THE HISTORY OF THE IRAQ LEVIES 1915-1932

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with the origins and developments of a British-initiated force, known as "The Iraq Levies", which was raised during the Mesopotamian campaign of the First World War. This is a subject which had previously received very little rigorous historical study.

The Force began with some forty mounted Arab scouts, recruited from Zubair in southern Mesopotamia by the Field Intelligence unit of the Imperial Expeditionary Force (I.E.F. 'D') in July 1915. By May 1922, the Force had expanded to approximately 6,000 officers and men, as against a planned 7,500 at the Cairo Conference.

A survey of the performance and military background of several British officers who served with the Levies, was considered worthy of study. Mostly they came from the Indian Army, and thus were experienced in what may be described as "political soldiering" – an invaluable qualification for their service in Iraq.

It was felt important that the different ethnic backgrounds and political aspirations, as well as religious loyalties represented in the ranks of the Levies required investigation to assist in an understanding of their motivation and service.

Without a detailed review of these factors, it would be difficult to comprehend how a force which could be considered to owe its allegiance to its pay-masters, could undertake the task of internal security in so volatile a region as that of Iraq, especially during and after the First World War. When its political problems, both internal and external, had to be resolved by the British government which became the mandatory power.

This thesis ends with the achievement of Iraq's independence in 1932. The Levies, however, were not finally disbanded until May 1955. That final section of their history was not to be without drama and incident; but it awaits the attention of another student who is interested in the nature and evolution of British Imperial Forces in the Middle East. Their day has now ended, but this thesis hopes to illuminate a little of their history and significance.

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PREFACE

The thesis would not have been possible in the first instance, I being a very mature student, without the support of my family, and especially my wife Ruth, as the work entailed my being absent from Suffolk over long periods of research. I am also most grateful to Major Bryan Keatley for reading the draft and providing valuable observations. During the last ten years, I have received every encouragement from family and friends alike.

During my first four years as an undergraduate student at SOAS, I owed much to several members of the teaching staff in the History Department for their patient guidance in the disciplines required in the pursuit of higher education. In this period, in particular, my thanks are due to my tutor Dr. D.O. Morgan and to Professor M.E. Yapp (now retired), Dr. G.R. Hawting, and Dr. C.J. Heywood and also Miss M. Hillman, then the department's invaluable secretary.

I am indebted to several members of the staff of the SOAS Library for their co-operation: to Mr. A. Farrington and his staff at the India Office, also to the staff of the Public Record Office for providing me with every assistance in my researches. I am likewise indebted to the curators at the Library of St. Antony's College, Oxford, for allowing me access to some of St. J. Philby's manuscripts. My thanks are also due to Miss J. Marks for typing the thesis, and to Mrs. C. Lawrence for the preparation of the maps.

Transliteration has proved a considerable problem, arising from the range of documents used, and from the many small variations of place names to be found there. My aim has been to achieve a measure of consistency and also to make it possible for the reader to recognise the location of the major events.

But I owe most to my supervisor, Dr. R.M. Burrell, for his encouragement in my undertaking this work in the first place, for sustaining my determination to complete it and for his unflagging patience in correcting my method of presentation. Should any faults remain, they are mine.

R.V.J.Y.

September, 1997.

CHAPTER I

> "It would be strange indeed if in a life struggle between the greatest oriental and the greatest continental power Mesopotamia had played no part in the contest." *A Sketch of the Political History of Persia, Iraq and Arabia: with special reference to the present campaign* (Calcutta, 1917), p.2. (Probably written by A.T. Wilson.)

This PhD thesis studies the history of a small, but by no means insignificant, military force in the Middle East, the "Iraq Levies". The origins of that body are obscure and complex, as Chapter 2 will show. It was born in the confusion of the British campaign in Mesopotamia, which began very soon after the Ottoman Empire joined in the First World War. That Mesopotamian campaign has been the subject of much later research, and no little controversy but, as will be seen, very few of the books written on it pay much attention to the origins and role of the Levies. By the end of the First World War they were, however, performing a wide range of valuable duties, and their ad hoc origins in no way diminished their future role and importance.

The work attempts to offer an interpretation of events; it is not a traditional regimental history, which endeavours to record all the events with relatively little attention given to analysis and interpretation. Therefore, not all the known military operations performed by the Levies are included here, but only certain representative ones, to demonstrate the wide range of tasks they had to perform – often, as will be seen, without training and adequate equipment. After the end of the First World War, the Levies were to be the subject of numerous reforms and reorganisations, not all of which were carefully planned or well co-ordinated. Despite this, they were an extremely useful force during the period of the British Mandate.

My wish to conduct research into the historical origins of the Iraq Levies was in large part personal, and due to the fact that I had both the honour and pleasure to serve with that Force over a period of two years – from 1941 to the middle of 1943. During this time I spent four months in Habbaniyah; one year on the northern frontier with an Assyrian company based on Ain Zala; then six months in Sharjah and Dubai, commanding an Arab company. There were also two other interludes with Assyrian

companies in Iran and in Palestine, but my period of service is outside the scope of the thesis. In all, my Middle East military service covered a period of 16 years in eight countries, and this strengthened my wish to see how the Iraq Levies formed part of the wider pattern of the modern military history of the Middle East.

Prior to joining them, the Iraq Levies had existed for 26 years. I only managed to glean a little knowledge of the origins of the force through conversation with local men whose service in the Force was often intermittent. But their experiences were sufficient to encourage further study, should the opportunity arise.

As so little seemed to be known about the origins and development of the Iraq Levies, this thesis has been structured around some simple and direct questions – but finding satisfactory answers to them was by no means always a straightforward process.

The basic questions were: What were the origins of the Levy Force? What were the causes created by the Mesopotamian campaign which initiated the early recruitment of local Arab irregulars, and what were the roles designated to them, and by whom? What were these early tasks and how and when did they change as the campaign progressed? How was this achieved as the roles of the Levy Force developed and became more regularised in character? What were the methods of recruitment, and what arms, uniforms and training were found necessary to enable these irregulars to meet the demands placed upon them by the Civil Administration and the imperial Mesopotamian forces? How and why did it become necessary to recruit men from other local ethnic groups as the campaign progressed and the area of enemy-occupied territory increased until the armistice? In what manner did the Levy Force work in conjunction with the imperial occupying forces at the end of the Mesopotamian campaign, and eventually most closely with the RAF?

An initial problem in answering some of the questions posed concerned the location of the relevant archives – there were no consecutive sets of files labelled "The Iraq Levies" at the India Office Library, or at the Public Record Office. At the India Office Library and the PRO, the staff appeared to have little, if any, knowledge of the Iraq Levies. Thus it was

necessary to trawl very widely for information. The first task was to locate relevant documents, and it soon became clear that I was venturing into uncharted waters. According to my supervisor, that would be part of the "enjoyable challenge" of my research, and so it has proved to be.

The layout of the thesis is based on a traditional chronological approach, in which the pattern of events unfold as they occur. Sometimes the chronology has been interrupted to carry forward the story of a particular series of events. The chapters vary in length and in the period of time covered, because of the changing nature and intensity of events. Some themes occur in almost all chapters – such as the importance and personality of the man on the ground and the lack of co-ordination between London and Baghdad which created the demand for innovation and improvisation by local British Levy officers.

Only one file entitled "Iraq Levies" was discovered in the India Office Library, covering the period from September 1919 to December 1920. Some of the documents in the files were to be found as copies in other files – these were of identical content, being copies sent to or from other departments. In particular, these were often Political Officers' reports, which had, for example, been passed to London under a covering letter. This duplication presented much extra time-consuming work.

Another problem sometimes encountered concerned the fact that although the Indian government was responsible for the prosecution of the "First Phase" of the Mesopotamian campaign, the conduct of the "Second Phase" was later assumed by the War Office. During the period of this changeover of responsibility some items of correspondence were still being passed to India while others were for the War Office and London only.

It was clear that the importance of an irregular body of Arab "guards", responsible to their local Political Officers, failed to draw much attention in high places when Britain was still heavily engaged with the European campaign. It was not until the first Kurdish revolt of 1919, followed by the Arab revolt of 1920, that the Levies started to attract serious attention in London. The PRO files pertaining to the Levies then became more voluminous and coherent. From October 1922, when the RAF was given the

responsibility for the control of Iraq, the Air Ministry files on the Levies became more orderly and easier to follow.

During research, some documents made plain the apparent muddled thinking behind which many of the decisions were made. However, various questions remained unanswered. In an attempt to let the facts speak for themselves, it was sometimes necessary to relay the words of the men who dealt the cards, and those who had to play the hands assigned to them. In this context, a letter acquired by the author, and written on 25 June 1922, by a serving British Levy officer, Captain P.S. Hornyold, and cited in Chapter V, p.164, casts an important light on prevailing conditions in the Levies during June 1922.

The first task was to discover and present the narrative of relevant events as accurately as possible. Some of the information was based upon technical military detail; for example, the exact composition and armament of the Levy units. It has been possible to intersperse some of this technical information with descriptions of the performance of the Levies in their various operations. This thesis is designed to describe how the Levies developed from a somewhat disorganised force of sundry units into a balanced fighting force, organised on recognisable military lines. It will be shown that this was achieved in the face of considerable and varied frustrations.

In the context of primary source material, the following is a general guide and evaluation of the documentary content of the files by chapters. Chapter II covers 1914-1918: The War Diary of Lt.-Col. Beach, and his Intelligence Summary on War Office Files 157/777 and 158/708 (World War 1. H.Q. Papers); also India Office File L/MIL/17/5/327, provided the information on the recruitment of Arab irregulars, for assisting British Field Intelligence officers in their work, and the first "Shabanah" and River Guards on India Office Files L/P&S/10/617 to 732. The latter files contained a very broad range of material, but there was, alas, no index.

In Chapter III covering 1919, the increasing number of Political Officers' Reports on their districts, as more enemy territory came under British Civil Administration, provided an excellent source of information on the early "Shabanah", "Militia" and "Levies", as the designations for the irregulars changed during the first four years of their existence. These reports

were mostly available on the India Office Files L/P&S/10/617 to 732. There were, of course, other files which contained some telegraphed correspondence between the Civil Administration and London, and these are referred to in the relevant footnotes and listed in the bibliography. This chapter also contained the evidence concerning the first "Kurdish Rising", derived from the following India Office Files, L/P&S/10/162, 658, 732, 781, 889, and L/P&S/5/798. Some of these documents are copies of Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force telegrams.

Chapter IV covers the "Arab Insurrection" of 1920, followed by the "Cairo Conference" of March 1921 and its immediate aftermath. For this, the main documents are to be found in India Office Files L/P&S/10/175 to 874. These contained the Civil Administration (Iraq) Foreign Office Files 371/5073, 5227-9, 6351, 8998 (Political and General Correspondence), and Levy matters. Colonial Office 696/3 (Iraq – Correspondence and Reports) covered Levy operations. AIR 5/1253 (Historical Branch Records Series II) dealt with the Arab Insurrection operations, some of which were copies of War Office reports, published in the *London Gazette.* Air Ministry Files AIR 5/555 referred to the Cairo Conference, as did Cabinet papers 24/123. Also, Cabinet papers 24/126 contained some general memoranda on Iraq.

Chapter V, from 1922 to 1926, deals with the period when the RAF took over "Control" of Iraq from the War Office in October 1922. The preponderance of documents from then on were to be found in the Air Ministry series AIR 2/1450, and comprise mostly Air Ministry policy for Iraq. AIR 2/1451 deals with the policy on control of punitive bombing in Iraq. AIR 5/295 deals with the possibility of Levy units being transferred to the Iraq army. Foreign Office film 371/9004 refers to the RAF defence problems for Iraq's northern frontier. These AIR files were well arranged by subject content.

Chapter VI discussed events from 1927 to 1932, most of the information for which is contained in the "Iraq Command Report October 1930 to September 1932", files AIR 2/1452 and 5/1255; also Foreign Office 371/16922, and Colonial Office 730/118/5, which provided some items of interest.

It may be appreciated from this brief survey of assorted files, that the research of the primary sources has represented a large jigsaw puzzle; a series of miscellaneous pieces of information from which a picture has been constructed on the growth of the Iraq Levies. There were very few instances when one file could provide a sequence of any length on an issue. The reason for this was that throughout the 18-year period covered by this thesis, the structure of the Force rarely represented one coherent policy – it was for ever changing, according to the needs of its prevailing masters. In other words, it evolved by meeting requirements as they occurred. Therefore, no one governmental department, or service command sired it; it was as orphan with many foster parents, who cared for it only to serve their immediate needs.

It is also unfortunate that imperial units serving alongside Levy units during, for example, the Arab Insurrection of 1920, failed in general to record the conduct of the Iraq Levies. Levy records of these operations by the Force should have been retained – but none were discovered by the author.

Regarding the secondary sources, only one was directly relevant to the Iraq Levies – J.G. Browne's *The Iraq Levies 1915-1932.* This, alas, gave no indication of either the nature or location of the primary documentation available to him as Levy Commandant between 1925 and 1932. *The Iraq Levies* provides a typical condensed Force history, and has proved a helpful signpost to chronology. Browne states that much of his information was founded upon conversations with a number of British ex-Levy officers and senior NCOs. In his conclusion, Browne assumes that the change of designation to Air Defence Force heralded the demise of the Levies, whereas in reality, it was but one more change of nomenclature to be added to their list.

Inaccuracy was another problem to be confronted. In his work, Browne states that Major J.I. Eadie was the first British officer to raise 40 Arab irregulars for the Field Intelligence of I.E.F. "D". This assertion was confounded by entries discovered in the "Intelligence Summary" of Lt.-Col. W.H. Beach (Head of Field Intelligence for Force "D") on W.O. file 157/777-8. An entry dated 20 July 1915 indicated chronologically that Captain J.I. Eadie was not the first – it was, in fact a Lt.-Col. Leachman. This "find" opened a faint trail to the genesis of the Levies.

The secondary material on Iraq is quite considerable, but is lean on coverage of the Iraq Levies. It is to be regretted that so few ex-serving Levy officers recorded their experiences, particularly regarding the political and administrative problems they encountered during their service with the Force between 1915 and 1922. The few articles found in regimental journals mostly read like a recruiting campaign, stressing the recreational opportunities and improved pay, perhaps to encourage their regimental colleagues to join the Levies, in the years between the wars.

The most important secondary work, after that by Browne (mentioned above) is Sir Arnold T. Wilson's *Loyalties Mesopotamia 1914-1920.* This work offers considerable information on the political background to Anglo-Iraqi relations during the immediate post-war years, together with an important insight regarding the British government's inter-departmental turmoil in coping with the restless development of the Middle East. However, the Levies were but one facet of his remarkable list of responsibilities during his tenure as Deputy High Commissioner in Iraq.

