.\textsuperscript{292} The outbreak originated in a quarrel between an Assyrian of the Tiyari tribe and a townsman who was provoked by the latter’s jeering at the Assyrian man who was on his way to have his photograph taken in full national costume. An exchange of insults led to fighting and in a short time a general melée ensued which rapidly spread through the whole bazaar. Each side armed themselves with anything handy which they could seize from the neighboring shops. The fight lasted for about three quarters of an hour and was eventually stopped by the police with the assistance of the prison staff. As it was Sunday, there were many men of the Assyrian Levies in the bazaar. The event nearly spiraled out of control by bringing the Assyrian soldiers into a battle with the Iraqi recruits. Fortunately, the men of the Iraqi Army, who were in their barracks at the time, were prevented from joining in the fray by the prompt closing of the barrack gates. Two Assyrian children were killed but their murderers were never discovered. The number of civilian casualties was not known as most of the injured were treated in their homes. A Court of Enquiry ordered by the Air Officer Commander found that the fracas was not premeditated but that there had long been bitter feeling between the Assyrian troops and the Arabs.\textsuperscript{293}

In the wake of the friction in Mosul, the Assyrian immigrants dispersed to their mountains, and the Air Marshal decided to move the Assyrian families to Kirkuk and remove the Assyrian Levies from Mosul and quarter them in the vicinity of Dohuk. In British perspective, the agitation in Mosul was caused by “the extremists” who were anxious that the influx of “alien Christians” from Syria would outnumber the comparatively small Muslim Arab population.\textsuperscript{294} Indeed, the Mosul conflict in bazaar intensified the ill-feeling between the Iraqi Arabs and the Assyrians to

\textsuperscript{292} Draft by Mr. Ward for the High Commissioner, Baghdad in 1933, “Historical summary of development of the Assyrian question, Part I, 1914-1925” [FO 371/16894], 499; Stafford, 67.

\textsuperscript{293} Intelligence Report, Summary of Report No. 17, Secretariat of H.E. the High Commissioner for Iraq, Baghdad, September 6, 1923, 151.

\textsuperscript{294} Intelligence Report No. 19, Secretariat of H.E. the High Commissioner for Iraq, Baghdad, October 4, 1923, Iraq Internal Affairs, 183.
such an extent that some of the leading people of Mosul petitioned the government to “have all the Assyrians turned out of the country…”295 The British static perception of the Mosul disturbance as a Christian-Muslim conflict further reified the Assyrian-Iraqi division based on religious differences.

The mutual hostility was further exacerbated by the clash between the Assyrians soldiers and the townsmen at Kirkuk on May 4, 1924. As in Mosul, relations between the Assyrians and the townspeople of Kirkuk, mainly of Turkoman origin, were unfriendly. A second battalion of Assyrians, composed of “the wildest tribal elements,” was stationed in Kirkuk with their families in preparation for the Sulaimani operations against Shaykh Mahmud, the Kurdish national leader, who was engaged in one of his periodic revolts against the Iraqi government.296 On the day of the operations, the Iraq Levies began to leave for Chemchemal and formed a camp there while only two companies and the Assyrian families remained in Kirkuk. Seeing the Assyrians moving out of town, the Turkoman residents threatened to harm the soldiers’ wives and families when they left to fight against the Kurdish rebellion. People chanted at them in the bazaar, “Now that half of you have gone to Chemchemal, we are not frightened of you.”297

Ultimately, a disturbance broke out between three Assyrian privates and three Muslim shopkeepers over the price of an article in a coffee shop about 10 A.M. on May 4, 1924. Two wounded men were knocked down with sticks during the dispute. The brawl in the coffee shop turned into a riot when the Assyrian soldiers ran to their lines and excited their comrades by complaints that an insult had been offered to the Levies.298 After being dismissed from the parade,

295 Press Supplement, Baghdad Times, October 1, 1923, 190.
297 Browne, 35.
298 Telegram from High Commissioner, Baghdad, to Colonial Secretary, London, May 7, 1924, disorders involving Assyrian Levies at Kirkuk [CO 730/59], Records of Iraq, 1921-1924, 462.
the Assyrian soldiers decided to assault a number of Muslims on their way back.\(^{299}\) Although the civil police tried to bar their way into the town, the Assyrians broke through, “seized their rifles and ran amok through the bazaars of the town, firing on everyone they saw” for some three hours.\(^{300}\) According to a telegram from High Commissioner Henry Dobbs, police were powerless and Kurdish Cavalry Levies were detained in lines by British officers “for fear of making racial fighting worse.” The British refusal to deploy the Kurdish Levies unit to pacify the riot indicates their use of a class regimental system in combat operations to avoid heightening the levels of inter-communal hostility.

This bloody event not only undermined the reputation of the Iraq Levies, but also brought the deeply-entrenched animosity between the Assyrians and the Iraqis to the surface. The clash resulted in thirty-six local Muslim inhabitants killed and sixty wounded, including men, women, and children.\(^{301}\) Five Assyrians were killed and four wounded in the town.\(^{302}\) An attack on one or two local Christian houses by the Muslim population in retaliation also took place on May 5 and eight Christians were killed.\(^{303}\) The incident also intensified sweeping resentment against the existence of the Iraq Levies in Iraq. Prime Minister Jafar al-Askari delivered a heated speech regarding the mutiny of the Assyrians at Kirkuk, expressing the hope that the Assyrian Levies should be disbanded.\(^{304}\) The disturbance at Kirkuk also caused anxiety among the townsfolk of

\(^{299}\) Intelligence Report No.10, The Residency, Baghdad, May 15, 1924, Iraq Internal Affairs, 472.
\(^{300}\) Stafford, 67.
\(^{301}\) Intelligence Report No. 10, The Residency, Baghdad, May 15, 1924, 473; Stafford, 67; Draft by Mr. Ward for the High Commissioner, Baghdad in 1933, “Historical summary of development of the Assyrian question, Part I, 1914-1925” [FO 371/16894], 499.
\(^{302}\) Intelligence Report No. 10, The Residency, Baghdad, May 15, 1924, 473.
\(^{303}\) Stafford, 67; Telegram from the High Commissioner, Baghdad, to Colonial Secretary, London, 7 May 1924, disorders involving Assyrian Levies at Kirkuk [CO 730/59], eds. Alan De Lacy Rush and Jane Priestland, Records of Iraq, 1914-1966 (Slough: Archive Editions, 2001), 462.
\(^{304}\) Intelligence Report No. 11, The Residency, Baghdad, May 29, 1924, 479; several British diplomatic records provided a different number of Assyrians killed, either eight or ten casualties (Draft by Mr. Ward for the High Commissioner, Baghdad in 1933, “Historical summary of development of the Assyrian question, Part I, 1914-1925” [FO 371/16894], 499); Intelligence Report No. 12, Secretariat of H.E. the High Commissioner for Iraq, Baghdad, June 12, 1924, 509).
Arbil regarding presence of any Assyrian Levies in the town.\textsuperscript{305} In the British static perception of races and religions, the Kirkuk incident that took place on the last day of Ramadan was regarded as “the massacre of Moslem by Christians” which was likely to accentuate “serious outburst of anti-Christian feeling” and make the passage of the 1930 Anglo-Iraqi treaty and treatment of the Assyrian question more difficult.\textsuperscript{306}

After the violent clash, the court sentence that seemed to favor the Levies’ soldiers generated widespread resentment and controversy among Muslim population in Kirkuk. According to the telegram from High Commissioner Henry Dobbs, the British proposed that the ringleaders of the incident would be tried by special session of the Court, the composition of which the Iraqi government had selected in order to satisfy all parties of its impartiality. However, a British judge, Air Commodore Hearson, presided over the Court and the outcome of the court ruling did not satisfy Iraqi victims, nor did it fairly treat all sides of the conflict. The court was of the opinion that although there was a feeling of antipathy amounting almost to hatred between the Assyrian soldiers (Christians) and a section of the townspeople of Kirkuk (Muslims), the outbreak which culminated in an armed attack on the town was entirely “spontaneous and unpremeditated on the part of the Assyrians.”\textsuperscript{307} According to judgment pronounced by the special Court of Sessions on the disturbances in Kirkuk, one Assyrian officer, a corporal, two lance-corporals and six men had been committed for trial on the charge of “being accessory to a mutiny which resulted in the death of certain persons,” while two officers were committed on the charge of giving false evidence. However, due to absence of reliable evidence to support the charges against the three officers, they were consequently acquitted and released. As regards the nine other men accused,

\textsuperscript{305} Intelligence Report No. 12, Secretariat of H.E. the High Commissioner for Iraq, Baghdad, June 12, 1924, 509.
\textsuperscript{306} Telegram from High Commissioner, Baghdad, to Colonial Secretary, London, May 7, 1924, disorders involving Assyrian Levies at Kirkuk [CO 730/59].
\textsuperscript{307} “The Tragedy of Kirkuk,” Intelligence Report No.11, Baghdad, May 29, 1924, Summary of Report, 492.
eight were found guilty of willful murder but since it could not be proved that the rounds fired by
them had actually killed anyone, the death sentence was commuted to long-term imprisonment.\footnote{Intelligence Report No.21, Baghdad, October 16, 1924, Iraq Internal Affairs, 566.}
On the same account, a historical summary of development of the Assyrian question presented to
the High Commissioner in 1933 stated that a few of the perpetrators in the massacre were given
“light sentences of imprisonment which were afterwards cancelled by the order of King Feisal.”\footnote{Draft by Mr. Ward for the High Commissioner, Baghdad in 1933, “Historical summary of development of the Assyrian question, Part I, 1914-1925” [FO 371/16894], 499.}
Pressured by the British authority, the Iraqi government showed a moderate view towards the
Assyrians by granting clemency or a pardon of punishment altogether. Undoubtedly, the result of
the trial exasperated Muslims in Kirkuk who anticipated a greater number and more severe
penalties in connection with a mutiny which resulted in the brutal murder of unarmed citizens,
including women.\footnote{Intelligence Report No.21.}
This verdict caused considerable comments in the Iraqi press which stated
that such a sentence was “unaccustomed to the justice of the British court-martial” and demanded
the disbandment of the Iraq Levies.\footnote{“The Tragedy of Kirkuk,” Intelligence Report No.11; Stafford, 68.}

The Mosul conflict and the Kirkuk disturbance exemplified the communal tensions
between the Assyrians and the Arab Iraqis that resulted from the ethnicization of the Iraq Levies.
The British recruitment of Assyrians into their imperial forces and their trust in the Assyrians’
military competence based on the concept of martial races cultivated a superiority complex among
the Assyrian soldiers who viewed other races with contempt. Furthermore, the court sentence that
catered to the interests of the Assyrian recruits intensified communal hostility and distrust among
Iraqi community which sought to eliminate the Assyrian Levy forces altogether. Although the
enlistment to the Iraq Levies provided financial and strategic advantages for the British, it served
to otherize the Assyrian soldiers whose presence and activities undermined any chance of their assimilation into the Iraqi nation. The next section will discuss how the Iraq Levies constituted part of the reason that obstructed the Assyrian refugee settlement in northern Iraq.

The Iraq Levies and the Barrier to the Assyrian Refugee Settlement

While the Iraq Levies may have consolidated imperial rule in the Iraqi mandate according to the practice of divide and rule, its existence and operations created a minority question and sustained the ongoing issue of the Assyrian refugee settlement which impeded Iraqi nationalists’ Pan-Arab vision. According to Sargon Donabed, the Assyrians were portrayed as “the equivalent of British marionettes with teeth; tools which could be used to destroy the new and independent Iraqi state which the British had opposed.”312 Hence, the enlistment of Assyrians in the Iraq Levies shaped them as the enemies of the state who interfered with both the defense policy and national integration of Iraq. In *al-Iraq* newspaper on June 2, 1923, an editorial section provided a commentary in support of King Faisal’s speech at Mosul regarding the foreign nationals residing in Iraq:

> All that the Iraq wishes is to live free and independent and the Iraq is prepared to receive with welcome the hand of any people given out with a view to friendship and the exchange of common interests, on condition that such people do not touch the freedom and independence of Iraq and entertain no ambition for Iraq territories.313

The last sentence suggested the possibility of peaceful coexistence between Iraqis and other ethnic communities had the latter not developed autonomous aspirations in the Iraqi state. Nevertheless, a great number of Mosulis sent a petition to the King begging the government to refuse admittance

---

312 Donabed, 229.
313 Press supplement, *Al-Iraq* No. 926 June 2, The Political Situation as Defined by H.M. the King (Editorial Comments on King Faisal’s speech at Mosul), 80.
of the Assyrians to Mosul when the Ministry of Interior gave consent to the High Commissioner on receiving the Assyrian refugees from Syria due to lack of funds on the part of the Near East Relief Committee in 1923. This situation was paradoxical in two ways. First, the admittance of the Assyrian refugees only served to diminish the British hope to achieve the unity of Iraq. Secondly, the Iraqi government faced a dilemma in which it purported to support foreign nationals while trying to appease its population who were hostile to the Assyrians. Clearly, the Assyrian question continued to be one of difficulties that were not only related to the task of settling these people in Iraqi territory but also the task of integrating them into Iraqis without arousing racial and religious animosities.

The Iraq Levies exacerbated the Assyrian refugee issue because it represented the Assyrian enclave that generated hostility in Iraq and enabled the British to use a minority discourse in order to secure territory and legitimize their imperial rule in Iraq. In this context, the Assyrians became redefined by the British as a “minority” to serve as an excuse in the Turkish-Iraqi frontiers (Mosul Vilayet) negotiations to cover British desire to control Iraq’s oil fields and prolong its Mandatory control of Iraq. Thus, the Iraq Levies, having become ethnically defined as an Assyrian force, was used as a geopolitical strategy that further separated the Assyrian refugees from their Arab and Kurdish neighbors in Iraq.

---

314 Press supplement, Al-Iraq No. 926 June 2.
Since the early 1920s, Mosul province not only became a contention between Turkey and the Mandate of Iraq, but also a territorial issue for the influx of Assyrian refugees from their homeland in the Hakkiari mountains. Claiming that Mosul had not been in the hands of Britain when the Mudros armistice pact was signed in 1918, Turkey argued that Mosul was part of its territory because the majority of inhabitants were Ottoman non-Arabs. Mosul no doubt engaged Turkey’s attention mainly because it aimed to possess the oilfields of Mosul and claim them as security for financial assistance.\textsuperscript{316} Britain wanted Mosul to be part of Iraq because of the substantial oilfields that could be used as a bargaining chip to prolong the Mandate power over that country. The Sunni-dominated Iraqi government also wanted Mosul to strengthen its authority and gain influence over the nationalistic elements against British rule in Iraq.\textsuperscript{317} These conflicting interests served to complicate the problem of the Assyrian refugee settlement for several years.

