Britain in Iraq During the 1950s:
Imperial Retrenchment and Informal Empire

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ABSTRACT

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Britain in Iraq During the 1950s: Imperial Retrenchment and Informal Empire

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Following the Second World War and the independence of India in 1947, Great Britain recognized the importance of the Middle East to its postwar economic recovery and to the maintenance of the British Empire and Commonwealth. During the 1950s, British officials turned to Iraq as a crucial foothold from which to both secure Britain’s continued dominance of the Middle East and prevent the Soviet Union’s penetration of the region. This thesis examines how Britain sustained its position in Iraq during the 1950s by adapting its formal relationships and connections into informal advantages that fit with postwar realities and international, domestic, and regional attitudes and pressures. Ultimately, Britain managed to maintain its position in Iraq through the pursuit of informal economic, cultural, and military influence.
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Although emerging victorious from World War II, Great Britain faced heavy economic burdens, mounting domestic demands, and uncertainty regarding its widespread international commitments in the postwar period. Rising nationalism in Asia and Africa, increasing domestic and international distaste for imperialism, and the creation of the United Nations contributed to a global environment eager to see the end of the British Empire. Imperial consolidation in India, Ceylon, and Burma appeared to signify that the days of empire had passed, and that an inevitable process of decolonization had begun. The British Empire seemed to be in a state of dissolution and some envisioned its imminent collapse.  

The British Empire and Commonwealth was on the decline, as the British government economized, consolidated, and reexamined its interests and objectives at home and abroad. Yet, narratives of British decline following the Second World War mask the ways in which British officials sought to maintain the Empire and Commonwealth. In spite of substantial postwar obligations, the government did not pursue a comprehensive decolonization policy. In fact, given the emerging threat from the Soviet Union, officials viewed the Empire and Commonwealth as more important than ever. The British government considered its colonial territories, formal relationships, and informal bonds around the world as critical to its postwar economic recovery and to

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upholding its great power position. With the granting of independence to India in 1947, London turned to the Middle East—the heart of vital sea and air communication lines, rich in oil, and strategically located along the Soviet Union’s southern border—as a critical region to the maintenance of the British Empire. In the Middle East, Britain’s strategic interests and external pressures combined, making it central to the government’s postwar strategy.

Britain dominated the Middle East from the British capture of Baghdad and Jerusalem in 1917 until the Suez Crisis in 1956. In the interwar years, the British developed substantial formal and informal influence over the political, economic, and military structures of the British Mandates in the Middle East, including Palestine, Iraq, and Transjordan, and they maintained a dominant position in Egypt and the Persian Gulf. During the Second World War, Britain intensified this Middle Eastern presence with

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intrusive economic controls, large numbers of British and Indian troops, and widened political influence. Wartime controls, however, amplified postwar unrest and fueled an aversion to a continued British presence. In the postwar period, the Cold War, the rise of the United States, the creation of the state of Israel, Arab nationalism, and Britain’s economic burdens and worldwide commitments limited London’s ability to sustain a dominant position in the Middle East. British policymakers, nevertheless, planned to reshape the region in ways that preserved their influence by replacing formal systems and alliances with informal mechanisms based upon mutual interest, which Middle Eastern peoples and international opinion would find more acceptable.

During the 1950s, as Anglo-Egyptian relations deteriorated, Britain turned to Iraq as an alternative foothold from which to maintain its position in the Middle East. In the early 1950s, terrorist assaults on British installations and personnel at the Suez base, the 1952 Egyptian Free Officers Coup, the rise to power of Gamal Abdel Nasser, and Egypt’s provocative brand of Arab nationalism challenged Britain’s reliance on a Suez-centered policy and made Iraq all the more important. By 1955, the formation of the Baghdad

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9 Ovendale, Transfer of Power, 84; Louis, British Empire in the Middle East, 22-23; Holland, Pursuit of Greatness, 266.
Pact and the insecurity of Britain’s position elsewhere in the region contributed to London’s turn towards Iraq as a vital center of its Middle East strategy.¹⁰

Connections forged since British forces first occupied Iraq during World War I allowed Britain to enjoy an overwhelming dominance in the country. From 1920 to 1932, the Kingdom of Iraq was erected under a British Mandate, and British advisors worked closely with Iraqi officials to forge Iraq’s constitution, governmental institutions, and laws.¹¹ Iraq secured its independence in 1932, but British political and military advisors remained entrenched within the Iraqi government and retained an enormous degree of influence. British connections to the Iraqi ruling elite and the royal family, the British Royal Air Force bases at Habbaniya and Shaiba, a well-developed network of personal connections, and close Anglo-Iraqi economic and cultural ties provided a foundation for Britain’s continued influence in Iraq following the Second World War.

Given the strategic importance of Iraq to Britain’s postwar position, this thesis evaluates Britain’s attempts to adapt its formal connections and advantages in Iraq to postwar realities by cultivating informal economic, cultural, and military influence from 1945 until the Iraqi Revolution in 1958. Assessing British efforts to maintain their influence in Iraq offers a lens through which to reevaluate and to better understand the complex process of British decline and how it exhibited itself in the Middle East. The thesis also examines the manifestations of the Anglo-American relationship in Iraq and challenges oversimplified narratives of British decline and American rise in the Middle East by analyzing the ebb and flow in the transfer of power in the postwar period.

In the decade after World War II, Britain retained its leading position in the Middle East, but required American economic support to ensure continued Western dominance of the region.\textsuperscript{12} The United States emerged from World War II as the leading Western power and took on new international responsibilities. Yet, American officials relied on Britain for its worldwide strategic connections and bases, and Britain’s position as a vital communication link between Europe and Britain’s Empire and Commonwealth.\textsuperscript{13} Initially, Washington reluctantly took on a role in the Middle East, but as the 1950s progressed, American officials recognized the region’s importance and it became the site of intense cooperation and conflict between the U.S. and Britain.\textsuperscript{14} As early as 1944, London and Washington expressed a desire for Anglo-American cooperation in the Middle East, particularly collaboration in the fields of defense and intelligence.\textsuperscript{15} Yet, Anglo-American tensions and rifts over the 1951 Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis, the Baghdad Pact in 1955, the 1956 Suez Crisis, and the Arab-Israeli dispute often overshadowed cooperation.\textsuperscript{16} Understanding the complicated nature of British decline


and American rise in the Middle East provides a more complete picture of Western influence in the region following the Second World War.

Historians, contemporary observers, and British officials have long debated the reasons for the British Empire’s decline, a debate which intensified as the deterioration of Britain’s position in the world accelerated. Decolonization following the Second World War prompted historians to seek to explain the roots of Britain’s imperial decay. Most arguments revolve around three categories, which link the decline of the British Empire to domestic interests, colonial-nationalist pressures, or international influences and criticism. Some historians root the dissolution of the British Empire in Britain itself, arguing a combination of economic burdens, lack of imperial nerve, and public indifference towards or ignorance of the Empire caused the decline. Others focus instead on international pressures stemming from the rising power of the United States and the Soviet Union, and from new attitudes and ideologies espoused by the United Nations and other international bodies. For others, Britain’s struggle with a rising tide of Afro-Asian nationalisms contributed most significantly to Britain’s fall. Certainly, a combination of these three factors impacted Britain’s decline after 1945, which occurred

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The traumatic experience and effects of the Second World War significantly impacted the end of the British Empire. Historian John Darwin argues the war brought about both reintegration within the British Empire and Commonwealth and ignited forces that contributed to its ultimate decline. World War II forced Britain to take up intrusive policies that sharpened discontent and anti-colonialism, including the restriction of civil rights, the increased presence of British military forces, and the commandeering of imperial economies for the war effort, which increased prices and taxes.\footnote{21 Darwin, *End of the British Empire*, 118-119.} A transformed postwar international political climate and burdensome wartime debts challenged Britain’s postwar position in the world and led to both consolidation and renewal within the Empire. Yet, historian John Gallagher asserts that the British world system was perilously fragile and already showing signs of decay long before 1939, and that “whatever caused the end of empire, it was not the Second World War.”\footnote{22 Gallagher, *Decline, Revival, and Fall*, 73, 141.} Whether it prompted the end of the British Empire or not, the Second World War brought about considerable changes in the British world system and marked a decisive turning point in the Britain’s imperial history.

In the postwar period, London committed to decolonization in some parts of the Empire, but the course of Britain’s withdrawal was variable and deceptive.

Decolonization was part of an ongoing process to adapt to the new world order after
1945, a process characterized by “remissions and revivals” as worldwide events altered the calculus of empire. After the Second World War, the formal empire—Britain’s colonies, dominions, protectorates, and other directly administered territories—decreased in desirability within an international arena attuned to equality among nations and shaped by the United Nations and anti-colonialism. Changes in the international political climate paired with the emergence of the Cold War made it both possible and advisable to look for alternative ways to protect and promote British interests. Decolonization was subtle, intricate, and misleading, as “external alterations concealed inner continuities,” and masked London’s pursuit of informal means to sustain British influence. Consistent with Britain’s imperial tradition, London had long preferred informal influence to formal empire. As John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson assert in their transformative article on the subject, “It is only when and where informal political means failed to provide the framework of security for British enterprise (whether commercial, or philanthropic or simply strategic) that the question of establishing formal empire arose.” Informal linkages provided Britain with sizeable advantages without the economic burdens and political unrest incurred in the pursuit of more formal forms of empire.

After 1945, a pattern of official thinking on empire continued to shape Britain’s formal and informal imperial commitments. In the 1960s, Robinson and Gallagher developed the concept of the “official mind” to describe official British thinking in the

late nineteenth century and to provide a better understanding of British “imperialism” and thoughts on empire. Robinson and Gallagher proposed that official policymaking was “a flow of deliberation and argument” involving “a reading of the long-run national interest which stayed much the same from ministry to ministry, regardless of the ideological stock in trade of the Party in power.”\(^\text{28}\) The reliance on a “complex political arithmetic” continued throughout the twentieth century, and a policy of pragmatism imbued Britain’s official mind in both defense and political issues.\(^\text{29}\) Historian Robert Holland argues after the Second World War that a vein of realistic adjustment “ran increasingly close to the surface of British official thinking, since although the United Kingdom could no longer hold down sub-continents, she was—and intended to remain—quite capable of retaining critical stations on the compass of world affairs.”\(^\text{30}\) After the Second World War, the official mind clung to notions of the continuation of Britain’s informal empire in the Middle East to help secure Britain’s strategic position around the world.

The British Empire was one of complex and staggering contrasts, with multiple levels of imperial involvement and informal influence, and an extensive variety of colonial administration, which contributed to an uneven process of decolonization.\(^\text{31}\) John Darwin emphasizes the importance of recognizing that “it is not only difficult to say exactly when empire did end, but what precisely that empire was.”\(^\text{32}\) More than just

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\(^\text{32}\) Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation*, 3.
economic and political authority, the British Empire consisted of various cultural and institutional influences, including in art, literature, law, and religion. The British Empire was a “constitutional hotch-potch of independent, semi-independent and dependent countries, held together not by formal allegiance to a mother-country, but by economic, strategic, political or cultural links that varied greatly in strength and character.” The “ramshackle appearance” of the British imperial system reflected the British instinct to keep colonial authority flexible, work with local customs and societal traditions, and rely upon indirect methods where possible. As a result of the bewildering diversity within Britain’s formal and informal empire, decline and transition within the Empire occurred in an uneven and intricate manner.

A penchant for informal influence, paired with a pattern of official thinking, shaped Britain’s desire and approach to maintaining its influence in the Middle East after 1945. In light of Cold War concerns and domestic economic burdens, London viewed the Middle East as central to its postwar position, and viewed Iraq as increasingly vital to the British position in the Middle East. Many studies address the British administration of the Iraqi Mandate, the period of independence from 1932 to 1941, and the 1958 revolution, but the period following the Rashid Ali Coup in 1941 until the revolution in 1958 has received much less attention, especially regarding Britain’s continuing influence in Iraq. Adeed Dawisha, Majid Khadduri, Michael Eppel, Stephen Longrigg and Frank Stoakes provide exceptional studies of the political and constitutional history of Iraq during the 1950s, but within studies that cover a wide swath of Iraqi history, resulting in a lack of

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detail. General histories of Iraq by Charles Tripp and Phebe Marr cover even broader time periods, offering only a brief overview of the post-World War II period.

Transformations within Iraq’s social, political, and economic structures made the country an exceptional arena for Britain to pursue new forms of informal influence. Following the Second World War, a vibrant and volatile domestic climate emerged within Iraq, as education and literacy levels rose, cultural movements flourished, political participation expanded, and the Iraqi government experimented with political and economic liberalization. In December 1945, in response to pressure for liberalization from Iraqi and British officials and the Iraqi people, the King’s Regent—‘Abd al-Ilah—called for economic and social reforms, the formation of political parties, and free elections. In 1946, the Iraqi government followed through on these reforms by expanding political participation, which resulted in 1946 to 1954 being one of the most participatory periods in twentieth century Iraqi politics. Periods of openness were often followed, however, by periods of repression, as the opinions of political opponents frightened Iraqi elites and prompted arrests, dismissals, and leadership changes.

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38 Dawisha, *Iraq*, 103.

historians acknowledge that the Iraqi government attempted to liberalize and reform.40 But, others view Iraqi efforts to broaden political participation and encourage economic development as half-hearted at best.41 Regardless of the reforms’ success, these attempts made the postwar period a formative one for the Iraqi state, and amplified Britain’s desire to shape and add to Iraq’s increasing educational opportunities, cultural movements, and political and economic development.

Economic influence provided one mechanism through which British officials, firms, and experts maintained and expanded Britain’s influence in Iraq. The economic history of Iraq during the 1950s has received considerable attention because of the creation of the Iraqi Development Board, a unique institution in the Arab world at the time. Kathleen Langley, Fahim Qubain, and Edith and E.F. Penrose demonstrate extensive progress in economic development and industrialization in Iraq during the 1950s.42 A number of foreign expert and government-sponsored reports also detail the successes and shortcomings of the board and Iraqi economic growth.43 Yet, the accounts fail to significantly depict the British role in Iraqi development. Chapter one seeks to address this deficiency by examining how Britain used economic influence as an informal mechanism to adapt its connections to the Iraqi economy and government into continued

41 Silverfarb, Twilight of British Ascendency, 89, 92; Eppel, Iraq from Monarchy to Tyranny; Marr, Modern History of Iraq.
42 Kathleen Langley, The Industrialization of Iraq (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1961); Qubain, Reconstruction of Iraq; Penrose and Penrose, Iraq.
advantages during the postwar period. British officials, experts, and firms maintained their influence through a number of initiatives, including the pursuit of closer Anglo-Iraqi economic cooperation, by gaining Iraq’s full membership in the sterling area, by serving as experts and advisors in the Iraqi government and on the Development Board, by securing business and development contracts, and by shaping Iraq’s oil development.

Cultural influence provided another method through which Britain could sustain its position in Iraq. Some work has been done on British propaganda in the Middle East following the Second World War, but it only scratches the topic’s surface. Britain’s public and cultural diplomacy efforts in Iraq receive little attention among the studies that detail Britain’s diplomacy during the period from 1945 to 1958. Chapter two describes how Britain utilized public diplomacy, increased educational and cultural links, and domination of foreign news sources and radio broadcasting in Iraq as a path through which to adapt Britain’s advantages into more acceptable forms, which could contribute to liberalization in Iraq and outlast Britain’s formal political and military connections. British influence upon Iraq’s news, educational opportunities, and cultural movements was subtle, camouflaged, and pervasive, providing a critical mechanism for a continued British presence in the country.

Military connections and influence offered another means for the British government to preserve their strategic position in Iraq, to protect vital oil interests in the Persian Gulf, and to prevent Soviet penetration of the Middle East. A number of studies

analyze British defense policies in the Middle East following the Second World War. However, few detail the continued importance and influence of British military forces in shaping the Iraqi armed forces, other than through the lens of the development of the Baghdad Pact. Chapter three illustrates how the Anglo-Iraqi military connection helped Britain maintain a strategic foothold in Iraq at a time when London faced uncertainty and upheaval in its position elsewhere in the Middle East.

While the thesis remains focused on Iraq, regional crises and events in the Middle East had an enormous impact on Britain’s position in the country and on the Iraqi state. British interactions with Iraq did not exist within a vacuum; international, regional, and domestic pressures collided in Iraq, fueling old challenges and creating new complications. In January 1948, the signing of a new Anglo-Iraqi Treaty at Portsmouth incited large demonstrations in Baghdad and throughout the major cities of Iraq, contributing to the treaty’s failure. The large and widespread uprising—called Al-Wathba, or “the Leap”—which built upon unrest over the situation in Palestine and displayed a heightened level of Iraqi political activity that came to characterize the decade until the 1958 revolution. The riots, however, paled in comparison to the resentment and anger incurred against Britain following the war in Palestine and the creation of the state of Israel. Many historians emphasize the crisis in Palestine as the

episode that cost Britain Arab friendship and goodwill, and substantially contributed to a
decline in British influence across the Middle East. According to journalist and scholar
Elizabeth Monroe, measured by British interests alone, the promise of a Jewish national
home in Palestine “was one of the greatest mistakes in our [British] imperial history.” The
situation in Palestine foiled British desires to maintain Arab friendship, and fueled
the rise of a population of angry, disillusioned Arab youth who disdained the presence of
a Zionist Israel and the complacency and aid provided to it by the West. The creation of
Israel and rising Iraqi hatred of Zionism added to already tense Arab-Jewish relations in
Iraq, and between 1948 and 1951, 120,000 Iraqi Jews were airlifted to Israel, ending the
most ancient community of the Jewish Diaspora.

After 1945, the maturation of Arab nationalism and its movement from the
intellectual periphery into the cultural and political center of Arab politics challenged
British power and exacerbated unrest in the Middle East. The Palestine War in 1948
catalyzed the Arab world and fed rising nationalist sentiment. During the 1950s,

51 Monroe, Britain’s Moment in the Middle East, 43.
52 Hyam, Britain’s Declining Empire, 123; Ovendale, Transfer of Power, 77.
54 Ovendale, Transfer of Power, 84; Louis, British Empire in the Middle East, 24; James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni, eds., Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 3-4.
Egyptian leader Gamal Nasser embodied and nourished the spread of Arab nationalism across the Middle East, with his charismatic persona and effective public messages. Iraqi-Egyptian rivalry intensified as Nasser’s impact on Iraqi public opinion escalated.\(^5^6\) James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni argue that in the 1950s and 1960s Arab unity seemed a realistic possibility, and therefore, Arab nationalism took on a unitary and hegemonic nature, which lasted until the rise of local, regional, and communal variants of Arab nationalism in the 1970s.\(^5^7\)

Regional events with international implications and impacts, including the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company nationalization crisis in 1951 and the Suez Crisis in 1956, had a pervasive destabilizing influence on British policy in the Middle East. The Anglo-Iranian oil crisis in 1951 highlighted Britain’s inability to secure its position in the Middle East in the same overt ways it had in the past, and contributed to divisions in the Anglo-American relationship.\(^5^8\) The 1956 Suez Crisis in particular has received thorough attention from historians, as the signal of the end of British preeminence in the Middle East.\(^5^9\) International pressures and regional crises stirred turmoil in the Middle East, while the Cold War and Britain’s postwar economic needs made preserving British influence in Iraq and throughout the region all the more important. Nonetheless, during the 1950s, Britain managed to adapt its relationships and ties in Iraq to postwar realities.

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\(^{5^6}\) Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism*, 135-147.

\(^{5^7}\) Jankowski and Gershoni, *Rethinking Nationalism*, xv.


by pursing informal economic, cultural, and military influence in the country, and in so doing, remained the dominant Western power in Iraq until 1958.
CHAPTER 1: “A RACE AGAINST TIME”:

BRITISH ECONOMIC INFLUENCE IN IRAQ¹

By 1945, Britain had fought and survived a devastating world war, but Britain’s wartime debts and postwar economic burdens loomed large as London confronted a domestic environment eager for postwar recovery. Simultaneously, British officials had to adapt imperial policy in the British Empire and Commonwealth to fit new colonial-nationalist demands and international attitudes attuned to self-determination and anti-colonialism. London also adjusted to changes in the international arena, including re-coupling with Europe, the rise of the United States as the dominant Western power, and a burgeoning threat from the Soviet Union. The immediate postwar years witnessed the end of British rule in India, Burma, and Ceylon as officials realized the necessity of cutting back Britain’s worldwide commitments, leading to a shift in focus towards the Middle East and Africa as a new decade took shape. British officials enlisted new tactics and strategies to adjust to a postwar world, but in practice, the new methods often maintained continuities with the past. After 1945, Britain strove to retain its great power status despite declining means with which to do so.

In August 1949, the Foreign Secretary of the Labour government, Ernest Bevin, wrote the Middle East was an area of “cardinal importance… second only to the United Kingdom itself.”² Poised between the emerging superpowers and rich in oil, the Middle

² Quoted by Nicholas Owen, “Britain and Decolonization: The Labour governments and the Middle East, 1945-51,” in Michael Cohen and Martin Kolinsky, Demise of the British Empire in the Middle East: Britain’s Responses to Nationalist Movements, 5.
East played a central role in Britain’s postwar strategy and pursuit of power.\(^3\) The Middle East was a crossroads for imperial communications to the Far East, British air bases in Iraq lay within striking distance of southern regions of the Soviet Union, and Britain’s military base at the Suez Canal Zone in Egypt provided unrivalled military installations at a vital node of world-shipping.\(^4\) In the decade after 1945, British officials drew upon their unrivalled experience and connections in the Middle East to uphold their dominant position in the region.\(^5\)

During the early to mid 1950s, wavering Anglo-Egyptian relations, the rise to power of Gamal Abdel Nasser, and intensifying Arab nationalism led Britain to question the continued reliance upon Egypt as the center of its strategy in the Middle East.\(^6\) In the early 1950s, British officials began to turn towards Jordan and Iraq, their closest allies in the Middle East, as alternatives to an Egypt-focused strategy.\(^7\) Throughout the decade, as Britain sought to adapt its informal empire to fit postwar realities, Iraq served as a central arena in Britain’s attempt to sustain its advantages in a region increasingly resistant to British influence. This chapter describes how Britain maintained its predominant position in Iraq during the 1950s through formal and informal economic influence. Following the

\(^3\) Cohen and Kolinsky, *Demise of the British Empire in the Middle East*, 24; John Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation*, 144-145; Louis, *British Empire in the Middle East*, 4-5.