Other works give only incidental information on the development of the Levies. These include C.J. Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks and Arabs.* It was his service in Kurdistan during 1919 that was particularly enlightening. General Sir Aylmer L. Haldane's *The Arab Insurrection of 1920,* showed how the performance of the Levies in the field changed his mind on the military value of the Force. *The Assyrians and Their Neighbours* by the Rev. W.A. Wigram, is an interesting book, and provides an insight on the Assyrian people who were to play an important role in providing manpower for the Iraq Levies.

A book which appeared by its title to be relevant, was *The Role of the Military in Politics* by M.A. Tarbush. It provides an example of the existing jealousies over the Assyrian Levies, expressed by the misguided Iraqi public, which prevailed in the period discussed by the author. In fact, the work is a disappointing one. It says very little about the Levies, and its view of them is clearly influenced by Arab nationalist political views – as can be seen from the following quotation:

> The swaggering Assyrian levies with their slouch hats and red or white hackles, who stood guard at the homes of the High Comissioner, and Hinaidi, the British Air Force Headquarters,

> situated in a suburb of Baghdad, became the symbol of British domination (p.97).

The Marquess of Anglesey's *History of the British Cavalry 1816 to 1919,* vol.VI, provided information on the "Cavalry versus Mounted Infantry" controversy; and Brigadier-General F.J. Moberly's official history of *The Campaign in Mesopotamia 1914-1918,* was most useful, not only for the campaign, but also for a brief description of the Assyrian and Armenian exodus from Urmia to Hamadan, and the formation of the "Urmia Brigade". There are a number of other works, listed in the bibliography, which provide much general information on the historical background and many social and other aspects of the ethnic groups serving in the Iraq Levies. These, with the former works, helped to provide a picture of history of Iraq before and during the years covered by this thesis.

The books listed in the bibliography provide reading on Iraq in relation to Britain and her policies in the region, both prior to World War One and during the Mesopotamian campaign and its aftermath. However, little can be gleaned from this selection on the history of the Iraq Levies to the year 1932.

As will be seen in the bibliography, the range of secondary literature is wide. It includes official and unofficial histories of the Mesopotamian campaign, regimental histories of those involved, and memoirs by serving soldiers – one of the most interesting being *On the Road to Kut,* written under the pseudonym "Black Tab" (referring to the collar tabs worn by the Indian army's equivalent of the Royal Army Service Corps). The author provides a vivid account of the floods and mud the imperial forces faced in lower Iraq, which so impaired the progress of man and beast; all of which compounded the difficulties in trying to maintain vital supplies to the fighting troops and the evacuation of the wounded. Braddon's *Siege of Kut* may, with advantage, be read in conjunction with the former, because the latter's material was obtained from officers and other ranks who were listed as being in Kut at the time of the siege. In the same context, Millar's *Death of an Army* joins with some others in the condemnation of General Townshend's failure to press the Turks to alleviate the suffering of his men in Turkish captivity. Davis's *Ends and Means* explores the problems and military misdemeanours to be found in the prosecution of the campaign.

Few publications, other than A.T. Wilson's *Loyalties Mesopotamia 1914-1920,* have dealt in depth with the numerous difficulties experienced both in creating and maintaining the British Civil Administration, already mentioned above. However, Lyell, who served under Wilson as a Political Officer from 1917 to 1920, leaving the service in 1923, appears to have admired his chief for his iron determination, coupled with an inexhaustible capacity for hard work. Lyell felt that the seeds of Bolshevism were spreading in Islam. His work in the Land Registration Department ("Tapu") brought him into contact with many walks of Iraqi life. Main's *Iraq from Mandate to Independence,* may be read to advantage with Lyell's work. Main provides a lively view of Iraq through the eyes of an academic, and as a local newspaper editor, between 1920 and 1930.

The two main ethnic groups, other than the Arabs, discussed in this thesis, are the Kurds and the Assyrians. McDowall's *A Modern History of the Kurds,* is a study in depth on Kurdish problems, and explains the causes for their reputation for "political dissidence". The Assyrians play an important part in this work, as they became an essential source of Levy manpower. Their history is well covered by Wigram, already mentioned above.

Westrate's *The Arab Bureau: British Policy in the Middle East, 1916 to 1920*, is most revealing. It appears that the agency acquired an almost free hand in foisting its ideas on London; it alone had the time to assess and interpret the information acquired from its intelligence network; its reports to London must have been like water in the desert to those seeking to acquire knowledge on the world beyond Europe. Although Winstone's *The Diaries of Parker Pasha* does not include Iraq, it does, however, provide evidence on important personalities, both Arab and British, involved with Iraq, as being members of one of the two Arab secret societies – namely Al-Ahad (Military), and Al-Fatat (Civil).

There are several books which cover Mesopotamian history, while others discuss British Middle East policy. Ireland's *Iraq: a Study in Political Development*, commences in the seventeenth century, when Britain considered Turkish Arabia as an extension of the Persian Gulf, right through until 1936, when the Society of National Reform began a vigorous programme for infrastructure, to include road, railway and irrigation schemes.

Jackson's *The Pomp of Yesterday: the Defence of India and the Suez Canal*, provides interesting references to Germany's preparation of the Turkish army for war against Britain and her Empire as far back as 1883, with the ultimate objective of invading India. Yet, by the end of World War One, the British army was administering almost the whole of the former Ottoman Empire south of the Taurus mountains. In a similar context, Darwin's *Britain, Egypt and the Middle East: Imperial Policy in the Aftermath of War 1918-1922*, contains informative comments on British post-1918 imperial policy, stating that her security lay ultimately not in her capacity to crush nationalists, but in an ability to divide or defeat those powers whose military and economic strength matched her own. In his work *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire*, K. Jeffery appears to have used some primary source material similar to that used in this thesis, but has made no reference to the Iraq Levies. Also, P. Marr's *The Modern History of Iraq* seems, in some instances, to lack adequate research in the primary sources. The author claims: "The occupation that was to change the future of Mesopotamia came about less by design than by accident". The Levies in c.1920 are described as "a special army contingent recruited entirely from among the Assyrians". It would appear from these assertions, that too much attention was paid to local hearsay.

Nevertheless, the secondary literature had little to contribute directly to the research, and this may perhaps be seen as further indirect evidence of the obscure nature of the origins and early history of the Levies. After perusal of this selection from the bibliography, the poverty of secondary material with regard to their early history is made conspicuous by its absence when compared with the copious imperial regimental and services histories of those formations which took part in the Mesopotamian campaign. Also unfortunately, there is little reference to the Levies in academic monographs such as P. Slugglett's *Britain in Iraq 1914 to 1932*, or in general histories, such as E. Monroe's *Britain's Moment in the Middle East 1914 to 1956.*

Any inference on the immediately available sources must, however, be tempered with the possibility of what the future may yet reveal; as must the fact that the RAF Regiment is now so well established, and that the Levy force had by 1932 become "The RAF Levies Iraq". RAF historians may yet discover valuable primary material and new knowledge based on the papers

and memoirs of retired air force officers. Not to attempt to undertake such research on the history of a Force, which literally "came under their wing", could prove a disconcerting omission, because the service of the Levy Force extended into World War Two. Disbandment of the Force did not take place until 1955.

CHAPTER II

This chapter proved to be the most difficult of the entire thesis to write, especially during the archival research on the origins of the Levies and their growth. Many individuals had a role to play in the development of the Iraq Levies, some of whom left most useful documentary records, enabling one to trace in detail the Levy evolution; others, because of exigencies of the wartime milieu, left little or nothing for use by later historians. What can be claimed for this chapter is that it provides a far more detailed and in other ways a substantially different picture from the more "standard" Force Record by J.G. Browne.

It was the British invasion of Mesopotamia in November 1914, which ultimately brought the Iraq Levies into being. It will be shown that in December 1914, the urgent need for information by the Indian Expeditionary Force "D", about their enemy, the Turkish army, its intentions and strength, this requirement became the essential catalyst for recruiting irregular Arabs for service under British officers, for field intelligence-gathering work. There also developed a need for using local irregulars in guarding the developing Lines of Communication (L of C). By the use of more Arab irregulars, they released a considerable number of regular British troops for front-line service. Later, as the Mesopotamian campaign developed, the newly-established British-organised and officered Civil Administration had essential tasks which were also to be met by the use of "friendly" Arab irregulars.[1]

It will also be shown how official personalities played a considerable part in determining almost every issue during the evolution and transformation of the Levies; from a handful of Arab Scouts finding their own arms, clothing and mounts, to a force that years later had a strength equal to that of a weak Division, armed with light and medium machine-guns and artillery.

Without World War One encompassing Mesopotamia, the Iraq Levies would never have existed, therefore a brief introduction to that campaign is felt necessary.

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[1] See Map 1, p.271.

On 5 November 1914, Britain and France declared war on Turkey. On the same day, the Indian Expeditionary Force "D", (I.E.F. "D"), approximate strength one Brigade, sailed from Bahrein to Basra, seen as the "key to Mesopotamia", under the command of Brigadier-General W.S. Delmain. His task was to secure the co-operation of the Shaikhs of Mohammerah and Kuwait; to capture Fao, and to move up the Shatt-al-Arab to support the Shaikh of Mohammerah and secure the Abadan oil refinery and pipeline. He was also to reconnoitre routes towards Basra for the advance of the remainder of the force which was by then being mobilised in India under the command of Lieutenant-General A.A. Barrett.

Barrett's charge was to take Basra, provided he considered his total force was of adequate strength for the task. The Political Adviser to the expedition was Lieutenant-Colonel P.Z. Cox. This officer is important, both for his report on the initial stages of the campaign, and in the following years as head of the Civil Administration in Mesopotamia. He already had wide experience in the Persian Gulf region, and so carried considerable weight in Indian political circles.

Fao fell on 6 November 1914. On 15 November, General Barrett commenced his advance on Basra with the majority of his 6th Indian Division. Operations began with two successful minor actions, Saihan and Sahil, on 15 and 17 November respectively. By 22 November, I.E.F. "D" had occupied Basra. The speed and success of this operation raised British prestige in the region.

At this point, troops had been deployed to protect the oil installations, Basra was in British hands, and the short campaign had achieved its original political and strategic objectives. The Turks had fled, and the local Arabs received British and Indian troops with enthusiasm.

However, events followed which would end in committing Britain and India to a perilous extension of the campaign in Iraq; and this, in turn, created the circumstances which led to the creation of various irregular groups which, as will be seen, were the precursors of the Iraq Levies.

Lieutenant-Colonel Cox, the Political Adviser of I.E.F. "D", sent a private telegram to the Viceroy on 22 November 1914, stating: "...after earnest considerations of the arguments for and against I find it difficult to see

how we can avoid taking over Baghdad..." This telegram perhaps represented the beginning of a dichotomy of political policy and military strategy, where, for success, they should have remained interdependent. The original limited political and military objective Basra, was within the capacity of India's military experience and available forces – but the initial aim expanded into an undertaking out of all proportion to its original concept. The result of Cox's expressed exuberance was that General Barrett was allowed to expand his bridgehead. Barrett had approved that fateful missive.

The events which produced the initial recruits of the Iraq Levies after the fall of Basra were complex, and it would be best to take them in chronological order. During the Turkish evacuation of Basra, they destroyed their administrative structure. This contingency was anticipated, and a senior British Indian police officer arrived with a handful of Indian police, within two weeks of Basra's occupation, to assume the policing of the township. This police force was to expand slowly, and the training required was time-consuming. This police force must not be confused with "Shabanah", "Gendarmerie", or any other nomenclature adopted by the forerunners of the Levies. But the latter did perform police duties in the basic sense until the regular police could train men to take over – but only in the nature of "watch and ward". The police maintained a separate entity throughout the period of this work.

The army's expansion of operations increased the Lines of Communication with dumps of stores and the use of river craft to augment their transport facilities, which were eventually followed by a railway system. This military infrastructure with telegraph lines required troops to guard them. To free the regulars for the front, the army employed a few local armed Arabs but not before Cox, on 6 March 1915,[2] cabled to India for "100 Punjabis to protect against lawless gangs of Arabs". His request was not met.

As military objectives were achieved, so the "occupied enemy territory" increased, requiring pacification and administration. The officers who would take charge would require an executive force with which to impose their authority on the population in this acquired territory. For this

[2] L/P&S/10/513, F.107

work the Civil Administration would have to employ local Arabs. However, in July 1915, the army's field intelligence was to lead the way in employing Arab irregulars to work with British officers. It was these particular Arab irregulars who became the precursors of the "Iraq Levies".

It will be shown that from 1915 to the beginning of 1917, the initial trend of the development of this irregular force mostly mirrored the somewhat haphazard and disastrous escalation of the Mesopotamian campaign. As the narrative unfolds, it will be noted that there are many confusing changes in nomenclature in the early years; for example, the ubiquitous term "Shabanah" (a Persian word meaning night-watchman), could indicate mounted or dismounted men, and gave no indication of the exact employment or terms of service, which will be seen to vary considerably. Their resources were few, because the prosecution of the main campaign was all-consuming. Thus the force was the "sworn brother to grim necessity" from its inception.

As stated, it was the Military Field Intelligence of I.E.F. "D" which was first to make use of local Arab irregulars. The senior Intelligence Officer was Lieutenant-Colonel W.H. Beach, R.E., and his assistant was Major H. Smyth. A series of telegrams emanating from the Chief of General Staff (C.G.S.) India to General Barrett (the G.O.C., I.E.F. "D"), appears to have been the catalyst causing the initial use of Arab irregulars in the field.

The I.E.F. "D" Field Intelligence "War Diary"[3] quoted a telegram from the C.G.S. India to General Barrett, dated 19 December 1914, which began: "The organisation of an efficient intelligence service should be your first consideration, and you should have agencies at least as far north as Baghdad and as far west as Ha'il. Can your present staff do this to your satisfaction?"" Barrett responded to the effect that he felt his staff was adequate, but stated: "...I will try to establish agencies at Ha'il and Baghdad; but at present the distance of the former makes it impracticable". Indeed, one can but wonder at the geographical appreciation of the C.G.S. India in making the request in the first place.

The C.G.S. India continued to be less than impressed with the I.E.F.'s intelligence activity and reportage during the first few weeks of the campaign.

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[3] L/MIL/17/5/3227, Appx.94.