In spite of the Kirkuk outbreak that led to the political agitation against the Assyrians, the Iraqi government under Prime Minister Abd al-Muhsin as-Sa’dun was seemingly prepared to grant

\textsuperscript{316} "Kemalist Turkey and Iraq," \textit{Times of Mesopotamia}, August 1, 1932.
\textsuperscript{317} Tripp, 56.
generous terms to settle the Assyrians in a homogenous homeland in northern Iraq. Needing the backing of Britain to secure Mosul, the as-Sa'dun government acceded to British pressure regarding refugee settlement. Then the Iraqi government under Prime Minister Jafar al-Askari gave assurances on a number of points proposed by British High Commissioner Sir Percy Cox regarding the settlement of the Assyrian refugees at the Constantinople Conference on May 31, 1924.\textsuperscript{318}

Recognizing both the services which the Assyrians rendered to the Allied cause during World War I and their future relations with the Iraqi state, the British pressed for a frontier to the north of Dohuk that included Amadiya and the northern hills occupied by the Tiyari, Tkhuma, Jelu and Baz tribes to provide a home within the territory of the Iraqi state. This policy was regarded as serving the interests not only of the Assyrians but also of the Iraqi state which agreed on the following points:

1. That the Iraqi Government will assign the vacant lands under reference above to the Assyrians free of cost on favorable terms.
2. That the Iraqi Government will grant both to those Assyrians who are thus resettled in lands to be newly-assigned and to those of the Tiyari, Tkhuma, Baz, and Jelu country (if secured for Iraq from the Turkish government) a generous measure of liberty in the management of their own purely local affairs, such as the choice of their own village headmen and the making of adequate arrangements in each village for the collection and payment, subject to the supervision of the Iraqi government, of such taxes as that government may fix.\textsuperscript{319}

Such an announcement implied the establishment of an autonomous homeland for the Assyrian refugees who were able to elect their own leader and manage their own administration and finance under the authority of Iraqi state. This agreement served British strategic purposes in two ways. First, it fulfilled the promise that the British gave to the Assyrian Levies that they would be granted

\textsuperscript{318} Draft by Mr. Ward for the High Commissioner, Baghdad in 1933, “Historical summary of development of the Assyrian question, Part I, 1914-1925” [FO 371/16894], 499.

an independent state in return for their military service. Secondly, the British was able to claim responsibility for the Assyrian minority who resided in the frontier area within the British Mandate boundary. In this regard, the Iraq Levies became a rationale for the British to justify their claims for the frontier zone in northern Iraq. Likewise, the question of the Assyrian refugees helped legitimize British rule as it assisted the Iraqi government in addressing the minority issue. Nevertheless, this agreement was not immediately put into effect as the question of the frontier was still under the impending negotiations with Turkey. The scheme of settlement was dependent on the inclusion of Iraq of the mountain homes of the Tiyari, Tkhuma, Jelu and Baz tribes in the Hakkari district.\(^\text{320}\) Unfortunately, less than four months after the announcement was issued, the scheme failed as the Turkish representative Fethi Bey refused to consider a claim which had never been advanced before and infringed “both the spirit and letter of the Treaty of Lausanne.”\(^\text{321}\)

Immediately afterwards, matters came to a head when the Assyrians who had returned to the disputed areas in the northern frontier without the Turkish government’s permission attacked and captured the new Turkish Wali of Hakkari, who was on a tour of exploration in the district. Back in 1922, the whole of the Upper and Lower Tiyari Assyrians, the two most important tribes, together with the Tkhuma and some of the Jilu and Baz tribes, proceeded to their pre-war homes in Hakkari. Since the Turkish authority at that time was almost nonexistent, they appeared to have met with no opposition from the Turks.\(^\text{322}\) A trend emerged in which every Assyrian soldier in the


\(^{321}\) Draft by Mr. Ward for the High Commissioner, Baghdad in 1933, “Historical summary of development of the Assyrian question, Part I, 1914-1925” [FO 371/16894]; The Treaty of Lausanne was signed between Turkey and the Allies on July 24, 1923. The Iraqi-Turkish frontier was left for future negotiations to settle. Article three of the treaty gave Turkey and Great Britain nine months to resolve the frontier dispute and, if that failed, the issue was to be referred to the Council of the League of Nations. The Turkish and Iraqi government undertook that, pending the decision to be reached on the subject of the frontier, no military or other movement shall take place which might modify the present state of the territories. Thus, a solution to the Assyrian settlement problem remained unresolved (Fred Aprim, “Assyrians in the World War I Treaties: Paris, Sèvres, and Lausanne”).

\(^{322}\) Stafford, 46.
Levies who completed his two-year term of service, left the army and head to Hakkiari to join the Tkhuma and Tiyari who had already gone there to their homeland.\textsuperscript{323} For the next two years, the Assyrian settlement problem appeared to have ended.\textsuperscript{324}

However, this precarious peace came to an end after the Assyrians attacked the Wali of Hakkiari and his men, which resulted in the eviction of the Assyrians from Turkey in the autumn of 1924. Fearing that Wali of Hakkiari would send troops to attack and expel them, the Tkhuma tribes preemptively fought the Turks and captured the Wali and some of his escort, which resulted in five Turks killed and two wounded.\textsuperscript{325} Although the Wali was saved from death and expressed a strong desire to remain on good terms with the officials of the neighboring areas during the meeting with the Qaimmaqam of Amadiya and the Administrative Inspector, the Turkish government decided to punish the Assyrians by sending regular troops and tribesmen to ravage the new settlements and compel their inhabitants, mostly Tkhumas and Upper Tiyaris, to return to Iraq on September 14, 1924:

There can be no question of the participation of Turkish regulars in the attack on the Assyrians. Iraq police posts have been burnt along the line of their advance but no movement has been made south of the Ashita valley towards, Amadiya. The Tkhuma and Tiyari have deserted their villages (in Chal), many of which have been burnt, and have flocked down to Amadiya. Their example has been followed by many Christian villages in Barwari Bala. Some 6,000 refugees are said to be in Amadiya and arrangements are being made to provide them with the necessaries of life. Levies assisted by Assyrian tribesmen are holding Ain d’Nuni, (some ten miles N. of Amadiya) and the villages within a three mile radius of that post.\textsuperscript{326}

The eviction of the Assyrian by the Turkish army in 1924 led to a number of vital socio-political implications for Iraq. The arrival of 8,000 refugees to Amadiya due to the Turkish attack virtually

\textsuperscript{323} Badawi, 263.
\textsuperscript{324} Stafford, 35.
\textsuperscript{325} Intelligence Report No.17, August 21, 1924, 544.
\textsuperscript{326} Intelligence Report No.20, October 2, 1924, 559.
undid all the progress in settlement achieved in the preceding years.\textsuperscript{327} The Assyrian refugee problem became an acute and thorny problem for the Iraqi government. The influx of the Assyrians from Turkey also encountered the rising tide of Iraqi nationalism led by the ardent Arab nationalist government of Yasin al-Hashimi.\textsuperscript{328} Under considerable pressure from the British, the Iraqi government consented to allot a sum for seeds and arrange for the building of houses and shelters. Without additional funds, it was impossible to supply blankets, tents and rations which were urgently needed. This condition also caused fear among the British in that it would have had a far-reaching effect on the Levy force, both regards recruiting and discipline.\textsuperscript{329}

The Emergence of a Minority Discourse

To address their concern regarding the cohesion and discipline of the Iraq Levies, the British attempted to secure the Hakkiari highlands for the settlement of the Assyrian refugees. During the League of Nations’ adjudication of the Turco-Iraqi border in 1925, the British put forward the following arguments:

In spite of their isolated position in the heart of a country under Turkish rule, the small Assyrian people, in the very early days of the Great War, determined to espouse the cause of the Allies and to seize the opportunity to break away from the rule of those whom their past history had led them to regard as their persistent oppressors. They endured great sufferings as the result of this decision. They were driven from their own country and died in thousands in their flight to Iraq…The British government feels under the strongest obligation to secure their settlement in accordance with the reasonable claims and aspirations of their race. They have appealed for the establishment, in the whole of their ancient habitat, of a British protectorate.\textsuperscript{330}

\textsuperscript{327} Draft by Mr. Ward for the High Commissioner, Baghdad in 1933, “Historical summary of development of the Assyrian question, Part I, 1914-1925” [FO 371/16894].
\textsuperscript{328} ‘Tripp, 58; Yasin al-Hashimi (1884-1937) was a former Ottoman officer who became a two-time Iraqi prime minister under King Faisal. He played a major role in Iraqi interwar history as an advocate of armed force and the army against internal critics and rebels. He attempted to create a permanent elite of educated, disciplined army officers as the vanguard of the new nation (Michael Provence, “Ottoman Modernity, Colonialism, and Insurgency in the Interwar Arab East,” International Journal of Middle East Studies 43, no. 2 (2011): 220).
\textsuperscript{329} Intelligence Report No.22, October 30, 1924, 572.
\textsuperscript{330} Stafford, 85.
This statement demonstrates the British use of a minority discourse to secure the Hakkiari mountains in two ways. First, the British depicted the Assyrians as being a persecuted minority under the Turkish oppressive rule. Second, the British claimed to be fulfilling their obligations towards the Assyrian refugees and respond to the Assyrian aspirations to return them to their pre-war home. To achieve this goal, the British requested that the League of Nations accept the establishment of the Assyrians in a compact community in that frontier within the territory of the British Mandate. If the Assyrian community could not be established in their “ancestral homelands,” then they should be settled in “suitable adjacent districts.”

In addition, the British pointed out the devastating political and economic consequences had the League of Nations handed the Hakkiari districts to Turkey:

To draw the line further to the south in this region would, apart from economic and strategic disadvantages, produce such a panic among the Assyrians that they would find no alternative but to resort either to mass emigration or to fight to the death in defence of their ideals. Peace and prosperity upon this section of the frontier would be impossible.

To strengthen the arguments, the British also claimed that the warlike Assyrian people were willing to give their loyalty to Iraq on certain conditions and would constitute a valuable frontier community to the Iraqi state. In fact, the Assyrian leadership did not want to establish a community under the British Mandate territory; they wanted to return to their old homes and establish Assyrian villages in Turkish territory. According to Mar Eshai Shimun, the Assyrian Patriarch, had it not been for British assurances of establishing an autonomous homeland, “the Assyrians and all the remaining inhabitants would have preferred Turkish to Arab rule.”

---

331 Stafford, 85.
332 Ibid.
to the League of Nations only redefined the Assyrians as a persecuted minority in order to advance their territorial claims and legitimize British authority in Iraq.

However, the historical record of the Assyrians as war allies of the British against Turkey in World War I convinced the League of Nations’ special commission to hand the Hakkıari highlands to Turkey. In October 1924, the League of Nations appointed a special commission to examine the claims of Great Britain and Turkey. The Commission commenced its inquiries in the spring of 1925. On July 16, the League of Nations considered the submitted report and decided to accept the claims of Great Britain for the inclusion of Mosul in Iraq, but rejected the claim that the Hakkıari mountains should also be attached to Iraq.\textsuperscript{335} According to Stafford, the Commission decided to hand the Hakkıari mountains to Turkey for two reasons. First, the question of restoring the Assyrians to their former homes north of Mosul was not raised at the Lausanne Conference. It was only raised by the British government at the Conference of Constantinople in April 1924. Second, since the Assyrians had risen at the instigation of foreigners early in the Great War against their lawful government, it was unfair to take a territory from Turkey to settle a people who “deliberately took up arms against its Sovereign.”\textsuperscript{336} In this respect, the British co-optation of the Assyrians in the Iraq Levies not only served to destroy their aspirations to return to their homeland, but also alienated the Assyrian community from their former government in Turkey.

Besides the British redefinition of their war allies as a persecuted minority, the attitude of the Turkish government towards the Assyrians greatly complicated the Assyrian problem in Iraq. Since the Assyrians fought against them in World War I, the Turks regarded them as permanently hostile and only awaited an opportunity to attack them in return. In view of the Assyrians, the Turks evicted the Assyrians because they were highly suspicious that the British officers had

\textsuperscript{335} Stafford, 86.
\textsuperscript{336} Ibid.
visited Hakkiari to recruit Assyrians for the Levies in 1924. The Turkish government also feared that the establishment of the Assyrian community in the frontier zone would constitute a buffer state under British influence. As a result, the Turks denied the Assyrians access to their former homes, constantly protested the establishment of Assyrian settlements in the frontier zone, and demanded the disarmament and the removal of all Assyrians from the Turkish border. The resolution adopted by the Council of the League of Nations in December 1925, whereby the bulk of the territory formerly inhabited by the Assyrians was allotted to Turkey, also dispelled any hopes of returning the Assyrians to their homes in the Hakkiari mountains. On June 25, 1928, the Turkish Consul-General in Baghdad addressed an official communication to the Iraqi Ministry for Foreign Affairs stating that “the Turkish Amnesty Law did not cover the Assyrians who would not be permitted in any circumstances to enter Turkey.”

Thus, the British endeavors to obtain favorable treatment for the Assyrians from the Iraqi government met with additional difficulty in that the grant of concessions to the Assyrians would have affected Turkey-Iraq relations.

The Problem of Settling the Assyrians among the Kurds

Fig. 8 Sketch map of villages in which Assyrians were settled 1920-1933. From: R.S. Stafford. The Tragedy of the Assyrian Minority in Iraq (London: Kegan Paul International, 2004).

337 Stafford, 110.
In the view of the British, the only possible solution was to settle the Assyrians on unoccupied lands in the northern districts of Iraq where they had to live among the Kurds. Seeing that the Assyrians were “an industrious people and made good tenants,” the British thought that the Assyrians had to be scattered, living among the Kurds as tenants of Kurdish aghas. Although this solution was by no means ideal as the Kurds and the Assyrians often quarreled, it was practicable as they had been neighbors for centuries. This fact was affirmed by the report from the Commission of Enquiry stating that “We have been able to establish the fact that of all the Moslem races the Kurds live on the most friendly terms with the Christians.”

The British solution to the Assyrian refugee settlement in this case signified the British perception of the Assyrians and Kurds based on how they used to live alongside each other as mountaineers under the Ottoman Empire. The regional commonality of two mountainous tribes became the convenient British policy to end the refugee crisis. However, under the British Mandate of Iraq, the Iraq Levies were frequently deployed to fight against the Kurdish rebellions in the mountains. Having the Christian Assyrians live among the Muslim Kurds would only serve to antagonize the ethnic relations in Iraq.

Another obstacle to the British scheme was that the Assyrians feared the Kurds would find an opportunity to attack them. Therefore, the Assyrians demanded that they should live in a compact body, claiming that there were ample empty villages for them to settle in. In July 1927, Captain Foweraker, a Levy officer, was appointed to undertake the settlement work. He moved constantly among the Assyrian tribes to investigate their needs, inspect possible settlement sites, interview government officials and local landlords, draw up leases for the settlers, and assist families to move into the new and more suitable settlement areas. However, Yusuf Malek, an Assyrian civil servant under the British, stated that although Captain Foweraker's settlement

---

scheme or the “Z-plan” managed to settle a certain number of the Assyrians, planting them amidst the Kurds conveyed that “all the British plans were not for the good of the Assyrians.”\textsuperscript{340} Mar Eshai Shimun also added that the Z plan was disastrous because it did not take into consideration the safety and the health of the Assyrians. Certain districts within the plan were rife with malaria and other diseases.\textsuperscript{341} While the British found the Assyrian refugees difficult as they objected to all settlement plans that would not allow them to occupy a homogenous land, the Assyrians regarded the British as reneging on their promise and seeking to subjugate them by posting them among the Kurds.

Another barrier to the Assyrian settlement plan was the Kurdish opposition to share their territory with the Assyrians who helped the British suppress their revolts in Kurdistan throughout the Mandate years. As previously mentioned, from 1920 to 1928, the Iraq Levies engaged in a number of operations against the Kurdish uprisings in the districts of Dohuk, Zakho, Agra and Amadiya.\textsuperscript{342} In fact, the Assyrians considered that they had been used to maintain the balance of power between the Arabs and the Kurds in Iraq, which naturally angered the Kurds.\textsuperscript{343} Consequently, inter-communal tensions that emerged between the Kurds and the Assyrians cast further doubt on the plausibility of their peaceful coexistence within the same territory. After Captain Foweraker’s task was terminated due to shortage of funds in November 1928, the new scheme under the direction of Major Wilson planned to settle about three hundred families in the Baradost region in northern Iraqi Kurdistan.\textsuperscript{344} As the Minister of Interior sent the Iraq Levies to prepare the ground for settlement in 1931, the Assyrians rejected the Baradost scheme claiming

\textsuperscript{340} Yusuf Malek, \textit{British Betrayal of the Assyrians}.
\textsuperscript{341} Shimun, \textit{The Assyrian Tragedy}, 20.
\textsuperscript{342} Malik.
\textsuperscript{343} Stafford, 110.
\textsuperscript{344} Ibid., 50.
that the area was too far away, isolated and prone to be attacked by the Kurds. The plan was finally abandoned because of the raiding into that area which was carried out by the followers of Shaykh Ahmad of Barzan in 1931.\textsuperscript{345} The Barzani rebellion demonstrates the Kurdish leader’s defiance of British attempts to force the Barzanis to give up their lands to the Assyrian settlers.\textsuperscript{346} Hence, the failure of this scheme reflects the ongoing ethnic hostility between the Kurds and the Assyrians which stemmed from both the Iraq Levies’ operations against the Kurds and the Assyrian settlement on the fringes of Kurdistan at the hand of the British.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the processes of otherizing the Assyrians in Iraq through colonial methods of recruitment, operations against Kurdish uprisings and a geopolitical strategy in a frontier conflict and refugee settlement. It argues that the martial race theory that recruited the Assyrians based on their military prowess and discipline and the class regimental system that formed an entirely Assyrian Levy force shaped the Assyrian soldiers and the Assyrian community as a whole as an “internal other” in Iraq. The social and economic privileges conferred on the martial Assyrians also demonstrate that the British formation of the Iraq Levies otherized the Assyrians through manipulation of ethnic factor that intertwined socio-economic issues with ethnic affiliations. Thus, the inter-communal tension and conflicts between the Iraq Levies and the Iraqi army and between the Assyrians and other ethnic communities were not only rooted in politicized ethnic identity, but also social and economic grievances. In addition, this chapter examines the British use of a minority discourse that redefined the Assyrian refugees as a persecuted minority

\textsuperscript{345} Stafford, 44.
under the Turkish government for their own strategic ends. The Iraq Levies served as a geopolitical tool that antagonized the Turks and the Kurds and thwarted the Assyrian refugee settlement process. Consequently, the Iraqi government found it increasingly difficult to narrow the gulf between the Assyrians and the Iraqis and unite the diverse population to achieve a cohesive Iraqi state.