Second World War, London pursued closer Anglo-Iraqi economic cooperation and strengthened Anglo-Iraqi economic ties by securing Iraq’s full membership in the sterling area. British officials and experts served on the newly created Iraqi Development Board and continued to hold positions throughout the Iraqi government and its institutions. British firms secured new development contracts and maintained old business relationships built up in Iraq since the British occupation of Iraq during World War I. Based in London and run by a British operating company in Iraq, the British held the dominant position in the Iraq Petroleum Company and made substantial contributions to Iraqi oil development. Economic influence served as an informal mechanism through which the British could maintain their advantages into the postwar period by adapting their relationships and connections into more acceptable forms.

**Britain’s Postwar Politics and Economy**

In July 1945, Prime Minister Clement Attlee and the newly elected Labour government took office, facing enormous economic, domestic, and international burdens. The Labour government brought sweeping changes to the nation’s socio-economic structures, including reforms in education, health, welfare, and in British industry. Seeking to reconcile the twin goals of welfare and continued greatness, London prioritized domestic reforms, but the Labour government maintained postwar occupation duties in Europe, Africa, and Asia, and confronted nationalism and insurgency within the British Empire. Attlee sought to reevaluate Britain’s imperial commitments and withdraw from the Middle East and the Mediterranean, but Bevin, the Chiefs of Staff, and other British officials vehemently objected to a jettisoning of Britain’s informal

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empire in the Middle East. Traditionalists won out, and Labour’s imperial policy retained a remarkable degree of continuity with the past in recognizing a national interest—in the maintenance of Britain’s worldwide position—that transcended the domestic political battle and international demands. As one historian emphasizes, the Labour government “in fact played the game very much within the old rules, bounded by the limits of a very broad agreement which interested and ‘moderate’ sections of both parties had established in wartime.”

In rethinking British policy towards the Empire and Commonwealth, the Labour government sought to give concessions where necessary, while keeping the initiative ahead of rising nationalism and other disruptive forces by transforming formal alliances into informal partnerships. Labour sought to support and to mold moderate nationalisms into forms that British policymakers could accommodate and which would allow for a continued British presence. Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin became the driving force behind this policy, promoting the preservation of empire through “mutual interdependence,” which would encourage understanding, economic development, and social reform with the hope of building trust and support among a new generation of leaders within the Empire and Commonwealth.

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9 Silverfarb, *Twilight of British Ascendancy*, 78-79; Dockrill, *Britain’s Retreat from East of Suez*, 1-10; Hyam, *Britain’s Declining Empire*, 96-98.
13 Hyam, *Britain’s Declining Empire*, 94-98, 162-166; Dockrill, *Britain’s Retreat from East of Suez*, 14-15; Louis, *British Empire in the Middle East*, 47, 737; Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation*, 137; Owen,
and the threat of Soviet expansion in mind, in January 1947, Bevin wrote to Attlee, “My whole aim has been to develop the Middle East as a producing area to help our own economy and take the place of India.” Bevin dreamed that the Middle East, paired with African mineral resources, would allow Britain to preserve its paramount position in the postwar world.

After 1945, Britain’s pursuit of a “world role” held a tenacious longevity. Attlee’s government and the Conservative governments of the 1950s espoused alternative policies on empire, but in practice the difference was less marked. Facing financial weakness, increasing nationalism, and international criticism, the Churchill government continued a pragmatic approach towards empire, making compromises where necessary with the goal of gradual change. Both the Churchill and Eden governments sought to scale down overseas commitments in order to reduce government expenditures, but questioned unnecessary withdrawal that could cause a loss of prestige and, in turn, a loss of power. Like the Labour government before them, Conservative ministers thought the stability of the sterling and Britain’s international standing were interlinked, and dependent on the informal empire. The reliance upon permanent staff in Whitehall

15 Cohen, “The Strategic Role of the Middle East,” in Cohen and Kolinsky, Demise of the British Empire in the Middle East, 24; Gallagher, Decline, Revival, and Fall, 144; Edward Ingram, “Pairing off Empires: The United States as Great Britain in the Middle East,” in Controlling the Uncontrollable? The Great Powers in the Middle East, ed. Tore T. Petersen (Trondheim, Norway: Rostra Books, 2006), 3-5.
16 Holland, Pursuit of Greatness, 2.
17 Hyam, Britain’s Declining Empire, 168-171; Elliot, Independent Iraq, 139; Heinlein, Scrutinising the Official Mind, 87, 99; Holland, Pursuit of Greatness, 266.
18 Heinlein, Scrutinising the Official Mind, 87.
contributed to the coherence in British policies and continuities in imperial
management. Postwar needs and the shadow of declining economic, military, and
political power strengthened the British desire to maintain the Empire and
Commonwealth and stimulated a pattern of great power activity that persisted into the
1960s.

Britain emerged from World War II with an extensive empire and world system,
but its postwar survival depended upon U.S. economic assistance. During the war,
Britain accumulated approximately £3 billion in foreign debts, while exports fell in both
value and quantity. In December 1945, after months of negotiations in Washington,
Britain secured a loan of $3.75 billion, plus the conversion to credit of $650 million, as a
final Lend-Lease settlement. British officials also negotiated a loan from Canada of $1.25
billion, bringing the total North American borrowing to the figure of $5 billion.
Washington recognized the vital importance of supporting Britain’s postwar position as a
result of the emerging Cold War, the need for access to Britain’s staging posts and
military bases worldwide, and the need for political support from the British Empire and
Commonwealth. Britain served as a vital link between Europe, the U.S., and the British
Empire, and American policymakers looked to London to lead an integrated Western

19 Louis, British Empire in the Middle East, 113.
20 Heinlein, Scrutinising the Official Mind, 88; Darwin, Britain and Decolonisation, 125; Galpern, Money,
Oil, and Empire, 3.
Judith M. Brown and Wm. Roger Louis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 331; Darwin, Britain
and Decolonisation, 60; Strange, Sterling and British Policy, 61; Ovendale, Transfer of Power, 247; Louis,
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22 Darwin, Britain and Decolonisation, 66; Frank Brenchley, Britain and the Middle East: An Economic
History 1945-87 (London: Lester Crook Academic Publishing, 1989), 5; Scott Newton, “Britain, the
Sterling Area and European Integration, 1945-50,” in Money, Finance, and Empire 1790-1960, eds. A.N.
23 Darwin, Britain and Decolonisation, 135; Dockrill, Britain’s Retreat from East of Suez, 11; Louis,
British Empire in the Middle East, 112.
Europe, safeguard the Middle East, and be a principal partner in strategic defense planning and intelligence cooperation. Despite differing priorities and national interests, Britain’s wide range of connections uniquely placed it as a key U.S. ally. Historian C.J. Bartlett emphasizes, “a mix of weaknesses, usefulness, and potential therefore supplied the British with bargaining power.”

Wartime policies and postwar economic conditions had the effect of focusing London’s attention on the Empire and Commonwealth in general, and the Middle East in particular, as critical to Britain’s survival and recovery. As a result of wartime expediencies and increased imperial and colonial cooperation, “notions of the empire as a privileged economic space were strengthened, with the sterling area and imperial preference seen as underpinning close economic links.” The sterling area had provided a mechanism through which to fight the war, while economizing on dollar spending. The British were able to rely on “sterling balances” in countries within the Empire as a means of securing wartime goods. By the end of the war, Britain’s sterling balances in total were equivalent to seven times the value of its gold and dollar reserves. In 1945, some Middle Eastern countries found themselves in possession of sizable sterling balances;

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Egypt held the most with £390 million, then Palestine with £120 million, and Iraq with £70 million.29

The two decades following 1945 witnessed the peak of the imperial economy as it had been constructed after 1931.30 Britain sought to bolster economic union as a result of the need to find and exploit sources of food and raw materials that did not require payment in dollars, and encouraged the production of commodities that could be sold for dollars to help pay for essential imports to the sterling area as a whole.31 In 1948, the Empire provided 45 percent of British imports, which rose to 48.3 percent by 1954; in those years the Empire also took nearly half of British exports. These imports, paid for in sterling, saved Britain hard currency, especially dollars, crucial to Britain’s economic recovery.32 The decade following 1945 also witnessed the roots of the sterling’s decline; the convertibility crisis of 1947, devaluation in 1949, and the balance of payments crisis in 1951 underscored the vulnerability of Britain and the sterling area to global trends and U.S. economic policies.33

Fears of catastrophe after the 1947 crisis, however, resulted in much closer economic integration within the sterling area. Various post crisis measures tied independent members of the sterling area more closely than before the Second World

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29 Brenchley, *Britain and the Middle East*, 16-17.
War to a common trade policy, limited their rights over credit, and obliged them to purchase a larger proportion of imports from Britain than they had done in 1938. Historian John Darwin emphasizes, “At a time when their survival as a trading state had seemed in doubt, the British had drawn upon the stores of financial and economic influence built up in the great age of expansion before 1929 and had successfully reoriented their trade to escape the disaster that had loomed in 1947.”

Postwar economic challenges reinforced the importance of the Empire and Commonwealth, and contributed to the pursuit of continued British influence, where possible. The Middle East—with its oil and its vital position along world shipping and air communications lines—was seen as critical to Britain’s postwar recovery and lasting great power position.

**Britain’s Postwar Position in Iraq**

On 9 January 1945, Sir Kinahan Cornwallis, the British Ambassador to Iraq since 1941, wrote in one of his final dispatches from the country that “it is probable that amongst Iraqis as a whole a more genuine desire exists than at any time in the past to strengthen the bonds of friendship and co-operation between the two nations.”

Ambassador Cornwallis wrote of the excellent conditions of Anglo-Iraqi relations and “the undoubted opportunities which exist for British business enterprise.” He urged the Foreign Office to scoop up the major business contracts available, to provide first-rate British officials to the Iraqi Government, and to assist in schemes of public health.

Cornwallis’s pleas for the continuation of British influence in Iraq corresponded with the

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policies of the new Labour government and with traditional British aims and informal ties to the region. With increasing uncertainty regarding Britain’s position in Egypt, as early as 1947, the Foreign Office envisioned Iraq as a keystone of their position in the Middle East and as an alternative to a Suez-centered strategy.\(^{37}\)

The Second World War, however, left Iraq in an unsettled postwar state with economic hardships, shortages of goods, inflation of prices, wartime dislocation, and the effects of British and Indian troop withdrawals contributing to popular unrest.\(^{38}\) During the early to mid 1940s, Iraq moved from one economic crisis to another as rivalries within the Iraqi government prevented the successful administration of the state, which further inflamed popular hostility.\(^{39}\) While Cornwallis recognized goodwill among some Iraqis, other British officials noted growing discontent and anti-British feeling among the Iraqi population, especially among the “under-privileged, under-paid, and half-educated.”\(^{40}\) By 1947, all of the Indian troops and most of the British troops had left Iraq, weakening Britain’s military control over the country and forcing British officials to turn to alternative measures, including economic development, to sustain Britain’s position.\(^{41}\) While Britain redefined its influence in the late 1940s and early 1950s, it continued to exercise substantial control at several levels of the Iraqi government.\(^{42}\) In 1945, Britain remained Iraq’s primary Western ally, chief economic supplier and customer, and primary foreign relationship. Stephen Longrigg, a British official who served in the Iraqi

\(37\) Silverfarb, *Twilight of British Ascendancy*, 123.


\(41\) Silverfarb, *Twilight of British Ascendancy*, 76-79.

\(42\) Elliot, *Independent Iraq*, 138.
government from 1918 to 1931 and then as a senior executive in the Iraq Petroleum Company from 1931 to 1951, and Frank Stoakes, who served as Director of Middle Eastern Studies at St. Antony’s College, Oxford, emphasized that “after the Second War the independence of India did not lessen Great Britain’s interest in Iraq. Communications had still to be maintained, Middle Eastern oil was every year of greater importance, and Russia, the traditional bogy of her Middle East policy, had reappeared with grimmer menace.”

In the late 1940s, the Attlee government, and more particularly Ernest Bevin, sought to advance Britain’s partnerships in the Middle East into the postwar era by encouraging economic modernization, which would raise standards of living and demonstrate Britain’s support of “peasants, not pashas.” Many British officials adopted an ambitious and optimistic postwar attitude towards the ability to accelerate the pace of economic development and replicate the experience of “the West” in “the East.” In 1945, the British were the first to launch a development program in the Middle East, based on the belief that economic and technical assistance could alleviate poverty and disease, help stop the spread of communism, and provide a mechanism for continued British influence. London aimed at winning the support of political elites, particularly the younger more progressive ones who, “given their increasingly radical, nationalistic, and anti-western tone after the Second World War, posed serious dangers to the old imperial

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order.” With limited British resources and constrained budgets, British officials on the ground in the Middle East focused on local sources of capital and manpower, which led to a more sensitive approach to local conditions and realities.

After World War II, regional and international pressures, including worsening crisis in Palestine, uncertain Anglo-Egyptian relations, and the emerging Cold War, added renewed urgency to reforming the Iraqi state into one which could help bring stability and Western ideals to the region. In Iraq, as in other areas within the British Empire, Britain faced the serious dilemma of being aligned with the ruling elite, or the “old gang,” while simultaneously sympathizing with reformers. Historian Wm. Roger Louis asserts, “On the one hand the British favoured reforms; on the other they wished to retain the friendship of those ruling Iraq.” British officials urged the Iraqi government to pursue measures of liberalization and to implement economic and social reforms to avert revolutionary upheaval. During the 1950s, Iraq, with the help of British and other foreign resources, made extensive progress in economic development and industrialization despite the obstacles to improvement, which included administrative defects, lack of political commitment, and poor implementation. Although the Iraqi government failed to secure political stability, economic development was a central feature of Iraq during the 1950s and a critical mechanism through which Britain maintained its influence.

46 Kingston, Britain and the Politics of Modernization, 1-3.
47 Kingston, Britain and the Politics of Modernization, 12, 28.
48 Louis, British Empire in the Middle East, 317.
50 Kathleen Langley, Industrialization of Iraq; Fahim Qubain, Reconstruction of Iraq; Penrose and Penrose, Iraq.
The Sterling Area, British officials, and British Businesses

Britain’s preeminent position in Iraq’s economy since the formation of the Iraqi state meant that even as the British position diminished during the 1950s, London retained a dominant role in Iraq’s trade, finance, oil industry, and economy at large. In 1915, British occupation forces in Iraq introduced Indian currency, which was utilized until its replacement by Britain’s currency, the pound sterling, in 1932. Thereafter, the Iraqi currency—the Iraqi dinar—was based on and equal in value to the pound. Prior to 1945, Iraq was unique among sterling area countries in the maintenance of its own U.S. dollar pool, but Iraq’s postwar dollar needs were set to outpace its dollar imports. During the Second World War, Iraq accumulated dollars through exports to the U.S., from a fee on the passage of Turkish goods through Iraq, and from the expenditures of American military personnel in the country. By 1944, however, the reserve rapidly declined with the Mediterranean reopened to shipping and with fewer American military personnel stationed in Iraq. Also, with British industry devoted almost exclusively to military production, Iraq had to secure consumer goods elsewhere.

In March 1944, Iraq had a reserve of nine million dollars, which decreased to six million dollars by the end of the year. In December 1944, Britain offered to assist Iraq and provide for its dollar needs, on the condition that Iraq become a full member of the sterling area. In 1945, in return for Iraq’s full integration into the sterling area, British officials offered Iraq thirteen million dollars, of which six million would come from Iraq’s former dollar pool, four million from Iraq’s anticipated dollar earnings, and three

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51 Penrose and Penrose, *Iraq*, 149.
52 Longrigg and Stoakes, *Iraq*, 137.
53 Silverfarb, *Twilight of British Ascendancy*, 112.
million from the central sterling area pool.\textsuperscript{54} In May 1945, the British and Iraqi
governments finalized a new financial agreement integrating Iraq fully into the sterling
area, and requiring that Iraq turn its dollars and non-sterling area currencies over to the
central pool. In return, Britain would provide Iraq with its scarce currency needs,
including increased dollar allotments.\textsuperscript{55} Iraq surrendered a significant measure of its
financial sovereignty to Britain in its full integration into the sterling area.

Anglo-Iraqi economic agreements weathered the challenges of the early postwar
years, during which Iraq desired more dollars than Britain could provide. In the early
1950s, London worked diligently to maintain Iraq’s membership in the sterling area.
British officials often traveled to Baghdad to make agreements on scarce currency
allotment to cover Iraq’s essential imports and other payments.\textsuperscript{56} In July 1952, the British
and Iraqi governments agreed to maintain the financial relationship between the United
Kingdom and Iraq on the basis of common membership in the sterling area “until further
notice.”\textsuperscript{57} In securing Iraq’s adherence to an open-ended economic partnership, Britain
retained significant financial control over the country, which enhanced Britain’s ability to
keep Iraq within its sphere of influence.

As the decade progressed, British government officials and British firms
cultivated other relationships with the Iraqi government and business community. During
the summer of 1953, the Anglo-Iraqi Economic Committee met for the first time in

\textsuperscript{54} Silverfarb, \textit{Twilight of British Ascendancy}, 112.
\textsuperscript{55} Silverfarb, \textit{Twilight of British Ascendancy}, 111-115.
London. The following October and November, a British Treasury delegation and a British trade mission travelled to Baghdad to secure further economic cooperation and business contracts. The Anglo-Iraqi Economic Committee continued to meet in 1954 and 1955 to discuss financial and economic agreements. On 25 October 1954, King Feisal II welcomed the first British Trade Fair to Baghdad, which lasted two weeks and featured goods from over four hundred British firms. Housed in elegant pavilions on the bank of the Tigris, the fair built upon “long and cordial relations existing between Britain and Iraq” and demonstrated how Britain could assist in the development of Iraqi resources. The most popular attractions were televisions, the first seen in Baghdad, and an ice rink with free ice skating. Iraqi authorities also used the trade fair to organize their own pavilion to display progress in Iraqi industries and economic development. The British Ambassador to Iraq, Sir John Troutbeck, called the event a huge success.

A number of British officials served in the Iraqi government and preserved British influence in the administration of the Iraqi state. Throughout the early 1950s, the British Embassy reported that the number of British experts in the Iraqi government continued to increase. In 1951, Dr. K.G. Fenelon began working in the Iraqi Ministry of Economics as the government’s “Expert in Statistics.” Fenelon conducted numerous and

groundbreaking research and statistical enquiries into agriculture, industry, housing, distribution, services, and transport throughout Iraq. The surveys provide one of the main sources of data on the Iraqi state and its infrastructure in the 1950s. Prior to his work in the Iraqi government, Dr. Fenelon was the Director of Statistics in the British Ministry of Food from 1946 to 1950, and served in the Institution of Production Engineers and as Chief Research Officer of the British Engineers’ Association during the Second World War.\textsuperscript{65} During the 1950s, Iraqi government intervention into the economic sphere expanded, including the nationalization of the Iraqi Shipping Company, the Iraqi National Insurance Company, and the Iraqi Date Trading Company. Even with government intervention and nationalization, however, the Iraqi National Insurance Company retained a British manager.\textsuperscript{66} In addition, the termination of the last British Director-General of an Iraqi government department did not occur until May 1954, with the departure of the Director-General of Irrigation, F.S. Hardy.\textsuperscript{67}

With fewer British resources to draw from, British officials and advisors in the Middle East increasingly turned to local financial and human resources. London’s preoccupation with economizing its worldwide commitments meant British officials in Iraq often enjoyed a degree of autonomy, and adopted an adaptive style of operating, which maximized local participation, and emphasized the personal rather than the political. With a flexible and minimized approach, British development was less visible

to the general public, and less likely to stir unrest. British advisors were placed in Iraq’s legislative structure and development programs, and “less publicized advisors (sometimes ‘camouflaged’ to obscure their true role) on British salaries provided continuous assistance.” With their firm location in the Middle East and with a more adaptable nature, Britain could maintain a high quality of advising and understanding of local and regional conditions.

British firms sought contracts in a variety of economic sectors, including transportation and agriculture. In 1950, the Iraqi government hired the British firm Rendel, Palmer, and Tritton to provide guidance on the present and future conduct of the railways. The firm worked closely with the Iraqi Railway’s British Director-General. Founded in the early nineteenth century, the firm originated with James Meadows Rendel, a prominent civil engineer in the early to mid nineteenth century, who had four sons that also became prominent engineers in England and throughout the British Empire. Rendel, Palmer, and Tritton still exists today under the name High-Point Rendel, and maintains offices in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Hong Kong, Johannesburg, Kiev, London, and Singapore. In 1951, the British Overseas Airways Corporation, a precursor of British Airways, acquired the right to operate transit and terminating services between the United

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69 Elliot, *Independent Iraq*, 159.
Kingdom and Iraqi territory. BOAC was one of the only foreign airlines operating in Iraq during the 1950s. British firms with experience throughout the Empire took advantage of British connections in Iraq and secured important business contracts that prolong British influence.

British development of Iraqi infrastructure began in earnest during the First and Second World Wars. Wartime necessities resulted in British construction of basic infrastructure in Iraq that was nearly non-existent prior to their arrival, including roads, bridges, railways, irrigation, and port development. During World War I, the British military established railway lines from Baghdad to Basra and from Baghdad to the Persian frontier. During the Second World War and into the postwar period, development of Iraqi railways continued, and by the 1950s, the railways became the main arteries of Iraq’s communications and transportation of goods. In June 1950, British officials made the final arrangements for a loan of three million pounds from the British government to the Iraqi State Railways. The funds contributed to the development of railway extension lines to Kirkuk and Erbil, to link the north of Iraq with the south, and to serve the oil fields in Kirkuk and Khanaqin. Yet, the British Embassy in Baghdad reported, “The money was used mostly to pay off debts owed by the railways to British firms.” Hardly ironic, by 1950 Britain and Iraq had developed numerous and widespread linkages, which

75 Longrigg and Stoakes, Iraq, 133.
76 Langley, Industrialization of Iraq, 114-116.
resulted in British pounds destined for Iraq ending up in the hands of British firms. These are just a few of the firms the British Embassy in Baghdad reported had taken advantage of Iraqi development and business, and certainly not all British businesses reported their dealings in Iraq to the embassy.

British firms also remained active in the Iraqi agricultural sector. In Basra, the British played a central role in the date industry, which built on the long tradition of date cultivation in southern Iraq.\(^\text{78}\) During date season, the prospects for work attracted thousands of Iraqis from the countryside to Basra to take part in the picking, packing, and shipping of dates.\(^\text{79}\) The British firm Andrew Weir and Company held a monopoly on the export of dates from Iraq. In February 1950, the Iraqi Parliament renewed their contract for another three years, “much to the satisfaction of the majority of the Basra growers and packers.”\(^\text{80}\) Most Basrawis recognized that the present system guaranteed a steady price and market for dates, in place of the uncertainty that could prevail under competitive conditions.\(^\text{81}\) In July 1950, as the high demand for dates from wartime and the immediate postwar years subsided, many Basrawis expressed fury over Britain’s failure to purchase large quantities of dates.\(^\text{82}\) But, the British responded immediately, and by August 1950, the British purchased more dates, and those that could not be sent to England were sent to

India, the Gulf ports, Australia, and South Africa, as well as to the U.S.\textsuperscript{83} British provision of Iraqi dates to other countries within the sterling area, Commonwealth, and former British territories demonstrates the importance of Britain’s imperial connections, both past and present, and illustrates how British officials were able to act quickly when necessary.