He again telegraphed on 24 December1914 to General Barrett: "Regarding information of important Arab Chiefs and of the enemy, you are doubtless keeping in close touch with your Chief Political Officer, nevertheless this fact should not preclude your telegraphing all this kind of information in full to me". These two telegrams could have prompted the intelligence staff of I.E.F. "D" into initiating Arab irregulars for use by their Field Intelligence Officers – based on Indian Army experience on the North-West Frontier – urged on by their Force Commander. These two communications were followed by a very disgruntled third on the 26th:

> ...your intelligence service. So far it has rather lacked initiative, and the outlook has been too local. Please impress on your General Staff that the operations you are now conducting are regarded in Egypt, India and London as a portion only of the principal campaign against Turkish troops, officered and assisted by Germans.[4]

This last telegram arrived soon after the occupation of Qurnah (9 December 1914), after which the I.E.F. was involved in some stiff fighting around Ahwaz, during which period its General Staff would have been fully employed. Also in the same period, the strength of the I.E.F. was increased to that of an army corps, which required that a senior general should take command. The replacement chosen was General John E. Nixon, who assumed command on 9 April 1916. It appears that it was not until after the change in command that the intelligence staff had the necessary opportunity to produce a scheme for improving their field intelligence gathering, the author of which was Major Smyth.

Beach's Intelligence Summary entry on 5 July 1915 stated: "Handed Smyth's scouts scheme over to 'D(b)' to carry on with".[5] Beach then stated he had talked with Captain Eadie about working up local connections. Eadie was one of the intelligence staff and an excellent linguist, and no doubt was detailed to look into the possibility of obtaining reliable local Arabs for Smyth's scheme.

In the same Summary, on the 17th, Beach states: "To C.P.O. [Cox] and told him Army Commander wished raising of Arab 'Guides' got on with at

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[4] L/MIL/17/5/3227, Appx.146
[5] W.O. 157/777 and 778

once. C.P.O. sent for Zubair (local Arab Shaikh) to be here tomorrow to talk it over and get Scouts out now to watch for reported Kurdish Cavalry".

It is worth noting that the nomenclature for the scheme already vacillates between Scouts and Guides. This practice becomes the norm in future Levy designations.

Before these early issues are set aside, another issue needs to be raised – how Captain J.I. Eadie and Major R.E. Hamilton came to be thought the first officers to raise irregular Levies for the military. It is in the work of J.G. Browne (a senior officer in the Force from 1925 to 1932), *The Iraqi Levies (1915-32)*.[6] His book states: "In 1915, Major J.I. Eadie of the Indian Army, who was then a Special Service Officer in the Muntafiq Division in Mesopotamia, recruited forty Mounted Arabs from tribes round Nasiriyah, on the Euphrates, for duty under the Intelligence Department". It appears they became known as the "Muntafiq Horse", were soon increased to sixty, and were called "Arab Scouts". This increment tallies with the Intelligence Summary extracts being discussed.

Browne continues: "In March 1916, another small mounted force, also sixty strong, was raised by Major Hamilton, the Political Officer at Nasiriyah". These were called the "Political Guard". It will be noted, as discussed above, that the nomenclature varies considerably, and will continue to do so throughout this work. Unfortunately, the book, a most valuable guide to the development of the Force, gives no sources for the content, other than consultation with some fifteen ex-officers and N.C.Os.

It is desirable to establish chronologically who was the first officer to command these "Arab Guides/Scouts" (Arab irregulars) for military field intelligence. Of the Intelligence Officers on Beach's staff, any one could have filled the role; although they were sometimes attached to formations, they were still directly under Beach and/or Cox. Leachman, an officer of subsequent publicised fame, arrived at Basra on 11 March 1915. He was interviewed by the C.P.O. (Cox), and posted as an Assistant Political Officer (A.P.O.) to the 6th Infantry Division. There he held a dual role, both with the military as a Field Intelligence Officer, and as an A.P.O. under Cox. In both

[6] J.G. Browne, *The Iraqi Levies* (London, 1932), pp.1-2.

these roles he was on the staff of the Commander I.E.F. "D". Leachman was no stranger to the country. He had travelled in Iraq in 1910, and in so doing made useful Arab contacts.

For the purpose of establishing the first officer to command the Arab irregulars raised by the Field Intelligence of I.E.F. "D", it is necessary to return to Beach's Intelligence Summary and, in particular, the entry dated 20 July 1915. As discussed, Beach had visited Cox, and told him: "...the Army Commander wished raising of Arab Guides got on with at once". The next entries are as follows:[7]

> 17 July 1915. Interviewed Shaikh of Zubair with C.P.O. Got A.C. to consent to Harvey for Guides at Zubair.
> 20 July 1915. Arranged that Harvey goes to Zubair to raise Guides on 22nd. Gave him all his instructions.
> 20 July 1915. Leachman reports Arab Guides as a success.
> 21 July 1915. Gave Harvey final instructions before he leaves for Zubair on 22nd to commence raising Guides.

These entries appear to provide reliable proof that Leachman was the first with his "Arab Guides". He seems to have obtained a head start in the scheme, perhaps because of the previous Arab contacts made on his previous trip to Iraq in 1910, as discussed above. Also, he may well have been in at the inception of the plan because of his dual role as Intelligence Officer and Political Adviser to the 6th Division (Major-General C.V.F. Townshend). Neither Eadie nor Hamilton is mentioned at this stage in raising Guides/Scouts.

Beach noted in his Summary on the 23rd: "A corps of Arab Guides is being formed with sections at Khamisiyah, Nasiriyah, and Amara". (Part of this plan was put on "hold" by General Gorringe, Commander 12th Division, on 6 August 1915).

However, on 24 July 1915, Beach wired Smyth that the Army Commander had approved his numbers, "30 Khamsieh and 30 Nasiriyah of Guides/Scouts for the townships of Khamsieh and Nasiriyah" respectively; and that he was sending him Eadie to help interrogate some Turkish prisoners.

This entry in Beach's Intelligence Summary dated 13 August 1915, confirms the date when Eadie is first consulted about raising Scouts/Guides:

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[7] W.O. 157/777 and 778.

"Consulted Eadie regarding Guide scheme at Nasiriyah".[8] Again, on 18 August: "Spoke Eadie regarding his possible move to Nasiriyah".[9] On 24 August 1915: "Told off Eadie for Nasiriyah".[10] By then it is clear that the Guides/Scouts scheme had been launched; but it is possible to detect some uncertainty, perhaps about their exact role. There was also the matter of General Gorringe wanting the scheme to be put on hold in his area. So Beach then refers both matters to the Army Commander (A.C.) on 24 July 1915: "Spoke A.C. regarding definition of I.Os' [Intelligence Officers] duties at Nasiriyah, and he wrote a d/o [demi-official] to G.O.C. 12th Division"[11] (General Gorringe).

Beach's meeting with the A.C., and the latter's letter to Gorringe, seemed to have an almost immediate effect – because Beach's next entry of the 27th stated: "12th Division report Arab Guides started".[12] Nixon was not dubbed the "ginger general" for nothing. It would certainly appear from these varied entries that the best of plans were still subject to the "fog-of-war" meaning; the change of situations on the battlefield could alter plans and priorities.

The next item of interest in these summaries is the method of payment for the Guides/Scouts scheme. In the relevant entry of 27 July 1915, Beach notes: "Shaikh of Zubair in office. ...Paid him 1st month's pay of Arab Guides".[13] It appears that it was the practice to pay the Shaikh for the "hire" of the men; and, as it subsequently transpired, this could include the Shaikh or his son if they and their men were employed as a "unit". This was certainly the case for some remuneration for the "civil" irregulars. In these circumstances, and for "military" employment, the men found their own arms, clothing and mounts, fodder and food.

The Summary has two more entries of interest. On 3 September, Beach noted: "Major Smyth arrived. Lots of good news regarding Nasiriyah arrangements. Guides scheme booming". This indicated that Eadie's unit was in the field (some forty days after Leachman's). From them on, Beach

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[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.

starts to receive Eadie's intelligence reports, but these have not been traced. The second point of note is an entry by Beach on 8 November 1915: "Eadie wires asking to enlist more Scouts as new tribes come in. Wired sanction". This unspecified increment of men could tally with Browne's assertion that the Scouts/Guides were increased around this time.

Beach's Intelligence Summaries point conclusively to the military being the first in the field with Arab irregulars; that Leachman was first, with his "Arab Guides" on 20 July 1915, and that Eadie followed with his men "on the ground" by 3 September 1915. The fact that there is no further mention of Leachman after the brief statement above, may be said to be typical of his reputation – he avoided putting pen to paper, much to the chagrin of his commanders and biographers. It is reasonable to assume that Leachman paid his men direct from his official imprest account, as Beach does not comment on paying for men on the "Tigris Line". Leachman's biographers relied heavily on his letters home for information on his activities and campaign locations. One of the three was Philby. In his unpublished "The Legend of Lijman" (sic) he states: "And among them came Leachman's future biographer to whom, in due course, fell the task of dealing with his accounts, and often large financial operations hastily scribbled on scraps of paper and not too easy either to decipher or to understand".[14] At the time Philby was the Civil Revenue Commissioner in Mesopotamia.

It will be noted that throughout the campaign the Civil Administration, under Cox, lacked a firm policy from London, especially as regards Britain's intentions after a conclusive defeat of the Turks – would Turkish rule ever again return? Full co-operation could not be given by the indigenous population without a firm undertaking on this point. As long as that possibility remained open in the minds of the people, the uncertainty created fear, in which mutual confidence was difficult to establish. Even the military commanders lacked firm political objectives; the campaign proceeded on an "opportunity basis". In this way, the alternating fortunes in battle of the two armies was reflected in the relations of the populace with the agents of the British military government.

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[13] Ibid.
[14] Philby, "The Legend of Lijman" (unpublished), p.8.

As previously discussed, as well as the Arab irregulars serving in the I.E.F's field intelligence, there were irregulars employed by the newly-created Civil Administration for the Enemy-occupied Territories. As soon as townships were occupied, such as Basra, Ahwaz, Qurnah, Nasiriyah and Amarah, a British Political Officer (P.O.) was installed. His first task was to ensure local security. To this end the P.Os recruited Arab irregulars for the task of watch-and-ward, usually via the shaikhs or headmen. They also provided escorts for the P.Os. As the Civil Administration developed, the military passed on to it the control of the river and store-dump guards employed along the lines of communication. However, the strength of the latter was dictated by the military, who also financed their pay.

It was the Arab irregulars, employed by the Civil Administration, who acquired the old Turkish name of "Shabanah". Although it is to be found in various Military and Civil Administration documents, the name was considered somewhat derogatory, because it was the ubiquitous name for the unpopular Turkish gendarmerie. It was a name which took years to discard, and, in spite of subsequent numerous official attempts to replace the term, it endured. But it was never applied to the Irregular Field Intelligence Units of the army.

But it is necessary here to establish the prevailing situation in the campaign by the late summer of 1915, in relation to the activities of the Civil Administration. Broadly, the success tally of the Anglo-Indian forces was that they had destroyed the enemy's counter-offensives; and Nixon had established a line on Nasiriyah-Amrah-Ahwaz to consolidate the Basra wilayet; the oilfields and their installations were made secure, together with the Gulf shaikhdoms of Mohammerah and Kuwait. Nixon had only to consider his future plans. Already Kut beckoned, and Baghdad lay 103 miles beyond – the latter a coveted prize of British generals and senior politicians alike.

By September 1915, the Civil Administration had six Special Duty Officers (S.Ds) in the field, plus Leachman. An A.P.O. (Assistant Political Officer), Captain C.T.W. Fowle, was sent to Ahwaz on 6 November 1915. It may be assumed these S.D. Officers, working directly under Cox, were given the task of making contact with the Arab shaikhs to prepare the way for the new Civil Administration, and also to try to bring in the "waverers" on to the

British side away from the staunch supporters of the Turks. A great deal of extra enemy territory had been gained since the commencement of Nixon's advance on Amarah and Nasiriyah in May 1915.

In his Summaries, Beach mentions on 19 October 1915, that Major R.E.A. Hamilton was A.P.O. Nasiriyah. A further entry mentioned: "Intelligence Officer states that in place of the 31 Arab Guides now enlisted in Nasiriyah (all sons of Sheikhs), 300 could if necessary, be obtained of excellent class without any difficulty". The report was dated 8 October 1915, so could have been sent by Hamilton. There is another connection with this entry. Two of Leachman's biographers mention the content of one of his letters home, written some time in October 1915; it stated: "...They have just told me to enlist a large number of Arab horsemen – I lightly suggested that I should command them myself". These entries confirm that these units were popular with certain local Arabs, and were successful in the eyes of the military.

Between mid 1915 and 1916, the Civil Administration acquired a considerable area of enemy territory, which was divided into Political Divisions and Subdivisions. The pacification of these "Enemy-occupied Territories" began with the occupation of Suq-ash-Shuyukh and Nasiriyah (8-25 July 1915). It was then that the Special Duty officers began to get the shaikhs and headmen of townships and large villages to raise their own "Shabanah", on repayment, for duties of "watch and ward". They were only responsible for their own environs.

It is proposed to bring selected examples of the P.Os' work in the field into the discussion. The following reports by officers of the Civil Administration are the first discovered covering this early period in correspondence[15] concerning the "Political Control of Hammar Lake", an area occupied by the 12th Infantry Brigade. Three officers of the Civil Administration were requested to submit reports on control of the lake area; they were Major Hamilton A.P.O. Nasiriyah, and Captains H.R.P. Dickson, A.P.O. Suq-ash-Shuyukh, and A. Grey, A.P.O. Kurna. The reports were dated 3 January 1916. They are particularly interesting for their detailed comments

[15] W.O. 158/708, January 1916.

on some of the Arab tribal problems with which they had to deal, together with recommendations for necessary action to be taken. Captain Dickson's has been chosen as the best example, as follows:

> In accordance with G.O.C. 12th Division's orders, that I should submit my ideas in writing as to the best way of redistributing, administering, and policing the tribes of Hammar Lake...assuming Hammar Lake will be put under Suq.
>
> REDISTRIBUTION
> (1) The Hammar Lake, including Chabaish and Beni Raad tribes to be brought under A.P.O. Suq's jurisdiction.
> (2) All Lake tribes of Beni Khaigan stock to be placed under a selected Beni Khaigan Shaikh.
> (3) These Lake tribes of Bani Esad stock to be left under Shaikh Majia of Chabaish.
>
> This would do away with the perpetual source of trouble arising from the fact that a number of Bani Khaigan tribes are now under the heel of the Bani Esad tribe, with whom the Beni Khaigan have always considered themselves at war...

His appreciation of the situation continues with his suggested plan for administration of the Lake area. It was Dickson who offered the most detailed suggestions, and from these it is possible to anticipate the shape of the irregular levied force, which was being created by pressure of local situations. The report continues:

> ADMINISTRATION
> (1) A junior officer who *must* speak Arabic, to be attached to A.P.O. Suq, to help him run Suq municipality affairs and local Police...
> (2) A *Mudir*...to have in his charge the policing of the Hammar Lake. ...He would have 30 policemen and one chaoush under him...
> (3) A second Mudir to be appointed at *Khamisieh*. ...20 mounted police to be in his charge.
> (4) A third Mudir of Beni Said. ...Here a small post would be built on spot where Turks had one. Under him would be 1 chaoush and 10 men to be stationed at Beni Said. 1 Ombashi and 10 men at Hezlik village.