The hostility of the Iraqi nationalists towards the Assyrian community in Iraq informed the Assyrian soldiers of their marginalized identity and status in the political, societal and economic spheres in Iraq. The Muslims’ animosity towards the Assyrians also served to kindle the fire of Assyrian nationalist sentiments in defense of and in opposition to both the Arab and Kurdish communities. Their newly defined status as an Assyrian minority in an Arab dominant state thus became the rhetoric that the Assyrian nationalists employed to attain independence and homogenous homeland. The Assyrian nationalist movement and its tragic consequences will be discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER III: FROM THE ASSYRIAN NATIONALIST MOVEMENT TO THE 1933 ASSYRIAN MASSACRE

But where is the 11th day of November 1918 for the Assyrians? Are not the Assyrians still in the trenches? And “Where are the British now” their ally? “battle and toil survived, is this the end Of all your high endeavor? Shall the stock That death and desert braved be made a mock Of gazine crowds, nor in the crowd a friend?”


Contested Nationalisms

The formation of the Iraqi nation-state, under British authority, in the years following World War I, oscillated between negotiations with and repression of diverse communalist forces intent on maintaining their boundaries and autonomies. Although there were moments of collective struggle that marked the formation of the Iraqi national entity, from the 1920 Iraqi Revolt to the 1941 Anglo-Iraqi War, the respective visions of the nation of various political forces did not always coincide. These conflicting images of the nation were partly shaped by their communal affiliations and different world-views. Following World War I, the Assyrians fought courageously under British forces against the Turks as they were promised British assistance for a guarantee of freedom and return to their ancient homeland in the Hakkiari mountains. Having encountered British officers and Western ideas of self-determination in the Baqubah refugee camp in Iraq after the First World War, as well as having had their experiences in the nationalist struggle at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, the Assyrians cultivated a national consciousness that encouraged them to claim their political and socioeconomic position in the emerging Iraqi state. The emergence

---

348 Stafford, 74. See Chapter 1 for more details regarding the Baqubah Refugee Camp and the initial phase of the Assyrian Nationalist Movement.
of the Assyrian nationalist movement in the 1920s that continued through the early 1930s constituted part of the contested and fragmented aspect of Iraqi national identity.

The previous chapter dealt with the ethnicization of the Iraq Levies that alienated the Assyrian community from Iraqi society and the British redefinition of the Assyrian refugees as a “persecuted minority” to claim Mosul and the northern Turkish-Iraqi frontier. Due to a series of failed Assyrian refugee settlement schemes, a large number of the Assyrians remained dispersed and unsettled in the northern part of Iraq. This chapter analyzes how the Assyrians saw their association with the British through the Iraq Levies as beneficial to their cause and began to adopt an imperial rhetoric of national independence and national minority as a strategy to maintain autonomy and communal self-administration. Seeing that the British were prepared to withdraw from Iraq without fulfilling their promised demands, the Assyrian religious leaders and officers redefined themselves as a nation and claimed their rights to self-determination and a homeland by the end of the British Mandate.

By exploring the Assyrian independence movement’s different approaches, ranging from submitting petitions to the League of Nations, quitting military service, and emigrating to Syria, the first section of this chapter argues that a symbiotic relationship between the British and the Assyrians, through the Iraq Levies, not only convinced the Assyrians of British assistance in their struggle for autonomy and independence, but also promoted the Assyrian nationalist movement that challenged the integrity of the Iraqi state at the time of the termination of the British Mandate in 1932. Since the Assyrian officers proclaimed their desire to be independent from Iraq and fought against the Iraqi military on the Iraqi-Syrian border, they were perceived by the Iraqi government and Iraqi population as traitors and enemies of the state. The Iraq Levies’ participation in the nationalist movement ultimately provoked resentment from the Iraqi state towards the Assyrian
community. The systematic conduct of the Assyrian massacre in 1933 by the Iraqi army thus marked a radical turn in Iraqi nationalism that not only empowered the Iraqi military in politics, but also excluded the Assyrians and other ethnic minorities.

The Assyrians’ Concern at the End of the British Mandate

When the British announced their decision in the autumn of 1929 to end the Mandate of Iraq, the Assyrians became concerned about their future and feared for their lives under the rule of a new Arab state, a fear exacerbated by the fact that no provision had been made for the protection of minorities in the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of June 30, 1930. For this reason, the Assyrians were concerned that once the British influence was withdrawn without effective guarantees for the future safety of the Assyrians, their position would be made intolerable in Iraq. Likewise, the Assyrian leaders feared that the autonomy they had had under the British mandate would be restricted, if not ended, under the proposed nation-state. Fearing their fate under Arab rule, the Assyrians inundated the offices of the British officials and of the Secretariat of the League of Nations with alarming appeals. Although the petitions of the Assyrians were heard, nothing was done in practice to allay their apprehensions. The League of Nations Frontier Commission’s

---

349 Stafford, 89; Although no provisions had been made to protect the minorities, under Articles 4-5, Britain, in consultation with Iraq, would protect the latter from an external aggressor by being allowed to maintain airbases, which were protected by the Iraq Levies, at selected locations. Moreover, Article 1 stated that upon ratification, Britain would be permitted to maintain forces at Hinaidi and Mosul for a period of five years. After that time Britain would withdraw them. While Britain sought to terminate its mandate in Iraq, a new treaty of alliance would allow her to maintain air bases at strategic locations to protect her vital communications in that country (Great Britain, Cmd 3675, Notes exchanged with Iraq Prime Minister embodying the separate financial questions referred to in the second exchange of notes appended to the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of June 30, 1930 (Cmd 3627), HMSO, London, 1930).

350 Ibid., 365.

351 Shimun, The Assyrian Tragedy, 11.
recommendations for the welfare of the Assyrians remained a dead letter as no League Commissioner was appointed to investigate the Assyrian case in Iraq.\footnote{352}

In addition to their demands for British protection and fulfillment of their request before the end of the Mandate, the Assyrians accused the British of having broken its promises to the Assyrians. During World War I, the Assyrians were almost wholly dependent on the British as refugees in new Iraqi territory. With little stake in the emerging Iraqi Arab polity, the Assyrian refugees viewed military service to the British in the Levies as an opportunity not only to access colonial salaries but also to advocate for their own autonomy. The Assyrians believed that they would be compensated for their military service to defend the borders of the nascent state of Iraq against the Turks and protect the security of the state after the end of the First World War. By the end of the Mandate, however, the Assyrians found themselves “alienated and disappropriated of every right in the very state that [they] helped create and that [they] Assyrians - not Arabs or Kurds – defended.”\footnote{353} The charge was made that Britain ought to have returned the Assyrians to Hakkiari, and that its failure to do so constituted a “breach of faith.”\footnote{354}

Realizing that the prospect of returning to Turkey was thwarted, the Assyrians were willing to cooperate with the Iraqi government under the condition that the British government remained in Iraq. However, as the refugee settlement plans did not fulfill their demands and the British planned to withdraw, the Assyrian question remained unresolved.

\footnote{352}{The members of the League of Nations were not convinced of the truth of the reports submitted to them and were extremely reluctant to release Britain from her obligations and responsibilities before ensuring that the protection of minorities would be guaranteed. To convince the League, Sir Francis Humphrys made the following eminent declaration at Geneva: “Should Iraq prove herself unworthy of the confidence which has been placed in her, the moral responsibility must rest with His Majesty's Government, which would not attempt to "transfer" it to the Permanent Mandates Commission. Afterwards, the League of Nations accepted Iraq as an independent member under false pretenses without any safeguards for the protection of the minorities, the Assyrians in particular (Yusuf Malek, \textit{British Betrayal of the Assyrians}).}

\footnote{353}{Badawi, 308.}

\footnote{354}{Stafford, 89.}
The Assyrian Nationalist Movement

In light of the news of the end of the Mandate with no guarantee of their security, the Assyrian leaders decided to submit petitions describing their concern for security under Arab rule and the implausible prospect of Assyrian-Iraqi peaceful coexistence to the League of Nations. The Patriarch of the Assyrian Church, Mar Eshai Shimun, called on all Assyrian bishops and maliks (leaders) to a conference in Mosul to address the future of the Assyrians in 1931. On October 23, 1931, he petitioned the League of Nations for the establishment of their demands for autonomy and a national home which encompassed Amadiya, Zakho and Dohuk districts in northern Iraq.\textsuperscript{355} In addition, he asked for permission to leave for Syria to find a new settlement there. Mar Shimun’s letter to the Mandates Commission states that:

The Assyrian nation which is temporarily living in Iraq, having placed before their eyes the dark future, and the miserable conditions which are undoubtedly awaiting them in Iraq, after the lifting of the mandate, have unanimously held a Conference with me in Mosul on October 20, 1931. At this conference were present the temporal and spiritual leaders of the Assyrian nation in its entirety as it will be observed from the document quoted above bearing the leaders’ signatures. The future conditions were fully discussed and these center around two points: Can we or can we not live in Iraq? At the conclusion of lengthy deliberations, it was unanimously decided by all those present that it is quite impossible for us to live in Iraq. The leaders’ will was entrusted with me see the document signed by them to explore all means that I deem possible to find a way for the emigration of the Assyrians from Iraq...we are positively sure that if we remain in Iraq, we shall be exterminated in the course of few years.\textsuperscript{356}

This petition suggested that the Assyrians were not only afraid of their future after the end of the Mandate, but also refused to live under the Arab government. Referring to the Assyrian community as a “nation,” Mar Shimun demonstrated his insight into the delicate issue of accommodating minority nationalism within the Iraqi state that required a single and dominant vision of Iraqi nation. Rather than facing imminent risks of persecution and oppression by the Iraqi state, the

\textsuperscript{355} Donabed, 96.
\textsuperscript{356} Malek, \textit{The British Betrayal of The Assyrians}. 
Assyrians decided that the best alternative for them was to emigrate to other states and live under the protection of the Western powers or a neighboring state in Syria. On this point, Mar Shimun further stated that:

We therefore implore your mercy to take care of us, and arrange our emigration to one of the countries under the rule of one of the Western nations whom you may deem fit. And should this be impossible, we beg you to request the French government to accept us in Syria and give us shelter under her responsibility for we can no longer live in Iraq and we shall leave.357

Evidently, this petition demonstrated the “refugee mentality” of the Assyrians who were determined to dissociate themselves from Iraq and depended heavily on the British for social, political and economic assistance and security. A consequence was the Assyrians’ subscription to the idea of homeland and sense of attachment to the European powers for their well-being and safety in the Iraqi state.358 This mentality, combined with a strong motivation to seek autonomy and a desire for independence, pushed the Assyrians to refuse to live under the Arab government and to relentlessly seek a new shelter in different states.

Despite being pressured by the League to guarantee the safety and well-being of minorities, the British advisers and Iraqi politicians could not accede to their demands. The Hakkiari region had been annexed to Turkish territory since the signing of the treaty between Britain, Iraq and Turkey regarding the settlement of the Iraqi-Turkish frontier on June 29, 1926.359 The Assyrians could not have an autonomous homeland in northern Iraq as the Kurds, who formed a vast majority of the population there, strongly opposed it. Handing Mar Shimun a temporal authority over the mountaineers in northern Iraq also disconcerted the Iraqi government regarding the potential

357 Malek.
secessionist movement in the future. Moreover, the establishment of a state within a state would infringe on the sovereignty of the emerging Iraqi nation-state. Since the request and pleas to honor their promises fell on deaf ears and responses to Mar Shimun’s petition were delayed, the Assyrian leaders and officers decided to take action and planned for a general “cessation of service” by all the Levies.

The Assyrian Mutiny 1932

The Assyrian officers’ mutiny against the British authorities demonstrated their belief that their military service and long-time alliance with the British would endow them with political weight in negotiating their nationalist demands. At the beginning of 1932, the British downsized the Assyrian Levies by 350 men. Artillery units, signal units and the 4th battalion had been disbanded against the will of the Assyrians but with little or no protest.\footnote{Badawi, 295.} As the handover of Iraq was now imminent, the Assyrian officers convened, discussed the developments and raised the matter with Rab-Khaila Dawid, the liaison officer with the British.\footnote{Badawi, 295.} They told him that it would be better and more honorable for all of them in the Levy army to turn in their weapons and end their service because their numbers were decreasing, and their force was shrinking. They urged him to realize that at the end they all would be discharged, and they would have no voice and no rights when Iraq became independent.\footnote{Badawi, 295.} On June 1, 1932, when the name of Dawid showed up on the list of those to be discharged, all Assyrian Levy officers signed a document voluntarily terminating their positions with effect from July 1. The reason was that Britain had “failed

\footnote{Badawi, 295.} Rab Khaila Dawid d’Mar Shimun was the son of Mar Eshai Shimun and brother of Mar Benyamin Shimun XXI and Mar Paulos Shimun XXII. During World War I, Dawid took an active role in the leadership of Assyrian Levies as Rab Trema (Commander of two hundred). In 1925, Dawid was promoted to the rank of Rab Khaila (Commander General) for the Assyrian Levies (“Dawid d’Mar Shimun,” Marshimun.com).\footnote{Badawi, 295.}
adequately to ensure the future of the Assyrian nation after the termination of their mandate over Iraq.”

They gave the British authorities one month’s notice that they would lay down their arms unless the British helped them achieve independence.

In support of the cessation of service, the Assyrian leaders drew up an Assyrian National Pact which emphasized their nationalist aspiration and autonomous homeland for all Assyrians that had been spread in various countries. On June 16, 1932, Mar Eshai Shimun called all the Assyrians to meet and discuss possible solutions to their problem at Sir (Head of) Amadiya. By the end of the meeting, an Assyrian National Pact was drawn up. This pact consisted of a number of demands and stated that if these were accepted the Levy resignations would be withdrawn.

The text of the petition included the following points:

- The recognition of the Assyrians as a “millet” (ethno-religious minority group with national rights) inhabiting Iraq, and not merely as racial or religious community.
- The return to the Assyrians of their former homes in the Hakkiari Mountains.
- If this return proved impossible to fulfill,
  - A new homeland should be provided in Iraq open to all the Assyrians now in Iraq or outside, with its headquarters in Dohuk, and to be administered by an Arab Mutasarrif assisted by a British Advisor.
  - A commission should be formed to provide suitable Government-owned lands, to find the necessary funds, and to provide for the registration of such lands in the name of the Assyrians.
  - Assyrians should be given priority in the administrative officers for the said homeland.

The first demand listed in the Pact demonstrated that the Assyrians still held onto the millet model as forms of solidarity and organization. However, the term millet that the Assyrians mentioned did not exactly refer to Ottoman millets. Unlike other religious minorities designated as millets under the Ottomans, the Assyrians were granted a measure of religious and legal self-
administration. As the nation-state form had transformed their political circumstances, the Assyrians identified themselves as a national minority group and considered themselves as separate communities for religious reasons similar to millets. In addition, while the Assyrians still clung to their desire to return to their ancient homeland, they were also open to a new possibility of an autonomous entity in Iraq that would accommodate the Iraqi Assyrians as well as other diasporic Assyrian communities in other states. Both the mutiny and the National Pact indicated the Assyrians’ commitment to establish an Assyrian nation, a promise which the Assyrian soldiers believed was given to them by the British since the Great War. Unfortunately, despite their attempt to adapt their nationalist discourse to the new political order of nation-states, the list of demands indicated the Assyrians’ naiveté regarding the imperial powers’ exploitation of local allies for their own strategic ends in the post-war world.

The Assyrian Community’s Internal Division

Nevertheless, the Assyrian officers had different opinions regarding the wisdom and effectiveness of the petition to quit military service. Some thought that the British would not put up with a threat of mass resignation. Others discussed the various possible ways the British might react. Although Malik Loko Shlimon d’bit Badawi, an Assyrian officer in the Levy force, was one of the officers who signed the petition submitted to the British officer, he raised a number of questions regarding the potential success of the petition in influencing British policy towards the Assyrians in Iraq: “But what exactly had the British promised us? What exactly were the rights that we were asking? Did the Assyrians have written documents from the British spelling out those promises?"\(^{367}\)

In the atmosphere of a heated debate, there were those who believed it was futile to

\(^{367}\) Badawi, 295.
sign the letter of mass resignation at a specified time because they felt that it was absurd to threaten the British. Another group of officers suspected that they were being taken advantage of by the patriarchal family because Rab Khaila Dawid’s name was on the list of those to be discharged with the next batch. Still there were others who were determined to resign whatever the outcome because they felt betrayed by the British and they wanted to do something for their people.³⁶⁸ The divergent viewpoints concerning the petition claiming autonomy and political rights suggest that the Assyrian nationalist movement was weakened and divided by their own disunity and factionalism.