During the early 1950s, decreasing date exports and disputes over the British monopoly fueled debates between date growers and date packers, and between the Iraqi Date Association and Andrew Weir and Co. The British Embassy relayed that while Basra merchants recognized the exceptional work and experience of Andrew Weir, “nobody ha[d] the courage to say so, chiefly because it [was] an Iraqi institution competing for favour (and ultimately for business) with the monopolists who [we]re a foreign firm.”\textsuperscript{84} British firms remained active in Iraq, but coped with increasing local criticism. Despite rancor with the National Date Association, Andrew Weir still took on the semi-official function of collecting taxes. The Iraqi government assigned the company the task of collecting the five percent export-tax on dates. The company only agreed “since there would have been general confusion and a stoppage of their exports had they firmly refused to agree to collection.”\textsuperscript{85} Andrew Weir and Co. reluctantly collected the tax, but in doing so, extended British business and its authority into the lives of many Basrawis in the date industry.

In the 1950s, the British remained the dominant force in the Iraqi economy, but they no longer went unchallenged. In 1951, the Basra Consulate reported the growth of German, Japanese, and American competition, both in imports to the country and in development contracts to foreign firms. British officials reported that the U.S., Germany, and France proved energetic competitors, winning big contracts “where our own firms have either not troubled to bid or have been outbidden.” In 1953, however, British exports to Iraq remained twice the value of those from the U.S., their closest competitor, and six times those of Germany. In his farewell address at the end of 1954, Ambassador Troutbeck noted the serious intrusion of foreign competitors into Iraq, but argued the British commercial community remained “by far the strongest and most solidly established.” In 1957, exports to Iraq from Britain stood at £34.4 million, the highest export level ever experienced in British goods to Iraq. Britain also still held twenty-nine percent of the market and remained Iraq’s main supplier, in spite of encroachments by the U.S. and West Germany.

During the early 1950s, the United States began to provide economic and technical aid to the Middle East as part of a worldwide promotion of economic development and modernization, and in doing so, became Britain’s main economic competitor in the region. Following World War II, and in light of the Cold War, Washington embraced the notion that the developing world could be radically

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transformed by technical aid and capital, and that economic growth would lead to political development, social stability, democratic governance, and absorption into the pro-Western camp. For Washington, the significance attached to economic development in Africa and Asia owed much to Cold War considerations, which placed the role of Afro-Asia as marginal and more potential than actual. On 5 June 1950, President Truman signed the Foreign Economic Assistance Act, which continued the European Recovery Program (commonly known as the Marshall Plan), provided aid to Far East and Palestinian refugees, and instituted the Technical Cooperation Administration (also called the Point Four Program). The cooperative Point Four Program was designed to work with indigenous countries to increase economic strength and social and political stability through development of natural resources, capital, health, agriculture, and education. In April 1951, the U.S. and Iraq signed a Point Four agreement in Baghdad, which approved American technical assistance to Iraq focused in the fields of engineering, irrigation, agriculture, vocational education, and general economic policy development.

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91 Darby, *Three Faces of Imperialism*, 211.


In 1952, Ambassador Troutbeck wrote of the American Point Four officials in Iraq that “due to their inexperience of Middle Eastern methods and a growing suspicion on the part of the Iraqis of Western technical assistance in general, the contribution which these experts made to the economic and social development of the country was limited.”

The Point Four program was ambitious and based on an American sense of the roots of prosperity, and did not account for the different circumstances of Asian and African societies. The more Point Four and the specialized agencies of the U.N. operated in the Middle East, “the more it became apparent that the mere addition of money and bodies into the technical assistance market was of debatable usefulness.”

Yet, by 1954, Troutbeck conceded, “The American member of the Development Board, backed by Point IV experts and a go-getting firm of consultants, showed such enterprise and activity that American influence is now predominant in the Board.”

The British community in Iraq, however, saw in Point Four “merely a design to capture markets.” Ambassador Troutbeck articulated a sense of bitterness and alarm within the local British community upon seeing “a horde of highly paid American experts sweeping into a country whose traditional ties are with ourselves and hears them denigrating all that Britain has done here.”

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96 Darby, Three Faces of Imperialism, 180; Kingston, Britain and the Politics of Modernization, 60-61.
97 Kingston, Britain and the Politics of Modernization, 58.
American aid in Iraq.\textsuperscript{101} Even with the Eisenhower Doctrine in 1957, British officials reported the “replacement of British by American influence, prophesied in many quarters, did not take place.”\textsuperscript{102}

\textit{Iraqi Oil}

During the Second World War, oil exploration and production in Iraq remained low, as a result of wartime restrictions, oil disputes, and the oil companies’ concerns regarding over production.\textsuperscript{103} After the war, however, rising worldwide demand contributed to increased oil exploration, development, and rapid expansion of pipeline capacity, which led to an explosion in crude oil production in Iraq from four million tons in 1949 to thirty million tons in 1954.\textsuperscript{104} Four companies dominated Iraq’s oil industry: the Iraq, Mosul, and Basra Petroleum Companies and the Khanaqin Oil Company. The Iraq, Mosul, and Basra Petroleum Companies fell under the umbrella of the Iraq Petroleum group, of which Royal-Dutch Shell (British-Dutch), the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (British), Compagnie Francaise des Petroles (French), and the Near East Development Company (American) held 23.75 percent each, and C.S. Gulbenkian (Armenian, British national) held the remaining five percent. The other concession, the Khanaqin Oil Company, was a subsidiary of AIOC. Khanaqin was located about one hundred miles northeast of Baghdad on the border between Iraq and Iran.\textsuperscript{105}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{104} Qubain, \textit{Reconstruction of Iraq}, 138.
\bibitem{105} Longrigg and Stoakes, \textit{Iraq}, 148; Qubain, \textit{Reconstruction of Iraq}, 130; Benjamin Shwadran, \textit{The Middle East, Oil and the Great Powers} (Jerusalem: Israel University Press, 1973), 238.
\end{thebibliography}
The British made a substantial contribution to oil development in Iraq through their dominant position in the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) and their role in oil infrastructure development. During 1952, the development of Iraqi oil infrastructure progressed alongside rising worldwide oil demands, and included the completion of an oil pipeline from Baiji, located about thirty miles north of Tikrit, to Banyas in Syria, and an oil pipeline from Ain Zalah, located about fifty miles northwest of Mosul, to Baiji.\textsuperscript{106} British firms gained contracts to supply piping in the construction of additional pipelines from Baiji to Baghdad, and from oilfields at Zubair, near Basra, to a loading depot at Fao along the Shatt al-Arab. Loading stations along the Shatt al-Arab permitted the export of oil by tanker through the Persian Gulf. British firms also secured contracts in engineering work, including a British firm that obtained a contract for the civil engineering work at a new Baghdad refinery in late 1952.\textsuperscript{107}

In an effort to improve relations between the Iraqi government and the IPC, the company appointed Sir Herbert Todd as their chief representative to Iraq. Todd served as a Second Lieutenant in the Mesopotamia Campaign during the First World War, followed by work in the Indian Political Service. Sir Todd was charged with coordinating public relations, labor, and commercial policies of the IPC and its associated companies.\textsuperscript{108} The IPC was an international company, but its headquarters were located in London, the operating company in Iraq was British, and most of the company’s non-Iraqi employees

were British. The oil industry in Iraq may have been financed and developed by British, American, French, and Dutch capital, but it was British in nationality and governed by British law.

The proximity of the Abadan oil refinery and the AIOC oilfields in southwestern Iran to Basra, located only thirty miles away, intensified the British desire to preserve their influence in Iraq and contributed to Iraqi economic development. During World War I, the British developed a port at Basra capable of accommodating large quantities of goods, which became one of Britain’s greatest contributions to the Iraqi state. Basra served as Iraq’s only functioning port and entry point capable of catering to world shipping and to Iraq’s vital imports and exports through the Persian Gulf. After World War II, traffic at the Basra port declined, but the continuous increase in oil tanker traffic compensated for the loss. By 1951, the Basra port handled five to six times more traffic for Abadan than it handled for Basra. In the spring of 1951, following the AIOC crisis and the closing of the Abadan refinery, gross tonnage using the port’s facilities dropped by about seventy-five percent. The port, however, benefited from increased traffic for Development Board programs, and rising Basra Petroleum Company (BPC) oil production.

The British-dominated Iraqi oil industry also pursued integration with local Iraqi economies. The BPC, an associate company of the IPC, only began exporting oil in 1951,

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110 Qubain, Reconstruction of Iraq, 159-160.
112 Langley, Industrialization of Iraq, 108.
but the company was called “the pioneer of integration in Iraq,” and was at the forefront of integration policy in the oil industry.\(^{114}\) The BPC promoted integration with the Basra community by employing locals and fostering local enterprise, including reliance upon local food production, transportation services, and printing markets.\(^{115}\) The company built homes for its employees and contractors, publicized local manufactured goods to other oil companies in the Persian Gulf, and supported the development of local trade fairs. During 1956, the BPC awarded forty-two contracts to local firms for construction work valued at nearly five hundred thousand dinars, and purchased nineteen thousand dinars worth of services from Basra furniture manufacturers, tailors, and carpenters. The company’s purchases, encouragement, and initiative stimulated the Basra economy and augmented the BPC’s prestige in Iraq.\(^{116}\)

The Iraq Petroleum Company also established an integration policy in Kirkuk, and facilitated local economic advancement.\(^{117}\) In 1952, the IPC launched a plan called the “Home Ownership Scheme,” which provided Iraqi employees with the opportunity to build their own home and pay for it out of deductions from their wages over an extended period of time. The IPC assisted in house design, financing, and legal formalities. The employee provided a ten percent down payment for the home. Then, the Eastern Bank, a British Bank in Kirkuk, advanced the remainder of the money needed for construction, with the loans guaranteed by the IPC.\(^{118}\)

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117 Shwadran, *Middle East, Oil and the Great Powers*, 262.
housing programs created steady business for Iraqi contractors. Stephen Longrigg and Frank Stoakes assert,

At a time when there were no modern industrial establishments outside the oilfields, the railways and the Port, these organisations set an example of good wages and working conditions on the one hand and of good workmanship on the other. Subsidised canteens, shopping facilities, medical treatment—the IPC hospital in Kirkuk is one of the best in the Middle East—sickness benefits, leave, end of service gratuities, transport to work, clubs, cinemas and sports grounds, housing estates and subsidised building societies, savings schemes, joint consultative practice, evening classes—all these were to have their influence when modern industry developed after the Second War and in its turn sought to promote health and satisfaction among its employees.119

The IPC and its subsidiary companies, which pursued integration with local communities, provided basic services and support to the Iraqi people. The companies took on semi-official functions in providing financing, healthcare, and education and in supporting local business and development. With British domination of the IPC, integration policy contributed to Britain’s lasting position in Iraq.

The Iraqi Development Board

From 1920 until 1950, Iraq’s political development received the most attention as a result of the need to strengthen the Iraqi government’s position in respect to the diverse ethnic and religious groups within the country. After 1950, however, increased oil revenues and the heightened political significance both Baghdad and London placed upon raising living standards made the shift to economic development possible and advisable.120 Iraq had excellent prospects for development, possessing the abundant land,

119 Longrigg and Stoakes, Iraq, 153.
120 Langley, Industrialization of Iraq, 12-13; Jalal, Role of Government in the Industrialization of Iraq, 127; Longrigg and Stoakes, Iraq, 112.
natural resources, and capital, in the form of oil revenues, necessary for progress.\textsuperscript{121} The Tigris and Euphrates rivers offered the water vital to the development of vast unused land area, and Iraq had a low population density in relation to its resources.\textsuperscript{122} In 1945, after Egypt, Iraq was both the most populous Arab country and the Middle Eastern country in which Britain had its largest economic investment.\textsuperscript{123} Iraq had some of the most promising prospects for development within the region after the Second World War, “endowed with the world’s second largest oil reserves, the most water of any country in the MENA [Middle East and North Africa] including Turkey, some of the richest alluvial soils, a strong British educational system, and a relatively large, skilled workforce.\textsuperscript{124}

Partly as a result of prodding from London and “after three years of urging” from the British Embassy in Iraq, in April 1950, the Iraqi government created the Development Board. The board was a novel institution in the Arab world designed to direct oil revenues towards economic development programs.\textsuperscript{125} The board consisted of six members, of which three had to be experts, including at least one British and one American expert. These members were appointed for five years, and could not be current Iraqi government officials. The Iraqi Prime Minister and Minister of Finance were ex-officio members and maintained liaison with the current government. The board was charged with the formulation and implementation of financial plans and investment

\textsuperscript{121} Qubain, \textit{Reconstruction of Iraq}, 254; Penrose and Penrose, \textit{Iraq}, 137; Shwadran, \textit{Middle East, Oil and the Great Powers}, 253-254.
\textsuperscript{122} Qubain, \textit{Reconstruction of Iraq}, 254; Penrose and Penrose, \textit{Iraq}, 137.
\textsuperscript{123} Brenchley, \textit{Britain and the Middle East}, 103.
programs for developing Iraq’s resources and raising the standard of living. Most importantly, the Development Board had an autonomous status, with its staff employed independently of the normal civil service and its operating budget existing outside the realm of the current government in control of Iraq. In early 1953, popular riots over political maneuvering in the Iraqi government during November 1952 led the government to transfer the board’s administrative machinery to the newly created Ministry of Development. This move jeopardized the board’s effectiveness by placing its administration at the mercy of a ministry connected directly to the current Iraqi government in power. Despite this “untidy arrangement,” as Ambassador Troutbeck called it, the Board and Ministry worked well together (momentarily) and development programs moved forward. With urgent calls for liberalization and reform continuing throughout the 1950s, the success of the board became “a race between reform and revolution.”

Britain secured two critical positions on the Development Board: one to a British financial expert and another British official served as secretary-general. The British role in the board is often downplayed in works on economic development in Iraq. To concede that the British held an important role on the board is not to suggest that the Iraqi

129 Qubain, Reconstruction of Iraq, 31.
131 Qubain, Reconstruction of Iraq, 34; Penrose and Penrose, Iraq, 168; Langley, Industrialization of Iraq, 166; Jalal, Role of the Government, 17.
members, and the Iraqi government, did not contribute to or take charge of their own economic development, which they indeed did. But, discounting the British position on the board results in an incomplete understanding of Iraqi economic development. In December 1950, Sir J.W. Edington Miller took up his functions as finance member and secretary-general of the board.\footnote{Sir H. Mack, “Iraq: Annual Review for 1950,” in Jarman, Political Diaries of the Arab World 1948-1958, 168.} Miller had served as a commissioner and financial secretary in the Sudan government from 1920 to 1949, and briefly served on the British Council, before joining the Development Board in Iraq from 1950 to 1954.\footnote{“Catalogue of the papers of Sir John Wilson Edington Miller,” Durham University Library, last modified February 2010, http://endure.dur.ac.uk:8080/fedora/get/UkDhU:EADCatalogue.0480/PDF.} This position provided Britain with decisive access to Iraqi development and to information critical to securing contracts for British firms.

The Development Board derived its funding from oil, “Iraq’s Third River.”\footnote{Qubain, Reconstruction of Iraq, xxii.} With rising demand and exploding oil production in the Middle East, regional governments began to seek a greater share in oil revenues. In 1950, the approach of “equal sharing of profits” came to overshadow wartime and postwar controversies over the calculation of oil royalties. In December 1950, the American oil company ARAMCO negotiated a 50/50 profit-sharing agreement with the Saudi government, sending shock waves throughout the major oil concessions in the Middle East.\footnote{Penrose and Penrose, Iraq, 157; Qubain, Reconstruction of Iraq, 132; Langley, Industrialization of Iraq, 165; Longrigg, Oil in the Middle East, 190-191.} The agreement pressured the IPC to come to a similar one with the Iraqi government. In August 1951, after prolonged negotiations in Baghdad, a 50/50 profit-sharing agreement was reached.
covering the IPC and AIOC concessions. In February 1952, the Iraqi Parliament ratified the new oil agreements, which provided sufficient funds and safeguards in the form of guaranteed minimum payments for the Development Board to begin its programs and to plan ahead for future projects. The law that established the Development Board in 1950 diverted to it one hundred percent of Iraqi government oil income. In 1952, the figure was reduced to seventy percent as a result of the enormous increase in profits from the new Iraqi oil agreements. In 1950, the Iraqi government earned around five million pounds from oil revenues; by 1955, Iraqi oil profits rose to nearly seventy-four million pounds. With the 1952 oil agreements, “the oil industry became suddenly the central factor affecting the stability and development of the country.”

Economic development held the much-desired promise of pulling millions of Iraqi people out of poverty, and of alleviating pressures that stirred unrest and opposition against the Iraqi government and the Anglo-Iraqi connection. The cost of living for lower and middle class Iraqis continued to escalate after the Second World War, with no more than twenty percent of the Iraqi population enjoying a standard of living that could be described as remotely healthy or comfortable. The Consul-General at the British Consulate in Basra, F.A.G. Cook, reported, “The labouring class, with their income of three shillings a day or less, have to do with the barest necessities. Many are said to live

138 Shwadran, Middle East, Oil and the Great Powers, 261, 270.
139 Qubain, Reconstruction of Iraq, 159-160.
entirely on dates (of the poorest unexportable quality) and dry native bread only.”¹⁴⁰

Many Iraqis believed that factories automatically and painlessly brought higher living standards and freedom from “colonial subservience.”¹⁴¹ One historian adds, “Iraq, just as many other countries, appears to have labored under the illusion that plenty of capital, a pile of imported industrial equipment and a battalion of foreign experts and technicians somehow add up to national economic development.”¹⁴² British officials sought to maintain their informal influence by shaping Iraqi economic development, while Iraqis saw development as a mechanism to quickly raise living standards and sever the British connection. The tension between British goals and Iraqi expectations consistently troubled the Anglo-Iraqi relationship.

British firms sought to participate in Iraq’s development by obtaining contracts through the newly created Development Board. The first Development Board program came into law in June 1951, covering the period from 1951 to 1955, with total expenditure expected to be over 65 million dinars.¹⁴³ In 1952, the initial program was revised as a result of the new oil agreement, and new provisions pegged total expenditure at over 155 million dinars from 1951 until 1956. Projects included river control along the Tigris and Euphrates, as well as construction of roads, bridges, buildings, schools, and hospitals. The Board focused mainly on irrigation, and subsequently on mining, industrial

¹⁴¹ Langley, Industrialization of Iraq, iii.
¹⁴² Qubain, Reconstruction of Iraq, x.
schemes, land reclamation, and other infrastructure development.\textsuperscript{144} Contemporary observers and historians criticized the concentration on irrigation as resulting in too much attention to long-term development, and not enough to immediate Iraqi needs and relief projects.\textsuperscript{145} The Iraqi government, however, had good reason to focus on irrigation. About eighty percent of Iraq’s 4.8 million people relied on agriculture for employment, making control of the Tigris and Euphrates critical to Iraqi livelihood.\textsuperscript{146} In June 1950, officials negotiated a loan of nearly $13 million from the International Bank of Reconstruction and Development to cover expenditure on part of the Wadi Tharthar scheme, which included the construction of a dam and diversion of water on the Tigris.\textsuperscript{147} The Board awarded a contract to the British firm Balfour, Beatty, and Company for six million dinars in connection with the initial earth-moving stages of the scheme.\textsuperscript{148}

Upon his reelection as Prime Minister in 1954, Nuri Said, who served as Prime Minister of Iraq fourteen times between 1930 and 1958, initiated an increase in the number of British advisors in Iraq, while simultaneously attempting to distance himself from the British Embassy.\textsuperscript{149} Nuri remained close with Britain as a result of the British role in the Development Board, the Baghdad Pact, and a shared antipathy of Nasser, which brought Anglo-Iraqi military and economic collaboration to a high point in

\textsuperscript{145} Langley, \textit{Industrialization of Iraq}, 236, 273-274; Salter, \textit{Development of Iraq}, 116-120.
\textsuperscript{146} \textit{Department of State Bulletin}, vol. 24, Jan.-June 1951, “Point 4 Agreement Signed With Iraq,” p. 653.
\textsuperscript{149} Dawisha, \textit{Iraq}, 149.
Foreign affairs often dominated Nuri’s administration at the expense of internal issues, but even as political evolution stagnated, Nuri propelled economic growth. In 1954, as a result of mounting criticism of the board’s sluggish progress, Nuri invited Lord Salter, a noted British economist and scholar, to examine the board’s activities and offer advice on how to amplify the board’s productivity. Lord Salter considered Iraq’s greatest assets its soil and water resources, and promoted the development of agriculture alongside industrial expansion. He also suggested the immediate allotment of funds for short-term projects such as housing schemes. Unlike other reports, Iraqi ministries took Lord Salter’s recommendations seriously from 1955 when he delivered the report until the revolution in 1958.

In March 1955, the Iraqi government approved a new five-year development program totaling more than three hundred million pounds, which included a greater focus on producing quick and visible results. The Development Board utilized Lord Salter’s advice and increased allocation to housing and away from “bricks and mortar development.” In December 1955, the board also expanded its welfare measures to provide the average Iraqi with immediate benefits. British officials reported Iraqis began to experience the benefits of oil revenues, either in housing, education, healthcare, flood....
control, or irrigation. In the postscript of his survey, Lord Salter wrote, “Granting wise administration, peace and stability, Iraq now has a prospect of a rapid advance in national prosperity and individual welfare which has been rarely equaled in history.” The new development program and increased government expenditure resulted in higher levels of employment and yielded some instantaneous economic relief to the Iraqi people, but British officials questioned if the new program would produce enough economic benefits to stem increasing Iraqi unrest.