Under this heading there are typical "Shabanah" sub-units being projected; some are to be equipped with "mashoof" (a clinker-built canoe-like boat of the Marsh Arab, with high curved prow and stern), with which to traverse the lake. The police are under a separate heading, which follows.

POLICE
Head Quarters of whole Police Force in Suq area to be at Suq. The police to be under the A.P.O. The Deputy Commissioner of Police who it is understood will shortly take up his duties at Nasiriyah could periodically visit and inspect them. The latter would also arrange for pay and clothing etc. from Suq Head Quarters for *all* police in the Suq area (i.e. Town Police, river police, horsemen and lake police). The point being that though A.P.O. would control the Police movements, and issue orders to them, they, the police would actually form part of the *Iraq Police Force*, and would be paid and clothed from Basra Vilayet funds.

There are a few interesting issues in this suggestion. It appears that "regular police" are here under discussion, indicating that within a year the Basra police had sufficient trained men for duty beyond that township. Nasiriyah was the old headquarters of the Turkish District Administration. It was of considerable political importance, being a centre from which the tribes of the Lower Euphrates could be controlled. There was also a strategic consideration: situated at the junction of the Euphrates and the Haį, it had represented a potential advanced base for any possible Turkish counter-attack on Basra.

So these considerations could explain the priority the area was being given early in the campaign. The political divisions had to create their own budgets, based on anticipated divisional revenue; that is why, in his appreciation, Dickson is anxious to hive off the cost of police to Basra. His projected revenue dictated the strength of his Shabanah force.

It should be noted that the small "regular police" element mentioned, soon proved unsatisfactory, and was returned to Basra – it appears to have been a linguistic problem, the police being Indian.

The next piece in the "Arab Irregulars/Shabanah" jigsaw is a document to "The Director, Arab Bureau, c/o Director Military Intelligence, Cairo. *Memorandum*. Tribal Guards under control of Political Officers", signed by A.T. Wilson, for the C.P.O., Iraq Section Arab Bureau.[16] Although the covering note is dated 26 January 1917, it obviously covers late 1916, as the opening paragraph states: "...the light railway, Qurna to Amara was

[16] L/P&S/10/617, Fs. 252-259.

completed" (the date of completion being 28 November 1916). Extracts are as follows.

It will be remembered that the Civil Administration raised a force of local Arab irregulars to provide the Political Officers with the necessary power to enforce their authority in their areas. The memo. begins:

> The tribal guards (Shabanah) who are enrolled and paid by the local political officers play an important part in the protection of the rivers in the Occupied Territories and of the railway along the Tigris, of which the section from Qurna to Amara is now completed, from tribal raids, such as were common in the time of the Turk. No such guards have as yet been enrolled for the protection of the Basrah Nasiriyah railway.

This confirms that by then the military lines of communication were under the Civil Administration, and that the military advised the P.Os and A.P.Os on the necessary strength and dispositions of these guards. Also, that not only Shabanah were used for security of the lines of communication, there was another method: "Tribal responsibility is not however absent even on this route, the friendly tribes...being charged with the maintenance of peace on the desert frontier, in return for the subsidy accorded them".

The text returns to Shabanah matters:

> The Shabanah are enrolled by the A.P.O. of the district through the Shaikhs. Owing to the difference in local conditions and available material it has not been found possible to maintain universal rates of pay applicable to all districts, and at present they vary between 20 to 25 for Shabanah, 25 to 30 for Onbashis, 30 to 35 for Chaushes. The men are supplied with arms and uniform by government. [The figures refer to rupees.]

There are a few points needing clarification. Concerning pay, the sums mentioned were paid monthly. Because the military was a big employer of local labour, over-generous pay for the force could cause employment problems. In the early days Shabanah were mostly armed with captured Turkish rifles. On the question of uniforms (as stated) those who were employed on a contractual (unspecified) basis, via a shaikh or headman, to patrol their townships, villages and the environs of same, usually equipped themselves to include mounts. But those men who were individually enlisted by the P.Os, normally via the shaikhs, during late 1915 and early 1916, were, where possible, issued with a headdress comprising argal and chafiyah, also a

cavalry-style K.D. jacket, sirwal (baggy cotton trousers), belt and ammunition pouches, boots, or sandals. But uniform, such as it was, appears not to have been regularised, and was usually in very short supply until 1918. However, it is most doubtful if any attempt was made to provide the military field intelligence Scouts/Guides with uniforms, as it would inhibit their activities as intelligence gatherers, sometimes behind enemy lines.

The memo. confirms that: "The organisation of the force is in the hands of the Assistant Political officer, and varies according to the requirements of the district". It further states that where the force was composed of separate tribal elements, no single local leader could be put in charge. Also, it was found inadvisable to post Shabanah in their own tribal district, as they were tempted to take part in local feuds. As the service was considered "honourable employment", dismissal from government employment was generally regarded as heavy punishment. The strength of the force on the date of the memorandum of 26 January 1916, was 500, and there were no manpower problems then. The designation "Sowar" (trooper) implied mounted, and that of "Shabanah" dismounted; but even these basic designations were seldom maintained. Shabanah was frequently used in the context of both mounted and dismounted men, or in any other connotation.

The memorandum also confirmed that Shabanah irregulars were being used as "district police", as noted in this extract:

> The Shabanah, or river guard, existed under the Turkish regime, and a semi-military tribal guard, such as the Sowars of Suq and Nasiriyah, performing the duties of a civil police under civil authority, corresponds very closely with the Turkish Gendarmerie and is readily accepted as a continuation of the former administrative system. Under existing social conditions the patrolling of traffic routes by semi-military tribal levies is found to be the most effective guarantee of security. Moreover Sowars and Shabanah will provide an outlet for restless spirits and give an opportunity of honourable service to petty chiefs and impoverished members of ruling families, such as the Sa'adun, whose loyalty to the British administration will be proportionately larger according to the measure of their personal participation in local authority.

This last extract ends the memo, which is unsigned. However, there can be little doubt that the author was Captain Dickson, A.P.O., Suq (Suq-ash-Shuyukh abbreviated). The pointers are the citing of Suq and Nasiriyah as

examples of policing by Sowars (troopers); he was ex-Indian Army cavalry; spoke Arabic, and appears "at ease" in his appointment. Captain Dickson's reports will be used later for discussion in this work.

It will be remembered that early reference was made to raids by armed Arab gangs in the environs of Basra, and Cox's request to India for men of fighting capacity from the Punjab. In this context, the reference to the river guards perhaps requires a descriptive background to the then prevailing situation, especially over the period November 1914 to the occupation of Baghdad on 30 April 1917. I.E.F. "D" had a very considerable problem in dealing with the audacious raids of tenacious gangs of armed Arabs, who targeted river craft employed in transporting military stores along the waterways of the lengthening lines of communication. Nor were the attacks of these gangs confined to the rivers; they were even brazen or courageous enough to raid army store dumps, and had been known to crawl into military camps under the barbed-wire fence to tie the muzzle and legs of a tethered cavalry horse, and drag it out under the wire. These conditions were partly conducive to the early expansion of the civil irregulars.

A good example of the co-operation between the P.Os and the military, is illustrated in an Annual Report for the Qal'at Salih District for the year 1916-17, by Lieutenant H. Hiles, A.P.O., dated March 1917.[17] Under "Shabanah", he pointed out that: "...if the Shabanah are to remain a permanent force in this area, the question will have to be taken in hand from the revenue point of view..." It appears that the number of Shabanah on which he had estimated his annual budget, was not, in the opinion of the G.O.C. Defences, sufficient to safeguard the railway, and extra men had to be enrolled. Hiles's annual cost for the river and railway Shabanah was about £T2,000, which was more than the total land revenue received from the Shaikh. "But on the brighter side, whereas the district had been in a very unsettled state, caused by outlaw Shaikhs in the marshes...it would not have been safe or responsible, to have relied solely on the Shaikhs for the protection of the Lines of Communication."

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[17] L/P&S/10/617, Fs. 111-113.

It may be appreciated from these brief sketches how and why the irregular force of Shabanah evolved, and was by necessity tied to the prevailing conditions in the campaign. The Civil Administration was trying to establish in the minds of the populace that they (the British) were better administrators than the Turks. In Wilson's words, the task of the Civil Administration was "to renew the weft and warp of the life of the civil population". Their duty was also to the British exchequer, by way of recovering revenue from the people whose land was under their stewardship. This was no easy task where almost every man was armed. It was soon after the capitulation of Kut, for example, that attempts at voluntary enlistment failed and the old fears that the Turk might return again took hold.

Almost every P.Os report from 1916 to 1919 throws more light on the development of the irregular Shabanah in one way or another, because these reports covered various periods and locations. Most of the reports are divided into sub-headings, and cover all aspects of the P.Os division, for example; revenue, crime, irrigation, railways, rivers, etc., and Shabanah. Where space allows, their own words convey the flavour of their trials and tribulations so much better than any paraphrase.

The next selected for its content on Shabanah, is from the A.P.O. Qurnah District, Captain J.B. Mackie, dated 28 May 1917, for the year 1916-17.[18] Extracts on Shabanah state:

> The Shabanah force in this district now total 246, while a further force has been sanctioned but not yet recruited. Their business is the guarding of the river telegraphs and railway lines in this district...they have carried out their work in a thoroughly efficient manner...a lot of thieving...by the marsh tribes on the Tigris Line but the Shabanah were too watchful and the thieves soon found that it paid better to remain content with what they already possessed than to run the risk of losing that for the uncertain hope of getting more.

Also his men provided protection for the "balam" convoys (local river craft larger than "mahailas", for conveying military stores). Like Lieutenant Hiles, he stated that the tribes that had caused trouble had now "come in", and were living peacefully.

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[18] L/P&S/10/617, F.97.

On Shabanah armament, Mackie noted that those on the Shatt-al-Arab and Euphrates were armed with Turkish rifles, and that those on the Tigris Line had British long rifles. Lastly, it appears that no drill had been possible because of security commitments; but there was a waiting list of recruits. "Because of duties, little or no training could be undertaken...But almost every many knew how to use a rifle, even if he was not schooled in the finer points of musketry and ceremonial drill."

To recapitulate briefly: in this somewhat confused beginning, the irregulars served the requirements of the Military and Civil Administrations alike. In the former role, as already discussed, they were employed by Field Intelligence, found guards for supply dumps, telegraph lines and river "bunds" along the lines of communication. Later, they undertook guard duties for the railways and for whatever purpose regular troops could not be spared, the irregulars filled the gap. Their duties in the Civil Administration have been touched on, but in point of fact they were "jacks of all trades", and were without any organisation in the accepted military sense. There were no establishments as such, numbers varied from district to district according to requirements and the responsibilities of each P.O.

During 1916-17 attempts were made to provide a basic uniform and this, like the strength and organisation of the force, evolved gradually and according only to availability. Until then they used their local dress, found their own arms and ammunition, and fed themselves and their mounts. As mentioned in the intelligence summaries, they were sometimes "contracted" (undefined) via their shaikhs or village headmen. As this discussion develops, it will be seen that official terms for service finally developed.

The following Annual Report by Captain H.R.P. Dickson, A.P.O. Suq-ash-Shuyukh, for 1916-17, provides a lively and revealing picture of his method in organising his units.[19] He appears to have been a keen and progressive officer, as follows:-

The sub-heading conveys an important message, because of the designation "Mounted Scouts" and also because the report covered the year 1916-17, the year in which General Maude had taken command of the I.E.F.

[19] L/P&S/10/617, Fs. 164-167.

Maude was strongly against the use of Arabs in the "field", and maintained his stance in spite of being urged by London to utilise the local population where possible. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that he had objected to the use of Arabs by field intelligence, and so the "Muntifiq Horse/Scouts" of Captain Eadie (the area of the Muntafiq encompassed Suq-ash-Shuyukh) were handed over to Dickson, an officer in the Civil Administration and P.O. at Suq. It has not proved possible to support this contention by documentary evidence, but, towards the end of this work, the supposition will appear more feasible.

Shabanah Force and Mounted Scouts

He found the Suq police force, as discussed, "totally unsuitable". Their duties had been taken over by the "Suq Shabanah Force". This unit had been increased from 100 to 120 to meet the extra duties.

At that time the Civil Forces at his disposal were:

"A" Mounted Men	"B" Dismounted Riflemen
1 Yuzbashi	1 Yuzbashi
30 Scouts	1 Bashchaush
	1 Writer
	12 Chaushes
	120 Shabanahs
Total: 31 Mounted	Total: 135 Dismounted

The "Scouts" were under a contractual arrangement, with Thamir Beg, a Sa'adouni and an elder brother to 'Ajaimi (who remained a thorn in the side of the British, being strongly pro-Turk). Thamir, a prominent man of his tribe, remained staunch to the British. At the end of 1916, he was without rent for his lands, so, as an alternative, he petitioned to raise thirty mounted Shabanah on a monthly subsidy of Rs.1,500, plus a personal salary of Rs.500 per month. According to Dickson, the arrangement was most successful. As mounted police, their duties were varied: they patrolled the local environs, keeping law and order among the wandering tribes within the borders of Suq, and were armed with good Martini carbines together with 100 rounds of ammunition. It appears their work changed the whole temper of the area, making it safe for the P.Os to ride at will, unescorted. The commander of this "little patrol" was a fighter of local repute; disfigured by the loss of his left

eye, but "...a quiet pleasing man to meet and the last man in the world to be suspected of being a renowned desert raider".

The "B" force of dismounted men was commanded by another Sa'adouni, who also "knew his job". They were organised into twelve sections of ten men each. These were armed with the Turkish .304 rifle and 100 rounds per man. Their duties were primarily to keep the river communications open; and secondly, to police the township and its environs. Dickson claimed they were all good shots, and, as marsh men, could be taught nothing about the management of a "mashhuf".

This officers' force was organised to obtain objectives, namely maintenance of law and order, provision of a small "Striking Force", and a training period for all of them. To achieve his three targets, he divided his 120 dismounted men into two parts. For fifteen days, sixty men (half the dismounted force) were sent out to man nine district posts. The remaining sixty manned five town and two river posts. These last sixty men were given rudimentary training, and they also provided a force, which was directly under his hand at headquarters, to deal with any major civil trouble. After the fifteen days were completed, there was a "turnabout"; the sixty men on duty outside the township exchanged duties with those inside.

Their training was, militarily, fairly rudimentary; it included a certain amount of drill and musketry, with "great attention paid to cleanliness, smartness and care of arms".