British Reaction to the Petition

While the cessation of military service caught the British off guard, it failed to have any direct influence on British policy decisions. Far from being concerned about losing Assyrian forces, the British responded by bringing in their own forces, airlifting them from Egypt, to replace the Assyrian Levies.³⁶⁹ Moreover, the High Commissioner used Mar Shimun to persuade the Assyrians to withdraw their resignations.³⁷⁰ On June 29, 1932, Mar Shimun met with Sir Francis Humphrys, the British High Commissioner, and agreed to write to the Levies, instructing them to withdraw their resignations. The conditions of the continued service were as follows:

- The Levies would continue to serve loyally until discharged.
- They would not again attempt to resign in a body.
- That if no satisfactory reply was given by the League to the demands of the Assyrian National Pact the Levies agreed to be discharged, not simultaneously, but over a considerable period.
- They undertook not to interfere in politics in future.³⁷¹

³⁶⁸ Badawi, 298.
³⁶⁹ Ibid., 305.
³⁷⁰ Stafford, 165.
³⁷¹ Badawi, 115.
The gradual discharge of the Levies suggested that the British might still need the Assyrian Levy force to maintain security of the nearly-independent Iraqi state and secure the British strategic interests in Mosul and aerodromes in Habbaniya and Shuaiba. Nevertheless, to eliminate the root cause for further unrests that might occur because of the Iraq Levies, the British prevented the officers from becoming involved in domestic politics altogether.

The patriarch’s letter to the Iraq Levies created a lot of confusion and division in the army because some of the soldiers said they would comply with the patriarch’s request and return to service while others said it was the patriarch who had advised that they quit service unless their demands were met. These uncertain and divided opinions among the soldiers subsequently spread among all the civilian population. One faction leaned towards Mar Shimun; the other faction opposed him. Remarkably, the Assyrian mutiny had two effects on the Assyrian nationalist movement. First, the Assyrians realized that they had been betrayed and the promises they thought they had were reduced to nothing. Their tremendous effort and steadfast loyalty for the Allies against the Central Powers in 1915 was considered irrelevant near the termination of the Mandate. Secondly, from the signing of the petition to the lack of its effectiveness, the Assyrian community grew increasingly divided along political and ideological lines, posing an obstacle to their nationalist and independence efforts.

The Final Attempt to Establish a Homogenous Homeland at the End of the Mandate

After Iraq became an independent and sovereign state on October 3, 1932, Mar Eshai Shimun left for the Geneva Conference in December 1932 in a final effort to bargain with the League.\textsuperscript{372} He spent three months there observing the deliberations of the Council of the League.

\textsuperscript{372} Donabed, 98.
of Nations. On December 5, 1932, Mar Shimun addressed the Permanent Mandate Commission meeting and urged the Council to fulfill its obligations toward the Assyrian nation. On December 15, 1932, the Council reached its resolution on the independence of Iraq with the following extract regarding the Assyrians:

Notes with satisfaction the declaration by the representative of Iraq of the intention of the Iraq Government to select from outside Iraq a foreign expert to assist them for a limited period in the settlement of all landless inhabitants of Iraq including Assyrians and in the carrying out of their scheme for the settlement of the Assyrians of Iraq under suitable conditions and, so far as may be possible, in homogeneous units, it being understood that the existing rights of the present population shall not be prejudiced.\textsuperscript{373}

The final decision of the League of Nations conference made evident the failure of Assyrian aspirations as brought forth by Mar Eshai Shimun. From the Assyrians’ point of view, a homogeneous settlement was the only means to make them feel secure. However, the Committee of the League of Nations changed the question of “homogeneous settlement” into that of “homogeneous units,” an expression that allowed the Iraqi government to disperse the Assyrians.

In response, Mar Shimun then addressed a note to the President of the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League pointing out the inadequacies of the resolution passed on December 15, 1932, with regard to guarantees for the security and wellbeing of the Assyrians in Iraq. The petition to the League on December 16, 1932 states that:

The resolution passed by the Council of the League of Nations on 15 December 1932 is not in conformity with the spirit of the recommendations set forward by Your Commission from time to time and does not in any way guarantee the least hope not only for the future welfare and safeguard of the Assyrian as a whole, i.e. in the way of a homogeneous settlement in Iraq, but not even for a quick way for urgent relief work for the 15,000 Assyrians who are now living without homes and utterly destitute in Iraq.\textsuperscript{374}


\textsuperscript{374}Statement made by Mar Eshai Shimun to President, Permanent Mandates Commission, Dated December 16, 1932, from Mar Shimun, “Catholicos” Patriarch of the Assyrians to the League of Nations, in Yusuf Malek, \textit{The British Betrayal of the Assyrians}. 135
Besides the issue of homogenous settlement, Mar Shimun pointed out that the resolution did not address the future well-being of the Assyrians, nor did it care for the humanitarian relief for the rest of the Assyrian refugees in Iraq. The sudden change in the League of Nations resolution proved to Mar Shimun that there were no real guarantees that the Assyrians would be settled in Iraq in a compact homogeneous community.\textsuperscript{375} Despite his years of experiences on settlement plans, Mar Shimun realized that the resolution on the settlement schemes was disastrous to his people. His mission also basically failed to impress the council of the league in the face of strong opposition from both the British and Iraqi governments' representatives. The failed nationalist effort of the Assyrians in 1932 to establish a national homeland convinced the Assyrians that they needed to leave Iraq before they suffered from persecution under the Arab Iraqi government that suspected the Assyrian community of anti-government rebellion.

To Stay or To Leave

As Iraq became independent, the future of the Assyrians was in the hands of the same people against whom they fought in 1920 alongside the British to maintain the imperial authority in the early days of the occupation. Predictably, the Iraqi political leaders, Iraqi press and parliament objected to the settlement of the Assyrians and launched a pervasive propaganda against the Assyrian community. The Assyrians became a disease in the eyes of many in the Arab nationalist party, Hizb al-Ikha al-Watani, founded by Rashid Ali al-Gaylani, an Arab nationalist and future Prime Minister of Iraq.\textsuperscript{376} Moreover, the Iraqi government used several methods to

\textsuperscript{375} Stafford, 310.
\textsuperscript{376} Dobaned, 99; Hizb al-ikha’ al-watani (The National Brotherhood Party) was formed in 1930. It included Rashid Ali al-Gaylani, Hikmat Sulayman, Naji al-Suwaydi, Ali Jawdat al-Ayyubi, Kamil al-Cadirji and Abd al-Ilah Hafiz. The party’s main policy was to seek amendment of the 1930 Anglo-Iraqi Treaty. The group played an important role in Iraqi politics, organizing conspiracies and fomenting tribal rebellions in the Euphrates against the governments then in power. Al-Gaylani, like his ally al-Hashimi, was not particularly friendly to the British, but when in office he
cause dissension within the Assyrian leadership by ignoring recognized Assyrian leaders and replacing them with unpopular individuals. To break up the political power and influence of the patriarchal family, Major W.C.F.A. Wilson, administrative inspector in Mosul, asked Mar Shimun to come to Baghdad to discuss the settlement issues with the government and detained him there. After Major Thompson’s Z settlement plan in the Dashtazi area was rejected by the Assyrians due to poor water conditions and malarial-prone lands, the Mandatory power announced that it was the only solution they could offer to the Assyrians:

This is all that I can repay you. You must agree to be absorbed in the body politic of Iraq, must forget your language, traditions and customs and remain a disunited people for definite purposes. Even in your personal affairs, the Iraq Government must dominate.\(^{377}\)

In the British perspective, the only option left for the Assyrians was to assimilate into the Iraqi state. This assimilation policy took three forms. First, the Assyrians had to cease using their Assyrian language and practicing their Assyrian traditions and customs. Secondly, they had to accept the reality that they had to remain dispersed and stateless to continue living in Iraq. Thirdly and most importantly, although the Assyrians could become part of Iraqi citizenship, their social, political and economic status would be unequal to, or inferior to, the dominant Iraqi citizens. The illegal detention and maltreatment of the patriarch as well as the proposed assimilation policies in Iraq added to the list of grievances among the Assyrians in Mosul and promoted their greater suspicion of the Iraqi government’s motives.\(^{378}\)

The mutual hatred and suspicion of the Iraqi state and the Assyrians manifested in two meetings regarding the future of the Assyrians in Iraq held in the office of the Mutasarrif of Mosul, Khalil ’Azmi, on July 10-11, 1933. The meeting of the Assyrian leaders, Iraqi and British officials

\(^{377}\) Shimun, 20.
\(^{378}\) Badawi, 101.
had two purposes. First, the Iraqi government had given an undertaking to the League not to place any obstacle in the way of any Assyrian who wished to leave Iraq. Second, it was essential to explain that the Iraqi government had no power to compel other countries to accept the Assyrians. 379 During the meeting of July 10, the acting Mutasarrif explained the Iraq Government’s policy for a heterogeneous settlement which Yusuf Malek, an Assyrian civil servant, had claimed to “completely destroy” the Assyrians through assimilation:

It is in the interest of Assyrians who decide to reside in Iraq to obtain nationality certificates, for the Iraq Government cannot allot lands to those who do not consider themselves Iraqis; such people cannot expect to attain private or government positions without it. 380

The statement proposed a naturalization policy of the Assyrians in which the Assyrians had to accept Iraqi nationality in exchange for acquiring a grant of land in Iraq. The policy also suggested restrictions of all political, social and economic rights for the non-Iraqi citizens. For the Iraqi government, this proposal would help inform and assure the League of Nations that the Assyrians had been settled, the proof being a list of those who had obtained the nationality papers. For the Assyrian community, this proposal meant the removal of the Assyrian national identity from Iraq.

Realizing the consequence of this naturalization policy, the Mutasarrif warned those who disagreed with this idea with threatening language:

The Assyrians ought to obey the rule of the country, and the government will not tolerate, in their capacity as an independent State, to see anyone in the country ignoring the laws and order, under which all the subjects are bound. But the patience extended by the Government towards the Assyrians, and the kind treatment they met with are specially due to the humane and kind attitude of a kind government towards the refugees in her lands. But I do not mean that these shall continue forever, for those who cannot be loyal subjects try to do worse, and do not deserve their privilege. 381

379 Stafford, 141.
380 Shimun, 23.
381 Khalil Azmi Bey, speech at Mutassarif residency in Mosul, 10 July 1933, LNA R3923. 4/6523/3314.
His statement emphasized the Iraqi government’s dominance over the lives of the Assyrian subjects who were required to respect the law and order imposed by the government. The state’s humane treatment of the Assyrians was viewed by the Iraqi government as a privilege which could be removed as soon as the Assyrians sought to violate the law and rebel against the state. In this respect, the Iraqi government assumed the existence of a majority and its right to assert its authority. Such a “majority” consciousness, in turn, stimulated a “minority” consciousness in an ethnically- and culturally-defined group outside the majority’s definition of national identity. In a circular process, the Assyrian minority nationalist movement created an impression on the Iraqi majority’s attitudes that excluded the Assyrians.

According to Stafford, the most significant element for the settlement of the Assyrian question was the cooperation between the Iraqi government and the Assyrian leaders. He also provided two alternatives for the future of the Assyrians, either assimilation or emigration:

What has impressed me most has been the lack of contact between Assyrians and the government officials. They appear until quite recently to have considered themselves as being foreigners living in a strange land. I want all you Assyrian leaders who are present to-day [sic] to realise once and for all that this is an intolerable situation and one which must end. There is no middle path . . . or they must be prepared to leave the country. As regards the second alternative which I have mentioned, that of leaving Iraq. The Iraq government has undertaken to grant every facility to those Assyrians who wish to leave Iraq. That is to say that no one who wishes to go will be prevented from so doing. But the Iraq government is in no way responsible for finding a place outside Iraq for Assyrians to go to. It is up to Assyrians themselves to make such arrangements, both as regards to obtaining approval from the government of the country in which they wish to settle and as regards the expenses of transport.382

Stafford recommended that the Assyrians either accept Iraqi citizenship and nationality or leave the country. Nevertheless, he maintained his reservation regarding the emigration option by warning those who wished to leave that the Iraqi government would not be responsible for finding a new settlement outside Iraq for them. The Assyrians who wanted to emigrate needed to make

---

382 Shimun, 23.
their own arrangements and request approval from the country in which they want to settle. In this regard, Stafford listed a number of difficulties in finding settlements in Turkey, Iran and Syria:

Turkey. There is not the slightest chance of the Turkish government modifying its present attitude towards Assyrians. It will not accept them at any price. Persia. The Persian Government has said that it would accept small groups of Assyrians but the conditions offered are hard (i) all arms to be surrendered. (ii) settlement not to be in one place but in very widely separated places. (iii) no rights in the land to be given. (iv) no financial assistance to be given. Syria. As you are aware the French authorities in Syria already have the problem of the Armenian refugees. They have no land to offer Assyrians. It is true that young Assyrians might be able to obtain employment in the French Colonial armies, but let me tell you that such service is hard in the extreme.383

Stafford’s remark laid out all the obstacles that countered the ultimate objectives of the Assyrian nationalist aspirations. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the return to their original homeland in Turkey had been thwarted since the settlement of Mosul question in 1925-26 and the hostile attitude of Turkey towards the Assyrians remained. The constraints posed by the Persian government would not be favorable to the Assyrians as they were required to be disarmed, dispersed, and stateless with no economic support. While the option of enlisting in the French colonial armies remained possible, Stafford closed that door by claiming the issue of Armenian refugees and the difficulty of serving the French Mandatory power. Evidently, Stafford did not favor Assyrian emigration, nor did he consider such an option likely. The only choice left for the Assyrians would be to stay and become citizens of the Iraqi state.

In line with the Mutasarrif and Stafford’s speeches, Major Thompson made the following announcement: “Make up your minds once and for all that you must settle in Iraq. No other country will offer you the terms and conditions that you are being given by the Iraq Government. Decide to make the best of it without further delay.”384 The speeches clearly stated that the only option left for the Assyrians was to settle in and assimilate into Iraq, which would risk their being doubly

383 Shimun, 23.
384 Ibid.
marginalized. This means that they would not only be designated as an Assyrian minority subject to Arab hegemonic rule, but would also risk being persecuted and excluded from access to sociopolitical and economic opportunities on the basis of their ethnic and religious identities. The defiant speeches of the Mutasarrif of Mosul, Colonel Stafford and Major Thompson thus reinforced the Assyrians’ apprehension of their future in Iraq and suspicion of the Iraqi government. Believing that the Iraqi state sought to break up their nation, an armed group of Assyrians under the leadership of Yaqo and Loko of Tkhuma left Mosul for Bosriya and then the village of Ain Diwar, on the border with Syria on the nights of July 14-15, 1933.

The Battles at Faishkhabur and Dairabun

![Fig. 9 Disposition of Army Pickets at Dairabun. From: R.S. Stafford. The Tragedy of the Assyrian Minority in Iraq (London: Kegan Paul International, 2004).](image)

The emigration of the Assyrians to Syria proceeded with no instance of aggression until the fighting at Faishkhabur on August 4, 1933. On the evening of July 21, the Qaimaqam of Zakho reported that large numbers of the Assyrians were crossing the Tigris by the ferry at Faishkhabur, a small Chaldean Christian village on the Tigris that formed the frontier between Iraq and Turkey.
Persuaded by Yaqo and Loco of the French promise to give them lands, around 190 men attempted to cross the border on July 25. A large portion of them made it successfully with no incident, whereas others were disarmed and arrested or let go.\textsuperscript{385} In view of Stafford, the departure of the Assyrians to Syria would have solved the Assyrian refugee question that occupied the Iraqi government for many years.\textsuperscript{386} However, the trouble occurred when the Assyrians were immediately rejected by the French authorities although allowed to keep their weapons.\textsuperscript{387} The return of the armed Assyrians to Iraq unsettled the remainder of the Assyrians and culminated in a violent clash with the Iraqi army that further aggravated the hostility of Iraqi population towards the Assyrian community in Iraq.