British and Iraqi officials viewed economic development as a way to diminish the harmful consequences of regional strains and crises that stirred instability. Following the Suez Crisis in 1956, radical undercurrents fomented in Iraq as a result of pressure from Nasser, Radio Cairo, and Arab nationalists. In March 1957, to ease the side effects of the Suez Crisis, the Iraqi government held its second “Development Week,” during which it opened new development projects in and around Baghdad and in northern Iraq. Despite external pressures, the British Embassy reported appreciable advances in economic and social improvement during 1957 (on paper at least), including new development projects, the reform of the civil service, the development of social insurance, and preparations for a new labor law. British officials claimed that Anglo-Iraqi relations had somewhat recovered from Suez on account of Britain’s disengagement from apparent cooperation

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157 Sir M. Wright, Development of Iraq, 123.
with Israel, the extension of credit to Iraq from the IPC, and a number of other marks of British goodwill.\footnote{Sir M. Wright, “Iraq: Annual Review for 1957,” in Jarman, \textit{Political Diaries of the Arab World 1948-1958}, 435-436.}

The Iraqi government’s level of success in instituting political and economic reforms significantly affected popular perceptions and approval of the Anglo-Iraqi connection. Iraqis closely linked British officials to Iraq’s ruling elite and monarchy, meaning low popular approval of the Iraqi government impacted popular opinions of Britain.\footnote{Elliot, \textit{Independent Iraq}, 1.} Ambassador Troutbeck lamented that in economic development “the only certain thing is that any falls and failures – and there will inevitably be some – will be laid at the door of the British.”\footnote{Sir J. Troutbeck, “Review of Iraq during 1952,” in Jarman, \textit{Political Diaries of the Arab World 1948-1958}, 241.} Difficult environmental conditions, widespread health inadequacies, a largely illiterate population, and struggling social, economic, and political institutions challenged both the success of economic advancement and the British position in Iraq.\footnote{Penrose and Penrose, \textit{Iraq}, 167.} Iraqi officials and foreign experts criticized the absence of an efficient administration to coordinate and execute development projects.\footnote{Jalal, \textit{Role of the Government}, 28-29; Salter, \textit{Development of Iraq}, 117-118; International Bank of Reconstruction and Development, \textit{The Economic Development of Iraq} (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1952), 77-79.} The Iraqi administrative apparatus rewarded seniority, not merit, reducing the importance of personal improvement and efficiency. Political instability and the shuffling of civil servants also inhibited administrative continuity.\footnote{Jalal, \textit{Role of the Government}, 28-29, 62.} In 1952, for example, the lack of engineering and administrative staff handicapped Development Board expenditure, which reached only fourteen to fifteen million dinars versus the estimated twenty million dinars.

\addcontentsline{toc}{section}{Footnotes}
With such issues clogging the development administration, the expertise of foreign consultants proved invaluable to the implementation of projects.\(^{167}\)

To thwart popular disorder, Baghdad needed to overcome administrative difficulties, and demonstrate its commitment to feasible development projects and take action towards their implementation.\(^{168}\) In February 1951, Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Said visited Basra to discuss his government’s progress in economic and social advancement. Nuri spoke of having expanded cultivated areas, decreased unemployment, protected Basra against floods, drawn up projects for redistribution of state lands, increased Iraqi influence in the Arab League, and improved Anglo-Iraqi relations. The next day, a local opposition newspaper scoffed that “the only novel thing about the whole proceedings was the free distribution of Pepsicola.”\(^{169}\) In March 1951, during the AIOC crisis, British officials at the Consulate in Basra reported Iraqis feared the kind of social unrest manifesting itself in Iran, but “confess they do not know what to do about it, as no government can be trusted to act for the Iraqi people rather than for their own private interests.”\(^{170}\) General Iraqi public opinion remained unconvinced that the government had accomplished, or sought to accomplish, any concrete reforms that impacted their lives.

The lack of communication between the bureaucracy that administered the development programs and the Iraqi people they were designed to benefit contributed to a lack of awareness about actual economic progress. Iraqi bureaucrats and the *fallah*, or the


farmer and peasant class of Iraq, were equally contemptuous of one another. Among the
fallah, “deep-seated suspicion of the bureaucrat and his designs, [was] gained from
centuries of unpleasant contact with government which was usually restricted to military
conscription and the collection of taxes.”171 The Iraqi government and foreign experts
sought to introduce new agricultural practices to boost production and advance socio-
economic reforms. The fallah and other traditional groups within Iraq, however,
struggled to adjust to new techniques and often resisted change, which either challenged
their traditions and customs or required them to place their trust in the government.
Conservative elements of Iraqi society, including large landowners and tribal leaders,
questioned development and called changes in tribal structure and tradition overly
hasty.172

Among the effendiyya, or the educated, professional, and middle class Iraqis,
inadequate progress in social and economic development, paired with neglect of political
liberalization, exacerbated disdain for the Iraqi government.173 The opposition’s ability to
stir up unrest depended to a large extent on whether economic benefits reached the mass
of the Iraqi population in sufficient volume.174 British officials in Baghdad reported the
problem with economic development in Iraq was the desire for quick results, noting that

171 Qubain, Reconstruction of Iraq, 256.
172 Qubain, Reconstruction of Iraq, 256-261; Penrose and Penrose, Iraq, 192-194.
173 Eppel, Iraq from Monarchy to Tyranny, 9, 24-25; Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, “The
Revisited, eds. Robert A. Fernea and Wm. Roger Louis (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1991), 133; Khadduri,
Independent Iraq, 33; Penrose and Penrose, Iraq, 171.
174 Sir M. Wright, “Review of Iraq during 1955,” in Jarman, Political Diaries of the Arab World 1948-
1958, 406.
the common Iraqi “wants to run before he can walk.” Historians Edith and E.F. Penrose argue, “In Iraq, as everywhere else in the 1950s, there was a very great underestimation of the speed with which change could be effected.” The simultaneous resistance to change and eagerness for its advancement created an uneasy dilemma within Iraqi society, and contributed to disillusionment with the government. Baghdad failed to demonstrate to the Iraqi people the progress made in socio-economic development and how the country’s exploding oil wealth directly benefited them. In January 1954, Ambassador Troutbeck argued, “If things are allowed to drag on as they have been for so long, an explosion seems inevitable.” Two years later, the British Ambassador to Iraq, Sir Michael Wright, who replaced Troutbeck in 1954, reiterated, “It is in a measure a race against time if the political evolution of Iraq is to take place peacefully and an upheaval avoided.”

The available documentation on Iraqi economic development reveals a considerable amount of progress took place during the 1950s. By 1958, two flood control systems (one on the Tigris, the other on the Euphrates) had practically eliminated the danger of disastrous floods; communications and public utilities were improved and spread across the country; educational facilities, health, and other social services were promoted and access widened; and housing programs were initiated. Shortcomings in

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Iraqi development must be considered in respect to the substantial progress made in the short time period of a decade in which Iraq undertook programs of rapid economic advancement. The short span of Iraqi national experience, the neglect of development work in the early twentieth century, and the destabilizing influence of regional events and crises should also be remembered.\textsuperscript{180} After 1950, Iraq made notable progress in socio-economic development, but its slow pace and the lack of immediate benefits, paired with insufficient political liberalization, intensified general disenchantment with the Iraqi government. The failure to convince the Iraqi people of true progress contributed to the creation of a domestic climate that welcomed the Iraqi Revolution in 1958.

Britain’s postwar economic burdens, international pressures, and regional crises challenged its position in Iraq, but building upon decades of experience and connections, Britain sustained its influence through informal means in the postwar period. The British turned to informal economic influence as a path through which to adapt their relationships and ties in Iraq into more acceptable forms that fit postwar realities. British officials, experts, and firms preserved Britain’s position by securing Iraq’s full membership in the sterling area, by pursuing close Anglo-Iraqi economic cooperation, by gaining business contracts, and by serving in the Iraqi government and on the Development Board. British firms and businesses expanded their ties to the Iraqi economy, and the British-dominated Iraq Petroleum Company contributed to Iraqi oil exploration, development, and production. Britain’s official and unofficial economic ties to Iraq provided the access and opportunities to strengthen Anglo-Iraqi connections.

Britain’s pursuit of new economic links and the preservation of old ones contributed to
the maintenance of its dominant position in Iraq in the 1950s, a period in which the
British position in Iraq was crucial to their Cold War strategy and when trade,
investment, and oil production were key to their postwar economic recovery.
CHAPTER 2: WINNING IRAQI HEARTS AND MINDS:
BRITISH PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN IRAQ

Following the Second World War, economic burdens and widespread worldwide commitments decreased the military and economic means with which Britain could maintain its position within its formal and informal empire. British officials had to adapt to an international environment saturated with the rhetoric of the United Nations and independence movements in Africa and Asia, and eager to see the British Empire come to a final end. In the decade and a half after 1945, Labour and Conservative policymakers drew from old traditions of empire and developed new tactics to fit the British Empire and Commonwealth to new realities. Changes in the international political climate and the manifestation of the Cold War made it both feasible and prudent to look for alternative ways to protect and promote British interests.¹ Britain’s strategic necessities collided in the Middle East, a vital region relative to the Soviet Union and central to Britain’s postwar economic recovery.²

As early as 1947, the Foreign Office envisioned Iraq as a keystone of their position in the Middle East and as an alternative to a Suez-centered strategy.³ In the early to mid 1950s, as Anglo-Egyptian relations deteriorated, British officials turned to Iraq as a position from which to secure the Middle East, prevent Soviet penetration of the region,

¹ Hyam, Britain’s Declining Empire; Darwin, Britain and Decolonisation; Louis, British Empire in the Middle East, 4-6, 21, 737; Heinlein, Scrutinising the Official Mind, 308.
² Silverfarb, Twilight of British Ascendancy, 78-81; Monroe, Britain’s Moment in the Middle East, 207; Dockrill, Britain’s Retreat from East of Suez, 10; Ovendale, Transfer of Power, 18-19; Galpern, Money, Oil, and Empire, 11; Hyam, Britain’s Declining Empire, 73.
³ Silverfarb, Twilight of British Ascendancy, 123.
and protect the Persian Gulf and its oil. During the 1950s, Britain confronted Western
challengers to their influence in Iraq for the first time, with the United States emerging as
Britain’s main ally and competitor throughout the region. Through the Point Four
program and the public diplomacy campaigns of the United States Information Service,
Washington promoted American economic and cultural influence in Iraq. While
American officials recognized the Middle East’s importance during the early Cold War,
they remained reluctant to take on a serious role, and continued to view the region as a
British responsibility. Washington inserted its influence into the Middle East in fits and
starts, and London only reluctantly withdrew or shared responsibilities.

Following the Second World War and until the Iraqi Revolution in 1958, Britain
retained a dominant position in Iraq, serving as its primary economic partner, sole
Western ally, and a key force in Iraq’s postwar economic, social, political, and military
development. In the immediate postwar years, however, Britain substantially reduced the
number of British political advisors and military forces in Iraq, requiring officials to seek
alternative means to sustain British influence. This chapter examines British attempts to
maintain their position in Iraq through public diplomacy, the control of news media, and

4 Cohen, “The Strategic Role of the Middle East,” in Cohen and Kolinsky, Demise of the British Empire in
the Middle East, 34; Cohen, Fighting World War Three from the Middle East, 298, 301; Devereux,
Formulation of British Defence Policy, 121, 141; Ovendale, Transfer of Power, 66; Holland, Pursuit of
Greatness, 270.
5 Louis, British Empire in the Middle East; Freiberger, Dawn over Suez; Kuniholm, Origins of the Cold
War; David Lesch, ed., The Middle East and the United States: A Historical and Political Reassessment
(Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003); Hahn, United States, Great Britain, and Egypt.
6 Frederick W. Axelgard, “US Support for the British Position in Pre-Revolutionary Iraq,” in The Iraqi
York: I.B. Tauris, 1991), 77; Ovendale, Transfer of Power, 33-34; Kuniholm, Origins of the Cold War,
431; Thacher, “Reflections on US Foreign Policy towards Iraq in the 1950s,” in Louis and Fernea, Iraqi
Revolution of 1958, 63; Louis, British Empire in the Middle East, 102.
and Fernea, Iraqi Revolution of 1958, 32.
8 Silverfarb, Twilight of British Ascendancy, 76-79.
educational and cultural programs. After 1945, Britain realized the importance of building up support among the Iraqi people by fostering Anglo-Iraqi cultural and educational links, by bolstering Britain’s image in the country, and by retaining their dominance of the supply of foreign news and radio broadcasting to Iraq. British officials and representatives used over three decades of Anglo-Iraqi connections and relationships as a foundation for informal forms of British influence. Through courting the Iraqi public and its opinion-makers, Britain aimed to stimulate better relations, foster British trade, and build support for British interests. The emergence of the Cold War made winning the hearts and minds of the non-communist world all the more urgent. Within a Cold War context and while simultaneously confronting regional crises and domestic concerns, British officials and organizations developed public diplomacy programs and provided information services that helped cultivate a path for a continued Anglo-Iraqi connection.

**British Public Diplomacy**

During the twentieth century, the development of mass communications and the rise in literacy rates, education, and political consciousness, dramatically increased the ability to impact audiences at home and abroad. International radio broadcasting, wider access to international news, and the use of cinema newsreels reflected a “shrinking” world. Britain was at the forefront of emerging communication technology and fostered communication development within the Empire and Commonwealth. The expanded

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ability to inform, cultivate, and manipulate public opinion amplified the necessity of “information work,” termed variously as publicity, public relations, advertising, or propaganda. The diplomacy of ideas included “the psychological and persuasive activities pursued by governments as part of the broader strategic policy-making process.”

During the twentieth century, the world realized the power of public diplomacy, or the development of information and cultural programs for informing, engaging, and influencing foreign public opinion, which some officials called the “fourth dimension” of foreign policy.

Historically, the British demonstrated an uneasiness regarding the use of propaganda and lacked the desire to promote themselves abroad. During World War I, the word “propaganda” gained notoriety, and became something “other people did.” British officials used a wide variety of euphemisms to describe their information activities, including publicity, national projection, and national self-advertisement. Propaganda had sinister wartime connotations, and was simply too unpopular and “un-English” to pursue during peacetime. Thanks to their “comfortable position in the world,” many British people felt no need “to blow their own trumpet,” and failed to see how the justness of democracy was not self-evident to all people. In the 1930s, after a decade of virtual inactivity in the field, the growth of totalitarianism in Europe accompanied by the dramatic employment of state subsidized propaganda by rival

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10 Taylor, Projection of Britain, 1; Vaughan, Failure of American and British Propaganda, 3.
12 Frances Donaldson, The British Council: The First Fifty Years (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), 11-14; Taylor, Selling Democracy, 64; Defy, Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda, 9.
13 Taylor, Projection of Britain, 5-7, 61, 77; Taylor, Selling Democracy, 66.
14 Taylor, Projection of Britain, 79; Taylor, Selling Democracy, 228.
countries induced Britain to pursue peacetime propaganda. Yet, the shift in policy was only half-hearted at best.\textsuperscript{15} In both the First and Second World Wars, the British showed an excellent talent for producing and disseminating propaganda, but officials remained uncomfortable with the peacetime continuation of “information work.”\textsuperscript{16}

Following the Second World War, Britain faced a relative decline in prestige and a worsening economy, which led some officials to recognize the necessity of enhancing public diplomacy efforts. The Attlee and Churchill governments did not share this viewpoint, and both governments cut funding to the British Council, the BBC, and other British information services.\textsuperscript{17} Some British officials, however, did take steps to continue information work, including the creation of the Central Office of Information (COI) in April 1946. During the immediate postwar years, the COI aimed to support British foreign policy, to spread knowledge of the Commonwealth and British ideals, and to provide a favorable background for the commercial selling of exports by showing Britain’s industrial and scientific successes.\textsuperscript{18} Despite spending cuts, Britain was the first country to formulate a coordinated global response to hostile Soviet propaganda with the establishment of the Information Research Department (IRD) at the British Foreign Office in 1948.\textsuperscript{19} The IRD focused on influencing foreign opinion-makers and

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item Taylor, Projection of Britain, 84, 293-295; Taylor, Selling Democracy, 64, 66.
\item Taylor, Selling Democracy, 65, 229; Defty, Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda, 28; Donaldson, British Council, 163; Sir Robert Maret, Through the Back Door: An Inside View of Britain’s Overseas Information Services (London: Pergamon Press, 1968), 135-147.
\item Taylor, Selling Democracy, 230, 234; Defty, Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda, 26.
\end{thebibliography}
concentrated their activities on areas threatened by communism outside the USSR. The British Council, the BBC, and other British information services also remained in force, although at a reduced capacity.

During the 1950s, the war of words and ideas became a principal battleground of the Cold War, resulting in a psychological struggle that occurred alongside more traditional military, economic, and political competitions. In the Third World, where illiteracy rates remained high, the press and radio persisted as the principal media in the fight for ideological allegiances. Britain intended to utilize this arena to come to terms with the Third World as an advisor and friend, rather than as a colonial overlord. British officials turned to public diplomacy as a means of fostering British trade and selling British ideas and standards to a postwar world imbued with anti-colonial and nationalist rhetoric. In the Middle East, public diplomacy provided Britain with a valuable mechanism through which to retain its influence and strategic foothold, while simultaneously withdrawing more formal and disagreeable forms of British influence in the region. After the Second World War, British officials, cultural organizations, and intermediary media agencies sought to mold public opinion, contribute to and shape expanding educational and cultural movements, and serve as the primary foreign news source throughout the Middle East.

20 Taylor, Selling Democracy, 237-238.
22 Taylor, Selling Democracy, 225; Osgood, Total Cold War, 1-5; Defty, Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda, 1.
23 Taylor, Selling Democracy, 226; Defty, Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda, 29; Marett, Through the Back Door, 148-182.
After 1945, Iraqis demonstrated increasing demand for and interest in educational opportunities. Rising levels of education contributed to Iraqi cultural movements in literature, art, and architecture, and the proliferation of newspapers further enhanced cultural production. Primarily in urban areas, advocates for a more cosmopolitan and participatory form of Iraqi society opened up political and social spaces to women, workers, peasants, and radical intellectuals, producing a vibrant, but volatile, political and social environment in Iraq. The Iraqi government recognized the need to adjust to this new climate and sought to amplify educational opportunities and improve the literacy rate, which stood at approximately eight percent in 1950. During the postwar years, the government built new schools and undertook new initiatives in adult and childhood education. From 1940 until 1950, approximately 350 new government primary schools were built. From 1950 to 1956, the number of government primary schools swelled from 1,101 to 1,861, a nearly seventy percent increase. In some districts, the Iraqi government provided grants to underprivileged students for clothing and food to complement improved educational access. The government also launched new adult education programs, including night schools “for illiterates and these surviving soldiers who wish to further their general education.”

As a result of high illiteracy in Iraq, oral transmission remained the fundamental means of communication and served as the principal disseminator of information. Most

26 Langley, Industrialization of Iraq, 128-129.
Iraqis obtained their news from gossip in coffee shops and bazaars, where middle and lower-income Iraqis spent their leisure time.\textsuperscript{28} Coffee houses served as political centers that linked intellectuals to the masses by allowing for illiterate Iraqis to hear newspapers read aloud and provided literate poor with access to newspapers that they usually could not afford.\textsuperscript{29} Among the tribal areas of Iraq, views were exchanged and news disseminated through the \textit{Majlis}, “the desert equivalent of the coffee house.”\textsuperscript{30} British officials and organizations understood the power of oral transmission and sought to shape the production and dissemination of news and information.

The relationships Britain cultivated in Iraq since their occupation of the region during World War I provided a framework of connections and a familiarity with the country’s physical and social geography that served as a foundation for Britain’s public diplomacy efforts. British officials and the British community built up a strong personal contact network in the country that no other Western power could rival.\textsuperscript{31} Indirect British influence in Iraqi politics also continued to furnish Britain with considerable advantages in the field of propaganda. Following the Second World War, the British Embassy’s Public Relations Office amplified public diplomacy effects to increase knowledge of Britain and its ideals, to build up goodwill among Iraqis, to counter communist propaganda, and to secure Iraq’s allegiance to the West.\textsuperscript{32} The Public Relations Office was the largest branch of the British Embassy in Iraq and its information programs were

\textsuperscript{29} Davis, \textit{Memories of State}, 94-96.
\textsuperscript{31} Vaughan, \textit{Failure of American and British Propaganda}, 28.
the most active in the country, with its largest office located in Baghdad and smaller provincial branches in Basra and Mosul. The Public Relations Office operated reading rooms throughout Iraq, which were equipped with reading materials, radios, and posters. The office also distributed motion pictures, supervised the release of Reuters and Arab News Agency information, and collected and disseminated other news, photographs, and Arabic and English publications.\(^\text{33}\)

British officials benefited from decades of knowledge and experience with Iraqi customs and its physical environment. Embassy officials fit their information outreach to the local environment by utilizing boats, generators, and other measures to secure a wider and more comprehensive distribution of information materials. In Chubeish, part of the marsh area of southern Iraq, the British reading room was built entirely of reeds to match the other dwellings in the area, even though reed construction proved inconvenient.\(^\text{34}\) In administering a far-flung empire, many British officials adapted more readily to the realities of both tropical and arid environments. During July 1951, temperatures in Basra rose to 123 degrees Fahrenheit with humidity at over eighty-five percent, resulting in the death of three European seamen and a number of Basra dockworkers. None of those who perished were British, but the British did not emerge unscathed. The British Consul-General at Basra reported that the iron decks of the H.M.S. Messina absorbed so much


heat while docked at the Basra Port that the ship’s cat fried on the deck, to the grief of the ship’s entire company.\textsuperscript{35}

A central aspect of the British Embassy’s Public Relations Office outreach included the dissemination and presentation of motion pictures. British officials distributed and presented films on a wide variety of topics. Many films publicized general information about Britain and its economic, military, or cultural progress, such as \textit{Top Liner} (describing the new British sea liner, the Queen Elizabeth), \textit{Flight for Tomorrow} (a film of a civil air display in Britain), and \textit{Atomic Physics} (presenting the work of atomic scientists).\textsuperscript{36} Other films had a more practical purpose, such as providing information on health or education. The British Consulate in Basra distributed films on health, varying in subject from teeth care to general health hints, to the Iraqi Directors of Health in Basra and to local cinemas, per their request.\textsuperscript{37} British officials used cinema vans and boats to exhibit informational, educational, and entertainment films throughout Iraq. In 1948, the Public Relations Office’s cinema van audience totaled an estimated fifty thousand Iraqis.\textsuperscript{38} The cinema staff operated out of Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul, utilizing eight vans and several boats to travel to and display films in urban areas and the remote tribal countryside. The continual touring of the cinema vans served as a crucial mechanism through which the British influenced literate urban classes, maintained relationships with tribal areas, and gained knowledge of the social, political, and economic conditions of

Iraqis outside the town and city centers.\textsuperscript{39} In Basra, the Public Relations Office staff offered weekly film presentations at the Basra Port Athletic Club, the Palestinian Refugee Camp, and at the local jail and hospital.\textsuperscript{40} British information officers also travelled to Kuwait and to southern parts of Iran, including Abadan, to exhibit films.\textsuperscript{41} These trips both spread British messages and presented crucial intelligence-gathering opportunities.