It is fortunate that his reference to the Shabanah terminates with some information on uniform and clothing. It is the first detailed description of its development. He states: "The uniform found most suitable is a long khaki 'Dugla' or kind of Cossack coat reaching to the ankles. It is both pleasing to the eye and liked by the Arab". This description largely corresponds to a caption "The Levy Uniform for 1916-1917" and illustration in Browne's Book. In the photograph two men are shown wearing agal and kaffiyah, the 'dugla', under which is a local white shirt and full cotton drawers tapering to the ankles (the latter known as "thaub shillaht" and "sirwal"), and boots. They also wore a local-type cartridge belt. In both pictures, covering 1916 and 1916-17, the men are shown wearing "abbahs" (the Arab cloak, of seasonal

weight) over the whole habiliment. The latter, no doubt, because there were no army "greatcoats" to spare.

However, in his next paragraph he states: "A uniform scale of clothing has recently been sanctioned for use of Nasiriyah, Suq and Hammar Shabanahs and horsemen—a distinct advance in the right direction". The administration-specified uniform was only available for Shabanah in the Nasiriyah area, perhaps indicating shortages, and that it was necessary in Nasiriyah where, because of its Turkish municipality background, Britain required to maintain a good image.

In the same report, Dickson made a brief comment on courts and local crime. He claimed that Suq town and its environs were:

> ...curiously situated in this matter (crime). Whereas the town may be looked upon as a civilized community to which ordinary laws of the land can be applied, the surrounding tribes have been treated quite differently. The Indian penal code cannot be bettered for purposes of dealing with cases in the town, but *Tribal Laws and Customs* must be employed in dealing with tribal cases.

It appears there was little crime in the township, other than petty robberies from houses by tribesmen, in league with a townsman. But among the tribes, matters were reversed, a man carried his life in his hands and killing and being killed were a part of daily life; but there was almost no premeditated murder. There were small tribal battles which, in almost every case, could be traced to land-grabbing, or rivalry over women.

With the application of law and order, the need arose for the apprehension of criminals, and sometimes the collective punishment of villages or nomadic tribes, by punitive action. In all these matters the local Arab irregulars, or "Shabanah", were the only civil law-enforcement agents of the District Political Officers. Few, if any, regular police served outside Basra township, being neither mobile nor suitable for such operations from 1915 to 1918.

Dickson understood tribesmen hated discipline, but four days leave each in their homes, and Dickson's own leadership and knowledge of Arabic ensured their loyalty. The administration must have thought well of him, as a number of his reports were selected to go to London via Cairo.

So it was that the Shabanah, in their varied roles, undertook their duties with little or no training or experience. Also, there was an important anomaly—that of Christian invaders imposing their ideas of justice upon Muslims, who for many centuries had known none other than Qur'anic law. This must raise the question of morale for these men in quasi-military employment. Those employed by Military Field Intelligence were small bodies of hand-picked men, led by experienced officers who spoke their language and had been successful in winning the confidence of Asians in the Indian Army, and perhaps, like Eadie and Leachman, had led them in battle. Their dangerous work, often seeking information behind enemy lines, led to mutual trust and confidence—a brotherhood developed in battle situations.

It is important to appreciate the divisions which existed in the Arab irregulars and their duties, for a clearer understanding of the growing pains experienced—their duties were seldom clear-cut. There was a considerable difference between the Scouts/Guides of Field Intelligence and the civil Shabanah; the latter's duties entailed guard duty along the lines of communication, the rivers, and telegraph lines; or, in the situation of Arab policing Arab, in and around their townships; imposing restrictions on tribes with whom they were familiar, and often being called upon to carry out punitive action against them. The Shabanah, unlike the Scouts/Guides, mostly lacked the occasion to experience comradeship with their P.Os in their more mundane tasks. It required time and opportunity for their British officers to acquire a similar understanding and mutual confidence with their motley, and sometimes reluctant, men. It is remarkable how quickly their numbers increased in view of the fact that there was no real organisation with which the men could identify.

It should be noted that Lieutenant-Colonel A.T. Wilson, who had been assistant to Cox, was appointed Acting Civil Commissioner in his place on 23 October 1917, when Cox was transferred to Persia. Wilson, like Cox, had served in Iraq from the inception of the Mesopotamian campaign. He had also been Cox's assistant in the Persian Gulf prior to 1914; so he was no stranger to the responsibilities of political stewardship. His new appointment was merely an extension of his existing mandate.

As discussed, the Shabanah strength was something in excess of five hundred on 26 January 1917, at a time when General Maude had reopened the campaign after a period of reorganisation and retraining of the M.E.F. Baghdad was occupied on 11 March 1917, and the Turkish retreat north began. The Civil Administration, by then under Wilson, continued to spread its mantle of law and order over the newly-occupied territory.

It is perhaps helpful to give the reaction of an official war journalist who visited the area of the Muntafiq in mid 1916. Because it is considered of historical value to have the comments of a reliable witness on the complicated conditions which characterised the work of Political Officers, Candler's description of his experiences in the Muntafiq area are given below: "Anarchy is normal. There is no village that is not a battlefield. Every Sheikh is against his neighbour, brother against brother; and there is no loyalty within the community".[20] Of Nasiriyah he stated:

> A student of British methods could not do better than pass a day in a town like Nasiriyeh, a year after occupation. Spend a morning in the court of the Military Governor. In the seat of authority you will probably find a very young officer, one of the type who has been in the habit of spending his leave before the war in Persia, Arabia, or the Himalayas, shooting strange beasts, picking up strange dialects and studying the ways of stranger people.

Most importantly, he noted:

> An interesting feature of our occupation was the enrolment of the Nasiriyeh Arab Scouts. All the local tribes are represented in the N.A.S., and a score of the Sa'doun, the ruling family of the Muntafiq. The scouts have proved very useful in patrol work and military intelligence.

This is an interesting piece of information in that it is recorded almost exactly a year after the formation of these irregulars by the military. By then the name had changed from "Guides" to the "Nasiriyeh Arab Scouts"; and already they had acquired a military abbreviation, the "N.A.S.". Further, it is reasonable evidence that they had indeed been Captain Eadie's men.

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[20] Edmund Chandler, *The Long Road to Baghdad*, vol. I, pp.271-7.

In contrast are the impressions of an American woman journalist, on a visit to the war zone round about September 1917.[21] She described the "Politicals" briefly as:

> These men in Mesopotamia should be called Civil Commissioners, perhaps. They constitute a kind of balancing-bar between normality of government and actual military rule, and their duties are to see that the life of the people goes on in the usual way, to introduce necessary measures of reform in matters directly affecting the civil populations, to keep open a friendly communication between the Arab head-men and the British military authorities, to collect taxes and to maintain, in so far as it is possible, the ordinary routine of governmental procedure.

This was a fair description, seen through the eyes of a journalist in the centre of the theatre of war.

International law demanded an adequate administrative structure in the occupied territories. However, aroused by Turkish incitement, some of the Arab population, the tribes of the Shammar and Muntafiqùin particular the former under the influence of Ibn Rashid, and the latter Ajaimi were a serious source for concern. In the districts, where the greatest burden lay, the essential task was to obtain and maintain the co-operation of the tribal leaders. Indeed, the P.O's Report for the "Muntafiq Division" (Major Dickson), for the period ending 30 November 1918,[22] observed:

> It is hoped that Local Shabanah will be able to enforce all our orders, the B. Sa'id alone can muster six times as many rifles as the whole of the Shabanah force. Should one fine day the tribe take it into their heads to decide to refuse to pay Revenue (a quite likely contingency, because they had never yet seen any of our troops either on Tigris or Euphrates), what then?

The exact date to which this extract from an Annual Report refers is not known. As usual in a P.O's report of this nature, it was a broad resumé of all matters concerning his district. The document was signed by Major Dickson, P.O. Muntafiq Division, and dated 9 January 1919, for the year 1918 (it seems he had been promoted).[23] It represents an important milestone in the

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[21] E.F. Egan, *War in the Cradle of the World*, p.109.
[22] L/P&S/10/619, F.291
[23] L/P&S/10/619, Fs. 110-105

development of the Levies. Dickson's Annual Report, pp.16-21, begins as follows:

> SHABANA
> The Shabana Force of the Muntafiq Division may be divided into 3 heads:
> "A" The Muntafiq Horse (Mounted Gendarmerie) [Assume ex-N.A.S.]
> "B" Suq Scouts (Shabana dismounted).
> "C" Town Police Shabana (for town duty only; dismounted).
>
> The above are all under command of Lieut. F.W. Hall, Shabana Officer for the Division, and were entirely reorganised, rearmed, and issued out with one standard form of clothing during 1918. The armament of the Shabana consists of .303 1914 short rifle and their uniform is somewhat similar to that worn by Indian Silladar Cavalry, except for the head-dress which remains the Kaffiyah & Agal. [The kaffiyah was red and blue.]

From the breakdown of the above force, the ubiquitous use of the term "Shabana" is, as usual, rather confusing. Here it denotes both mounted and dismounted, if, in the latter context, the name "Scouts" is added. The "Muntafiq Horse" described as "Mounted Gendarmerie" take on a quasi-military character. This partly confirmed by the corps' history, which is related in the following extract:

> THE MUNTAFIQ HORSE (strength 400)
> This corps first came into being early 1916, and its original strength was 30. In 1917 it was amalgamated with the then existing Muntafiq Scouts (a military body), and the strength rose to 75 men. In the latter part of 1917 it became necessary to raise the corps to 200 men, and finally with our penetration of the Gharraf region it was decided to raise the number producing a corps of 400 men. This corps is now entirely responsible for the maintenance of Law & Order in the Nasiriyah Dist. and throughout the Gharraf (Muntafiq Area). Every effort is made to run the corps as a regiment, and the name "Muntafiq Horse" was introduced to encourage the spirit of "Esprit de Corps" among the men, who one and all are members of the Sa'adoun and Muntafiq Tribes.

This brief history is so important to the main theme of this study that it is deemed necessary to quote it almost in full. It tallies in general with Browne's contention of amalgamation. There is one point in nomenclature: Candler wrote of the "Nasiriyah Arab Scouts", dubbed by the military the N.A.S. Dickson was P.O. Nasiriyah when Candler was there. Also, Nasiriyah

was the main township of the "Muntafiq" and so under Dickson's stewardship. Thus it would appear that Dickson had amalgamated the "Muntafiq Scouts" and the "Nasiriyah Arab Scouts" (N.A.S.) to form his "Muntafiq Horse".

> At present the Corps being in its infancy – not a very high standard of efficiency, is insisted upon. One's idea is to popularize service in it. Too much discipline does not suit the Arab, and at the commencement of things it would be a pity to frighten the tribesmen off. As time progresses, discipline will be tightened up and I have every hope of the Muntafiq Horse eventually becoming the first recognised Arab Irregular Cavalry in Mesopotamia.

It is also interesting to note that Dickson appears to feel that the tribesmen were potentially better fighting material than the townsmen. The duties of the corps were as follows:

a. Guarding the main lines of communication, by river and land, in the districts of Nasiriyah, Shatra, and Qalatsikar districts. To facilitate this, a chain of fortified posts were maintained along the Euphrates and the Gharraf rivers, between Shattra and Nasiriyah. This fortified chain, joined up with a similar chain in Suq district and Samawa.
b. Replacing need for military garrisons at Shattra and Qalatsikar.
c. Finding escorts for Survey Teams; Revenue, Telegraphs, Railway, Irrigation, and Agricultural advisers.
d. District Policing and general maintenance of Law and Order.
e. Collection of Revenue, destruction of towers etc of recalcitrant Sheikhs, when necessary.

The organisation of the "Corps" was broadly as follows:

Headquarters: Commanding Officer and staff of four

The Muntafiq Horse: comprised four squadrons, each of 100 all ranks. Each squadron (bulq) was made up of ten sections (mankar) of ten troopers (sowars). Squadrons had two Arab officers and a sergeant and each section, one unpaid corporal.

Pay: for officers and men as follows (per month):

Squadron leader	Rs.250	Choush	Rs.80
Squadron officer	Rs.150	Sowar proficient	Rs.70
Bash Choush Regtl.	Rs.100	Sowar recruit	Rs.60

Supplied by Government: uniform, equipment, rifle and ammunition.

N.B. Each man provided his own horse, saddlery and horse ration. The C.O. passed the horse, which could not be changed without sanction.

Terms of Service: six months, with the option to re-engage if desired.

The recruits were entirely tribal, selected from the leading families in the district. A "demand" for a specified number of men was sent among the shaikhs, who supplied them. At the time of the report, it was ten per shaikh. These were indeed, "levied" troops. Their training included dismounted drill, rudimentary equitation, squadron drill, and musketry. The corps was also served by regimental institutes, comprising veterinary lines, carpenter's, armourer's and tailor's shops.

It may be seen that this corps was being developed and organised on established military lines; but this was not the situation throughout the country under the Civil Adminstration in 1918. Most district irregulars were still run on less structured lines and much smaller strengths. It was, perhaps, a matter of maintaining the image of the Civil Administration in local eyes in that important and potentially restive area, the Muntafiq.

It is reasonable to assume that the initial irregular units raised at Nasiriyah caught the eye of the local senior army executive, perhaps because of the energy and enthusiasm expended on them by officers like Dickson in the Civil Administration, and Eadie in the Military. Once the potential of the irregulars as replacements in many post-war spheres to relieve regular troops had been recognised by the executive, help, by way of army instructors, was then made available.

As already mentioned, not all the districts were equally developed by the end of 1918. The following quotes are offered in contrast to Dickson's report above, in an attempt to assist the understanding of the broader situation. For example, the "Political Diary" of Captain L.M. Yetts, Dulaim Division, for December 1918.[24] He stated that the Shabanah were "...a good stamp of self-reliant desert Arab, strong, healthy, and excellent physique. They were engaged under the original method: an arrangement had been made with neighbouring shaikhs to supply the necessary men; they were to be changed "...periodically according to the Shaikhs' fancy..." This meant that the

[24] L/P&S/10/620, F.344.

greater majority of the men had to re-enlist every two months. On being questioned, these Shabanah had stated that drill was a "nuisance", and that discipline was "abhorrent". However, Yetts felt that if they were given uniforms and ordered to concentrate at Ruhaimah, they would respond almost to a man.

Lieutenant G.R. Pedder, A.P.O. in the Ba'qubah Division, had completed a Shabanah Progress Report for December 1918.[25] In it he stated that: "If the Shabanahs are given a good place to live in, they take much more pride in themselves and the discipline is far better". It appears that in his Division administration was ad hoc in almost every sphere. At Dalli 'Abbas, because of "...the scarcity of grain and famine prices, the horses are in poor condition, but this should improve with the present grain issue". When the cost of grain rose above the norm, the troops could not afford to feed themselves and their horses properly, and so "Revenue Barley" (grain taken in lieu of money, in settlement of tax dues) was resold at a controlled government price, and issued to the Shabanah on repayment. It appears that he was authorised to finance the purchase of horses: "I have been compelled to get rid of a number of horses quite unfit for work. If their owners have been otherwise satisfactory, I have advanced them money to buy fresh horses, or turned them into Piyadahs" (Persian term for foot soldiers).