Concerned that the accumulation of the Assyrians along the Iraqi-Syrian frontier would cause a geopolitical issue, the Iraqi government pursued two types of policies to prevent further emigration to Syria: diplomacy and armed forces. The Iraqi government thought that the Assyrian emigration was not merely a gesture of discontent, but also an act of protest against the government’s policy of the Assyrian settlement explained to them at the Mosul meetings on July 10 and 11.\textsuperscript{388} The Iraqi government also preferred having the Assyrians back in Iraq rather than allowing them to settle in Syria where they could have formed a base for causing hostile incursions into Iraq.\textsuperscript{389} More importantly, Yaqo’s emigration was seen by the Iraqi government as an attempt to force the League of Nations to settle the Assyrians in Syria.\textsuperscript{390} To handle this issue with diplomacy, on July 23 and 27, the Iraqi government approached the French delegation in Baghdad.
and requested the immediate application of Articles 5 and 6 of the provisional Agreement for the
Regulation of the Affairs of Frontier Tribes in force between the two countries in 1927. Under
these articles the French were bound to disarm the Assyrians and remove them some distance from
the frontier.\textsuperscript{391} On July 27, complying with the laws enforced, the French authorities evicted the
Assyrians from Syria and forbade further crossings from Iraq. On July 30, information that the
Iraqi government received stated that the French authorities had disarmed a large number of
Assyrians. However, when the arms were given back to the Assyrians by the French authorities on
the afternoon of August 4, the Iraqi authorities were not informed.\textsuperscript{392} The lack of information from
the French complicated the situation and eventually led to the altercation between the Iraqi army
and the armed Assyrian men on August 4, 1933.\textsuperscript{393}

With the diplomatic approach having failed, the Iraqi government decided to send military
forces to the Tigris with orders to allow Yaqo’s followers to re-cross the river back into Iraq on
condition that they gave up their arms in order to minimize the possibilities of bloodshed.
However, since the rifles had been returned to the Assyrians by the French, the violent clash
between the Assyrians and the Iraqi army was bound to occur. On the evening of August 4, 1933,
the headman of Faishkhabur telephoned the Army Commander at Dairabun that the Assyrians had
crossed the Tigris into Iraqi territory. In response, a company of infantry and squadron of cavalry
were sent out from Dairabun to intercept the Assyrians. According to Stafford, although it was
uncertain who fired the first shot, heavy fighting broke out. The Assyrians were fired on by

\textsuperscript{391} Stafford, 153.
\textsuperscript{392} Ibid., 153.
\textsuperscript{393} The Iraqi government indirectly learned indirectly that the French Mandatory authorities in Syria had returned five
hundred rifles to the members of Yaqo’s rebel band who had been previously disarmed on August 5, 1933, one day
after the Assyrians’ clash with the Iraqi army. The French claimed that the Iraqi government had not informed them
of Iraq’s local conditions so they were unaware of the seriousness of the problem. Seeing that the Assyrians who
wanted to return to Iraq had no warlike intentions, the French restored their arms to them (“The French and the
Assyrians,” \textit{The Iraq Times}, August 17, 1933).
machine guns while they were crossing the river to the east side of the Tigris. Five thousand Iraqi soldiers, police and support aircraft were brought to bear against fewer than eight hundred Assyrians during the confrontation. As estimated by Malik Loko Shlimon, an Assyrian officer, at the end of the skirmish, thirteen Assyrians were dead and eleven wounded while dozens of Iraqi soldiers were killed.\textsuperscript{394} Owing to the growing mutual suspicion and hatred between the Iraqis and the Assyrians, the encounter of the Iraqi army and the armed Assyrians would have led to a bloody skirmish.

To complicate the matter even further, some propagandistic reports stated that armed Assyrians returning from Syria had mutilated the bodies of Iraqi soldiers. Although Stafford stated that such reports had to be accepted with reserve, he added that the tribal character of the Tkhuma Assyrians may have rendered the reports credible. According to one investigation, the army’s political officer stated that:

\begin{quote}
The political officer with the army, who is at present in Mosul, now gives that account that the Assyrians burnt all the piquet equipment and that he would go no further than to say that the bodies were burnt inadvertently in the burning of the tent. As to the alleged beheading, all he knows for a fact is that the unarmed driver of the lorry had his throat cut.\textsuperscript{395}
\end{quote}

Malik Badawi, one of the Assyrian officers who had fled to Syria, clarified on this alleged violent act that the Assyrian men had lit fires in the pickets to signal Malik Yaquo that the mountain was in their hands. Unfortunately, one of the fires went out of control and burned some bodies of the dead soldiers.\textsuperscript{396} Moreover, the Assyrians only wanted to leave Iraq and did not want to fight the Iraqi army.\textsuperscript{397} Although the reports quoted above indicated that the Iraqi political officer did not see any

\textsuperscript{394} Donabed, 106.
\textsuperscript{395} Secret Memorandum, Serial No. 126 from Special Service Officer, Mosul, to Air Staff (Intelligence), Air Headquarters, 6 August 1933, regarding military operations (Assyrians at Faishkhabur) in Iraq [AIR23/655].
\textsuperscript{396} Badawi, 360.
\textsuperscript{397} Ibid., 361.
evidence of injury, the final line reaffirmed the Iraqi government’s skeptical attitude towards the Assyrians and aroused the Iraqi army to retaliate against them with violence. As a consequence, a few Assyrians were rounded up by the army near Dairabun and shot. The remainder, perhaps two hundred in number, moved into the mountains. Major Allfrey, a member of the British Military Mission and liaison officer to the column at Dairabun, came across the bodies of fifteen Assyrians, who had obviously been shot in cold blood. After inquiring of Bekr Sidqi, an Iraqi officer, regarding the issue, Major Allfrey was informed that these executions had been carried out as retaliation against the atrocities committed by the Assyrians at Dairabun.\textsuperscript{398} The Assyrians’ emigration to Syria suggests the spread of the state’s physical presence that restricted their field of political action. The establishment of fixed borders with a state’s authority on either side left a minority group with a limited extent of freedom to move or leave the country. Although the flight of the Assyrians en masse could take them to another nation-state, their action was perceived as violating the dominant state’s authority. After the Assyrians had been turned away by the French and engaged in wars with the Iraqi army, the Assyrians not only remained to be stateless refugees, but also became regarded as disloyal collaborators. As a result, in times of war and uncertainty, the rumors were perceived as facts and any actions of the Assyrians were used to justify the Iraqi government’s violence against the rebels.

The Rise of Iraqi Nationalism against the Assyrians

Worse still, a number of exaggerated reports and unfounded atrocity stories were published in the Iraqi papers throughout the country. The misinformation about Assyrians mutilating bodies served to heighten anti-Assyrian zealotry, inflaming public opinion already excited against the

\textsuperscript{398} Stafford, 164.
Assyrian community. A great deal of patriotic enthusiasm was aroused by the Iraqi army’s operations against the Assyrians. A batch of volunteers, including ex-servicemen, ex-army officers of pension, law students, and Arab and Kurdish tribal shaykhs, left Mosul for the scene of operations to offer their services to the army.399 When news of the debacle at Faishkhabur and Dairabun reached Baghdad, animosity against Assyrians throughout the country became an active physical threat:

   Even in the highest circles there was talk of the “rid me of this turbulent priest order.” Let all the Assyrian men be killed, they cried, but spare the women and children as the eyes of the world are on us. Let the Arabs and Kurds be raised against the Assyrians. Let trouble be stirred up in Syria against the treacherous French.400

   This statement demonstrates that the anti-Assyrian sentiment became widespread at both state and local levels. In his interview with Air Vice Marshal C.S. Burnett regarding the Assyrian emigration, King Faisal was concerned that the Levies, which constituted part of the RAF, would rise against the government and cause further riots in Mosul. Having learned how the Assyrians had behaved treacherously against his troops, the king thought that “the army would not permit of any conciliatory action until a severe lesson had been inflicted on them.”401 By portraying the Assyrians as “a fabricated enemy of alien origin, speaking a barbaric tongue and adhering to an antiquated religion they held in common with the foreign British,” Iraqi officials considered that such a sentiment could diminish Kurdish and Shi’i rebellions and turn their focus to an enemy common to all.402 Such a shared anger and hatred toward the Assyrian element helped consolidate the Iraqi population’s nationalist feeling against the Assyrians who were perceived as an “other.”

399 *The Iraq Times*, August 11, 1933.
400 Stafford, 162.
401 Report by Air Vice Marshal C.S. Burnett, Air Headquarters, Iran Command, of interview with King Feisal and Mr Ogilvie-Forbes at the Palace, 6 August 1933, regarding the King’s concern at the attitude of the French in re-arming the Assyrians and allowing them to return to Iraq [AIR23/ 655].
402 Donabed, 99.
On August 8, 1933, many of the Baghdad lawyers went to the Ministry of Interior and informed Minister Hikmet Beg Suleiman of their intention to protest against the action of the Assyrians. In addition, about a hundred well-known residents of Mosul, including notable lawyers, doctors and businessmen, protested against the action of the Assyrians, and urged that the government should take all necessary measures against them. Evidently, as the Assyrian nationalist aspiration for a homogeneous homeland took a violent turn, it not only interfered with the Iraqi government’s desire to achieve state consolidation, but also enhanced Iraqi nationalist sentiment against the Assyrians across a broad range of political and social sectors. This clash of nationalisms in August 1933 culminated in a final phase of the Iraqi-Assyrian contentious relations in the post-independence era.

The Exclusion of the Assyrian in Post-Independent Iraq

Political intrigues and violence became a dominant feature of Iraqi politics after the British withdrawal from Iraq and the death of King Faisal in 1933. The year also marked a turning point in the sociopolitical history of Iraq. One of those events was the Assyrian uprising in summer 1933 which intensified sectarian feelings among urban Iraqi nationalists within the Rashid Ali al-Gaylani cabinet and the Iraqi army toward British policies that favored minorities and rural interests. According to a British diplomatic record, the Iraqi government perceived the Assyrians as “threats that the Iraqi crown could not ignore” for a number of reasons: the agitation by discontented Assyrians, the Syrian adventure, the refusal of Assyrian leaders to deal with the

---

403 *The Iraq Times*, August 8, 1933.
405 As a background to the disturbing developments of this period, a new cabinet was formed in Iraq headed by Rashid 'Ali al-Gaylani, the former chief of the royal diwan and an avowed arch-enemy of the Assyrians (Malik Loko d’Bit Badawi, *Assyrian Struggle for National Survival*, 313).
new government, and the direct confrontation with government troops. To recover their loss of prestige in the past summer, the Ikha government under Prime Minister al-Gaylani seized on the opportunity by handling the Assyrian peril ruthlessly. While the plan of the massacre was mainly the work of General Bekr Sidqi, Minister of Interior Hikmet Suleiman declared to Stafford that he had approved the general line of policy which General Sidqi adopted. Such reactions towards the Assyrians not only underscored the al-Gaylani administration’s failure to address Iraq’s ethnic and cultural diversity, but also highlighted the Iraqi government’s use of violence to solve the Assyrian problem.

The Iraqi government’s public policies also contributed to the difficulties of assimilating the Assyrian community. As the Levies were gradually disbanded by 1932, few ex-Levies Assyrian officers were employed by the Iraqi army due to red tape, suspicion and a general dislike of Assyrians on the part of the Iraqi government. According to Malik Badawi, an Assyrian ex-officer, the reenlistment of the Assyrian levy officers in the Iraqi army was supposed to be an option arranged by the British with the concurrence of the Iraqi government. After an officer was discharged from the Levies in the drawdown of the force or had quit voluntarily, he could be incorporated into the Iraqi police or the army if he so desired. On the contrary, Yusuf Malek, an Assyrian civil servant, argues that the re-enlistment of the Assyrians in the new force did not take place as planned. That force was about half the size of the disbanded Assyrian levies and was a mixed force of Arabs, Kurds, and Assyrians. Only a very small percentage of the old levy soldiers could therefore be re-engaged.

---

407 Majid Khadduri, Independent Iraq, 44.
408 Badawi, 315.
409 Malek.
To make matter worse, the Iraqi government refused to promote some re-enlisted Assyrian officers and turned away other new applicants. Having its own position on the matter, the Iraqi government chose which group of Assyrians it wanted to cooperate with and which group it considered a threat and a nuisance to be dealt with.410 While many Assyrians, owing to national prejudice, were slow to take the opportunity to obtain Iraqi citizenship, many others were refused naturalization with the motive of getting rid of them from the service.411 According to Stafford, in summer 1932, four officers, seven NCOs and fifty-eight other ranks were employed in the Iraqi army. Nevertheless, it was very difficult for them to obtain promotion to higher ranks. Stafford found it surprising that an Assyrian officer with much experience in the field had failed a written test. In his conversation with A.M. Hamilton, a British civil engineer in Kurdistan, Malik Yaqo, the former senior Assyrian officer in the Levies, stated that he had applied for a commission in the Iraqi army and in the police after his service guarding the airfield in Diana in 1932. However, the senior Iraqi officials said they did not want any more Assyrians in government service, and they would not have him either in the police or in the army. In fact, many of those Assyrians who already held government positions had been dismissed.412 This situation indicates that employment of former Assyrian Levy officers in the armed forces was not exactly the Iraqi military’s priority as a means of assimilating the Assyrians into the Iraqi state institution.

Not only did the Iraqi army refuse to reenlist the former Assyrian officers, the Iraqi government also hesitated to absorb Assyrian civilians into the Iraqi labor workforce. After the end of the Mandate, few competent and educated Assyrians could obtain government employment in Iraq. Although some of the best educated Assyrians decided to join the Iraqi Civil Service from

410 Badawi, 316.
411 Malek.
1930 onwards, by 1933, there were still only fifteen employed, most of them in very junior posts.\textsuperscript{413} Other Assyrians decided to obtain Iraqi citizenship in order to take jobs in the oil companies, but they were discriminated against by Kurdish and Arab colleagues.\textsuperscript{414} The inferior political status and poor socio-economic conditions of the Assyrians in post-independence Iraq suggest the Iraqi state’s persistent suspicion and fear of the Iraq Levies’ veterans. Consequently, the al-Gaylani government implemented public policies that discriminated against the Assyrian community as a whole, whether in civil or military service.

Fiery parliamentary speeches against the Assyrians also demonstrate the Iraqi nationalist intention to eliminate the Iraq Levies and disperse the Assyrian minority. Between June 27 and 30, 1933, fifteen venomous articles were published against the Assyrians and a number of official statements were made on the same subject. In one of these remarks, the government suggested a preparation for the military operations against the Assyrians:

\begin{quote}
The present cabinet must take any action that it deems fit irrespective of the consequences. It must resist the settlement of the Assyrians or the formation of the Assyrian levies. The nation is prepared to sacrifice it all to see that the present cabinet pursues its policy towards the Assyrians. Pressure is being brought to bear on Yaqo in the north and he is about to submit to the government. Police posts in Mosul have been reinforced and troops have been sent up to deal with the Assyrians and all necessary steps have been taken to protect the inhabitants (sic). The Assyrians are criminals and certain elements of them must be eliminated.\textsuperscript{415}
\end{quote}

The statement demonstrates the Iraqi state’s hostility towards the Assyrians based on two premises: the Assyrians as stateless refugees and the Assyrians as collaborators of the British in the Iraq Levies. Such a securitized discourse criminalized the unassimilable Assyrians that the Iraqi government deemed it necessary to exterminate. Later in August 1933, the Ikha party of Mosul demanded that the central government stamp out the rebellion, eliminate all foreign influence in

\textsuperscript{413} Stafford, 61.
\textsuperscript{414} Ibid., 60.; Malek.
\textsuperscript{415} Malek.
Iraqi affairs, and take immediate steps to enact a law for compulsory military service.\textsuperscript{416} On the other hand, Jafar al-Askari, a Minister of Defense, declared his plan for national unity: “to create a unified Iraq with an ideology of Iraqi nationhood, proper education and equal treatment have to be provided to minorities to assimilate them into Iraq.”\textsuperscript{417} Although the statements diverged in their solution to the minority question in Iraq, they converged in the sense that the minorities were perceived to be a foreign entity that may have served as an agent for Western interference in domestic affairs. In the context of the Iraqi government’s homogenizing policies, a foreign minority like the Assyrians had to be either assimilated or eliminated from the Iraqi nation-state.