One of the most effective means of propagandizing in Iraq was foreign radio broadcasting. Britain dominated radio broadcasting to Iraq in the decade following the end of the Second World War. The Iraqi Directorate General of Propaganda attempted to control Iraqi radio access, but failed to do so. British broadcasts, particularly the Arabic language broadcasts from Ash-Sharq Al-Adna, a British-controlled radio station on Cyprus, dominated foreign radio broadcasts to Iraq. As an independent radio station secretly operated by Britain, Ash-Sharq Al-Adna was one of Britain’s greatest radio assets. In 1950, a U.S. Central Intelligence Agency report emphasized that the Ash-Sharq Al-Adna broadcasts were the most popular Arabic broadcasts beamed to Iraq, and “the public likes both its music and its news bulletins.”\textsuperscript{42} Until 1953, Iraqis received British broadcasts from Cyprus more frequently and more widely than those from any other foreign country, with Arabic broadcasts from Cairo coming in second in both popularity


\textsuperscript{42} U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, “National Intelligence Survey- Iraq,” 43-23.
and reach. Historian James Vaughan asserts “until Nasser launched the ‘Voice of the Arabs’ in 1953 Sharq was probably the most popular station in the region.”

Britain relied on a number of intermediary organizations in its public diplomacy efforts to protect the credibility of British information materials. During World War I, the Foreign Office began a relationship with the BBC, and sought to maintain the BBC’s reputation for “objective and honest news reporting” at all costs. The BBC’s reputation was its greatest asset, contributing to widespread reliance on the service for foreign news and information throughout the Middle East. The BBC appreciated the potential power of the radio and inaugurated their Empire Service in 1932, followed in 1938 by their Foreign Language Service. In 1937, British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden made an urgent request for the immediate inauguration of medium-wave broadcasts in Arabic, noting that “although the number of private listeners in the Middle East remained small, the size of the potential audience to be reached was immeasurable because most cafes (the usual communal centres for the exchange of news in nomadic societies) possessed medium-wave receiving sets.” The BBC and the Foreign Office came into agreement, and on 3 January 1938 inaugurated BBC’s Arabic Service. By 1946, BBC’s “Near East Services” included broadcasts in Arabic for three hours, in Turkish for one hour, and in Persian for thirty minutes daily. Radio programming consisted of news bulletins, political commentaries, religious readings, music, and other entertainment. By 1953, BBC’s

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44 Vaughan, Failure of American and British Propaganda, 35.  
45 Taylor, Projection of Britain, 58.  
46 Defty, Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda, 93; Taylor, Selling Democracy, 238; Vaughan, Failure of American and British Propaganda, 35.  
47 Taylor, Projection of Britain, 66.  
48 Taylor, Projection of Britain, 195.  
49 Taylor, Projection of Britain, 205.
Arabic broadcasts, which opened each day with a reading from the Koran, were extended to four hours daily, while the Soviets broadcast in Arabic for only one, the French for three, and Egypt for two hours.  

During the 1950s, rising literacy, educational opportunities, and a more vibrant political and social climate in Iraq led to the proliferation of newspapers, which complemented improved access to foreign news broadcasts. The Iraqi government’s wavering efforts in political and social liberalization, however, produced periodic upheavals in the Iraqi press and resulted in a high turnover rate and the frequent suspension and abolition of newspapers. Iraqi newspapers were primarily privately owned and published, and served as organs of groups rather than commercial news ventures. As a result of their private nature, articles often included considerable editorializing, and mingling of factual matter, opinion, speculation, and argument. With meager funds, low circulation, and frequent upheaval in the Iraqi news industry, Iraqi papers could not afford to purchase any foreign news services or employ their own foreign correspondents. Therefore, they depended on information in free daily press bulletins distributed by the Iraqi Directorate General of Propaganda and on material from foreign media; mainly British, Egyptian, and Syrian sources supplemented by other foreign legations and information services. In spite of Egyptian competition, British agencies, including the Arab News Agency, Reuters, BBC, and Ash-Sharq Al-Adna, dominated Iraqi foreign media sources.

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In 1950, a U.S. intelligence report emphasized, “Because domestic sources of information are often inadequate, foreign material, mainly British, has wide circulation in Iraq, either directly or by secondary use in the domestic press or radio.” The British government subsidized and supported a number of British organizations, which served as intermediary sources of news and information favorable to British interests. Used more widely than any other news resource in Iraq, Reuters’ coverage was comprehensive and generally followed official British policy. Reuters accepted British government subsidies, but the Foreign Office ascribed great importance to keeping Reuters free from the “taint of propaganda.” London also subsidized the work of the Arab News Agency based in Cairo, which offered information materials and pamphlets at artificially low prices in various countries throughout the region. In Baghdad, the newspaper, the *Iraq Times*, was owned by a London firm, edited by Britons, and “morally dominated by the British Embassy.” In 1950, the *Iraq Times* had the widest estimated circulation of newspapers produced in Iraq, enjoying nearly twice the circulation of the next closest newspaper, *Liwa al-Istiqlal*, or “The Banner of Independence,” which was a key Iraqi opposition paper.

With the inadequacy of Iraq’s domestic press, most newspapers, books, and magazines were imported from Egypt and Britain. Many literate Iraqis read Egyptian dailies, but Britain dominated the import of books in languages other than Arabic or

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Kurdish. The British Embassy’s Public Relations Office primarily arranged the supply of imported literature to Iraq, affording British officials with considerable control over the materials literate Iraqis could access. The Public Relations Office also provided highly subsidized or free Arabic and English publications and booklets, including Arabic language magazines titled *Talking Point, Progress, and For Your Information*.\(^{57}\) In June 1952, Britain’s Central Office of Information created an Arabic language monthly called *Al Aalam*, or “The Globe,” to compete with the “nationalist, trashy, but attractively produced pictoral magazines printed in Egypt.”\(^{58}\) Its articles covered subjects including NATO, British support of social and economic development in the Middle East, and reports on the educational experiences of Arab rulers in British schools. Between 1952 and 1956, *Al Aalam*’s circulation nearly doubled from 28,000 to over 50,000.\(^{59}\)

Iraqi newspapers did not provide an accurate index of general public attitudes, but helped to crystallize the public opinion of several small and influential literate Iraqi social classes.\(^{60}\) To gain leverage in the Iraqi press, British information officers maintained contact with Iraqi newspaper editors and staff. The British Consul-General in Basra reported the editor of *Al Thaghr*, or “The Port,” visited the British Information Office regularly, and complied with most of the office’s requests for the insertion of articles into the newspaper. During 1949 and 1950, *Al Thaghr*, one of the main newspapers in Basra, included a number of anti-communist articles, played up the good administration and fair treatment of workers by the AIOC at Abadan, featured articles on how British firms


Other newspapers in Basra also published articles received from the British Public Relations Office and materials generally favorable to the British position.

During the 1950s, a number of opposition papers flourished depending on the Iraqi government’s current outlook towards liberalization. While British and American officials did not take these opposition papers seriously, the papers’ vehement attacks and criticisms of the Iraqi government, Zionism, and Western imperialism nonetheless contributed to popular unrest. The British Consulate in Basra held a particular disdain for the newspaper *Al Nas*, or “The People,” which officials referred to as the “bad boy” as a result of its frequent attacks upon the Basra Petroleum Company and Andrew Weir and Company. In the early 1950s, *Al Nas* complained of Iraq’s dates and oil falling into the “greedy hands of foreign companies.” Before its brief suspension at the end of 1949, *Al Nas* called foreign firms the “leeches sucking the blood of Iraq.” A.W. Davis, “Monthly Summary, Basra Consulate-General, March 1949,” in Jarman, *Political Diaries of the Arab World 1948-1958*, 59.

British officials reported, “All in all the closing of this paper will do no harm as its policy was anti
government, anti British, and anti-minority and was irresponsible in the extreme.”

While Al Nas’s messages may not have been representative of general Iraqi concerns and public opinion, the articles reflected the frustrations and anger of a literate and volatile class of Iraqis eager to see the end of the Anglo-Iraqi connection and justice in Palestine.

*The British Council*

The British Council was created in 1934 as “The British Committee for Relations with Other Countries,” demonstrating London’s recognition of the significance of public relations to British foreign policy. Shortening its title to the British Council in 1936, the council is Britain’s lasting legacy in cultural diplomacy and still maintains more than 200 offices in over 100 countries worldwide. In its first decades, the council focused on promoting a wider appreciation of British culture and civilization, encouraging the study and use of the English language, extending knowledge of British literature and contributions to the arts and sciences, and fostering educational and cultural exchange.

The British government created the British Council in response to the work of rival countries in the field of propaganda. Between 1929 and 1930, the French devoted £500,000 to cultural propaganda and the Germans and Italians devoted around £300,000 each. In 1935, the council’s budget was only £5,000, but by 1940 its budget had swelled to over £330,000. During the Second World War, the need to intensify Britain’s public

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69 Taylor, *Projection of Britain*, 139.
diplomacy efforts to counter Nazi propaganda and to bolster the Allied cause worldwide led to the council’s rapid expansion and an increase in its budget to over £2,500,000.\textsuperscript{71}

British Institutes served as the headquarters for British Council representatives abroad. In 1937, the council began to establish British Institutes in areas without an “indigenous Anglophile society.”\textsuperscript{72} From the institutes, British representatives contacted and cultivated relationships with local leaders in universities, in the government, and across society in the hope of encouraging goodwill towards Britain among a new generation of leaders and opinion-formers. The institutes presented films and lectures, and provided access to a wide-ranging collection of books and periodicals.\textsuperscript{73} Cultural diplomacy efforts established a framework of understanding and a network of relationships that helped to foster Britain’s economic, military, and political interests.\textsuperscript{74} One historian notes, “Although the method all through is strictly non-political, at the end of the process a considerable political or commercial benefit is likely to be received… for this reason British Council work must be regarded as essentially a long-term investment.”\textsuperscript{75}

After the Second World War, the British Council suffered serious budget cuts, but managed to continue their essential public relations initiatives.\textsuperscript{76} The council sought to adapt its programs to postwar realities and shifted its attention from cultural to educational work, and from developed to less developed countries. The council placed

\textsuperscript{71} Coombs, \textit{Spreading the Word}, 11, 125.  
\textsuperscript{72} Coombs, \textit{Spreading the Word}, 7.  
\textsuperscript{73} Donaldson, \textit{British Council}, 181.  
\textsuperscript{74} Taylor, \textit{Selling Democracy}, 234.  
\textsuperscript{75} Donaldson, \textit{British Council}, 182.  
\textsuperscript{76} Donaldson, \textit{British Council}, 163.
renewed focus on their libraries worldwide, to which permanent British Council representatives were designated to operate a central reference library in each country. The central library then served as a distribution center for any other institute or council library in the country. The council played a critical role in spreading British influence at a time when emerging nations were both eager to develop educational programs and willing to utilize British assistance. In the 1950s and 1960s, many developing countries sought to induce rapid educational advancement, and turned to the council and its libraries to provide course materials, reading space, and other support.

In Iraq, the British Council provided critical information services, spread knowledge of British culture and institutions, encouraged the learning of the English language, and strengthened the Anglo-Iraqi connection. The council’s work revolved around its institutes in Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, and Kirkuk, where council representatives encouraged Iraqis to attend courses, lectures, and events, including films, musical recitals, teas, art exhibits, clubs, and discussion groups for both men and women. Established in 1940, the British Institute in Baghdad was one of the first British Institutes. Iraq was among the small list of countries (comprising Egypt, Portugal, Cyprus, Malta, Aden, Turkey, Palestine, Columbia, and Uruguay) in which British Council work was well developed by the early 1940s. In 1943, Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden pressed the council to extend its activities in the Middle East, “because the teaching of English, the provision of amenities such as books and films and the diffusion

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78 Coombs, *Spreading the Word*, 114-115.
of information on Britain and British achievements [we]re the best means of affecting the attitude of governments and peoples in areas vitally important to us.”

In each country the British Council operated, its activities, programs, and initiatives were tailored to local needs and environments. British Council operations in Iraq included considerable attention to nursery and primary education, as a way to increase literacy and educational opportunities among Iraqi youth. In 1947, a visiting diplomat described the council’s nursery school in Baghdad as “the most practical and successful piece of publicity work which I have seen so far in the Middle East… I do not think it would be possible to exaggerate the excellent atmosphere of this school and the good which it must inevitably do in cementing Anglo-Iraqi good relations.” In 1953, the British Council described the nursery school program in Baghdad as one of its best investments. British Council representatives throughout Iraq also maintained close relationships with the British Embassy and with Iraqi notables. In the early 1950s, the British Consulate in Basra reported that leaders from the British Council maintained vital contacts throughout southern Iraq and the British Institute in Basra served as a center of cultural and social activity. In 1953, Ambassador Troutbeck wrote, “On the cultural side the British Council is doing fine work and its head has the closest relations with the Prime Minister and the Iraqi educational authorities.”

81 Quoted in Donaldson, British Council, 127.
82 Quoted in Vaughan, Failure of American and British Propaganda, 74.
83 Vaughan, Failure of American and British Propaganda, 74.
Iraq through the revolution in 1958 until today, only stopping services for two years after the 1967 Six Days War.\textsuperscript{86}

The British Council’s educational and cultural programs projected Britain around the world, and its decentralized nature afforded it with considerable flexibility in meeting its goals.\textsuperscript{87} In the Middle East, the council enjoyed the great advantage of having its representatives outside the political arena; and, therefore, their relations with locals did not suffer in the same way other British organizations did from current events. The council maintained a locally engaged staff, and benefited from friendships with people in power.\textsuperscript{88} In 1957, after reviewing the work of the British Council and British information services at home and abroad, the Cabinet member responsible for the co-ordination of Britain’s official information services, Dr. Charles Hill, said he regarded the work of the British Council “as unquestionably the most effective single thing which our country was doing to present itself overseas.”\textsuperscript{89}

\textit{U.S. Public Diplomacy and the Anglo-American Relationship in Iraq}

During the 1950s, the United States expanded its presence in the Middle East, as Washington recognized both its importance to the Cold War and Britain’s increasing inability to defend Western interests in the region.\textsuperscript{90} By the late 1940s, British officials realized the necessity of drawing the Americans into the Middle East, a historically

\textsuperscript{86} Coombs, \textit{Spreading the Word}, 125; Donaldson, \textit{British Council}, 1-2.
\textsuperscript{87} Coombs, \textit{Spreading the Word}, 278.
\textsuperscript{89} Quoted by Donaldson, \textit{British Council}, 205.
British sphere of influence, to provide economic and military assistance.\(^91\) At the end of 1954, Ambassador Troutbeck wrote from Baghdad, “I think, no doubt that – our relative positions in the world being what they now are – we must accept, and accept with a good grace, the increase of American influence in this part of the world.”\(^92\) Washington admitted the region’s significance, but it was reluctant to take on serious financial and military responsibilities throughout the 1950s.\(^93\) Narratives of Anglo-American influence in the Middle East following the Second World War often promote a simple dichotomy of an American rise and British decline, but such narratives fail to accurately account for the realities on the ground. Drawing from stores of political, economic, and military influence developed in the Middle East since the nineteenth century, the British maintained their dominance in the region into the 1950s, and in the Persian Gulf into the early 1970s.

Prior to 1941, the American presence in the Middle East consisted of mostly educational, missionary, and commercial activities, which had built up goodwill among Middle Eastern peoples.\(^94\) During World War II, American military forces entered the region as suppliers to British and Russian forces, and as participants in the Middle East Supply Center, which was created during the war to support British and American

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shipping and supplies. After 1945, the U.S. earned a global prestige that brought new responsibilities to uphold Western interests in a vast array of unfamiliar circumstances worldwide. Britain’s inability to maintain its financial commitments to Greece and Turkey led to a widening American role in the Eastern Mediterranean, and in turn, the Middle East. In 1947, under the Truman Doctrine, Washington assumed the financial responsibilities of Britain in Greece and Turkey and began economic and military aid programs to each country. Yet, American officials remained wary of undertaking heavy burdens in the Middle East, especially in view of U.S. commitments elsewhere.

Washington’s approach to the Middle East and to exerting its influence abroad reflected the nature of the American political system, which answered to domestic politics, emphasized the dangers of communism and the sins of colonialism, and had limited official experience with Africa and Asia. America’s body of ideas and sentiments rooted in domestic political culture and history shaped the country’s external orientation, and found expression in moralistic and idealistic conceptions of anti-

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colonialism, anti-communism, and economic development in the Third World. In the Middle East, American postwar policy applied broad principles and ideas of self-determination and free trade to complex colonial problems. Conceptions of the Middle East within a wider Cold War context and idealistic notions of the possibilities for postwar political and economic development gripped Washington and shaped American policies in the region.

In the immediate postwar years, both London and Washington identified the Middle East as a critical to the global Cold War. If the Middle East fell to communism, it would open Africa to further Soviet influence, and upset the balance of power in Europe and Asia. The need to maintain Greece, Turkey, Iran, and other Northern Tier countries as barriers to Soviet expansion and to ensure the political and economic stability of the Middle East meant Washington could no longer rely on a low-cost, minimal-commitment policy in the region. Moreover, to many Arab people, American support of Israel made the U.S. look less like a friendly anti-imperialist power and more like a new player in the old balance of power game. These realities did not stop American officials from writing off the region and many failed to realize the gravity of the transition occurring in the Middle East, or the extent to which they would need to get

100 Darby, *Three Faces of Imperialism*, 169-177.
102 Ovendale, *Transfer of Power*, 43.
involved.\textsuperscript{105} However, some officials in Washington recognized the importance of pursuing public diplomacy initiatives in the Middle East to counter communist propaganda and to secure the continued dominance of Western interests.

By the early 1950s, some officials in Washington acknowledged the value of public diplomacy as a critical Cold War weapon. In testimony to the power of words, the Department of State’s Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, Edward Barrett, quoted U.S. Lieutenant General Albert Wedemeyer, who said before the U.S. House of Representatives, “We should no longer consider our military forces—the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force—as our first line of defense. In my opinion, the machinery, whether it be the Voice of America or a psychological warfare agency, that our Government sets up will make a stronger contribution and should be considered the first line of defense.”\textsuperscript{106} Yet, before American officials could undertake peacetime propaganda they had to overcome widespread antipathy to its use. The U.S. wartime propaganda machinery fared far worse in the postwar years than Britain’s.\textsuperscript{107} From 1945 to 1953, American public information programs abroad underwent continual reorganization and bureaucratic upheaval, impeding the foundation of stable public diplomacy initiatives. Following the closing of the World War II Office of War Information, overseas information activities were transferred to the State Department in the form of the Interim International Information Service, which was then reorganized three additional times in a

\textsuperscript{105} Monroe, \textit{Britain’s Moment in the Middle East}, 159.
\textsuperscript{107} Defty, \textit{Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda}, 27-30.
matter of four years.\textsuperscript{108} Despite the upheavals of the early 1950s, American public diplomacy programs survived, and the Cold War provided added justification for expanded propaganda and cultural activities.\textsuperscript{109}

On 20 April 1950, in an address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Washington, President Harry Truman asserted, “We must pool our efforts with those of other free peoples in a sustained, intensified program to promote the cause of freedom against the propaganda of slavery. We must make ourselves heard around the world in a great campaign of truth.”\textsuperscript{110} In April 1950, President Truman launched the “Campaign of Truth” program to improve and expand U.S. information programs abroad.\textsuperscript{111} American public diplomacy efforts, however, remained incomplete and divided among various agencies until June 1953, when President Dwight Eisenhower established the United States Information Agency (USIA) to consolidate and increase the effectiveness of various foreign aid and information agencies.\textsuperscript{112} As a keystone of Eisenhower’s ideological Cold War initiative, he made clear the USIA had his administration’s full support.\textsuperscript{113}

Throughout the Middle East, the U.S. pursued a variety of propaganda initiatives, including reading rooms, radio broadcasts, and motion pictures. On 1 January 1950, the

\textsuperscript{109} Vaughan, \textit{Failure of American and British Propaganda}, 70-71.
\textsuperscript{111} Defty, \textit{Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda}, 138-139; Osgood, \textit{Total Cold War}, 43.
\textsuperscript{113} Cull, \textit{Cold War and the United States Information Agency}, 133; Osgood, \textit{Total Cold War}, 50-53, 89.
Voice of America broadcast its first Arabic language program, which lasted thirty minutes daily, until it was increased to an hour in 1951. In the postwar years, American plans to expand broadcasting in Middle Eastern languages fell victim to budget cuts. One historian emphasized, “America’s entry into the field of Middle East radio propaganda was thus both inauspicious and belated.” In Egypt, British listeners to the VOA declared it stimulated little local interest and that radio broadcasting should be left to the “experienced hand” of the BBC. Even American officials agreed that the VOA was too propagandistic, and that the BBC enjoyed the advantages of “seniority, experience, and talent.” By the mid 1950s, U.S. intelligence officials recognized that the Baghdad Radio had clearly gravitated into a British rather than an American sphere of influence.

In the field of motion pictures, American officials achieved more success, and American entertainment films from Hollywood dominated the arena and easily outperformed British films. In Iraq, Americans produced the majority, nearly sixty percent, of entertainment films available. American films were generally more popular, but the British enjoyed wider distribution as a result of their strong personal contact network and intimate knowledge of Iraq’s physical geography.

In educational and cultural exchanges, American programs achieved more widespread success. American missionaries and philanthropic groups had a distinguished history of involvement in Middle Eastern education, dating back to the missionary

115 Vaughan, Failure of American and British Propaganda, 37.
116 Vaughan, Failure of American and British Propaganda, 37.
118 Vaughan, Failure of American and British Propaganda, 83-84.
colleges founded in Istanbul (1863), in Beirut (1866), and in Cairo (1919). In 1945, this influence manifested itself at the United Nations Conference in San Francisco, in which twenty-five of forty Arab delegates had attended American schools in the Middle East. In 1949, of an estimated one thousand Iraqi students studying abroad, nearly five hundred pursued studies at schools and colleges in the United States. The U.S. extended the Fulbright Program to Iraq in 1950, which further expanded the number of opportunities available to Iraqi students for study in America. The increasing scale of American cultural and educational exchange programs in Iraq caused consternation among some British officials who felt it might weaken their position and the number of British experts serving in the Iraqi government. In the 1950s, U.S. educational exchanges began to outpace British exchange programs, but many Middle Eastern heads of state and future heads of state studied in England. The U.S. also had no equivalent to the British Council, except a patchwork of state and private agencies.