One final interesting feature of this Division concerns the Shabanah sharing guard duties with a neighbouring British unit (the 13th Hussars) by way of training.

> The Shabanahs liked working with British troops and at the same time learning the duties of a guard...both parties appreciate it – the Pte. Soldier because he gets fewer guards and the Shabanah, because he is working with Britishers.

For the Shabanah, it was perhaps the first opportunity to feel that they were at last recognised as soldiers, and their morale boosted accordingly.

Before leaving the issue of privately-owned horses of the Shabanah, there was an interesting factor at work in those early days prior to the reorganisation in 1919. Few Shabanah sowars owned their horse in its entirety; they owned only a part of it—a leg, or perhaps two—the rest was

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[25] L/P&S/10/620, F.365.

shared with others, a sort of mini-consortium of village neighbours. Thus during his service, the sowar endeavoured to buy the other partners out, to secure full ownership. This arrangement could have led to horses being underfed; the money saved on fodder being used to pay off the others of the syndicate.

There are few mentions of camels being used by the Shabanah. During the early planning stage by the Army Field Intelligence, there is mention of getting some camels for the Guides/Scouts, but they appear not to have materialised. However, they are mentioned by the A.P.O. of Zubair, Captain A.H. Roberts, in his Administration Report for December 1918, under "BLOCKADE":[26] "Khamisiyah was blockaded on the 19th and I went there on the 22nd to explain the system to Shaikh Hamid. The whole of that area is now being watched by camel patrols". His force for blockade duty was fifty camel sowars, and twenty-three piadas. The sowars provided their own camels. The "blockade" was to prevent vital stores reaching the Turks.

Captain H.R.P. Dickson's "Muntifiq Horse" was not the only Shabanah unit which was under development as a military unit; there was another, the "Hillah Shabahah". As already demonstrated, the importance of unique personalities in the Mesopotamian situation is exemplified by the work of Leachman and Eadie in successfully enlisting Arab irregulars into the army's field intelligence. Also, there is a strong and able personality to be found in Captain C.A. Boyle, who had joined the administration on 30 December 1917 to initiate and command the Hillah Shabanah. This is shown in his long and detailed report for his P.O. Hillah and the Civil Commissioner, Baghdad, dated November 1918.[27] In due course (14 January 1919), it was forwarded to the Under-Secretary of State, India Office, London. The Minute Sheet had two interesting comments, as follows: "The Secretary, Military Dept....this report...seems to indicate that there is good material for a future 'Mesopotamian Army'. Sgd. Shuckburgh, 10 March 1919."

This was followed by a second entry: "A very interesting report—& as you say the material promises well—much better than I expected. Sgd. H.V. Cox, 11 March 1919".

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[26] L/P&S/10/620, F.344

Indeed, it was a well-constructed report, and covered the period from January to November 1918. It is proposed to convey the gist of the fourteen typed pages as it represents the essential culmination of the ideas and needs of the Civil Administration for a reliable force, organised on sound military principles.

Boyle had spent the first three months "...endeavouring to induce the Shabanah placed by the Shaikhs in the various road and district posts to come into Hillah for training". It may appear odd that they could not be "ordered" to report—but, as discussed, the men were needed, and at that time they were almost free agents. He eventually succeeded; and by the end of March 1918 training commenced in earnest, in which the men showed great keenness. This enabled him to weed out the old and unfit "(the latter mostly suffering from venereal diseases)." He filled the vacancies created with recruits, and appreciated the help given in the recurrent six-weeks training programme by B.Os and B.N.C.Os attached to him as instructors.

The training was successful. "The men have shewn great zeal and have adapted themselves to military discipline." Recruiting had not been easy. "Enlistment is the gauge by which one can measure the popularity or unpopularity of the Shabanah amongst the Arabs and is therefore to a great extent a measure of success." He had at first found men from the tribes difficult to recruit, but finally they responded; "but townsmen, none".

The reason given is worthy of note.

> In January and February, when training was started in Hillah, the rumour went round that the British were short of men in the field and that the Government wanted to form an Arab army either to fight the Turk or to send to Bombay or London.

It appears that the issue of uniforms had given substance to the rumour. Nevertheless, Boyle achieved his required strength of 647 enlisted Shabanah, after the discharge of 382 unsuitable men.

There were two other recruiting impediments. One was the "reported" severity of the training; but this had been annulled when the men returned to their homes, fitter and stronger than when they left. The other was the lack of accommodation. There had also been the problem of suitable men being

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[27] L/P&S/10/619, F.609 to 623.

"pressed" into the M.E.F's Military Arab Labour Corps (who lived at home, but were on less pay than the Shabanah footmen). They were used for unloading ships, and in store depots.

The Shabanah terms of enlistment included the following: that the man brought a certificate of good character from his shaikh/mukhtar, who promised to produce him, if he deserted, during the first three months, which was the length of service initially binding on each man; that his guarantor was responsible for any item stolen by him; that tribesmen brought their own rifles, and sowars their own horses (ownership of which has already been discussed in detail). Saddlery, owned by the men, was of local design, and so unsuitable for military service, in that it was not designed to carry equipment. Boyle hoped this would be replaced by a "General Service" pattern in due course. It will be remembered that similar conditions prevailed in the units of Scouts/Guides in the Field Intelligence, in so far as arms, horses and saddlery were concerned.

The chief recruiting agents were still the shaikhs, who were urged by the P.Os to send men in. Townsmen were a very acceptable class of recruit. Boyle felt they were strong and used to riding since childhood—"the ideal cavalry recruit". He wrote: "The Shabanah is now in its experimental stages, and its status eventually will probably depend to a great extent on the experience gained now". The men enjoyed parades and field days, but he wanted to get them into barracks to improve discipline, and to enable him to get half his force in at a time for a month's training, while the other half were out at posts. He was sure that the training periods helped to break down tribal barriers. It appears that recruits from shaikhly backgrounds had become scarce; this was because of the policy of appointing "paramount" shaikhs in districts, answerable to Political Officers. In this way minor shaikhs had lost their previous influence, and the new senior patriarchs retained their sons to help them with their increased duties.

After training, Hillah townsmen had produced some good drill instructors, and were possessed of a basic education (usually from a Qur'an school). They also proved to be good shots, and in addition were physically strong and had good nerves. Boyle was satisfied that: "The Shabanah are now

well competent to cope with practically any situation they might meet with, in tribal fighting with the local tribes". Boyle gives a shrewd insight on his men's mentality: "For example a man who would not think of missing a parade or not turning up for guard, will, under cover of his uniform insult passers-by or take bribes when on blockade duty". He felt that "eradication" of the aberrations would be "...gradual, but is certain".

It is odd to note that the Hillah Shabanah had been issued with the .301 Peabody rifle. A serviceable weapon with a fixed battle-sight to 400 metres, this rifle was an advantage in the hands of irregulars, and was superior to the average weapon of the tribesmen. However, the ammunition supplied was next to useless. Boyle hoped the issue of these ex-Turkish rifles was only a temporary measure. The bayonets were of a good pattern, but too heavy for easy handling and smart drill movements. The mounted men were being trained along "Mounted Infantry" lines; the horses only for mobility, not a "shock" element, as in the cavalry.

It seems that Boyle was ordered to experiment in order to discover the suitability of "Mounted Infantry" as a tactical arm for the irregulars, as opposed to that of the "Cavalry", adopted by Dickson for his "Muntafiq Horse". The force now had two units which were, perhaps, under close scrutiny for decision-making on future policy. (A note on the issues of cavalry versus mounted infantry will be found in Appendix A, p.259.)

In his report Boyle discussed horses. The majority of the issues have been mentioned in this work; however, Boyle does make some points on local Arab ponies:

> A more ungainly and ill-shaped animal than the average type of Shabanah pony would be hard to find – on the other hand, for hard work, long-distance rides and cross-country riding over the type of obstacles to be met with in this country, they are hard to beat.

He also mentioned the local "plate shoe" which, although in no way conforming to the British model, "...appears very efficient and causes of lameness from injured hoofs or bad shoeing, are practically non-existent".

It is pertinent to mention here some of the minor operations in which the "irregulars" are known to have been involved, other than as guards, patrols, blockade duty, and general gendarmerie-type policing. Boyle's Hillah

Shabanah were sent to Madhatiyah on 12 April 1918, on a punitive operation, involving the destruction of some villages and shaikhly defence towers, and the apprehension of certain malefactors. The main reason seems to have been the recovery of overdue revenue. This small exercise proved successful in that Boyle's Arab troops were prepared to punish other Arabs on the issue of revenue collection, an affair in which they may well have held common cause with the dissidents. They were next called out in the same month, on the 21st, this time to destroy some twenty-seven towers and burn two villages. The latter affair lasted three days and, most importantly, it entailed a mounted march of thirty-three hours in the saddle, during which not a man or his mount were found wanting. They had vindicated Boyle's training regime.

Lastly, there was the problem of selecting suitable local officers and senior N.C.Os. Boyle considered that there were three available sources. First, the ex-Turkish officer or ex-civil official. Secondly, relations of a shaikh. Thirdly, selection from the ranks. The first two offered the attribute of education, but were found to have little influence with the men. The second category was restricted, because they were needed for their influence in administering the tribes. The third category was found to be the most useful source, as discipline increased and tribal influence became less. The latter also usually possessed a certain amount of education. In the long term, Boyle felt there was no one suitable class from which to choose the ideal Arab officer, that a class would have to be created, and that "more education would, in time, improve morals and manners".

It would be wrong to set aside this report before quoting his comments on the right type of British officer for the force:

> An officer with sufficient strength of character to assert his influence on the men must first get their confidence and the high road to get their confidence is to know their language so that they realise that any complaint or petition that they make will be understood, and fairly dealt with.

He added that physical fitness was an essential factor.

Generals Marshall and Costello had inspected his Shabanah[28] alternately, and expressed their approval on the method of training, smartness

[28] L/P&S/10/619, F.608.

in turnout, good physique and bearing; and finally, that they would turn into a good corps.

By the end of 1918, the two Shabanah formations had partly taken on the semblance of regular units, namely, the "Muntafiq Horse" and the "Hillah Shabanah", the latter more so as Hillah seemed to be earmarked as a training depot, but without written evidence. However, they did represent opposing lines of military thought; they epitomised the controversy of "cavalry" versus "mounted infantry".

To re-quote both officers on this issue:

Dickson:

> I have every hope of the Muntafiq Horse eventually becoming the first recognised Arab Irregular Cavalry in Mesopotamia".

Boyle:

> The Sowars are trained and armed purely as Mounted Infantry, their horses being used for mobility...any form of arme blanche, except a bayonet would be a hindrance to training...the effect of controlled fire in action by irregular mounted troops is much more than that of uncontrolled or semi-controlled shock-action.

These statements speak for themselves. They prove that Boyle was aware of the controversy which surrounded the two tactical principles, the basis of this important military argument; and therefore relevant in the history of the "Iraq Levies". It will be seen that, ultimately, the cavalry prevailed.

In so far as training was concerned in the Political Divisions, they found it difficult to sustain an adequate programme because of their other commitments; but it was a situation that was being slowly overcome during 1918, as operations moved further north, and the outcome of the campaign against the Ottoman forces was no longer in doubt. The military command, also realising that hostilities would come to a successful conclusion, had already designated the "irregulars" to replace regular troops wherever possible in preparation for the inevitable run-down of the M.E.F. To ensure these "replacements" were adequately trained, British regular N.C.Os were posted to the Shabanah in some of the Political Divisions to undertake training in drill, musketry and horsemastership. No doubt, because of the then recent

recruitment problems, there were insufficient recruits to warrant establishing a training depot; also no future policy had yet been made known.

There were a number of problems concerning recruitment during 1918, not all of which have yet been mentioned. To acquire much needed men, coercion through their shaikhs had been used. This, in turn, created more problems: "Owing to the difficulty of finding recruits, local Sheikhs have had to give monthly subsidies to men in order to induce them to join...this has raised their pay to Rs.70/- p.m."[29] The A.P.O. Aziziyah was forced to stop the practice as it caused local labour rates to become"abnormal" (January 1919).[30] The A.P.O. Diwaniyah, on the other hand, made a local notable, Khadim Lulu (with previous experience in the Turkish gendarmerie), a "Wakil Thabit", "on the understanding that he brings the Shabanah up to establishment", 30 December 1918.[31] "Establishment" in this context only meant the number of men required for a particular Political Division.

There were other problems encountered in the recruitment of both tribesmen and townsmen in any number during early 1918-19. The former were jealous of their freedom, and the latter found it difficult to leave rural commitments. Most of the irregulars, at this juncture, were becoming disenchanted with the niggardly pay and allowances on offer. There were financial "rewards" to be obtained by the Shabanah for the capture, or information leading to same, of wanted men. For example, the reward offered for the capture of Ahmed ibn Nahar was Rs.1,000. "Of this, the lion's share will go to Chaush Sayid Muhammad, whose information led directly to Ahmed's capture" (August 1919).[32] Indeed, a princely sum when considered with his approximate pay and allowances of Rs.80 per month. But the chances for such a reward were few.

By the time Ramadi was occupied on 29 September 1918, the recruitment problem had worsened. The P.O. of the Muntafiq Division reported that since news of the Armistice had reached Mesopotamia there was a general fear that the Turks would return to take vengeance on all collaboators if Iraq were given back to them. However, Wilson, when visiting

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[29] L/P&S/10/620, F.497.
[30] Ibid.
[31] L/P&S/10/620, F.284.

the district in November of that year, tried to dispel this fear by telling the local leaders that "Iraq was the new 'Arus' (bride) of Great Britain, and would never be returned".[33]

Nevertheless, inducements were urgently needed to raise sufficient Shabanah with whom to police the newly-acquired enemy territories. Back in June 1918,[34] Wilson had stated, in a report to London, that the conditions of the Shabanah were changing, and that as so much more was now expected of the men, the then current rates of pay were insufficient to attract men for service. However, he felt that any increase would entail considerable expenditure, and therefore "careful consideration" was needed before a decision was taken. But almost every Shabanah unit was below its required strength, and there was little choice but to act because desertions had already started. Wilson ended with: "The labourer is worthy of his hire, however, and prima facie there would seem to be no reason why the Shabana should not be as well paid as the men in the regular police".