Undoubtedly, the Assyrians’ rejection of assimilation and anti-state insurrection became the Iraqi army’s justifications for state-sponsored violence against the Assyrian minority. As the Assyrians came to be termed by the raging Arab media as “separatists,” Bekr Sidqi, a Kurdish army officer who was known to be anti-Assyrian, exploited this hostile discourse to enhance his military career and to validate his murdering of hundreds of the Assyrians in several villages in northern Iraq.\textsuperscript{418}

The Systematic and Indiscriminate Massacre

The phases of the military operations against the Assyrians demonstrated the Iraqi army’s objective to eliminate all the Assyrians from the Iraqi state. From August 5 to 9, an army detachment rounded up the Assyrian civilians in the Jebel Bekhair and killed them out of hand without asking them questions.\textsuperscript{419} On August 7, without informing the civil authorities and

\textsuperscript{417} Jafar al-Askari, \textit{A Soldier's Story}, 240.
\textsuperscript{418} Donabed, 107.
\textsuperscript{419} Stafford, 168.
proclaiming martial law, the intelligence officers violated the Iraqi Constitution by arresting Assyrians at Dohuk. In fact, the civil authorities in various villages helped the military to collect the rifles of the local Assyrians and round them up for the Iraqi police. The Assyrians in Dohuk were taken a short distance away from their village in lorries in batches of eight or ten and were then turned out of the lorries and shot down with machine guns. To make matter worse, the Assyrians who were shot were entirely innocent of complicity in Yaqo Ismail’s emigration to Syria. \(^{420}\) The collaboration between the military and civil authorities demonstrates the shared hostility towards the Assyrians. More importantly, the wholesale persecution of the Assyrians means that the Iraqi army did not simply aim to punish the Assyrian rebels who emigrated to Syria last July but to eliminate any Assyrians in sight.

The Simel Massacre on August 11, 1933

The mass murder of the Assyrians at Simel villages on August 11 indicated the Iraqi army’s intention to take revenge for their casualties and humiliation in the battles of Faishkhabur and Dairabun. Simel was the largest Assyrian neighborhood in which over one hundred Assyrians and ten Arab families resided. The headman of Simel was a strong supporter of Mar Shimun and followed Yaqo Ismail, the leader of the Upper Tiyari tribe, into Syria with fifty other men. Nevertheless, most of the Assyrian living there belonged to the Baz tribe which was not a party to the plans of the patriarchal faction led by Yaqo. The fifty men who followed Yaqo and emigrated to Syria were almost entirely Tiyari. \(^{421}\) Moreover, most of the men who had left for Syria were either hiding in the mountains or dead, while Simel housed predominantly women, children and men who had not participated in the battles on the Iraqi-Syrian border. The massacre thus reflected

\(^{420}\) Stafford, 169.
\(^{421}\) Ibid., 172.
a radical trend in Iraqi nationalism that characterized all the Assyrians, both civilians and militants, as scapegoats that needed to be eliminated.

The massive killing of the Assyrians in Simel proceeded in a systematic manner. The operation began with disarming the Assyrians to undercut their resistance capability. The Assyrians living in several villages, such as Sayyasd Zari, Manawi, and Qasr Yazdin were instructed to come down to Simel villages. The idea of the government was to reduce the number of massacre zones and prevent the spreading of their forces. Under orders of the Qaimaqam of Dohuk and Amadiya, the police began collecting the Assyrian arms on July 30. Then the Kurdish and Arab tribes were allowed to pillage the villages to terrorize the Assyrian population. To prevent the fight between the Assyrians and the Iraqi forces, the Qaimaqam of Zakho entered the Simel villages with soldiers and told the Assyrians to surrender their rifles. Assured that they would be safe under the protection of the Iraqi authority, the Assyrians handed their arms to the troops. They also believed this false promise because they had not heard of what had happened at

---

422 Malek.
423 Stafford, 172.
Faishkahbur and Dairabun between the Assyrians and the Iraqi army. Stafford described the scene of the dreadful massacre at Simel after the police had asked the Assyrians to surrender their arms to the Iraqi military as follows:

Suddenly and without the least warning the troops opened fire upon the defenceless Assyrians [sic]. Many fell, including some women and children, and the rest ran into the houses to take cover. Not a soul was to be seen in the streets. The troops well knew that there was not a rifle or revolver left in the village. Albeit well known for their strength, discipline and fighting competence, the Assyrians lost all morale partly because they were threatened by a series of pillaging by Kurdish and Arab tribes, and partly because they were disarmed. It would appear that the Iraqi army planned the massacre because it had removed the Assyrians’ weapons, a source of strength and security that made them appear superior to the Iraqi army. Without arms and British protection, the Assyrians became weak and helpless. Some law-abiding Assyrians tried to survive the mass murder by turning themselves into the Iraqi army patrols:

Many of the Assyrian villagers from the plain and foothills of Simel pressed hard by the raiding in progress, came down and gave themselves up to the army at Basitka Bala or surrendered to army patrols operating in the area. They were all shot by the army, irrespective of whether they had or had not been to Syria. Evidently, the Assyrians’ expression of loyalty to the Iraqi authority was not sufficient to guarantee their survival. The Iraqi army’s shooting of the unarmed Assyrian civilians who had not committed any violation against the Iraqi government highlights that the barbarous operation was intended to target all Assyrians in Iraq.

Besides the methodical aspect of the massacre, the operations also targeted Assyrian women and children who were not involved with the Assyrian aggression in August 1933 or the

---

424 Badawi, 364.
425 Stafford, 173.
426 Donabed, 484.
Iraq Levies. Reportedly, 305 men, four women, and six children were buried in Simel. Many of the killed were a little more than half-grown boys.\textsuperscript{427} Some of the women were raped by the police sergeant and the soldiers. Women had their bellies slashed and their wombs ripped out and placed upon their heads for amusement. Girls were taken into captivity by the army and were never seen again. Although some boys dressed up like girls to avoid being killed, this tactic failed as nine-year-old girls were also raped and burnt alive. Most children were stabbed to death as they threw themselves over the naked and headless corpses of their mothers.\textsuperscript{428} A diplomatic report from Barclay Acheson, the Associate General Secretary of Near East Relief, described the scene of atrocity against women:

After killing all the men, the soldiers stripped the dead, taking their things of value, and went after the women. The Arabs and the Kurds looted the village. The better-looking women were mishandled, stripped, and let go. The wife of Yaqo, the supposed leader of the Assyrians, who left for Syria, was repeatedly violated, stripped, and let go, and so were her two daughters.\textsuperscript{429}

The killing and violating of the Assyrian women and children indicated the Iraqi army’s aim to inflict fear and intimidation among the whole Assyrian population regardless of age and gender. According to genocide scholar Jacques Semelin, the act of massacring is used by those in power to assert their ascendancy by destroying the bodies of those identified as their enemies. A particular form of vengeance may be regarded as “dislocated” or “generalized” vengeance. This means that the perpetrators exacted revenge not on their direct enemies but on others, either unrelated strangers or groups related to their enemies by identity markers such as language, ethnicity, culture, religion, politics and gender.\textsuperscript{430} In this context, killing and raping Assyrian women did not aim to

\textsuperscript{427} Donabed, 176.
\textsuperscript{428} Ibid., 110.
\textsuperscript{429} Barclay Acheson, executive secretary, Near East Foundations to Hon. Wallace S. Murray, chief, Division of Near Eastern Affairs, 13 September 1933, 890g.4016 Assyrians/90.
right the suffered wrong. Rather, the violence enacted upon the female body can be interpreted as an act of vengeance toward the whole Assyrian community.

In view of the methodical and indiscriminate military operations against the Assyrians, the 1933 massacre can be considered a genocide. According to Hannibal Travis, a genocide demonstrates “a massive, systematic, and discriminatory atrocities against an indigenous group in whole or in part.” The question of how many people died in the massacre has been politically charged for decades. The Iraqi government downplayed their culpability, stating that less than one thousand Assyrians were killed. Stafford claimed that not more than six hundred lost their lives. According to Mar Eshai Shimun, the Iraqi army massacred somewhere between 600 and 3,000 Assyrian civilians. Regardless of the number of casualties, the mass murder of innocent Assyrian cultivators and villagers in peacetime indicates the Iraqi army’s view of the Assyrians as a potential threat to the Iraqi integrity. Paul Knabenshue, US Ambassador to Iraq, reported that the Iraqi government denied the massacre, claiming that it was a punitive action against rebels. Hikmet Beg Suleiman, the Minister of Interior, ascribed the whole affair to the Assyrians’ actions, the Kurdish tribes and the British machinations and intrigues. This claim demonstrates the Iraqi government’s two points. First, the Minister tied ongoing ethnic tensions to the security imperatives to prevent dissolution, partition, or foreign intervention in their territory. Second,

---

431 Hannibal Travis, *Genocide in the Middle East: the Ottoman Empire, Iraq, and Sudan* (Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 2010), 4. Prior to the 1960s, it was well established in diplomatic and scholarly communities that the Armenian genocide swept Assyrians and Greeks within a general anti-Christian persecution. The contours of this persecution, referred to at the time as “extermination,” “death of a nation,” “general massacre,” and “holocaust,” parallel the definition of genocide in international law (Hannibal Travis, “Constructing the Armenian Genocide: How Scholars Unremembered the Assyrian and Greek Genocides in the Ottoman Empire, in Hidden Genocides: Power, Knowledge, Memory, eds. Alexander Laban Hinton, Thomas LaPointe, and Douglas Irvin-Erickson, 175). 432 Stafford, 179. 433 Shimun. 434 Stafford, 161. 435 Travis, 3.
his statement reflects growing Iraqi nationalism that justified the violence against the Assyrians with their treachery against the state.

The Popular Receptions of the Iraqi Troops

Rather than being marked as the dark episode of Iraqi history, the Assyrian massacre became commemorated as a symbol of national pride and unity. The Iraqi army was given triumphal receptions when they returned to Mosul, Kirkuk, and Baghdad. Bekr Sidqi, the mastermind behind the massacre, motored through the crowded streets amidst enthusiastic applause. Paul Knabenshue reported in two dispatches at the end of August that there had been parades for Iraqi troops in both Baghdad and Mosul where cheering men, women, and children attended. Shops were closed and a holiday ensued to celebrate the victorious troops with jubilation:

One section of the victorious Iraq army returning from the front is now quartered at Mosul, and another section is arriving at Baghdad today. Mosul gave an enthusiastic welcome to its allotment. Triumphal arches were erected, decorated with watermelons shaped as
[Assyrian] skulls into which daggers were thrust and with red streamers suspended, intended, it is assumed, to represent blood.\textsuperscript{436}

This delicate representation of the heads of slain Assyrians was consistent with the prevailing sentiment in the town. The Mosulis disliked and feared the Assyrians who resided there, partly due to their relationship with the British and partly due to their involvement in inter-communal conflicts with the Iraqi population. Undoubtedly, while the Arabs fired revolvers and rifles in the air to mark their joy at the deliverance from the menace of the Assyrians, the Assyrians and other Christians were careful to remain in their houses. A speech made by Bekr Sidqi to the people of Mosul by way of thanking them for the reception of the army further increased the nervousness of the Christians:

O, Liberal sons of the Habda (Mosul)! Your display of the noble Arab character and your enthusiasm in honouring the Iraqi Army, which has disciplined the rebel Assyrians, and your great welcome to it in appreciation of the small duty which it has performed, has brought back to mind those immortal episodes, the true patriotism and the noble deeds, in which the people of Mosul were prominent under the most trying and difficult of times, when the sword of occupation was upon our necks. Thanks to you, O sons of the Habda, thanks added to admiration and esteem, thanks which I offer as a pledge of what the Army is about to perform in the future, in accomplishment of the great duty, which the Army has felt and is still feeling that it must be prepared to perform. Therefore let us, with Army and Nation, await that Day.\textsuperscript{437}

His speech depicts the Iraqi army’s victory over the Assyrians as the successful battle against enemies of Muslims and Arabs. For Iraqi residents in Mosul, the Assyrian massacre not only meant the elimination of the threat of the Assyrian revolt, but also the end of British imperial rule in Iraq. The Iraqi army became hailed as the saviors of the country who would be accorded with greater responsibilities for the state. Equating the army with nation, Sidqi’s statement not only marked the rise of Iraqi military in politics, but also advocated Iraqi nationalism that excluded the Assyrians.

\textsuperscript{436} Paul Knabenshue, US ambassador to Iraq, to Secretary of State, “Suppression of Assyrian Revolt”, (no. 165), 23 August 1933, 890g.4016 Assyrians/82.
\textsuperscript{437} Stafford, 169.
The Assyrian Massacre and its Implications for Iraqi Nationalism

The massacre of the Assyrians not only reflected the climax of tensions between the Assyrians and the Iraqi population, but also characterized Iraqi nationalism as violent, exclusive and anti-minority. Zoë Preston argues that the massacre exemplified the problem of Iraq’s state building, which “could only progress via nation destroying.” Zoë Preston, *The Crystallization of the Iraqi State: geopolitical function and form*, (Oxford; New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 251. Violence became the logic of the Iraqi state and substituted for the lengthy and often painstaking negotiations that were necessary to reconcile political rivals. Having achieved a newly independent state, the Iraqi government was determined to consolidate the state and devoted tremendous efforts to uniting multi-ethnic population under a single vision of Arab authority. In turn, the Assyrians, however, were perceived as traitors and foreign enemies due to their association with the British and their military service to protect the imperial interests. By the end of the Mandate, the Iraqi state’s nationalist agenda clashed with the Assyrians’ effort to claim their national autonomy and settlement in a homogenous community. These contrasting visions of the nation and the collision of the dominant state and minority nationalisms culminated in the annihilation of the Assyrian community as a whole.

Moreover, the events of Simel served as a blueprint for succeeding governments’ treatment of minorities. According to Yusuf Malek, the Iraqi army conducted a massacre against the Assyrians not only to express their anger, but also to demonstrate their military power before the discontented Kurds of the whole region and before the Shi’a who were on the brink of war with the Sunnis at that time. As a result, the Assyrian crisis became a “bellwether for the fears” of various ethnic groups trying to form a stable political community. In the same vein, Roger

---

439 Malek.
440 Davis, 61.
Cumberland, an American missionary in Dohuk, argues that Simel destroyed the confidence of the Assyrians and other minority groups, especially Christians, in the good faith of the government.\textsuperscript{441} The suppression of the Assyrians and tribes thus highlighted the breakdown of state-society relations and also the increased role of sectarianism in Iraqi politics during the 1930s. One of the remarkable examples of this development is the “farhud” after the end of the Anglo-Iraqi War on June 1-2, 1941. Yunis al-Sabawi, an associate of Prime Minister al-Gaylani and a member of the far-right and pan-Arab al-Muthanna club, led a mob attack on the Jewish community in Baghdad.\textsuperscript{442} The event exhibited a disturbing parallel to Simel as another Iraqi community suffered in the midst of political and security instabilities and the Iraqi officers’ deepening Arab nationalist feelings.\textsuperscript{443} The following series of persecutions against ethnic and religious minorities demonstrate that Iraqi state formation was to revolve around an exclusive Arab national identity.

The prominent role of the Iraqi army’s barbarity against the Assyrians also catapulted the Iraqi military into domestic politics. According to Eric Davis, the military’s role in Simel was enhanced at the expense of the Assyrian community marginalization.\textsuperscript{444} As discussed in this chapter, this event is significant in that the popular reaction to the Iraqi victory made the military the focus and symbol of national unity.\textsuperscript{445} In the context of rising militarism, anti-British and anti-

\textsuperscript{441} Paul Knabenshue, US ambassador to Iraq, to Wallace Murray, containing letter from Mr. Cumberland to Secretary of State, 13 September 1933, 890g.4016 Assyrians/110.

\textsuperscript{442} Yunis al-Sabawi, a Minister in Rashid Ali’s Government in April-May 1941, headed three small pro-Nazi groups: 'Kata’ib ash-Shabab' (Youth Troops), 'Haras al-Hadid' (The Iron Guard) and 'Quwat as-Sabeawi al-Wataniyah' (The Sabeawi National Force). These three groups of young soldiers, officers and police took an active part in the slaughter of Jews in June 1941 due to their adoption of a foreign anti-Jewish propaganda (Hayyim J. Cohen, “The Anti-Jewish ‘Farhūd’ in Baghdad, 1941,” Middle Eastern Studies 3.1 (Oct, 1966): 2-17).

\textsuperscript{443} Donabed, 124. According to many scholars, the rise of exclusivist Arab nationalism was related to some Arab intellectuals’ internalization of the German Nazi model. This Arab chauvinism was manifested in the suppression of the Assyrians in 1933 and the massacre of Jews in 1941. However, the Arab radicals’ relation with the Axis powers should be seen rather as a pragmatic policy as a result of their deteriorated view of the West, their anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist feelings (Basheer M. Nafi, “The Arabs and the Axis: 1933-1940,” Arab Studies Quarterly 19.2 (Spring 1997): 1-24).

\textsuperscript{444} Ibid., 121.