The U.S. Embassy and the United States Information Service (USIS) pursued a variety of pamphlet and poster campaigns in Iraq to bolster America’s image and interests. In the early 1950s, several anti-communist posters used by the USIS office in Baghdad featured a “greedy red pig” with a hammer and sickle tail and depicted the pig’s downfall. USIS officials designed the greedy red pig to look both ridiculous and frightening in order to stir resistance against communism. Another poster campaign focused on freedom of religion in the United States versus communist suppression of

120 Vaughan, *Failure of American and British Propaganda*, 76.
122 Vaughan, *Failure of American and British Propaganda*, 75-76.
religion. The poster juxtaposed images of the communist state as a bully mistreating a man labeled “religion” to photographs of the construction of a new mosque in Washington, D.C. Other anti-communist pamphlets aimed to alter the attitudes of Iraqis who were unaware or apathetic to the dangers of Soviet imperialism. To elicit the desired response, U.S. Embassy officials reproduced the image of Soviet territorial expansion on a map combined with the phrase, “Look at the map – collective security is your defense.” USIS officials intended the map to make evident the perils of communist expansion for Iraqis, and prime the general public for Iraq’s signing of a collective security agreement with the West.

It is often assumed that following the Second World War American resources quickly eclipsed Britain’s propaganda effort, but the U.S. public diplomacy apparatus took time to get up and running, and Britain “did not merely hand the baton to the USA.” In 1947, the British employed 8,011 staff in their information services, compared to only 3,885 in the U.S. propaganda machine. That same year, the British information budget totaled $42,588,452, while the U.S. budget totaled only $30,123,086. In the decade after 1945, the upheaval in American public diplomacy programs left Britain with the leading role in Western information services to the Middle East. Even after the creation of the USIA, American propaganda operations remained divided among the State Department, the Defense Department, the Economic

124 Document 21, Records of the U.S. Department of State, Record Group 59, NSA.
125 Document 62, Records of the U.S. Department of State, Record Group 59, NSA.
126 Defty, Britain, America, and Anti-Communist Propaganda, 251; Taylor, Selling Democracy, 239.
127 Vaughan, Failure of American and British Propaganda, 17.
Cooperation Administration, and the CIA. The slow development of the American public diplomacy apparatus fit with the lack of urgency in U.S. policy towards Iraq, which emerged primarily as a support to Britain’s position in the country.

As Washington expanded its role in the Middle East, Anglo-American cooperation and conflict increased simultaneously. As early as 1944, British and American missions in the Middle East were told to conduct Anglo-American relations in the spirit of cooperation. London first initiated Anglo-American cooperation in the field of anti-communist propaganda after the formation of the Information Research Department (IRD) within the Foreign Office in 1948. British officials regarded coordination and cooperation with the U.S. as a key feature of their anti-communist propaganda campaign, and revealed sensitive IRD policies to Washington. By 1950, American officials at the Department of State and British officials in the Foreign Office agreed to the “continuous exchange of ideas” regarding their propaganda programs. During the 1950s, officials in London and Washington shared detailed information about propaganda materials and objectives, and officials in the field shared intelligence and even pursued joint operations. Britain’s close and unique level of cooperation with the U.S. contrasted with London’s cautious approach to collaboration with other powers in Europe and in the Commonwealth.

128 Defty, Britain, America, and Anti-Communist Propaganda, 143.
131 Defty, Britain, America, and Anti-Communist Propaganda, 253; Taylor, Selling Democracy, 237-238.
132 Vaughan, Failure of American and British Propaganda, 42.
134 Defty, Britain, America, and Anti-Communist Propaganda, 103, 125.
In light of Britain’s economic burdens and a looming Soviet threat, many British officials welcomed the expansion of U.S. information activities in the early 1950s. Some officials on both sides of the Atlantic demonstrated enthusiasm for increased propaganda cooperation, while others exhibited reluctance and uncertainty about collaboration in such a sensitive field. In May 1950, senior American and British officials responsible for propaganda met at the Foreign Office in London to discuss increased coordination of propaganda policies, including the exchange of propaganda materials and cooperation in distribution techniques. The meetings resulted in enhanced collaborative efforts, but also revealed differences in opinion over tactics and policies. Some historians claim that the postwar decade was characterized more by mutual suspicion than by harmonious cooperation in Anglo-American propaganda efforts. However, the gravity of two great powers sharing sensitive information and materials about propaganda programs should not be understated.

In London, Washington, and in the field, anti-communist propaganda proved one of the most fruitful fields of Anglo-American association. Many officials in London and Washington were eager to confront the Soviet threat, and used any signs of Soviet influence to justify increased anti-communist operations. By the end of 1951, U.S. and British thinking began to converge regarding both the concept and conduct of political warfare as an offensive weapon in the Cold War. A combination of interests, precedent,

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135 Vaughan, *Failure of American and British Propaganda*, 42.
136 Defty, *Britain, America, and Anti-Communist Propaganda*, 144.
137 Vaughan, *Failure of American and British Propaganda*, 43.
138 Defty, *Britain, America, and Anti-Communist Propaganda*, 149.
139 Vaughan, *Failure of American and British Propaganda*, 98-102; Petersen, *Controlling the Uncontrollable?*, x.
and circumstance drove American and British cooperation. The U.S. was the only other nation with the inclination and resources necessary to pursue a similar anti-communist propaganda campaign. In the early 1950s, American and British officials responded to Soviet propaganda, which highlighted Anglo-American rivalry in the Middle East, with joint operations that demonstrated their solidarity. In the field, British and American information officers generally exchanged material and consulted in private, but sought to maintain “individuality of output” and the outward appearance of acting independently.

Levels of Anglo-American cooperation varied from post to post in the Middle East. During the 1950s, American and British officials in Iraq maintained a close relationship, but demonstrated the opposing forces of cooperation and conflict within the Anglo-American relationship. In 1950, information officers reported the sharing of information, joint propaganda operations, and even distributing one another’s propaganda in Iraq. British officials also helped American information staff translate materials and the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad reported the use of British anti-communist material in their Kurdish Bulletin. Other British and American officials, however, reflected uneasiness in Anglo-American collaboration. British officials in Iraq noted, “When such matters are discussed in Washington or London it is not difficult to find formulas laying down general principles of co-operation and agreeing that the efforts of the two countries

140 Defty, Britain, America, and Anti-Communist Propaganda, 168, 249-250.
141 Defty, Britain, America, and Anti-Communist Propaganda, 149.
142 Vaughan, Failure of American and British Propaganda, 44, 47; Defty, Britain, America, and Anti-Communist Propaganda, 150; Thacher, “Reflections on US Foreign Policy towards Iraq in the 1950s,” in Louis and Fernea, Iraqi Revolution of 1958, 63.
143 Defty, Britain, America, and Anti-Communist Propaganda, 150.
should be complementary and worked out according to a joint plan. The difficulty arises when it comes to putting these admirable principles into practice."

Before leaving Iraq in 1954, Ambassador Troutbeck noted the “remarkable” extent of American intervention, but worried, “There is a grave danger lest by a combination of free gifts and a blundering diplomacy the Americans will end by seriously weakening our own position without getting very much out of it either for themselves or for the free world.”

A number of roadblocks obstructed Anglo-American cooperation in the Middle East. Some British officials felt that the Middle East was “their patch” and subsequently resented any American encroachment upon a traditionally British sphere of influence. British and American officials also displayed mutual suspicion of one another’s intentions. In Iraq, the British Embassy reported some officials and individuals within the British community distrusted American motives in the Middle East, and had “no belief in American altruism.” American officials held their own suspicions, expecting that British requests for closer partnership were aimed at limiting the U.S. capacity for independent action in the region. Some officials in London, in fact, did want to gain a stronger position in order to make suggestions and criticisms of U.S. propaganda policies,

146 Vaughan, Failure of American and British Propaganda, 43; Ovendale, Transfer of Power, 77.
but securing a position from which to influence American information activities did not indicate a bid to control them.\(^\text{149}\)

Differing opinions and policies towards Arab nationalism and the legacy of colonialism in the Middle East also impeded Anglo-American cooperation. The postwar rise of nationalism and anti-colonialism heightened Anglo-American tensions and produced a serious headache for Cold War strategists. Contradictions between British interests and Arab nationalist aspirations thwarted British efforts to convince Arab states that a new era of friendship and equality had dawned in Anglo-Arab relations.\(^\text{150}\) Anglo-Egyptian antagonism and the Buraimi dispute with Saudi Arabia did little to convince the Arab world of a shift in Britain’s goals in the region.\(^\text{151}\) Many Arab peoples viewed any continuation of British influence as the extension of imperialism, making American officials reluctant to openly associate with the British out of fear of alienating Arab nationalists and being tarred by the “imperialist brush.”\(^\text{152}\) In 1953, the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, Burton Berry, reported, “The greatest problem grows out of the need to present a united front with Great Britain and France and, at the same time, to avoid the accusation of perpetuating colonialism.”\(^\text{153}\)

Dealing with imperialism and colonialism became a serious problem for officials on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1954, Ambassador

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\(^{153}\) Document 102, Records of the U.S. Department of State, Record Group 59, NSA.
Troutbeck wrote the Americans “seem to have become convinced that the British were outdated in their whole approach to the Middle East and that it was time for the New World to intervene.”\(^{154}\) Washington’s anti-colonialist rhetoric, its shift towards Egypt, and its neutral approach to regional issues hindered Anglo-American relations.\(^{155}\)

Arab reluctance to regard the Cold War as a pressing concern in their lives undermined Western propaganda focused upon the Soviet and communist threat. In May 1953, during a conversation with John Foster Dulles, Egyptian President Gamal Nasser demonstrated this dilemma when he stated, “I can’t see myself waking up one morning to find that the Soviet Union is our enemy. We don’t know them. They are thousands of miles away from us…. I would become the laughing stock of my people if I told them they now had a new enemy… and that they must forget about the British enemy occupying their territory.”\(^{156}\) In 1951, Dr. Stephen Penrose from the American University of Beirut emphasized that Communist ideology lacked potency in the Middle East, but nonetheless, generated effective anti-Western messages. To deal a substantial blow to the Western interests and make thousands of miles of oil pipeline vulnerable, the Soviets only needed to “arouse sufficient antipathy and bitterness toward the West among the peoples of the Arab world as to provoke them to sabotage and resistance.”\(^{157}\) Many Arabs viewed the possibility of Soviet expansionism only as an abstract threat, but they had


\(^{156}\) Vaughan, *Failure of American and British Propaganda in the Arab Middle East*, 127.

\(^{157}\) Document 24, Records of the U.S. Department of State, Record Group 59, NSA.
experienced British and French imperialism firsthand. Penrose recalled one Soviet propaganda leaflet that stated, “The Western imperialists are forging new chains for the Arab world, seeking to enslave the Arab peoples and forcing them to fight on their behalf against the peace-loving nations of the world, at the head of which is the Soviet Union.” Western responses to communist messages were hampered by ingrained suspicion of imperialism, anger over Israel, and rivalries among the Western Powers.

The greatest barrier to Anglo-American cooperation and to Western public diplomacy initiatives in the Middle East was the Arab-Israeli dispute. In 1954, Ambassador Troutbeck wrote, “Arabism, Islam, and anti-imperialism meet in concentrated fanaticism on the question of Israel, which largely dominates Iraqi thinking on foreign affairs.” Palestine dwarfed all other problems in the region, and “bedeviled” Middle East relations with the West. For the British, the Palestine problem ravaged their hopes for a stable Middle East and a continued Arab friendship. American officials consistently referenced Washington’s inability to address Iraqi concerns regarding justice in Palestine as the greatest obstacle to the improvement of relations between the U.S. and Iraq. In 1951, one Iraqi newspaper reported, “Why should the

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158 Podeh, *Quest for Hegemony in the Arab World*, 44; Louis, *British Empire in the Middle East*, 744-745.
159 Document 24, Records of the U.S. Department of State, Record Group 59, NSA.
Americans tell us about communism? We know its evils already, and we don’t care to hear from the Americans who betrayed us in Palestine about evils of which we are already aware.”165 In 1953, Sir John Troutbeck argued that although “Iraq lends itself to the attentions of dollar diplomacy… it will not quite sell its soul and no amount of dollars will affect the Iraqi attitude on such emotional questions as Palestine.”166

By the mid 1950s, both Britain and the United States had developed highly effective propaganda machinery in the Middle East, including high technical competence, use of local mediators and private agencies, and operational sophistication. However, the Cold War framework, which held a pervasive hold on the minds of Western propagandists, crippled British and American public diplomacy campaigns in the region. British officials in Iraq recognized that the Soviets showed little sign of pushing in Iraq, and that there were few Iraqi Communists in the strict sense of the word.167 Yet, the potential Soviet threat loomed large, during a decade when the battle between the communist and non-communist world imbued British and American societies and policies. While busy focusing on communism and the Soviets, Western propagandists failed to adequately address Arab concerns regarding the crisis in Palestine, Arab nationalism, and suspicion of Western interference.

During the 1950s, Iraq straddled two worlds. Rising levels of education and literacy and multiplying cultural movements produced a vibrant social climate, and Iraqi

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165 Document 21, Records of the U.S. Department of State, Record Group 59, NSA.
political elites began to pursue measures of economic development and political liberalization. However, conservative elements within Iraq and public disdain for the West regarding the crisis in Palestine and Western imperialism hampered Iraqi development and cooperation with Britain and the United States. To counter antagonism towards the West and to win Iraqi hearts and minds, British and American officials sought to foster goodwill among the Iraqi public and its opinion-formers by extending and improving their public diplomacy programs. In the decade after 1945, American public diplomacy programs suffered from continual bureaucratic upheaval and American officials failed to find a stable footing for their international information programs until the mid 1950s. Therefore, in the postwar years, Britain’s public diplomacy programs remained the dominant Western cultural force in Iraq and throughout the Middle East.

In the postwar period, growing Iraqi public resentment towards slow economic development, weak political liberalization, and corruption within the Iraqi government jeopardized the British position, which was closely linked and dependent upon Iraqi political elites. British officials attempted to engage young Iraqis through public diplomacy programs, but Arab nationalism, the Arab-Israeli dispute, and suspicion of British intentions obstructed cooperation. However, all hope was not lost, and in 1954, Sir John Troutbeck argued,

The Iraqis cannot get Britain out of their system. They will remember individual Englishmen who have served here with the keenest affection and esteem. They seem to feel at home in British company. I myself have met with nothing but courtesy and kindness from all the Iraqis I have known, both in Bagdad and throughout the country. In the country districts an Englishman can always be sure of a welcome from
every class. The upper classes for their part appear to derive comfort from the belief that no matter what they do or leave undone, Britain will always see them through.\textsuperscript{168}

After 1945, Britain sought to counter revolutionary forces in Iraq, to win Iraqi hearts and minds, and to preserve their position by extending and improving their public diplomacy programs, by increasing Anglo-Iraqi cultural and educational links, and by maintaining British control over foreign radio broadcasting and international news sources. British influence upon Iraqi news, education, and cultural movements was subtle, multifaceted, and considerably effective. During the 1950s, British public and cultural diplomacy efforts in Iraq, paired with their dominance of foreign news and radio broadcasts, provided a critical informal mechanism for adapting British connections into more acceptable forms that fit the postwar climate.

CHAPTER 3: STRATEGIC DEFENSE:  
THE ANGLO-IRAQI MILITARY RELATIONSHIP

With the independence of India in 1947, British officials looked to the Middle East and the Far East as critical strategic regions in their own right.¹ The Middle East served as a hub of vital sea and air communications, a shield to Africa, a center of oil production, and a buffer to the Soviet Union. In light of postwar imperial consolidation and the emerging Cold War, British officials considered the Middle East as a critical region to Britain’s postwar security and economic recovery.² In the 1950s, Britain sought to maintain its predominance in the region, including the retention of its massive military base at the Suez Canal zone, and military installations in Iraq and throughout the region.³

After the Second World War, British officials and strategists continued to rely on a pragmatic approach to the formulation of Britain’s Middle East defense policy. Officials responded and adapted to postwar crises and security threats as they occurred, instead of undertaking a serious reassessment of Britain’s military commitments east of Suez. The incremental adaptation to postwar constraints, without the enumeration of long-term objectives, led to reliance upon past imperial experiences as a guide to postwar defense policy.⁴ During the 1950s, successive British governments maintained strategies initially designed to defend India as a result of their reluctance to cut commitments or

¹ Darby, British Defence Policy East of Suez, 327.
² Ovendale, Transfer of Power, 2-3; Darwin, Britain and Decolonisation, 206; Devereux, Formulation of British Defence Policy, 3, 16, 121; Dockrill, Britain’s Retreat from East of Suez, 10; Darby, British Defence Policy East of Suez, 9, 31; Louis, British Empire in the Middle East, 16.
limit the scope of Britain’s military role in the East. While seeking to maintain their independence of action, the British recognized the need to draw American financial and military support into the Middle East to fully confront the Soviet threat. London also sought to preserve close Anglo-American cooperation in the fields of intelligence and defense.

The Attlee government, in particular Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin and the Chiefs of Staff, upheld the Middle East as second in importance only to the U.K. itself. During the 1950s, consecutive Conservative governments intended to reduce British commitments in the Middle East, but the region remained strategically vital to the postwar world. During the early to mid 1950s, Nasser and his aggressive brand of Arab nationalism chipped away at Britain’s position in Egypt, leading to the promotion of Iraq as a center of Britain’s Middle East strategy. This chapter examines Britain’s Middle East defense policy in the decade and a half after the Second World War, with particular attention to the increasing significance of Iraq. Close relations between British and Iraqi military officials and Britain’s dominance of the provision of military training and supplies to the Iraqi Army and Air Force contributed to the preservation of Britain’s position. The chapter also analyzes the manifestations of the Anglo-American military relationship in the Middle East and American and British attempts to secure a regional defense agreement.

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5 Darby, *British Defence Policy East of Suez*, 327.
7 Holland, *Pursuit of Greatness*, 266-270.
Britain’s Postwar Defense Policy

Prior to 1947, the overriding concern of the British Empire was the security of India, “the ultimate justification for a defensive system which spanned half the world.”

India’s importance drew less from any economic benefit, but from the Indian Army, which consisted of an enormous all volunteer Indian force and British officers. As “an English barrack in the Oriental seas,” British India made Britain into a formidable European and Asian power. Although subordinate to Whitehall, British India pursued an imperial policy within its own sphere, and throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries British administrators in the India government served as chief executors and managers of British policy in the Middle East. The defense of India depended upon the security of its land and sea approaches, its oceanic flanks, the Middle East, and the Far East. After India’s independence in 1947—the severing of the heart of Britain’s Indian Ocean system—the British government did not develop any new strategic doctrine to redefine military tasks and long-term objectives east of Suez. Instead, the “wings of the old system,” including the Middle East, the Far East, and Southeast Asia, became critical in their own right to Britain’s postwar recovery and strategic position. The experiences of

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9 Robinson and Gallagher, Official Mind of Imperialism, 12.

10 Monroe, Britain’s Moment in the Middle East, 11-13.

11 Darby, British Defence Policy East of Suez, 9-11; Devereux, Formulation of British Defence Policy, 16; Monroe, Britain’s Moment in the Middle East, 152; Ovendale, Transfer of Power, 3.
an imperial past guided postwar defense policy, as British military leaders tried “to find a means of doing, with diminishing resources, what they were told they had to do.”

After the Second World War, British officials sought to balance a multitude of relationships with Europe, the U.S., and with Britain’s Empire and Commonwealth. In the Middle East, Britain remained the dominant Western power, with widespread strategic footholds and long-held political, economic, and military relationships with regional powers. Over 200,000 British troops were stationed at the Suez Canal base, which occupied an area about the size of Wales, and was equipped with almost every facility necessary for war. The British also maintained air and naval installations at Lydda and Haifa in Palestine, air bases at Habbaniya and Shaiba in Iraq, the Arab Legion in the Transjordan led by British officer John Glubb, and naval bases at Aden and Bahrain. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, however, numerous military and economic burdens and postwar conditions, including Britain’s military obligations in Europe, the development of thermo-nuclear weapons, the rising power of the United States, and expensive commitments in Korea, Malaya, and Kenya, forced British policymakers to reevaluate their position in the Middle East.

In 1945, the new Labour Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, questioned Britain’s commitment to the Middle East, but Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin and the Chiefs of Staff were unwilling to compromise on the issue. The Chiefs of Staff were even

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prepared to resign rather than give way on Britain’s position in the region. The possibility of atomic warfare preoccupied Attlee, Bevin, and others in the “inner-ring” of the Cabinet, but ultimately, no major reassessment of Britain’s strategy in the Middle East took place to account for a shifting strategic environment. British officials decided to focus on Arab nationalism rather than atomic holocaust as the real threat to the Britain’s informal empire in the Middle East. In the immediate postwar years, the Chiefs of Staff reestablished a military policy based on the Three Pillars strategy under which the security of the British Empire and Commonwealth depended upon protecting the United Kingdom, maintaining vital sea communications, and securing the Middle East as a defensive and striking base against the Soviet Union.

In 1951, the Churchill government entered office seeking to maintain the façade of British power, while “quietly and with honour and dignity” reducing British obligations. In the early 1950s, Churchill was unconvinced of both the Soviet threat to the Middle East and the region’s continued importance, especially in light of nuclear capabilities and Britain’s postwar financial restrictions. The successful test of an American hydrogen bomb and Turkey’s accession to NATO in 1952, and the need to reduce an inflated defense budget, led the Churchill government to reconsider British Middle East defense strategy. The advent of thermo-nuclear weapons increased the vulnerability of conventional forces and concentrated base areas like Suez, which

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17 Louis, *British Empire in the Middle East*, 27-34.
challenged Britain’s traditional Middle East policy and resulted in continuing disputes over the proper balance between nuclear and conventional forces. In 1952, defense reassessment led to the production of a new Global Strategy Paper advocating for nuclear deterrence as a central tenet of British policy, and for a shift in focus from the Middle East to Europe and the Far East. Yet, adjustments in strategy took time, and London could not override the fact that, in practice, the Middle East and conventional force capabilities remained critical to Britain’s position.