By 15 September 1918, the increases had been approved and the A.C.C. was able to report:

> It has been found necessary to sanction a general increase in pay. This has taken the form of a proficiency allowance at the rate of Rs.10/- a month for horsemen and Rs.5/- for foot. It is granted only to those who can pass certain tests [unspecified] and its introduction is having a rapid effect in the improvement of quality.[35]

Pay for Sowars and Piada in "Civil Departmental Orders, M.E.S.Ex.Force H.Q. Baghdad, 1st October 1918, Part 2 Establishments, p. 87, Political",[36] shows Shabanah pay for mounted and foot as follows:

Designation	Rate per month	w.e.f.
Chaush	Rs.85	17.7.18
Sowars	Rs.70	24.7.18
Piada	Rs.35	24.7.18

(The 100 per cent increase of the Sowar over that of the Piada, was caused by the feed allowance for the Sowar's mount.)

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[32] L/P&S/10/617, F.448.
[33] L/P&S/10/732, F.92.
[34] L/P&S/10/732, F.89.
[35] L/P&S/10/732, F.92.
[36] L/P&S/10/619, F.64.

Taking the Muntafiq Division as an example, the rates of pay as at 9 January 1919 in the Muntafiq Division were as follows:[37]

Squadron Leader	Rs.250 per month
Squadron Officers	Rs.150 per month
Bash Choush Rgtl.	Rs.100 per month
Chaush	Rs. 80 per month
Sowar "proficient"	Rs. 70 per month
Sowar recruit	Rs. 60 per month

The "proficient" Sowar included the new increase of Rs.10 over the sowar "recruit", or a partly-trained man. The Sowar, it should be remembered, was still responsible for feeding his mount.

The terms of service for Shabanah appear not to have been specifically laid down in 1918. In the P.O's reports, it seems to have been a matter of a man's ability whether he was kept or discharged. In the Muntafiq Division, the terms of service in mid 1918 were "six months", with the option to re-engage "as often as desired". No doubt dependent on performance. Leave was at the rate of four days per month. Perhaps these terms of service were in use generally, although their promulgation has not been discovered in the files. But it was noted that efforts to get the men to sign on for longer periods had failed, with the result that the force was constantly full of newly-recruited men. This was adequate proof that a fixed term of service did not then exist in 1918.[38] This quick turnover of men could not have been conducive to satisfactory training programmes.

Accommodation for the men had been almost non-existent. Usually they appear to have been billeted about the towns and villages in which their duty caused them to be stationed. There was no training depot or central organisation—they were random units raised in the Political Divisions where there was need of their services. However, the army executive became more demanding, expecting a disciplined body, especially where they were taking over more patrols and guard duties from the military. No doubt senior officers, on tours of inspection, demanded a disciplined performance to inspire them with confidence in respect of the force providing the

[37] L/P&S/10/619, F.111.
[38] L/P&S/10/619, F.150.

replacements for regular troops. For example, in anticipation of demobilisation.

However, men not living in a unit and with little training, would be lacking in all-important morale. It was also difficult to impose discipline on a scattered unit. In 1918, there were more efforts being made to find fixed accommodation for the Shabanah. Captain Nelson Suter, P.O. Samawah, stated:[39]

> Sanction has been asked for the construction of a Shabanah headquarters building at Rumaitha. I sincerely hope sanction will be given as at present the Shabanahs are scattered all over the town and unless they are always together I fear they will never materialize into a good corps.

And again in the Baghdad Wilayat Fortnightly Report No.20, dated 1 October 1918:

> A Turkish fort, at the heart of the Jarbu'iyah district, known as Manzil-al-Shu'bah, has been taken over and will be used as a Shabanah Barracks. Lodging the men in barracks with necessarily curtailed liberties, will prove a further test of the future possibilities of the Shabanah as a disciplined force.

This was an undoubted attempt to bring a true semblance of military discipline to the irregulars.

To complete the summary of this fragmentary development over the war years by the precursors of the Iraq Levies in 1918, it is necessary to discuss the imposition of military discipline. The practice of corporal punishment was by then no longer used in the British Army. A Memorandum explaining "The Baghdad Criminal Procedure Regulations", was in force in Mesopotamia during the war. They were based on "The Sudan Criminal Procedure Code" (approved by Lord Kitchener after the reoccupation of Sudan in 1898, and based mainly on the Indian Penal Code). It seems to have applied to civilians and Shabanah alike. Whipping and flogging was the rule in 1918, and no doubt earlier, under this authority. It is understood it was still practised in the Indian Army at this time.

An extract from the P.O's report for December 1918 is quoted as an example: "Punishments: far fewer this month due perhaps to two severe

[39] L/P&S/10/732,Fs.99 and 169.

thrashings given last month to two sentries, found asleep on their posts, and who had their rifles taken from them by military police" (an old method used to provide proof of sleeping on guard duty—obviously a most serious offence). It continued: "A year's imprisonment to a very smart chaush, who enabled another chaush whom he was to arrest to escape, has also had its effect. The men dislike beating and I am avoiding fining" (ex. Ba'qubah Division).[40] Avoiding "fining" was correct, as the men received pay in lieu of rations.

In conclusion, as stated at the beginning of this chapter, the progenitors of the Iraq Levies did not have a straightforward planned inception—like Topsy, they "grow'd". Although for many years their major form of employment was similar to that of gendarmerie, their conception and birth was the result of a military liaison. It will be shown that, ultimately, they returned to their original family as a levied military force, commanded by the senior British officer responsible for security in Iraq, under whom they served, in conjunction with imperial troops and units of the RAF.

No considered policy brought about their existence; only expediency for intelligence gathering, to expand quickly into other spheres of need engendered by the campaign. In this way expediency was the sole guiding force, in the form of an ad hoc development, to include recruiting, strength, arms, mounts and equipment, pay, clothing, and, finally, terms of service.

Each service increased in numbers until 1917, when it appears the Field Intelligence units were handed over to be absorbed by the Civil Administration; for example, when the "Nasiriyah Arab Scouts" (N.A.S.) became the "Muntafiq Horse" under Major Dickson. It will be seen how this particular unit maintained its entity, though not its designation, over the next seventeen years. Following Dickson's work in the area of the Muntafiq, a new Shabanah unit was formed at Hillah, under the command of Major Boyle, whose purpose, it will be remembered, was to establish Mounted Infantry training in particular. But for the time being, the Muntafiq Horse continued as cavalry.

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[40] L/P&S/10/620, F.365.

Boyle's Hillah Shabanah however were destined to become the first training depot for the Force. The arms, especially the rifles, remained varied in type, and there was no regulation saddlery. An attempt to get the men into a standard uniform had been made, but even boots were in short supply.

Rates of pay had been established with a service agreement of sorts, but expediency remained the theme for some time to come. There were only two units, the Muntafiq Horse and the Hillah Mounted Infantry, which appeared to possess a rudimentary military unit structure. The remainder of the force was employed as "jacks of all trades". The force strength remained dictated by requirement.

The need for accommodation was, at last, recognised, but its provision would take a great deal of time. Rationing had not yet begun, and there was no firm policy for the future of the Force. However, it will be shown that this irregular corps would be under pressure for organisation and expansion, together with a training programme, in order to be able to take over as many duties as possible from the regular army and to enable demobilisation to begin.

CHAPTER III

The previous chapter covered the British invasion of Mesopotamia in 1914, the successful achievement of the initial objectives in the Basrah wilayet, the somewhat haphazard development of the campaign into a drive to capture Baghdad – only occupied after the ignominious surrender of Kut – and finally with the occupation of Mosul in late 1918.

It also showed how, during the first few months of the campaign, pressure from the C.G.S. India on the Field Intelligence staff of I.E.F. 'D' for improved Intelligence Reports on the enemy, caused the raising of troops of Arab Irregulars to assist the British Field Intelligence Officers in their work. These Scouts/Guides were soon followed by other Arab Irregulars and River and Army Depot Guards, along the Lines of Communication. The latter irregulars were organised by the Civil Administration, and quickly expanded into a corps representing the executive power of the Civil Administration during the period of British control of the Enemy Occupied Territories. Political officers used them as personal guards and District Police in the capacity of "Watch and Ward" in the villages and townships.

The reader will see that this chapter, unlike all the others in the thesis, covers in essence a single year—that of 1919. This is because that year was a crucial one for the future development of the levies. It was seen in the last chapter that the historical origins of the Force were both complex and obscure. Its development until 1919 owed a great deal more to personal initiative by individual British officers, and to often uncoordinated ad hoc arrangements, than it did to any coherent planning and the subsequent implementation of such plans.

In 1919, however, that situation began to change. The war with the Ottoman Empire was now over, and the British government had to consider the long-term future of Iraq, which inevitably involved the future nature and role of the Levies. It soon became clear that the planning for the future of Iraq often looked much more urgent in Baghdad than it did in London, where the British government had a post war list of other issues and problems to be addressed, which was truly daunting both in length and complexity. As always, the British government made European issues take precedence over

those in the Middle East and elsewhere. What appeared very urgent in Baghdad—or in Cairo—did not attract as much attention in London, until, that is, violent subversion occurred, as it was to do in both these countries. Then London had to take more notice—as will be seen in the following chapter covering events in 1920.

Those in charge of planning the future of Iraq were faced with the British National plan for demobilisation, then in full operation. It had been implemented in answer to the popular political and governmental demands for financial stringency. This, in turn, demanded the withdrawal of large numbers of imperial troops from Iraq and so produced the need for an "alternative" military force to be established to fill the gap created by the departing troops.

This would have two major assignments. The first to perform the tasks of the troops scheduled to leave for demobilisation in the United Kingdom; the second, and partly-related task, to maintain law and order throughout the country – a far from easy undertaking in the aftermath of war and military occupation. In some remote areas prolonged periods of lawlessness resulted from lack of control by central government.

The accomplishment of those twin tasks of taking over British troops and establishing law and order was a heavy undertaking, given both the fragmented nature of Iraqi society and the often rugged terrain in the north. The situation for the British officials in Baghdad and in other towns and cities, was made all the more difficult by the lack of agreement in London on plans for the future of Iraq.

It was in this context, for example, that in the mountains of Kurdistan, the Assyrian refugees from Ba'qubah camp were to be utilised for use with imperial troops under General MacMunn to help quell a violent Kurdish uprising. Owing to demobilisation there was a shortage of men trained in mountain warfare, which skill was second nature to the Assyrian mountaineers from their Hakkiari enclave, where they lived as a Christian "millet" in that region of Turkey, and had fought successfully with the Russians against the Turks until the Russian revolution left the Assyrians isolated. Thus, short of ammunition and Russian support, they fled south to Hamadan in August 1918.

As has been noted, the British government had other more urgent issues and problems to confront at the end of the First World War; the lack of guidance from London further exacerbated the many difficulties facing the British authorities, both civil and military, in Iraq. It will be seen also in this chapter (and in the following one), that even when the British government did devote time and attention to consideration of the future of Iraq, different departments of state held very contrasting and sometimes confusing views on what should be done, and how.

This chapter therefore covers a difficult and complex period. The urgencies and confusions of the war period may have ended, but the transition to a new and generally expected peace-time role for the levies, was to be a difficult one to visualise and to achieve. Progress was neither smooth nor uneventful.

The main issues for discussion include the organisation of the Levies at the beginning of 1919, the dispositions of the Political Divisions, the Civil Administration's stewardship in Kurdistan, the first Kurdish uprising, changes in Levy designations. Above all we see the commencement of the reconstruction of the Levies, entailing the decision to divide the Force into two parts – a "Striking Force" comprised of both Mounted Infantry and Infantry and "District Police", both mounted and foot. Also, where appropriate, it is proposed to discuss the general situation existing in the Force, as seen through the eyes of the P.Os and A.P.Os.

As a prelude to an investigation of the role of the Levies, it may be helpful to recall some of the causes which formed the basis of the unrest in Iraq. Among these was the publication of President Wilson's fourteen points of 8 January 1918, in which the twelfth point stated: "the nationalities now under Turkish rule should be assured of undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development". This was followed by the Anglo-French Declaration on 8 November 1919. This stated that the object of the British and French in the East was the establishment of national governments and administrations deriving their authority from the initiative and free choice of the indigenous populations. These statements were a source of motivation for independence by many of the ethnic and religious groups which had constituted the Ottoman Empire. Among those

peoples with whom this work is directly concerned were the Arabs, the Kurds and latterly, the Assyrians.

Without attempting a detailed and extensive discussion on these and other political pronouncements, suffice to say that the ambiguity they created did not ameliorate the already difficult task of the Civil Administration. The frontiers created by the war had not yet been agreed; for example, the Iraq-Persian frontier from Fao to Ararat, as laid down by the Frontier Commission of 1914, had not been ratified. More importantly, the northern frontier with Turkey had yet to be resolved. In 1919, the British proposals for delineation were meeting strong Turkish resistance, and the issue was of considerable concern to the Kurds as its projected path, in their eyes, would separate what they regarded as their true homeland. The latter issue was to form one of the reasons for outbreaks of contentious and dangerous unrest in Iraqi Kurdistan in which Turkish infiltrators were to become a part. Even the Syria-Iraq frontier was politically undefined, with what could be described as a "no-man's land" in the Ottoman Mutasarriflik of Deir-ez-Zor, an area which was to cause problems, and will form the first section of the next chapter.

In the context of these complex problems, the men to whom fell the task of dealing with the aspirations and disputes arising from them in the postwar period, were Cox and Wilson. Cox, it will be remembered, was the "Political Adviser" to I.E.F. "D" in 1914. Then, when the designation changed in July 1916 to "Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force" (M.E.F.), he continued in that capacity until April 1917, when he became "Civil Commissioner" for Iraq, with Wilson continuing as his Assistant from February 1915. However, Cox was put on "Special Duty" as H.M's Acting Minister in Tehran from 1 March 1918. Thus Wilson replaced Cox to become Deputy Civil Commissioner in Iraq and left Iraq when Cox returned on 16 September 1920.

Although Cox and Wilson provided continuity in the political field from the commencement of the campaign until after the Armistice, the sole responsibility for the administration of Iraq lay with the Commander-in-Chief (G.O.C.-in-C) Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force, until Cox's reappointment as High Commissioner for Iraq. However, because the situation in Iraq remained volatile, political and military affairs continued to be interdependent.

In preparation for discussion of the events affecting the Levies in 1919, it is first necessary to recall the Force's position at the start of that year. That will be followed by an investigation of various plans for improving their rudimentary structure and organisation. As previously indicated, it appears there was still some confusion in the Civil Administration as how best to meet the pressing demands on the Force. This was made apparent by the series of changes which followed one another, indicating uncertainty and lack of direction by the executive.

By the beginning of 1919, the Civil Administration had two partially organised units, namely the "Muntafiq Horse" at Suq under Dickson, and the "Hillah Shabanah" of Boyle; the former were being trained on the lines of the Indian Irregular Horse (Cavalry), and the latter were on trial as "Mounted Infantry" (M.I.). The remainder of the Force continued as before to be an ad hoc Force, dispersed throughout the Political Divisions. Divisional strengths varied greatly according to local requirements. The Force remained the executive power of the Civil Administration. The "Shabanah" of the P.Os performed the tasks of District Police, or gendarmerie; the latter designation was used intermittently. Already, in early 1919, the Force was either performing or gradually taking over various military commitments from the M.E.F.