\textsuperscript{445} Simon, 112.
minority sentiments in society, the al-Gaylani government seized the opportunity to re-introduce the conscription law in 1933, using the event as a justification for the need for an expanded military.\footnote{Ibrahim Al-Marashi, Military-Society Relations in Iraq, 1921 - 58: Competing Roles of the Army in State and Society in Iraq: Citizenship under Occupation, Dictatorship and Democratisation, eds, Benjamin Isakhan, Shamiran Mako, and Fadi Dawood, London: I.B. Tauris, 2017, 119.} The Assyrian crisis ultimately elevated the Iraqi military’s position and prestige in politics and society. This increased dominance of the Iraqi army fostered political instability and set the stage for the Arab world’s first military coup d’etat by Bekr Sidqi in 1936. Therefore, the Assyrian massacre attested to the rising tide of exclusive Arab nationalism against non-Arab minorities among the Iraqi officers and statesmen.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the Assyrian nationalist struggle and independence movement near the termination of the British Mandate in 1932 and how it led to the Assyrian massacre in 1933. As the British decided to withdraw from Iraq by 1932, the Assyrians’ fear of persecution under the Arab government pushed them to adopt the language of nation-state and a British-produced minority discourse to assert their ethnic-territorial autonomy. Although different factions within the Assyrian community sought divergent interests, the nationalist movement led by the religious leader Mar Eshai Shimun and the Assyrian Levies officers pursued a set of goals of returning to the Hakkiari mountains in Turkey, establishing a homogenous autonomous community in Iraq, or emigrating to other states under British protection. Analyzing the Assyrians’ wartime alliance with the Allied powers as well as their military service in the Iraq Levies, the first part of this chapter argues that the strong relationship with the British that had been cultivated since World War I
lulled the Assyrians into thinking that they had British support for their nationalist aspirations in the nascent state of Iraq.

However, the new-found Assyrian identity and struggle for an autonomous homeland was to clash with the national and religious sentiments of Arabs and Muslims in newly-independent Iraq. From submitting petitions to the League of Nations, mutinying against the British, to fleeing to Syria, the Assyrian nationalist efforts increasingly enhanced the Iraqi nationalist sentiment against the Assyrians. After the battle with the Iraqi army near the Syrian-Iraqi border on August 4, 1933, the Assyrians became identified as foreign enemies that threatened the integrity of the Iraqi state. As the Assyrian question menaced the Iraqi state’s Arab unity project, the Assyrian community became a common target that united various groups of Iraqi population under an exclusive definition of Iraqi nationalism.

The collision of the Assyrians and the Iraqi army on the battlefield on August 4, 1933 translated into their mutual exclusion in state and society of post-independent Iraq. Due to their suspicion of the Assyrians’ aggressive behaviors, the Iraqi authorities were reluctant to integrate the Assyrian ex-Levies officers and civilians into the Iraqi state institutions. Meanwhile, the Assyrians’ strong national identity and fear of being persecuted by the Arab government led them to refuse assimilation into Iraqi nation. Their anxiety for their future under Iraqi rule was confirmed by the Iraqi-led massacre of the Assyrians in Simel in August 1933. The Iraqi government’s deliberate attempt to annihilate the Assyrian community was not only justified by the Assyrians’ association with the British and anti-government rebellion in summer 1933, but also simply by their being Assyrian. The wholesale massacre of the Assyrian community in Simel thus characterized Iraqi nationalism as violent, exclusive and anti-minority.
The Iraqi - Assyrian conflicts were not only rooted in ethnic-religious hatred and fanaticism caused by the Iraq Levies, but were also grounded in security concerns of the homogenizing state that attempted to eliminate the threat from a minority group. Although the massacre was conducted by a small section of the Iraqi army, the methodical and sweeping aspects of the operations indicate how Iraqi nationalism was constructed in opposition to the Assyrian other. Playing a prominent role in the mass murder, the Iraqi army were regarded by the Iraqi population as the heroes of a communalist struggle against enemies of Muslims and Arabs. In the context of nationalism and anti-imperialism, Iraqi Arab nationalists’ responses to Assyrian separatism reflected both Iraqi ethnic-territorial nationalism as well as Iraq’s transition to nation-state form. The rising tide of Iraqi militarism and the pattern of violence against minorities thus demonstrated not only the turbulent process of Iraqi state formation, but also the fragmented Iraqi national identity shaped by the competing national discourses of various political and social forces, in this case the Iraqis and the Assyrians.
CONCLUSION: FROM ALIEN SOLDIERS TO ALIEN MINORITY: 
THE EXCLUSION OF THE ASSYRIANS IN IRAQ

“Years of war have changed the face of the old world. We have seen dynasties and empires unravel; peoples hitherto oppressed have rediscovered their former liberty; revolutionary systems of government have come into being - But it is probable that there is no human community, in relative terms, that has suffered trials and blows comparable to those endured by that small group, both Nation and Church, that bears the name of Assyrians.”

League of Nations, 1935

This research on the Iraq Levies and their role in shaping Iraqi nationalism serves three purposes. First, it explains how the Assyrians were instrumentalized by the British as colonial soldiers and minorities for imperial strategic interests. Secondly, it examines how the Assyrians rallied to Assyrian nationalism that was bound with territory as well as social and economic rights. Finally, it demonstrates how the impact of military recruitment and the nationalist struggle made the Assyrians resist assimilation into an Iraqi nation and become subject to persecution and annihilation by the Iraqi state. The finding of this study also explains why and when the Assyrians within Iraq – a nation-state in formation – came to be described, by the Iraqi statesmen, Iraqi army and several ethnic communities, as “British protégés”, “aliens,” “foreign enemy” and “minorities,” and what that tells us about Iraqi nationalism.

Examining the methods of recruitment and military operations of the Iraq Levies and how they provoked anti-Assyrian sentiments from the Iraqi state and society, this study connects the literatures on the British colonial defense policies, the Iraqi military under the British Mandate, and the Assyrians in Iraq by asking the following questions. How did British colonial policy and the model of Iraq Levies alienate the Assyrians from the rest of the local population in Iraq? How did the use of the Iraq Levies as a tool of divide and rule through military operations lead to communal tensions and conflicts with other ethnic communities in Iraq? And to what extent did
the Iraq Levies promote an exclusive definition of Iraqi nationalism within the Iraqi state and ultimately lead to the massacre of the Assyrian community by the Iraqi army in 1933?

Based on textual and discourse analyses of British archives, Iraqi newspapers, and memoirs, I argue that British use of the Iraq Levies as a tool of divide and rule in Iraq shaped the role of the Iraq Levies in producing the Assyrian as “other,” causing communal conflicts and shaping Iraqi nationalism to be exclusive and militaristic in the following ways. First, the martial race theory which recruited the Assyrian refugees based on their fighting qualities and discipline transformed the Assyrian soldiers into rivals of the Iraqi army. Additionally, the class regimental system that constituted the Iraq Levies entirely of the Assyrians alienated them from the rest of the local Iraqi population. Secondly, the British deployment of the Iraq Levies against Kurdish rebellions entrenched inter-communal tensions between both tribes and obstructed the Assyrian settlement among the Kurds in northern Iraq. Moreover, the British production of the Assyrian refugees as a national minority to advance imperial claim to Mosul and Iraqi-Turkish frontier pitted the Assyrians against Turkey, leading to the Turkish expulsion of the Assyrians from their ancient homeland on the Hakkiari mountains. Thirdly, the Assyrians’ military alliance with the British, through the Iraq Levies, assured the Assyrians of British support for their independence movement from Iraq by the termination of the British Mandate in 1932. The Assyrian nationalist demands not only fell on deaf ears of the Western powers, however, but also irritated the Iraqi government which sought to consolidate and homogenize the newly-independent state. Consequently, the British use of the Iraq Levies as a device of divide and rule shaped the Assyrians as an internal enemy of the state that needed to be eliminated. The 1933 Assyrian massacre demonstrates the calamity of an imperial use of the Assyrian minority for strategic purpose as well as Iraqi nationalism that excluded the minority through violent means.
This research contributes to two fields of scholarship focusing on the Middle East: colonialism and nationalism. In terms of colonialism, this study demonstrates the Assyrians’ relationship with foreign imperial powers through wartime military alliance. Their plight as refugees and victims of the massacre by the Turks during World War I brought them into contact with the British. British use of the Assyrians to maintain the security of Mandatory Iraq with lesser expenses and to claim Mosul with rich oilfields from Turkey portrayed the Assyrians as pawns of the imperial power used to extend its colonial authority.

In terms of nationalism, this study shows that, on the other hand, British recruitment of the Assyrians into the Iraq Levies and construction of Assyrians as a persecuted minority in Iraq cultivated and strengthened their Assyrian national identity. Their lives as mountaineers, their experiences as refugees and their post-World War I nationalist struggle laid a foundation for the Assyrian nationalists and officers to demand autonomy from Iraq. Unfortunately, the Assyrians became not only stateless refugees, but also ethnicized soldiers who were excluded in the nation-state of Iraq that pursued a policy of homogenizing and assimilating foreign elements. After the British transferred political power to the new Iraqi government in 1932, the tragic ending of the unprotected and unassimilable ethnic group in Iraq was either inferior political and socio-economic status, or genocide.

This study may serve to heighten the awareness of scholars of Middle Eastern history about a generally unrecognized and widely ignored issue of the ethnic and religious minorities that shaped historical forces in the Middle East. The materials contained herein may provide a basis for further research and prove a valuable point of departure concerning the state-minority relationship in the process of state formation during the Mandate period, the colonial military that was bound up with territorial disputes and the refugee settlement process, as well as the emergence,
evolution and clash of state and minority nationalisms in the context of colonialism and postcolonialism.

Many of the shortcomings of the state of Iraq during and after the monarchical period (1920-1958) can be traced back to the mechanisms and institutions founded at the time of the British occupation and continued under the mandate (1918-1932).\textsuperscript{447} The Iraq Levies under the British Mandate serves as an example of the state-minority relationships that were locked in a loop of exclusionary politics and securitization. At a state level, the perception of the Assyrians as foreign elements and as British collaborators was a securitized discourse to prevent the threat of separatism and secessionism that may have compromised the Iraqi state integrity. Thus, the Assyrian independence movement and emigration to Syria justified state violence and oppression of minority deemed to destabilize the social order. In the same vein, the British framing of inter-ethnic conflicts as Christian-Muslim animosity served their geopolitical interests to prolong their imperial rule in Iraq by articulating the minority issue in religious terms.

At a local level, the inter-communal conflicts between the Assyrians and Iraqi Muslims and between the Assyrians and Kurds caused by the Iraq Levies could be traced to a British discriminatory policy that contributed to political, social and economic inequality within Iraqi clientelistic society. Therefore, the rise of Iraqi military in politics and the exclusive aspect of Iraqi nationalism signify the fragile and radicalized political system under the British Mandate and the Iraqi state’s failed attempt to unite Iraqi diverse populations under a single Arab authority. Although the army’s victory over the Assyrians in 1933 contributed to an appearance of Iraqi national unity against a common enemy, the continued persecution of the Iraqi Assyrians as well

as the persistence of minority issues in the following decades, ranging from the Kurds and, the Iraqi Shi’a to the Yezidis, indicates that an Iraqi national identity remained fragmented.

This research is not the definitive work on the history of the Assyrians or Assyrian Church of the East. It deals with a historical episode of an Assyrian encounter with foreign powers during World War I and the tremendous consequences for their life in Iraq from the Mandate period to the post-independence era. This study does not claim that the exclusion of the Assyrians was the only element that characterized Iraqi nationalism. The Iraq Levies illustrated the imperial exploitation of the minority to counteract the anti-colonial nationalist movement and to preserve strategic aims. The Assyrian massacre indicates the justification and legitimization of Iraqi state policies that advocate purging and eliminating groups perceived as enemies during the nation-building process. The atrocity against the Assyrians also symbolizes the power of the Iraqi military to eliminate what they perceived to be the last vestiges of European power. Hence, the nationalist sentiment on the part of the Iraqi government and the local population can be considered as no less anti-colonialism than anti-Assyrian. The events of the various violent campaigns in Iraq afterwards are also a product of the homogenizing Iraqi state that sought to assimilate or eliminate the minorities to establish security and stability.

As a result of my study, further research might well be conducted in order to examine the continued subjugation and suppression of the socio-economic rights of the Assyrian minority in Iraq under the Republic (1958-68), the Ba'th and the rule of Saddam Hussein (1968-2003), and the current Iraqi government. Although the Iraq Levies had been disbanded since 1955, the Assyrians remained alienated and dispersed on the basis of their ethnicity. The ruling Iraqi elite in subsequent decades still perceived the highly trained and well-armed levies as a threat to its sovereignty – a sovereignty dependent on national unity. Instead of purging them physically as the Iraqi army had
done in 1933, the policies of Arabization and Ba‘thification from the 1960s to the 1970s which subsumed the Assyrians into a monolithic identity, resulted in the elimination of any modes of identification of the Assyrians outside the acceptable norms of Ba‘thism and Arabism. The policies of assimilation and homogenization directed against the Assyrians are a microcosm of the larger situation, which affected various political, cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities. This building of a coerced collective Iraqi identity suggests the nation-states system that had been constructed in large measure on the exclusionary categories of insider and outsider.

Considering the roles performed by the Assyrians since the beginning of the twentieth century, why have they been relatively neglected by most studies concerning these transformative periods of Iraq’s history? While the answer was inconclusive, this study fills the lacuna in Iraqi historiography by examining the role of the Assyrians in the Iraq Levies and how they may have shaped Iraqi nationalism under the British Mandate. Iraq was formed by competing visions of the state asserted by different social and political forces as well as by a dialectical relationship between the colonial power and the ethno-nationalist movements. Therefore, it is essential that historians reconstruct the framework of Iraqi historiography by creating a narrative that is not solely based on the nationalist history of the Iraqis, but also on the intersections of the experiences of both the Iraqis and the minority groups, in this case the Assyrians of Iraq. Only through the reconstruction of such a common history of Iraqis and Assyrians can the complexity of the Assyrian past that is so bereft in the official Iraqi historiography be finally captured.

448 Donabed, 244.
449 Ibid., 245.
APPENDIX

News Clippings from *The Iraq Times* (1933)

The Iraq Times, July 25, 1933.

It is rumoured that about 1,800 Assyrians left Iraq recently for Aleppo. They were refused admission into Syrian territory, and now they are trying to return to Iraq. The Iraqi authorities refuse to admit them unless they surrender their rifles and other weapons. A difficult situation has arisen, and we hear that the Government has despatched troops to the North.

The Iraq Times, August 1, 1933.

At a late hour last night we received from the Press Bureau a lengthy official statement on the position of the Assyrians in Northern Iraq. The statement appears to-day in our Arabic page, and an English translation will be published to-morrow. The leader of the Nationalist Party has published a letter which he recently sent to the Prime Minister, asserting to him the necessity of taking the necessary steps to clear out from Iraq, once and for all, the Assyrians who, notwithstanding the kindness and leniency shown them by the Iraqi nation, have always proved thievish to be a source of trouble to the country. The letter concludes with the statement that the Assyrians are to-day “a constant danger to the unity of Iraq and its peaceful aims.”

The Iraq Times, August 2, 1933.

The Frontier Episode.

On yet another occasion, however, the followers of Mar Shammon tried to disturb the peace. They assembled, fully armed, near the mountain of Bashi, when they found that the Government had not been caught unaware, and that the Government’s forces were sufficiently powerful to crush any unlawful movement, the party of Assyrians crossed the frontier into Syria. They numbered 1,800 armed men.

In view of the fact that their action was unlawful, and that it had been carried out without the Government’s knowledge or sanction, the Government decided these men should not be allowed to return to Iraq unless they first surrendered their arms. The Government’s view was that the dispersal of these men would safeguard the peace, and would be an example to others who might be contemplating unlawful action.

The Iraq Times, August 4, 1933.

The communique regarding the Assyrians is intended to be read in continuation of the official statement which we published on Wednesday. “The action of some of the Assyrians who left Iraq territory without the Government’s permission, and their entry into Syria without obtaining the permission of the Syrian authorities, have caused some uneasiness. The Government has now been informed that a number of other Assyrians intend to follow these men’s example. The Government therefore wishes to make an explicit announcement that it will not allow such Assyrians to return to Iraq at any cost. In the meantime the Government will pursue its former policy of settling the Assyrians on the land, on condition that they behave peacefully like other Iraqis and co-operate with Government officials wherever they may be.”