A combination of institutional factors, external circumstances, and official patterns of thought deterred a reappraisal of British interests in the immediate postwar period. The British custom of slow governmental change guaranteed few questions were asked to probe British commitments and purposes after 1945. Postponement of a major strategic reassessment occurred for several reasons, including, but not limited to, the general pragmatism in British policy, uncertainty about the impact of atomic weapons on military strategy, and the adoption of the ten-year rule in the winter of 1946, which contended another major war would not happen for ten years. In the military service departments, the Foreign Office, and the Colonial Office, “old ideas lingered on and the collective outlook remained imperial.” The idea of Britain’s continued “world role,”

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28 Darby, *British Defence Policy East of Suez*, 16.
independent status, and freedom of maneuver had a determined longevity within the official mind.\textsuperscript{29} Throughout the twentieth century, a striking characteristic in the development of British policy was “the search both at the state-directed economic level…and in the sphere of strategy, for some modified version of ‘Pax Britannica’, one whose geographical application was necessarily more circumscribed, and whose methods were more discreet, but which might still constitute a regional British hegemony.”\textsuperscript{30} This outlook provided a sufficient sense of purpose in the postwar years to obscure the need for fundamental questioning and to ensure the casting of British defense policy in a traditional mold, with a focus on immediate needs and threats, not long-term objectives.\textsuperscript{31}

Following the Second World War, the organization of Britain’s defense policymaking underwent an ongoing process of readjustment, contributing to the incrementalist nature of British defense policy. The structure of British defense decision-making was “a confederation of separate power centres,” not a centralized body, which fueled resistance to postwar attempts to unify and centralize the framework.\textsuperscript{32} In late 1946, the Attlee government created the post of Minister of Defense, followed up in early 1947 with the formation of the Ministry of Defense. But, without a strong Minister, service rivalry went unchecked, and the Chiefs of Staff and the three service ministers could by-pass the Minister of Defense.\textsuperscript{33} In 1955, the Eden government established the post of Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, in an unsuccessful attempt to create a

\textsuperscript{30} Holland, \textit{Pursuit of Greatness}, 347.
\textsuperscript{31} Darby, \textit{British Defence Policy East of Suez}, 55.
\textsuperscript{32} Baylis, \textit{Striking the Right Balance}, 12, 18.
single voice that reported on defense issues from the Cabinet. Britain’s defense policymaking remained inefficient until the early 1960s, when officials began to implement and adjust to new defense policies and frameworks.34

The simultaneous eagerness for and resistance to change in Britain’s defense policymaking structure manifested itself in Britain’s postwar strategy in the Middle East, where British officials sought to move away from arrangements that inflamed Arab nationalism, but found it difficult to do so in practice. Britain confronted a disjointed Middle East in which rising Arab nationalism countered conservative forces and in which some Middle Eastern governments experimented with economic development and political reform. Nasser and his enthralling charisma drew nationalists from all over the Arab world behind him, which challenged Anglo-Egyptian relations. The Attlee government and the Conservative governments of the 1950s sought to adapt Britain’s more formal, and locally detested, arrangements in the Middle East into informal partnerships, resulting in a concentration “on establishing friendly relations with amenable Arab states on the basis of equality.”35 In the fall of 1952, the Churchill government pursued a new “forward strategy,” or the Levant-Iraq strategy, which shifted away from a Suez-centered regional defense policy, and focused upon mobile forces and nuclear deterrence.36 British officials turned to informal techniques, including military-based connections and new regional defense agreements, to maintain their postwar

34 Baylis, Striking the Right Balance, 13-14; Darby, British Defence Policy East of Suez, 95.
35 Ovendale, Transfer of Power, 84.
36 Cohen, Fighting World War Three from the Middle East, 298, 301; Cohen, “The Strategic Role of the Middle East,” in Cohen and Kolinsky, Demise of the British Empire in the Middle East, 34; Devereux, Formulation of British Defence Policy, 121, 141; Ovendale, Transfer of Power, 66; Holland, Pursuit of Greatness, 270.
position. Iraq was a focal point of Britain’s renewed attention to smaller and more agreeable Middle Eastern countries.\textsuperscript{37} In 1955, the formation of the Baghdad Pact further contributed to Britain’s swing towards Iraq as a center of their Middle Eastern strategy.\textsuperscript{38}

\textit{The Anglo-Iraqi Military Relationship}

During the Second World War, British forces reoccupied Iraq following a brief Anglo-Iraqi war, which occurred in May 1941 on the heels of the military-backed Rashid Ali Gaylani Coup. To prevent further military uprisings, the new Iraqi government and its British advisors reduced the size of the Iraqi Army from 47,000 to 25,000 troops, and arrested or forcefully retired 605 out of 1,745 officers.\textsuperscript{39} It took the Iraqi Army nearly two decades to reach pre-1941 numbers.\textsuperscript{40} By the end of World War II, British officials realized the necessity of increasing the Iraqi military’s effectiveness so it could successfully confront internal revolts and external threats to the state.\textsuperscript{41} In the postwar years, however, Britain’s economic burdens and international commitments reduced their ability to provide Iraqi military forces with equipment and supplies, amplifying tensions in the Anglo-Iraqi relationship.\textsuperscript{42} In January 1952, the British Ambassador to Iraq, Sir John Troutbeck, wrote, “If we build up our strength in the Middle East and extend to Iraq sympathy in deeds as well as words, \textit{e.g.}, by supplying her with the arms she needs, there

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Devereux} Devereux, \textit{Formulation of British Defence Policy}, 121, 141; Ovendale, \textit{Transfer of Power}, 66.
\bibitem{Holland} Holland, \textit{Pursuit of Greatness}, 270.
\bibitem{Louis} Louis, \textit{British Empire in the Middle East}, 322-324; Dawisha, \textit{Iraq}, 100-101; Silverfarb, \textit{Twilight of British Ascendancy}, 93.
\bibitem{Dawisha} Dawisha, \textit{Iraq}, 100.
\end{thebibliography}
should be a reasonable hope of keeping Iraq fundamentally on our side in the Cold War.\footnote{Jarman, \textit{Political Diaries of the Arab World 1948-1958}, 223.} As Britain’s relations with Egypt deteriorated and the Cold War intensified, maintaining the Anglo-Iraqi defense partnership became all the more important. The 1930 Anglo-Iraqi Treaty and its military arrangements remained in force and included British control of air bases at Habbaniya and Shaiba. In spite of postwar domestic economic burdens and worldwide commitments, Britain continued to shape the Iraqi military and its policies during the 1950s through the provision of military training and equipment, and the retention of close personal military relationships.\footnote{Reports during 1950s detailing Britain’s continued relationship with the Iraqi Army and Air Force, in Burdett, \textit{Iraq Defence Intelligence}, 163, 176, 276-278, 351-353.}

The demands and policies of new international bodies, such as the United Nations, and regional challenges, including the Arab-Israeli dispute, tested Britain’s position in Iraq. In early 1949, the UN Security Council embargo on the supply of arms to the Middle East proved a serious obstruction in Anglo-Iraqi relations. During the first Arab-Israeli War, following the creation of Israel in 1948, the Iraqi Army held a sector of the front line in Palestine. In early 1949, Iraqi ammunition stores were insufficient to last if intensive fighting flared up again. In the same period, the Iraqi government grew concerned about internal security with the rumored return of Mulla Mustafa al Barzani, a Kurdish nationalist leader, to northern Iraq.\footnote{Silverfarb, \textit{Twilight of British Ascendancy}, 39-53, 173-180.} Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Said implored the British government to provide weapons, but weapons supplies were not released until the arms embargo was lifted in June 1949. By then, the Iraqi Army had vacated Palestine and
the internal security scare had temporarily subsided. During the early 1950s, Iraqi officials expressed continued anger regarding both delays in the delivery of British arms and ammunition and the inadequate number of vacancies in British Army training courses allotted to Iraqis. In 1951, a senior British intelligence officer in Iraq reported, “The view is strongly held that the failure by the West to supply arms to Iraq in adequate quantities will tend to heighten the feeling of isolation and despondency felt by many Iraqis, and encourage a policy of neutrality.” Britain’s delay in supplying arms and equipment bolstered opinions that Iraq appeared “to be getting little practical support” from maintaining a pro-British, and pro-Western attitude.

During 1950, increasing international tensions and Communist advances in Asia led the Iraqi government to seriously consider questions of Iraq’s ability to defend itself against aggression along its northern and eastern borders. Growing fears among Iraqi elites accelerated efforts to equip and train the Iraqi Army. In October 1950, the Commander-in-Chief of Britain’s Middle East Land Forces, General Brian Robertson, visited Iraq to advise on its defense and to bolster Iraqi confidence in the British alliance. Follow up visits by the Middle East Land Forces Reconnaissance Team and various other training teams further stimulated the interests of the Iraqi Ministry of

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49 “Note by Commandant General on Visit to Baghdad on 29th, 30th March 1951,” in Burdett, Iraq Defence Intelligence, 386-387.
Defense in military matters.\(^{52}\) In 1950, the British Ambassador to Iraq, Sir Henry Mack, reported, “The Iraqi governing classes remain attached to the British alliance, and are generally prepared to play whatever part may be allotted to them in our plans for the defence of the Middle East as a whole.”\(^{53}\) With heightened regional and international tensions and increasing Iraqi security concerns, a well-nurtured Anglo-Iraqi military relationship offered a path for continued British influence.

In the early 1950s, Anglo-Iraqi defense cooperation improved as Britain’s provision of both army and air force training and supplies reached sufficient levels to ease Iraqi doubts. In 1951, General Robertson visited the Iraqi Army to provide further advice, and a British training team assisted in the conduct of the army’s autumn maneuvers. The Iraqi Army utilized General Robertson’s recommendations and implemented important changes in the Iraqi Army’s higher command. British Air Chief Marshal Sir John Baker also enjoyed a close relationship with the Royal Iraqi Air Force, which steadily improved morale within the service.\(^{54}\) In 1952, British training teams continued to visit Iraq to conduct technical courses of instruction and to assist in the preparation and carrying out of exercises.\(^{55}\) In March 1953, during a meeting between Iraqi Minister of Defense Nuri Said and General Robertson, Nuri proposed, “You have a large headquarters with competent officers in all departments. I should like you to take charge of us, sending your various departmental officers periodically to look over the

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corresponding departments here, just as they would in the case of one of your subordinate commands.”

This kind of language demonstrates how powerful the Anglo-Iraqi relationship remained behind closed doors, even as officials sought to camouflage the connection in public.

In 1953 and 1954, Anglo-Iraqi military relations persisted on good terms. British officials enjoyed the advantage of offering advice to the Iraqi Army and Air Force. The British Embassy affirmed, “In times of trouble it is to us that the Iraq Government will instinctively turn for guidance and help.”

British training programs provided another critical Anglo-Iraqi military link. Iraqi officers and military personnel trained with British officers, used British equipment, and were brought up in the British military tradition and under British standards. Ambassador Troutbeck added, “The senior officers in the armed forces have mostly been trained in British institutions and have a keen respect for British ways.”

Close relations with the royal family and the predominance of English as the main foreign language in Iraq also eased a continued Anglo-Iraqi military relationship.

In May 1955, following the signing of a new Anglo-Iraqi defense agreement under the umbrella of the Baghdad Pact, British officials handed over Britain’s RAF bases at Shaiba and Habbaniya to Iraqi military forces in return for continued British assistance and aid in Iraqi military training. Iraqi and British military officers maintained close connections, as the passing over of the facilities took time, and the British

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continued to utilize the bases until 1958. British RAF commanding officers at both bases informed the Basra Consulate, “in so far as the real business of handing over has started at all – the Iraqi flag flutters overhead, but the signing of inventories of stores, buildings and equipment has scarcely begun – it has proceeded with the most exemplary smoothness.”

Throughout 1955, the withdrawal of British military elements proceeded according to plan, and British officials began to put in place a system of training and advising for Iraqi military forces that allowed for a continued Anglo-Iraqi military relationship. The British Embassy in Baghdad reported, “The new system of help and training to the Iraqi Air Force was set on foot smoothly.”

In December 1955, the British government waived a sum of nearly three million pounds due from Iraq for the buildings, installations, and land at the former British bases at Habbaniya, Shaiba, and Margil. But, the Iraqi government used the money to meet the expenses of new military training programs with the U.K. and to fund the procurement of British equipment in 1956 and 1957.

Not all British officials agreed on turning over the British air bases to Iraqis. The Chiefs of Staff wanted to retain the strategic footholds in the country, which were considered prime Middle Eastern real estate. Britain’s military services utilized the air bases for staging military aircraft in transit to the Far East, Australia, and New Zealand. The two bases also accommodated more than four thousand personnel.

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63 Ovendale, Transfer of Power, 94.
Troutbeck noted, in support of the exchange, that “the continued presence of our forces on Iraqi soil” proved a major source of resentment, and in the long-term generated hostility towards the Anglo-Iraqi connection.\textsuperscript{64} During the 1950s, the British military mission helped maintain British influence in Iraq and provided an alternative regional foothold to the Suez base.\textsuperscript{65} British officials upheld the Anglo-Iraqi connection by maintaining close military relationships between British and Iraqi officers, by providing equipment and training, and by turning over British air bases in Iraq in return for Britain’s continued provision of instruction and advising to the Iraqi military.

\textit{The Anglo-American Relationship and U.S. Policy in the Middle East}

During the 1950s, conditions in the Middle East seemed ideal for close Anglo-American cooperation based upon mutual need. Britain served as the traditionally dominant Western power in the region, but it looked to the U.S. for postwar support.\textsuperscript{66} The British needed American economic and military backing, and the Americans needed British connections and bases, while both hoped to preserve as much freedom of action as possible.\textsuperscript{67} Historian Steve Marsh argues, “The range and diversity of British interests, although often a source of friction, uniquely placed Britain to fulfill many American objectives which they lacked the power, influence or willingness to tackle.”\textsuperscript{68} During the 1950s, what emerges most significantly from the study of the Anglo-American relationship in the Middle East is the degree to which British and Americans officials

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\textsuperscript{65} Silverfarb, \textit{Twilight of British Ascendancy}, 109.

\textsuperscript{66} Marsh, \textit{Anglo-American Relations and Cold War Oil}, 3.

\textsuperscript{67} Louis, \textit{British Empire in the Middle East}, 112; Darby, \textit{British Defence Policy East of Suez}, 20-22; Bartlett, \textit{Special Relationship}, 31.

\textsuperscript{68} Marsh, \textit{Anglo-American Relations and Cold War Oil}, 176.
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cooperated, despite many major differences of opinion and cases of outright suspicion and competition.\textsuperscript{69} Anglo-American interactions, including moments of both cooperation and conflict, had an enormous impact on British and American policies and domestic politics in the Middle East.

The roots of the special relationship between Britain and the United States can be traced back to the origins of America itself, but only during the Second World War did a close, intimate, and informal partnership develop in a wide spectrum of political, economic, and military fields.\textsuperscript{70} While not a paradigm for what followed, David Reynolds argues the wartime alliance was “probably the most remarkable alliance of modern history.”\textsuperscript{71} Widespread disagreement exists regarding the nature of the “special relationship” or if a “special” Anglo-American relationship even exists. Regardless of its nature, historian D. C. Watt contends “in the minds of participants on both sides of the Atlantic that relationship, in its development, was perceived as being different from other international relationships.”\textsuperscript{72} Some historians emphasize Anglo-American cultural and sentimental ties at the root of the special relationship, but others promote the importance of common interests.\textsuperscript{73} Whether it is history, language, sentiment or shared concerns at the root of the “special relationship,” it is rather a mix of these factors than any one on its own.

\textsuperscript{69} Bartlett, Special Relationship, 77.
\textsuperscript{72} D. Cameron Watt, Succeeding John Bull: America in Britain’s Place, 1900-1975 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 159.
\textsuperscript{73} Ashton, Eisenhower, Macmillan and the Problem of Nasser, 2; Louis, British Empire in the Middle East, 112; David Watt, “Introduction: The Anglo-American Relationship,” in Louis and Bull, Special Relationship, 5.
own.\textsuperscript{74} The bottom line remains that the U.S. and U.K. conversed with an openness and regularity in a variety of fields, which was exclusive and on a different level from a normal ally relationship.\textsuperscript{75}

Anglo-American relations were a patchwork of conflict and cooperation, and exhibited a “two-sided, almost schizoid character,” a sort of “competitive cooperation.”\textsuperscript{76} In the immediate postwar years, the Anglo-American relationship waned as a result of the rapid break-up of the integrated war machine and the abrupt cancellation of U.S. Lend-Lease aid in August 1945. Subsequent haggling over the U.S. loan to London to aid in Britain’s postwar recovery and the unilateral ending of nuclear cooperation by Washington produced further bitterness and hostility.\textsuperscript{77} Yet, in 1947 and 1948, the wide range of links forged in response to the emerging Cold War, including shared interests in the security of Western Europe and the Middle East, the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and NATO, resulted in a revival in the special relationship.\textsuperscript{78} Anglo-American relations have been particularly “special” in regards to security, and especially, addressing the threat posed by the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{79} Admiral Sir James Eberle emphasizes,
“There are very few fields within the whole spectrum of military activity that have not been the subjects of bilateral Anglo-American agreements for the exchange of information and techniques.”

Cooperation in highly classified fields, including the development of nuclear weapons and intelligence collection, has helped sustain the “special character” of the Anglo-American relationship. As Washington’s foremost military ally, Britain filled an important position, which was unique in terms of the mutual confidence and trust it inspired between the individual military services of the two countries.

From 1950 to 1956, tensions regarding issues such as the AIOC Crisis, the Indochina War, and the Baghdad Pact simultaneously accompanied greater Anglo-American cooperation. In 1953, when Eisenhower came to office, he wanted to treat every country as a “sovereign equal,” but Britain’s influence within its Empire and Commonwealth, in Europe, and in the Middle East made Britain an invaluable ally. Despite the trauma of the Suez Crisis, in the late 1950s, both London and Washington moved to repair their alliance in light of deteriorating relations with the Soviet Union. Agreements made at the Bermuda and Washington Conferences in 1957 spawned increased trust and closer partnership. In 1958, the U.S. Congress repealed the McMahon Act, which prevented the sharing of U.S. atomic information and research, allowing Britain to benefit from the kind of wide-ranging atomic collaboration she

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82 Baylis, Anglo-American Defense Relations, 57; Ovendale, Transfer of Power, 58, 91; Hathaway, Great Britain and the United States, 30-31; Marsh, Anglo-American Relations and Cold War Oil, 1.
83 Ovendale, Transfer of Power, 67.
84 Baylis, Anglo-American Relations since 1939, 68-83; Bartlett, Special Relationship, 48.
enjoyed during World War II.\textsuperscript{85} Despite Britain’s declining economic and strategic position and a long list of British “aberrations” from the U.S. side of policy in Palestine, China, and elsewhere, the U.S. still respected British experience, particularly in the Middle East.\textsuperscript{86}

The 1950s witnessed the determined entry of the United States into the Middle East as Washington accepted the region’s importance, but American officials sought to avoid competing with or hindering Britain’s position in the region. With an increasing number of worldwide commitments and anxious not to overreach, Washington took on a limited role and supported the Middle East remaining as a British sphere of influence.\textsuperscript{87} London viewed the region as critical in its own right to the Cold War, but many American officials did not share this view.\textsuperscript{88} Many historians contend that by 1956 Britain had lost its power in the Middle East, and that the Americans were already on the rise.\textsuperscript{89} But, from the outset of the decade, the actual American military commitment to the region was small and “grew slowly and fitfully, from crisis to crisis.”\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{85} Baylis, \textit{Anglo-American Defense Relations}, 88; Baylis, \textit{Anglo-American Relations since 1939}, 84; Bartlett, \textit{Special Relationship}, 77.


\textsuperscript{88} Devereux, \textit{Formulation of British Defence Policy}, 24; Ovendale, \textit{Transfer of Power}, 34; Marsh, \textit{Anglo-American Relations and Cold War Oil}, 3.


\textsuperscript{90} Hurewitz, \textit{Middle East Politics}, 71.
The U.S. entered the Middle East primarily in response to its location in respect to the Soviet Union. By the late 1940s and early 1950s, American officials began to view the world through an all-encompassing Cold War lens in which Asia and Africa only acquired significance as a result of their position relative to the global struggle against communism. The external role of the Middle East overshadowed any consideration of its internal and regional characteristics. Concentration and over-reliance on the use or threat of military power, whether warranted or not, came at the expense of diplomatic initiatives, and led to a neglect of assessing the aspirations, sensitivities, and regional relationships within and between Asian and African countries. In the Middle East, focusing on the communist threat hobbled American policy by giving officials little leeway to deal with Arab nationalists, and isolating Soviet and communist influence proved difficult in a region with which Americans had little experience. British policymakers never saw the region solely through a Cold War lens, even though they played up such a view when in the company of American officials. For Britain, “doctrines and habits of mind which were a legacy of empire” prevented any recasting of their more complex, and historically specific, frame of reference.

In the postwar years, Britain’s position in the Middle East had eroded as a result of spending cuts, postwar overstretch, Arab nationalism, and the pernicious destabilizing influence of the Arab-Israeli dispute. By the late 1940s and early 1950s, British officials

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91 Darby, *Three Faces of Imperialism*, 144.
95 Darby, *Three Faces of Imperialism*, 147.
began to encourage American interest in the region in order to prevent the development of a vacuum that the Soviets might fill.\textsuperscript{96} In the early Cold War years, U.S. strategic planning depended upon Britain’s overseas bases, including bases in the U.K. and Egypt, which the British military opened up to American military needs.\textsuperscript{97} Until the early 1950s, American contingency planning for a Third World War against the Soviet Union assumed that a significant portion of the strategic air offensive would be launched from airfields in Britain and from the Suez Canal base.\textsuperscript{98} Historian Michael Cohen argues, “The Americans were torn between their need for Britain’s strategic infrastructure in the Middle East, and their desire not to alienate the Arab world. This meant that they had to do everything possible to maintain and support the British position in the region, short of making that support public.”\textsuperscript{99} By 1954, the U.S. National Security Council recognized the need for American leadership in the Middle East, but the region remained a relatively new frontier for Washington, resulting in close Anglo-American cooperation.\textsuperscript{100}

During the 1950s, the trajectory of U.S. influence in Iraq reflected the broader trend of American reluctance in the region. American commitments to Iraq during the decade were small and “half-hearted.”\textsuperscript{101} American officials “consciously resisted” the temptation to challenge Britain’s political and military predominance, and purposefully

\textsuperscript{96} Ovendale, \textit{Transfer of Power}, 52, 62-68.
\textsuperscript{97} Marsh, \textit{Anglo-American Relations and Cold War Oil}, 176.
\textsuperscript{98} Cohen, \textit{Fighting World War Three from the Middle East}, 27, 33.
\textsuperscript{99} Cohen, \textit{Fighting World War Three from the Middle East}, 42.
\textsuperscript{100} Ovendale, \textit{Transfer of Power}, 68; Defty, \textit{Britain, America, and Anti-Communist Propaganda}, 168-169, 214.
cultivated a secondary position to Britain in the country. At the Pentagon Talks in 1947, Washington reassured British officials that they did not intend to replace Britain in Iraq or to profit there at Britain’s expense. Some American diplomats expressed doubts about the sustainability of the British position, but little action was taken to remedy the situation and the U.S. continued to “quietly” back British strategic objectives in Iraq.