The news of the Assyrians’ crossing of the Tigris at Faish Khabur, and their subsequent attack on the Iraq Army, became generally known in Baghdad last night, and made a deep impression on the public mind. The most important fact that emerges from the events of the week-end is that the French authorities in Syria, for reasons which at present are known only to themselves, returned rifles to the Assyrians whom they had previously disarmed. Having regard to the Treaty of Sanjak-Voisins concluded between Syria and Iraq, with its explicit affirmation of the procedure to be followed when armed tribesmen cross the frontier from one country to the other, the Iraq Government is clearly entitled to ask for an explanation.

In all military operations a measure of secrecy is necessary. We believe that, when all the facts are placed before the public, it will be found that the Iraq Army behaved very creditably in a position of exceptional difficulty. It is clear, from the two official communiques published in the next column, that neither the military commanders on the spot nor the Ministry of Defence in Baghdad had the slightest reason to anticipate an attack by a thousand armed Assyrians. On the contrary, they had every reason to believe that the great majority of the Assyrians had been disarmed, and that the remaining two or three hundred would be disarmed in the immediate future.

The Iraq Times, August 5, 1933.

ASSYRIANS ENTER IRAQ
1,000 Cross Tigris
French Return Their Rifles

The IRAQ ARMY ATTACKED

The following official communiqué was issued in Baghdad yesterday:

“About 300 or more Assyrians who were not disarmed crossed the Tigris and entered Iraq territory, on the pretext that they were going to surrender themselves and their arms.

“Having crossed, however, they attacked the advance guards of the Iraq Army.

“After a short engagement which lasted several hours, the Assyrians were repulsed, leaving behind a number of dead.

“The advance guards of the Iraq Army are still continuing the pursuit.”

A Later Communiqué.

Late yesterday afternoon another official statement was issued by the Press Bureau, as follows:

“It has now been ascertained that the number of rebel Assyrians who attacked units of the Iraq Army exceeded one thousand, and that all their arms were returned to them by the local (i.e., French) authorities in Syria before they crossed the Iraqi frontier.

“These men took part in the engagement which took place on August 4th and 5th.

“The Iraq Army and the Police are continuing the pursuit of the scattered Assyrians.”

The Iraq Times, August 7, 1933.
The Iraq Times, August 9, 1933.

The Iraq Times, “Pursuit of the Assyrians,” August 9, 1933.
According to a telegram received from Baghdad in London yesterday, the rebel Assyrians had “surrendered unconditionally to the Iraqi authorities.” Rumors to the same effect were widely current in Baghdad yesterday, but no official statement was issued on the subject, and no official confirmation could be obtained. We now understand that the telegram received in London was premature, and that it was based on an inaccurate report received from the scene of operations.

A further statement was made yesterday, “in Iraqi circles in London,” to the effect that dissension among the Assyrian tribesmen themselves was the main cause of the trouble in Northern Iraq. It was explained that while the Lower Tigris tribes were prepared to accept the conditions laid down by the League of Nations, “the Upper Tigris, under their religious leader Mar Shimun—who was trained for the ministry at Canterbury—are dissatisfied.” It was added that recent developments in the Assyrian situation caused H. M. King Faisal’s hurried departure from Europe to Iraq by air.

The Iraq Times, August 9, 1933.

The Iraq Minister in London, Ja’far Pasha al-Askari, sent the following communication to the London “Times” of August 2nd:

The Times of July 27 contained a telegram from Baghdad regarding a small section of Assyrians who crossed the Iraqi frontier into Syria. The information received from the Iraqi Government shows that while the Government were executing the scheme for the settlement of the homeless Assyrians in Iraq, with the help of the British expert, Major Thomson, and spending the necessary funds for this purpose from the Iraqi Treasury, a small section of them left the country with their arms and entered Syrian territory, to the embarrassment of the Iraqi Government, and without their permission. The Iraqi Government are confident that the overwhelming majority of the Assyrians are grateful to them for their kind policy and do not sympathise with the folly committed by this section.

The Iraq Times, August 9, 1933.

A great deal of patriotic enthusiasm has been aroused by theIraq Army’s operations against the Assyrians. A batch of volunteers have left Mosul for the scene of operations to offer their services to the Army. They were led by Sayid Cha’abi Haji Thabit, the Nationalist Deputy for Mosul. Among the others who have offered their services to the Iraq Government are ex-Servicemen (who fought with the Turks in the Great War), some of the notables of Adhamiyah, ex-Army officers on pension, law students, Arab and Kurdish tribal sheikhs, “the people of Najaf,” and boys attending secondary schools.

We understand that the Iraq Government has made a strong protest against the action of the French authorities in Syria in returning rifles to the Assyrians whom they had previously disarmed. The Government has received a communication from the French Chargé d’Affaires in Baghdad stating that the Iraqi protest has been forwarded to Paris, and that a reply is expected within the next few days.

Various schemes are already being discussed for the punishment of the leaders of the rebel Assyrians. One of the proposals is that eight of the leaders should be “deported” from Northern Iraq to the plains of the Munafiq, where they would not be able to take an active part in Assyrian political movements.

The Iraq Times, August 11, 1933.
A Press Bureau announcement issued yesterday stated: "It has been ascertained that after the encounter of August 5th, 600 of the Assyrian insurgents took refuge in Syria, while the remainder dispersed to the mountains towards the east. Some of the latter have surrendered to the Government forces that have been pursuing them. Up to yesterday 350 of the Assyrians had been disarmed. The Government therefore considers that the military operations took a normal course, and that all that now remains to be done is the tracking down of 400 insurgents by the police. The scattered bands of Assyrians have been given a time-limit of 48 hours in which to surrender, and their surrender is expected by the Government forces."

We received yesterday from the Press Bureau the following communique: "Most of the scattered groups of Assyrians mentioned in the official statement of August 11th have been compelled to surrender to the authorities, or to take refuge in the villages. A small proportion of them, however, are still hiding, but it is not expected that they will make any attempt to disturb the peace. The Government considers that the punitive operations, in which the Army and police have been engaged, have brought the insurrection to an end. The Government will now take steps to punish those who, by instigating the insurgents to embark on their evil path, were responsible for the bloodshed that has ensued. The Government will also take steps to prevent the recurrence of such events in future. Daily communiqués will not be issued after to-date. The Cabinet thinks that it is its duty to thank the nation for its whole co-operation and patriotism, and also for the care taken to protect peaceful citizens who were living in villages near the scene of operations."

The Iraq Times, August 12, 1933.

The Iraq Times, August 14, 1933.

The Iraq Times, August 15, 1933.
The Assyrian Attack.

On the evening of August 4th a party of the Assyrians applied to the Iraq Commander to surrender their arms and to offer submission. This was accepted; but after crossing the river, which here forms the boundary, near Falah Khabur, they attacked the detachment sent to take over their arms. On the morning of August 5th another large force, which had crossed the river, attacked the camp of the Iraq Army. On the evening of the same day the Iraqi Government learned indirectly that the Mandatory Authorities in Syria had actually returned five hundred rifles to the members of Yakub’s rebel band who had previously been disarmed.

In view of the facts as outlined above, the Iraqi Government is compelled to register a strong protest with the Mandatory Power in Syria for not carrying out the provisions of the temporary agreement, and especially for returning the arms to the insurgents, after maintaining them and feeding them for about two weeks.

The Iraq Government also protests against the facilities allowed to the insurgents by the Mandatory Power in Syria, in allowing them to use Syrian territory as a base from which to attack the Iraqi forces.

The Iraq Times, August 15, 1933.
After a time some of the Assyrians expressed a desire to return to Iraq, which appeared natural enough, as they had left their wives and families behind them, bringing only their flocks, and, as they gave no indication of any warlike intentions, their arms were restored to them and they left. Immediately the Franco-Syrian authorities learned of the attacks on the Iraqi army they gave the strictest orders for the complete disarming of those who had remained and of all new arrivals.

In conclusion, the French authorities state that in their opinion there has been no infringement of the 1927 agreement and add that they have always been perfectly ready to cooperate with the Iraqi Government, but that the essence of cooperation is mutual understanding and the avoidance of recollection in matters of importance.

Britain. But there has been no evidence whatever of any religious intolerance on the part of the Iraqi Government. If some of its officials have been failures, the Assyrians have not been the only sufferers from their incompetence; and the stringent guarantees for the protection of minorities which were adopted by the Council of the League and accepted and ratified by King Faisal’s Government last year should have satisfied even Mar Shimun.

A series of errors, which began at Geneva in 1926, has led to a sanguinary collision between the Iraqi forces and a section of the Christian Assyrian minority and to a dispute between the Kingdom of Iraq and the French Government in its capacity of mandatory for Syria. The unhappy story of the Assyrians began in the War when they rebelled with Russian instigation against their Turkish overlords. When the Russian front collapsed in 1917 the Assyrians were driven into Persia, whence about 70,000 of them escaped with British aid into Iraq. There many of them joined the Iraqi levies which were raised and paid by the British Government. They were good soldiers, their British officers spoke well of them, and for ten years they rendered valuable services to the Arab State. But they were strangers to the country; they found its climate trying; their loyalty to the British and their support of the British mandate made them unpopular with sections of the Arabs and Kurds. The League Council’s decision of December 16, 1935, to leave Southern Hakkari outside the northern borders of Iraq deprived the Assyrians of their mountain home, and these sturdy people found themselves in the difficult position of refugees in an unfamiliar and none too friendly country where most of the mountain valleys suitable for their settlement were already occupied by Kurds. Even so, some found homes with Iraqi aid, but the ambitions or the extreme conservatism of their Patriarch and other causes have prevented a section of the community from settling down contentedly as citizens of the Arab kingdom.
The Iraq Times, August 21, 1933

The Death-Roll.

Seven hundred Assyrians are reported killed.

The neighbouring villages are crowded with panic-stricken women and children, whose condition is pitiable.

Sir Francis Humphrys is returning at once to Baghdad by air to use his friendly offices in this crisis, and pending his return King Faisal is reported to have postponed his intended visit to Switzerland.

Iraq was admitted to membership of the League of Nations last October, when the British mandate terminated, and British responsibilities in Iraq ceased on that date. There is, however, a Treaty of Alliance between Great Britain and Iraq.

The Iraq Times, August 22, 1933

“No attacks have been made by the Government forces or by volunteers upon the villages, or upon women and children or old men. The losses on both sides have been confined to combatants only.

“The insurgents committed certain atrocities by burning the dead and wounded, and murdering women and children.

“The great majority of the Assyrians remained peaceful and took the Government’s side against the insurgents—i.e., the followers of Mar Shimun. A large number of them volunteered to serve in the police to keep order in their own districts, and 700 of them are still in Government service and are carrying out their duties faithfully.

“The looting which occurred in villages vacated by the families of men who joined the rebellion was stopped immediately by the Government, and most of the articles looted have been returned.

The Iraq Times, August 23, 1933

According to a telegram from London received this morning, the Iraqi Minister in London, Ja’far Pasna al-Askari, has issued a statement categorically denying reports of a massacre of Assyrian women, children, and old men, and Iraq’s responsibility in connection therewith.

The Iraq Times, August 23, 1933

We hear that the “Lady Surma,” aunt of the Mar Shimun, at her own accord left Mosul yesterday, with several of her relatives, for Baghdad. We are informed that leading Assyrian chiefs who took no part in the rebellion have sent a telegram to H.M. King Faisal expressing their desire to be dissociated from the Assyrians “who revolted against Iraq notwithstanding the kindness shown to them and the assistance given them.” They conclude by expressing their wish to remain “peaceful and faithful citizens of Iraq.”
Arrangements are going on apace for the enthusiastic welcome which is to be given to the units of the Iraq Army, which will return to Baghdad early tomorrow morning from the operations against the Assyrian insurgents. A special committee is hard at work. Telegrams have been sent to many towns in Iraq suggesting that leading men should visit the capital to participate in the celebrations. The trade unions are to take a prominent part, and in this connection we hear that the guild-masters have issued circulars to all the barbers and coffee-houses in the city, urging that the victorious troops should be given free shaves and coffee for three days after their arrival.

Various organisations have arranged to participate in the welcome which is to be extended to the men. For several days they will be given free entertainment in the local cabarets, and, on a date to be decided by the Ministry of Defence, there will be a special matinée for them at all three cinemas. A certain number of free meals will be available for them in the restaurants, and the Baghdad barbers have decided to “do their bit” by giving them free shaves for three days. Owners of motor-buses will carry the public free of charge this morning to the railway station to greet the returning troops, who will themselves be carried free of charge for the next three days. In general this is regarded as a great occasion. The Iraqi authorities are doing their best to make it memorable, and they are having the spontaneous and enthusiastic co-operation of the public.

Early this morning, when this edition went to press, the excitement was intense. Crowds were marching down Rashid Street towards North Gate, with drums beating and other musical effects, and the atmosphere was not unlike that of a Muharram procession. All the trade unionists marched in columns, carrying the flag of their guild. The shops in Al Rashid Street were closed until the procession had passed. All points of vantage on Rashid Street, including the roofs of houses, were occupied by large crowds. The women shrilled “halabina,” and the children waved flags.
The outstanding event of the week-end was the return of the Iraq Army on Saturday morning from the operations against the Assyrians in the North. The fervour of the public welcome extended to the troops indicated the extent to which Iraqi feelings have been aroused—not so much by the suppression of the rebellion as the allegations made by the foreign press of excesses committed by Iraqi soldiers and irregulars. Not for many years has Baghdad been so excited. Everybody was awakened at dawn by the beating of drums in every quarter of the city. Nearly every quarter sent a deputation to march in the "Procession of Victory," with banners proclaiming whence they came. Many trade unions paraded as separate units.

His Excellency the Prime Minister is now at Mosul with H.R.H. the Crown Prince, attending a ceremonial parade of the Iraq Army units stationed there. Our Arabic contemporary "Al Istiqal" reports that when the Premier returns to the capital shortly he will broadcast an account of the sequence of events in the Assyrian rebellion, laying special stress on the Iraqi allegation that the Assyrians burnt the bodies of two Iraqi officers.

An Iraqi writer commends the broadcasting project: "Thus will the world learn the truth about the savagery of the Assyrians." In this connection we may observe that the Baghdad broadcasting station is at an experimental stage, and the transmission is not powerful. The Premier's speech, however, should be heard by owners of wireless receivers in neighbouring Arab countries (there are many in Syria and Palestine): it may be heard as far away as Cairo.

It is understood that the Ministry of Defence has granted one year's advancement in seniority to all Iraqi officers who took part in the operations against the Assyrians, including Beqir Sidqi Beg, the commanding officer. It is rumoured that further promotion awaits the latter, whose present rank is equivalent to that of a colonel. He will probably be promoted to the rank of brigadier, which carries the courtesy title of "pasha."

His Majesty King Faisal has been pleased to confer on the colours of the 1st and 8th Regiments of the Iraq Army the Order of the Rafidain (Class II), in appreciation of the services of the two regiments during the operations against the Assyrians.

We are informed by the Ministry of Defence that Shaikh Ansami al-Subbi has presented the Iraq Army with a silver cup, inscribed in Amarah work, "as a souvenir of the victory of the Army against the Assyrians." The cup has been sent to Mosul, to be kept in the Army Club there. The Ministry has expressed its appreciation of the gift.
The Origins of the Assyrian Revolt

No protest against the Patriarch’s detention was in fact ever made by the Tiyari and Tkhuma, or indeed any other Assyrians, nor (surprisingly perhaps, but such is the fact) has it ever been mentioned by them throughout the whole affair. On July 24th, after the exodus, Yaku addressed to the Qaimaqam of Zakho a letter explaining that he and his party had emigrated because they “did not agree with the policy” explained to them at the Mosul meetings of July 10th and 11th. The movement was not merely a gesture of discontent but an attempt to force the League to settle them in Syria.

Those familiar with the recent history of the Assyrian question will find no difficulty in realizing that the detention of Mar Shemoun in Bagdad was not required to prompt the exodus to Syria any more than it was required to cause the mutiny of the Assyrian Levies.

All would yet have been well had it not been for the extraordinary action of the mandarins of the Assyrian authorities in Syria. The sudden restoration of five hundred rifles (the figure officially admitted) could only be interpreted by the simple-minded tribesmen as a direct incitement to attack the Iraqi forces on the opposite bank of the Tigris, and so interpreted it was.

Not Anti-Christian.

“Gentlemen, I repeat that the punitive operations were directed exclusively against Tiari rebels, and did not in any way touch the remaining Tiaris who have shown themselves loyal and faithful to this country, or any of the members of the other communities. The affair is very far from being, as depicted by foreign newspapers, an anti-Christian affair. May God forbid that we should have any such thing as an anti-Christian question arising amongst us! The traditional and old-established spirit of brotherhood, to which expression was given during the recent event by members of the various Christian and other communities, is bound to compel those newspapers to recognize actual facts if they are really seeking the truth.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


188