With worldwide obligations, the U.S. avoided taking on military and political burdens in the Middle East, but as the 1950s progressed the necessity for an enlarged American role was clear. Washington began to commit more military aid to the region, but it remained weak in some areas, including Iraq. During the early 1950s, Washington’s relationships with Israel, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Iran took precedence over those with Iraq, a situation that caused distress in Baghdad. In March 1953, Iraq formally requested military assistance from the U.S., but months went by before Washington even responded. The U.S. sought to consult Britain on potential American military aid to Iraq, contributing to its delayed response. In February 1954, Britain and the U.S. signed a memorandum of understanding about the provision of military aid to Iraq, in which Washington was to coordinate its military aid, as much as possible, with plans already agreed to between London and Baghdad. It took until 19 December 1954 for the first

103 Louis, British Empire in the Middle East, 111.
106 Ovendale, Transfer of Power, 93.
consignment of American military aid to arrive at Basra. Delays in promised American military aid to Iraq frustrated Baghdad, and challenged the inchoate American-Iraqi relationship.

London welcomed a greater American commitment to the Middle East, but in practice, British officials and communities on the ground in the region had difficulties coming to terms with increasing American influence. The U.S. and the U.K. had common interests in Iraqi social, economic, and military structures, but Ambassador Troutbeck expressed “legitimate doubts” as to whether American officials went about matters “in the right way” in the region. In Palestine, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, the intrusion of American influence often complicated and compromised Britain’s regional relationships. In 1954, Troutbeck discussed America’s “remarkable intervention” in Iraq through economic aid, the use of American advisers, and the large number of scholarships to American universities offered to Iraqi students. All of which was followed by an offer of military aid “free of cost or political ‘strings’.” Yet, in terms of American military aid, Troutbeck queried, “Is it really meant to be complementary to British activity in the same field, or is the aim to push us out of the field altogether or at least reduce us to a minor role?” British officials also worried about Washington’s reluctance to accept responsibilities, which produced “a serious danger that the

Americans may end by destroying the British bulwark and leaving nothing but a vacuum for communism to fill.\textsuperscript{111}

\textit{Middle East Regional Defense Agreements}

During the 1950s, the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain, and France competed for political influence in the Middle East in a bewildering and complex race of military and economic aid. Compounding the already confused military politics in the region, the American-Soviet competition generated enormous amounts of military aid for regional clients, while the British and French attempted to use aid to maintain postwar influence.\textsuperscript{112} Britain, the U.S., and France monopolized the Middle East arms market until the Egyptian-Czech arms agreement in 1955.\textsuperscript{113} Concerned by rising Soviet influence, both Washington and London discussed the formulation of a regional defense agreement in the Middle East. American and British officials, however, found it hard to entice Middle Eastern countries into solely anti-communist alliances.\textsuperscript{114} Widespread anti-Western hostility and lack of belief in the Russian threat compounded this problem.\textsuperscript{115}

In 1950, in light of the Cold War and Britain’s need to reformulate its outdated military agreements, Whitehall began to seriously consider a multilateral Middle East defense organization, and Washington started to open up to the idea. American officials demonstrated an aversion to direct involvement in the region, but were willing to support


\textsuperscript{112} Hurewitz, \textit{Middle East Politics}, 11; Kunz, \textit{Butter and Guns}, 59.

\textsuperscript{113} Hurewitz, \textit{Middle East Politics}, 83.

\textsuperscript{114} Devereux, \textit{Formulation of British Defence Policy}, 43; Documents 126 and 127, Records of the U.S. Department of State, Record Group 59, NSA.

British initiatives. During 1951, the notion of a Middle East Command (MEC) took shape, which consisted of an integrated allied headquarters, a Middle East Defense Board, and a Chiefs of Staff Committee including the four sponsoring powers: the U.S., the U.K., France, and Turkey. The Middle East Defense Board would bring together all interested regional countries to advise the command itself. With Egypt as its base, Washington and London hoped the MEC would settle the Suez Canal issue for good. However, American and British officials miscalculated the Egyptian mood, and Egypt rejected the MEC proposal in the fall of 1951, destroying its chance of acceptance by other Middle Eastern states. Disagreements between London and Washington, and lack of interest among indigenous countries (besides Israel, Lebanon, and Iraq) for a regional defense organization with Western sponsorship led to the MEC’s collapse.

Although the MEC failed, the four sponsoring powers intended to pursue Middle East defense, with or without indigenous support. From 1952 to 1953, the Churchill government continued to vigorously encourage proposals for a Middle East defense pact. Britain’s Chiefs of Staff were particularly anxious that a Middle East defense agreement “be set up as soon as practicable, particularly as the Arab states are waiting for concrete evidence of our intention, and the longer we delay action the more our prestige

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118 Devereux, *Formulation of British Defence Policy*, 64.
in the Middle East must suffer.”\textsuperscript{120} The MEC’s successor—the Middle East Defense Organization (MEDO)—was designed mainly for planning and coordination purposes, with its headquarters located at Cyprus instead of Suez.\textsuperscript{121} London and Washington had high hopes for the organization, but the July 1952 Egyptian Free Officers Coup suspended MEDO planning.\textsuperscript{122} Lack of Arab support and “incessant argument” over the structure of the organization contributed to its demise. London’s insistence to continue seeking an agreement confronted pessimism among American officials. In its first year, the Eisenhower administration evaded cooperation with the British in Middle East defense. In June 1953, Washington withdrew its support for the MEDO and turned to Middle East regional defense along the Northern Tier.\textsuperscript{123}

The Northern Tier concept, from which the Baghdad Pact developed, took root in American thinking during the Truman administration. American officials understood the notion of a Northern Tier in reference to the position of Iran, Turkey, and Greece along the border of the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{124} In 1946, the Deputy Director of the Office of Near Eastern, South Asian and African Affairs at the U.S. Department of State, Loy Henderson, warned, “The Soviet Union seems to be determined to break down the structure which Great Britain has maintained so that Russian power and influence can sweep unimpeded across Turkey and through the Dardanelles into the Mediterranean, and

\textsuperscript{120} “Brief for Conversations with M. Mayer and M. Bidault, 13\textsuperscript{th} February- Middle East Defence Organisation,” in Burdett, \textit{Iraq Defence Intelligence}, 490-491.
\textsuperscript{122} Podeh, \textit{Quest for Hegemony in the Arab World}, 55; Document 127, Records of the U.S. Department of State, Record Group 59, NSA.
\textsuperscript{123} Devereux, \textit{Formulation of British Defence Policy}, 70-71, 73.
\textsuperscript{124} Kuniholm, \textit{Origins of the Cold War}, 426-431.
across Iran and through the Persian Gulf into the Indian Ocean.”\textsuperscript{125} The phrase Northern Tier is usually associated with John Foster Dulles and the 1950s, but as a geopolitical concept it originated in the “Great Game” rivalry between the British and Russian Empires for influence in Eurasia.\textsuperscript{126} As a traditional buffer zone between the Russian and British Empires, the Middle East was poised to play a similar role between the Soviet Union and the U.S.\textsuperscript{127}

In 1953 and 1954, the Eisenhower administration, and in particular Secretary of State Dulles, adopted the concept of Northern Tier defense as a possible Middle East defense organization. The British government remained lukewarm to the idea, which they feared would both anger Nasser and stymie British attempts to secure a Suez base agreement under the guise of a broader Middle East defense plan revolving around Suez.\textsuperscript{128} By 1955, however, Washington and London had switched positions, with Washington now wary of a defense pact along the Northern Tier out of fear of provoking the Soviet Union, angering Israel, or upsetting domestic American interests.\textsuperscript{129} From January through April 1955, the Eisenhower administration realized the depth of Egyptian opposition to a possible Turko-Iraqi Pact along the Northern Tier and how it


\textsuperscript{126} Louis, \textit{British Empire in the Middle East}, 53; Ashton, Eisenhower, \textit{Macmillan and the Problem of Nasser}, 40; Edward Ingram, \textit{The British Empire as a World Power} (London: Frank Cass, 2001), 53-54.


\textsuperscript{128} Ashton, Eisenhower, \textit{Macmillan and the Problem of Nasser}, 40-41; Cohen, \textit{Fighting World War Three from the Middle East}, xiv.

\textsuperscript{129} Ovendale, \textit{Transfer of Power}, 109; Document 130, Records of the U.S. Department of State, Record Group 59, NSA.
might bring instability to the region. While Washington was having second thoughts, London was moving in the opposite direction.

During the 1950s, Britain sought to begin the transition from preferential treaties in the Middle East, which allowed for the stationing of British troops at peacetime and the right of re-entry at wartime, to “equal” alliances under which Britain reduced its forces, but still enjoyed the right of re-entry during a crisis. Britain’s treaties of alliance with Egypt, Iraq, and Jordan were set to expire in 1956, 1957, and 1968, respectively. To defend the Middle East and its oil, officials in Whitehall felt “Britain needed to replace bilateral treaties with countries like Iraq and Jordan with multilateral mutual defence arrangements, arrangements that would seem less imperialistic to the Arabs and would help to spread the burden amongst the allies.” Yet, the British found it difficult to come to terms with the Middle East states as truly independent entities and allies, and Middle Eastern governments and people found Britain’s “change of heart” hard to believe.

Under the Eden government, British policy in the Middle East had two main objectives: the protection of British interests in Iraq and in the Persian Gulf. In 1955, under Eden’s guidance, the Baghdad Pact replaced Egypt as Britain’s primary defense

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132 Ovendale, Transfer of Power, 19; Hurewitz, Middle East Politics, 85; Louis, British Empire in the Middle East, 105-106; Devereux, Formulation of British Defence Policy, 194; Dimitrakis, Failed Alliances, 8.
133 Ovendale, Transfer of Power, 63.
134 Devereux, Formulation of British Defence Policy, 188.
135 Ovendale, Transfer of Power, 108.
concern in the Middle East. During Turko-Iraqi Pact negotiations, the British Embassy in Iraq reported, “The Iraqi and Turkish authorities sought our advice and assistance, at every step, principally because they wished Her Majesty’s Government (and the United States Government) to accede to the pact later.” In their intermediary role, the British secured the inclusion of an umbrella clause allowing for special agreements between signatories of the pact. On 24 February 1955, Turkish and Iraqi officials signed the Turko-Iraqi Pact in Baghdad, which provided a basis for cooperation in security and defense. The British quickly took advantage of the pact, and on 4 April 1955, British and Iraqi officials signed an Anglo-Iraqi agreement. On April 5, Britain acceded to the Turko-Iraqi Pact, now known as the Baghdad Pact. In September and November 1955, Pakistan and Iran acceded to the pact, respectively. The Baghdad Pact was the culmination of years of regional defense discussions and was devised to supplement a chain of alliances already existing for defense against the Soviet Union, including NATO and SEATO.

The British embraced the Baghdad Pact as an opportunity to uphold their place in the Middle East. The pact fit Britain’s essential defense requirements in the region and

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provided the prize of an Anglo-Iraqi agreement. Under the new Anglo-Iraqi agreement, Iraq assumed control and overall command of the British air bases at Habbaniya and Shaiba, but Iraq requested that Britain continue its military aid, advising, and training of Iraqi armed forces, and Iraqi officials agreed “to make available the necessary facilities to enable the United Kingdom to give this help.” Britain sought to present the Baghdad Pact as evidence of its commitment to a “new pattern of friendship,” and as part of the heralded transition in Anglo-Arab relations. British Embassy officials reported Iraqi opinion manifested itself “overwhelmingly in favour” of the Baghdad Pact and the Anglo-Iraqi agreement. Most of the celebrations throughout Iraq, however, revolved around the end of the 1930 Anglo-Iraqi Treaty and the rise of Iraq to “full nationhood,” not the continued Anglo-Iraqi connection.

In the United States, both the Department of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff urged the Eisenhower administration to join the Baghdad Pact, but the administration refused. Differences over the Baghdad Pact illustrated the difficulties in Anglo-American cooperation, as “both Washington and London were interested in the formation of a barrier to Soviet expansion in the Middle East, but it was more difficult to agree on the details.” Dulles, who abhorred the British connection, described the events after

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January 1955 as a British takeover of the Baghdad Pact for their own purposes.\textsuperscript{149} American and British infighting ensued as Washington turned away from the pact and towards Egypt and project Alpha, the Anglo-American bid to solve the Arab-Israeli dispute. In early 1956, British officials showed deep concern over the weak American line in the Middle East and Dulles’ poor attitude toward the pact.\textsuperscript{150} In March 1956, Eden drafted a message to President Eisenhower reporting, “There is no doubt that the utmost pressure will now be brought on Nuri from the rest of the Arab world and that every attempt will be made to bring about the collapse of the Baghdad Pact… I have been wondering, therefore, whether there is any concrete demonstration of support for Iraq and for the Bagdad Pact which it would be possible for you to give.”\textsuperscript{151} In the Middle East, U.S. ambivalence and fear of angering Egypt, and Britain’s inability to fully commit to the region as a result of widespread commitments and a limited defense budget, reduced the pact’s effectiveness.\textsuperscript{152}

The Baghdad Pact considerably intensified Egyptian and Iraqi rivalry, as the pact was not just about the Cold War, but also about the struggle for Arab hegemony between Iraq and Egypt.\textsuperscript{153} During pact negotiations and following its creation, Nasser mounted a full out campaign against Iraq and the pact through propaganda, the formation of an alternative regional alliance, and in the pursuit of the Czech arms deal in September

\textsuperscript{150} “Messages regarding the Baghdad Pact,” in Burdett, \textit{Iraq Defence Intelligence}, 602-607.
\textsuperscript{151} “Draft Message from Eden to President Eisenhower,” in Burdett, \textit{Iraq Defence Intelligence}, 610-611.
\textsuperscript{152} Podeh, \textit{Quest for Hegemony in the Arab World}, 34.
\textsuperscript{153} Podeh, \textit{Quest for Hegemony in the Arab World}, 34, 243.
Cairo’s intensive propaganda campaign, carried by “The Voice of Free Iraq” radio station from Egyptian territory, criticized the Iraqi government for breaking Arab unity and betraying Arab interests. Egyptian propaganda called the Iraqi people to rise up against the regime and to murder Nuri Said and the Crown Prince. The British Embassy in Baghdad reported, “The extreme violence and bad taste of this campaign defeated its own object. It aroused the low opinion and dislike of Egypt which are never far below the surface in Iraq.” In 1956 and 1957, other British observers feared internal revolt or a Nasser-inspired military coup within Iraq. The British Ambassador to Iraq, Michael Wright, reported, “At moments Nuri has felt that his efforts to align the Middle East with the West have been neither fully appreciated nor adequately supported, especially by the United States.” Iraq’s commitment to regional defense lacked full Western support, and Egypt’s stand against the West in the form of the Czech arms deal raised Egypt’s clout in the Arab world, leaving Cairo triumphant.

Following the Second World War, no major reassessment of Britain’s military commitments and objectives east of Suez occurred as a result of the pragmatic and incremental approach of a military defense organization in flux and resistant to change. With India’s independence, the Middle East became a central strategic zone in its own right, and imperial considerations and experiences continued to shape Britain’s objectives and policies in the region. In light of an emerging Soviet threat, the fear of global war,

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154 Ashton, Eisenhower, Macmillan and the Problem of Nasser, 50-54; Ovendale, Transfer of Power, 110-111; “From Cairo to Foreign Office,” in Burdett, Iraq Defence Intelligence, 589.
and rising oil demands, the maintenance of Britain’s position in the Middle East was more important than ever. Yet, Britain’s financial and economic burdens, and obligations in Europe, Africa, and Asia, complicated the continuation of its commitment to Middle East defense. The region also became a zone of intense Anglo-American conflict and cooperation, as Britain sought to preserve its position, and as the United States reluctantly assumed a role. Successive postwar British governments struggled to balance adapting to complex postwar burdens, while maintaining Britain’s great power status.

During the early to mid 1950s, Britain elevated the centrality of Iraq in its Middle East defense strategy as Anglo-Egyptian relations degenerated. Throughout the decade, Britain sustained close Anglo-Iraqi military relations through the supply of training and equipment, and through close personal military relationships developed between British and Iraqi personnel during official British military visits to Iraq and at the British RAF bases at Habbaniya and Shaiba. The Anglo-Iraqi military relationship culminated in 1955 with the signing of the Baghdad Pact, as British officials turned to Iraq as an alternative base from which to extend British power in the region, and an area key in its proximity to British oil interests in the Persian Gulf. Until 1958, the close Anglo-Iraqi military connection contributed to the maintenance of Iraq as a strategic foothold in the Middle East, at a time of regional uncertainty.
CONCLUSION

After 1945, Great Britain experienced a relative decline in influence around the world. In response, British officials sought to adjust the Empire and Commonwealth to postwar realities. Increasing international and domestic distaste for colonialism and pervasive rhetoric of equality among nations made modifications to Britain’s imperial policy essential. British officials also began to recognize that the formal controls the British exercised over its Empire were less necessary after 1945, as developing countries had to compete for Western favor in new international arenas, including the United Nations. This international climate made it possible and sensible to shift British policy towards informal mechanisms of influence. Historically, the British Empire in its many forms—formal and informal, colonial and Commonwealth—was built by a multitude of interests, maintained by a bewildering variety of government policies, and extended and deepened by various economic, political, and social forces. While accepting that the British experienced decline in their political, economic, and military power in the postwar period, it is crucial to recognize how Britain also maintained its influence through informal connections. Facing an arduous recovery, the British turned to both new strategies and old methods to simultaneously preserve the Empire and provide for postwar renewal.

During the Second World War, the British position in the Middle East was more visible than ever. Britain’s invasive political maneuvering, extensive economic controls, restriction of liberties, and enlarged numbers of British troops and personnel in the region contributed to postwar resentments and rising Arab nationalism. After 1945, British
officials sought to adapt formal mechanisms and wartime powers into informal influences in order to retain their dominant position in the Middle East. The Cold War and Britain’s need for postwar economic recovery made safeguarding and extending British authority in the region all the more important.

By 1945, London recognized the necessity of drawing Washington into the Middle East to both confront the Soviet threat and ensure continued Western dominance. Conditions in the Middle East seemed ideal for close Anglo-American cooperation based upon mutual need, with Britain as the traditionally ascendant Western power, and with the United States seeking to expand its influence worldwide, but lacking the connections and bases from which to do so. With new international commitments, Washington only reluctantly assumed a role in the Middle East and viewed it as a British responsibility. During the early 1950s, American influence penetrated the region slowly and unevenly. By the mid 1950s, Washington realized the need to accept a more active role, but worldwide obligations and a pervasive Cold War lens stunted the success of American initiatives. Narratives that present a simple dichotomy of American rise and British decline in the Middle East in the postwar period fail to account for regional realities. The U.S. entered the region in fits and starts and British influence lingered as Britain slowly declined from its dominant position. As David Reynolds argues, “The picture of an ailing imperial giant overwhelmed by the inexorable tide of decolonization and progress is too simple.”

During the 1950s, deteriorating Anglo-Egyptian relations and upheaval elsewhere in the Middle East resulted in Britain’s shift to Iraq as a vital foothold in its Middle East strategy. Britain sustained its influence in Iraq by cultivating informal economic, cultural, and military influence that built upon Britain’s historical experiences, connections, and advantages in the country. British officials, experts, and businesses shaped Iraqi economic development by gaining Iraq’s membership in the sterling area, by pursuing cooperative economic policies, by serving in the Iraqi government and on the Development Board, and by dominating Iraqi oil development. The Anglo-Iraqi military relationship bolstered Britain’s position in the Middle East and remained in force until 1958. Through public and cultural diplomacy and domination of Iraqi radio and news sources, British officials and intermediary organizations developed and strengthened Anglo-Iraqi cultural connections, which outlasted Britain’s political and military arrangements in the country. Ultimately, these informal connections facilitated the maintenance of Britain’s position in Iraq during a time of regional uncertainty.

In the postwar period, a number of regional crises and domestic Iraqi issues challenged Britain’s authority. The destabilizing influence of Arab nationalism and the Arab-Israeli dispute amplified popular Iraqi unrest. The Iraqi state faced serious dilemmas, including government weakness, insufficient economic reform and political liberalization, and the inability of the Hashemite royal family to tie itself to the Iraqi people and state. Regional and domestic factors proved to be decisive within Iraq, as British influence could not withstand the pressures of Iraq’s messy process of national development. Britain’s ability to adjust to the postwar situation and maintain its influence
was moot, however, as the Iraqi Revolution on 14 July 1958 swept away Britain’s position. British officials and military forces were not immediately forced to leave, but the revolution made the continuation of the Anglo-Iraqi connection untenable. The rise of the Ba’ath Party in the 1960s and Saddam Hussein’s long reign destroyed much of the remnants of British influence. However, recognizing Britain’s role in the creation and development of the Iraqi state is critical. The British delineated Iraq’s boundaries, administered the country directly for twelve years, and shaped Iraq’s economic, political, cultural, and military development to varying degrees from 1932 until 1958.

Britain’s experience in Iraq during the 1950s offers some implications for American policy in the Middle East today. After the Second World War, the emergence of the Cold War led to the creation of a comprehensive worldview in the West that focused upon a global communist threat. During the 1950s, British officials overcame a Cold War lens in the Middle East by referring back to their past experiences in the region, which resulted in a more nuanced Middle East policy. In Iraq, the British recognized the need to take a multifaceted approach to preserving their position, which included economic, military, and cultural forms of influence. Britain’s cultural programs and media organizations, including the British Council and the BBC, were the most effective in providing services and messages that people in the Middle East could accept and respect based upon their ability to address the Middle East beyond Cold War terms. In facing the contemporary Middle East, American officials must develop a policy that is not restricted by notions like Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” or the equating of terrorism with Islam. These ideas produce deeply flawed images of the region, which
confine American policy in narrow terms and inhibit Washington’s ability to engage moderate forces. The British experience in Iraq demonstrates the importance of stepping outside a particular worldview and seeking to understand the regional and domestic situation on its own terms.

During the 1950s, British officials struggled to prove to the Iraqi people the “change of heart” in their Middle East policy, and their desire to pursue equal partnerships in the region. After decades of experience with British imperialism, Iraqis could not eradicate deeply ingrained images of Britain as a colonial overlord. In the contemporary Middle East, American officials face a difficult battle in dismantling similarly embedded images of an invasive, hypocritical, and imperial United States. The road to recovery in American relations with the Middle East will require inventive and multifaceted initiatives, which seek to correct these representations by demonstrating a sufficient transformation in American policies towards the region. Britain’s experience shows informal cultural and educational influences proved least offensive and most effective in maintaining British influence, as Anglo-Iraqi educational and cultural links, including the British Council and educational exchanges, continued after 1958. Improved cultural and educational outreach programs could aid in the recuperation of America’s image and position in the Middle East. As the United States withdraws its formal political and military forces from the Middle East, it is all the more important to recognize the possible role of informal mechanisms of influence in future American policy towards the region.
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APPENDIX: MAP OF THE MIDDLE EAST