A "Memorandum on Shabanah in Mesopotamia" was issued on 8 November 1918[1] by the Civil Administration. It appears to have been the first of its kind and is mentioned by Browne. However, as it failed to establish a real military organisation, it is felt it would have been less confusing to delay discussion on it until the beginning of 1919, because alterations to it followed quickly in that year.

The contents of the memo. explained the chain of command and gave instructions for future co-operation with the military. It also stated that P.Os were responsible to the Civil Commissioner for the maintenance of order and collection of revenue. Also, there was at the P.O's disposal the means to enforce order, which were:

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[1] L/P&S/10/618, Fs.52-6.

1. Armed Arab district levies known as Shabanah.
2. Town police—police. (Meaning dismounted Shabanah.)

Further, the P.Os had certain responsibilities to the local military authorities for the protection of railways, stores, posts, etc. There was to be close liaison between "Administrative Commandants" (in reality military liaison officers) and the P.Os. The latter were responsible for the safety of their Sections, commanded usually by the A.P.Os; but the "Administrative Commandants" of the military were responsible for their locations, to assist the P.Os to obtain arms and equipment and generally help in making the Shabanah Force efficient. It may be assumed that the arms and equipment were to be supplied from the M.E.F's Ordinance and Equipment Depots.

The allocation of Military "Administrative Commandants" to P.Os was listed as follows:

Base Section to deal with the P.O. Basrah
Kurnah to deal with the P.O. Kurnah
Amarah to deal with the P.O. Amarah
Kut to deal with the P.O. Kut
Advance Section to deal with the P.O. Baghdad
Euphrates to deal with the P.O. Nasiriyah and Samawah Euphrates

A.P.Os were being appointed to command Shabanah in each Political Division; they were directly responsible for matters of routine, clothing, equipment, pay, accounts, and for keeping their P.Os informed as necessary. A.P.Os could use Shabanah in their districts, subject to the general approval of their P.Os. Another condition stated: "...that no action should be taken with the aid of Shabanah which may involve bloodshed, without reference to the local military authority".

Under "Defences of Localities and Small Posts" it was stated: "The men should be trained in this, but its importance is secondary, as a British Officer would always be at an important point, and it is not desired to train the Shabanah to act as a military force". This instruction now reads somewhat ambiguously; there was only one British officer per Shabanah unit, and that was the A.P.O. Therefore, he could only supervise one post personally, and Shabanah strengths mostly allowed for more; also, as they were taking over military posts, it could only mean that they were taking on military responsibilities.

The uniform of the Force remained similar to that already mentioned in Dickson's Report for 1918-19 in the previous chapter: agal, chafiyah, blouses kurta K.D., pantaloons, putties, boots, shirts, belts leather, brass shoulder badges. However, three types of rifle were on issue, which was strange, especially at a time when efforts were being made to achieve standardisation; also bayonet, bandolier and water bottle. Haversacks were "issued on demand only". This latter proviso is difficult to understand, especially where men were to be on detachment, perhaps manning isolated posts, and needing to carry rations and items of clothing. A brass badge was mentioned, but not described. It may be assumed to have been the crossed "Kunjars" which remained the insignia of the Iraq Levies.

The Memorandum also laid down a scale of pay for Shabanah. Yet again, there appeared an unexplained lack of uniformity. The scales varied by Political Divisions; four of them did not get the "Proficiency Pay of Rs.5/- per month", but the Muntafiq Horse received Rs.10/- for this allowance. Because no such distinction was accorded to Boyle's Hillah Shabanah, it may have been a "sweetener" for the Sa'aduni and other Muntafiq tribesmen. The Muntafiq had proved to be a difficult people to control.

The following table shows the extent of the variations in pay:

Mounted Troops	Foot Troops
Chaush Rs.55 to Rs.90	Chaush Rs.30 to Rs.55
Sowar Rs.45 to Rs.70	Sowar Rs.20 to Rs.40.

No explanation is given in the Memorandum for variations in the pay scales. The lowest paid mounted men were in Kut and, for the foot, in Qurnah and Amarah. These pay inequalities could have perhaps stored up trouble for the future. It will be shown in due course that the Civil Administration was not averse to breaking monetary promises given during recruiting.

Using the Memorandum it is possible to calculate the total number of men in the District Shabanah at that time. There were 1,882 Mounted Troops, and 2,781 Foot. In addition, there were 442 Municipal Watchmen and 362 men referred to as Revenue Colchis and Blockade Police. The overall strength was therefore 5,467. This figure is also shown by Browne.

The two important units previously mentioned were included in the above totals. Their individual strengths were as follows:

Nasiriyah (Major Dickson)	Mounted: 430; Foot: 367	Total: 797
Hillah (Major Boyle)	Mounted: 480; Foot: 429	Total: 909
	Grand Total:	1,706

Thus, of the total 4,633 District Shabanah, the Muntafiq and Hillah Divisions together equalled more than a third of the Force's total strength and represented the only potential fighting force in a real military sense.

It is felt helpful to give the dispositions of the Political Divisions at the beginning of 1919.[2] The fourteen Divisions shown rose to sixteen when it was felt expedient to expand the stewardship of the Civil Administration further north. It will be seen that the Political Divisions quoted below are not always named after the geographical location of the P.O's headquarters/office.

Kirkuk was in the Mosul wilayat, and had been occupied by the British on 25 October 1918.[3]

Division	P.O's H.Q.	Division	P.O's H.Q.
Dulaim	Ramadi	Khanikin	Khanikin
Samarrah	Samarrah	Kut-al-Amarah	Kut-al-Amarah
Hillah	Hillah	Amarah	Amarah
Shamiyah	Najafi	Muntafiq	Nasiriyah
Samawah	Rumaitha	Qurnah	Qurnah
Baghdad	Baghdad	Basrah	Basrah
Ba'qubah	Ba'qubah	Kirkuk	Kifri

In order to understand the difficulties faced by the levies in the north it is necessary to appreciate the ethnic complexity of that region. After the occupation of Mosul on 6 November 1918 the indigenous manpower situation in the Levies began slowly to change. Hitherto, the men serving in the Force had been Arab, with a few Turkoman and Persians. The new British territorial commitment of Kurdistan entailed the employment of Kurds, as well as other minor northern ethnic groups, with which to police the region.

There is confirmation of the employment of "Kurd levies" by the M.E.F., probably in a "Mobile Column" of 6th Division, commanded by General Cayley during an advance on Kirkuk in May 1918. This fact perhaps indicated to many that the Kurds were not necessarily anti-British. Their use by the M.E.F. in the spring of 1918 is mentioned by the Marquess of

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[2] L/P&S/10/619, F.107.
[3] Map 2, p.272, shows Political Districts.

Anglesey in his *History of the British Cavalry 1816-1919.*[4], stating that in the spring of 1918, when Kirkuk was occupied and the road to Persia closed to the Turks and German agents, Irregular Kurdish Horse were raised under British cavalry officers and N.C.Os. This group of irregular horse changed – "from dashing cavaliers became frontier foot police".

Wilson also mentions the use of irregular Kurds in his Report to the Secretary of State, India, for the months of October/November 1918,[5] in which he stated that,

> ...no organized Shabanah force in the Khaniqin District, and the duties of Shabanah have been carried out partly by Kurd levies and irregular horse provided by Muhammad Beg Dilo. The [Kurd] levies are not under political control and the need of their combined existence has disappeared.

By this it may be assumed that Wilson meant that these irregulars were not under his control, nor on the official pay roll of the Civil Administration. There had been conditions of famine throughout certain of the areas adjoining the Persian frontier, making the maintenance of public order difficult. Major E.B. Soane was then P.O. in Khanaqin from 5 December 1917, and raised a force of 200 Kurds under their own chiefs—among whom was Muhammad Beg Dilo. Soane may have taken on some of these men after their use by the M.E.F ended.

Amidst the religious minorities of this region was a significant Christian element, the Chaldeans (Assyrians, who formed a schism from the Nestorian Church, and given "Uniate" status); not to be confused with the Turkish Assyrians. In this important context, an administrative report from the Basra wilayat in the autumn of 1918 casts an interesting light on the arrival of Assyrians (Nestorians) in Iraq from the Hakkiari and Urmia via Hamadan, many of whom were destined to serve first with the M.E.F., and later in the Iraq Levies.[6] Item "C" of the report was headed "Migration of the Jelous" ("Jelous" being a "generic term" applied to the various Christian tribes operating in Trans-Caucasia, especially Urmia). It stated: "The Assyrian (Nestorians) engaged in the defence of Urmia against the Turks, evacuated

[4] Marquess of Anglesey, *History of the British Cavalry 1816-1919*, vol. 6, p.135 (London, 1995).
[5] L/P&S/10/732, F.119.

that district early in August (1918) with their wives and families and large quantities of horses and cattle and sought protection with us".

The "families", mostly comprising women, children and old and infirm men, were drafted into a large reception camp at Ba'qubah on the right bank of the Diyalah river. Those of the men who were willing and fit to bear arms, were enrolled by the British army at Hamadan into mixed battalions (to include men of the Armenian refugees) organised by General Marshall, and officered by those who had served in the then defunct mission of General Dunsterville. This corps was officially designated the "Urmia Brigade". However, the Armistice precluded this Corps from taking the field, and it was disbanded, the men being sent on to Iraq to join their families at Ba'qubah camp.

Later it will be seen how the Assyrians were called upon to assist the M.E.F. in fighting the Assyrians' traditional enemies, the Kurds. It is in the context of Kurdistan that the Civil Administration's governorship of Mosul is now discussed.

The Civil Administration's stewardship in Northern Iraq began in Mosul, and Leachman, whose work has been mentioned in the previous chapter, was posted there as P.O. on 11 October 1918. During November of that year, he reported on the state of his new Division.[7] He found the ex-Turkish Mosul Gendarmerie, on paper, comprised about 1,000 men many of whom "were old and useless". He returned to Turkey all serving men of Turkish nationality. Those from Baghdad and Lower Mesopotamia were returned to their homes in Iraq.

By the end of November, this Gendarmerie battalion consisted of twelve local officers and 362 other ranks. It may be noted that the term "battalion" is used for the first time in the context of the Shabanah/Levies (Leachman was an Infantry officer). Enlistment of recruits commenced and drill instructors obtained (borrowed, no doubt from local M.E.F. units). Five companies were formed according to districts. Leachman felt it necessary to "pay the men at a high rate, and Rs.50 was fixed for unmounted men". His "high rate" of pay was perhaps to discourage his men from resorting to the

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[6] L/P&S/10/732, F.94.
[7] L/P&S/10/19, F.287.

Turkish method of augmenting poor pay with bribery. There was a serious shortage of winter uniforms; "khaki drill is unsuitable to the cold winter in these parts". However, equipment was plentiful. (The latter, perhaps, because the M.E.F. depot was in the township.)

At about the same time as Leachman's appointment to Mosul, Major E.W.C. Noel was appointed as P.O. to the Kirkuk Division, which did not then include Sulaymaniyah. His role was to maintain contact with political and military developments in Kurdistan as they occurred. The region, with its mountainous topography created serious tactical and supply problems for the Army of Occupation. For the P.Os it presented a confused and dangerous political situation.

Generally, the Kurdish and Armenian questions were seen as interrelated, both in London and Baghdad. Wilson had tended to confirm this view in a telegram to the India Office in October 1918.[8] He urged the necessity for creating "a Kurdish confederation, free from Turkish influence" if an independent Armenia state, "which he understood to be contemplated by His Majesty's Government and the Allies, was to have a fair chance". It will be shown that the Allies' concern for the Armenian situation caused the Kurds to fear the possibility of Armenian domination in the region, backed by a sympathetic European support.

Wilson received a letter from Shaikh Mahmud of the Barzinjar after the occupation of Kirkuk by British troops in April 1918. In the letter, Mahmud offered his loyal services to Britain as representative in Sulaimaniyah. However, the Turks reoccupied Kirkuk for a short period and the place was re-entered by the British in June 1918. Nevertheless, Wilson had replied that he would accept the Shaikh's offer when the British returned to the region after the hot weather.

It is now necessary to discuss events on the appointment of Major Noel as P.O. Kirkuk Division. It may be remembered that on 1 November 1918, Wilson, in his brief, had instructed Noel to appoint Shaikh Mahmud as Governor of Sulaimani, should he consider it expedient, and to make other appointments of this nature "at your discretion".[9] Noel was also to help the

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[8] L/P&S/10/781, F.503-4.
[9] A.T. Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917-1920. A clash of loyalties* (London, 1931), p.128.

local chiefs, and to try to maintain law and order in areas beyond those under military occupation, which included Sulaimani. This was because the M.E.F. was reluctant to have isolated detachments too far north in view of provisioning problems (bad terrain with no roads) and lack of adequate communications.

Noel organised his Political Division in November 1918 according to his brief, appointing Shaikh Mahmud as Governor of Sulaymani, and other Kurdish officials to minor subdivisions to work under the guidance of British P.Os. This was in the hope of meeting some of the Kurdish aspirations for their own administration and autonomy, rather than the imposition of Arabs. But the tribes and townsfolk of Kifri rejected Shaikh Mahmud.

Wilson then visited Sulaimani by air on 1 December 1918 for a meeting with Shaikh Mahmud and other local notables. In their discussions it was pointed out to the Shaikh that the tribesmen and townsfolk of the Kifri and Kirkuk Divisions did not accept his leadership. In response, Mahmud agreed not to press for their inclusion within his proposed jurisdiction, and accepted the situation.

But, in fact, this was by way of a subterfuge to gain time for his future undeclared plans. It was in the latter context that Mahmud was to let it be known locally that he had a mandate from all the Kurds of the Mosul wilayat, and many in Persia. In short, in his mind, he desired to form a Unitary Autonomous Kurdish State. Also, during Mahmud's discussion with Wilson he had "...asked for British Officers for all Government Departments, including officers for Kurdish levies, stipulating only that the subordinate staff should, wherever possible, be Kurdish and not Arab".[10] This was the general agreement between Mahmud and Wilson.

The importance of the region to the British and future Iraqi governments at this time is encapsulated in a memorandum by the Political Department, India Office, initialled by Shuckburgh, dated 14 December 1918 to Wilson.[11] It highlighted the reasons for the region's importance for the viability of Iraq, which were: "...the power paramount in this country will command the strategic approaches to Mesopotamia and control the water

[10] L/P&S/10/781, Fs.503-4.
[11] Ibid.

supply of the eastern affluents of the Tigris, on which the irrigation of Mesopotamia largely depends". It was felt in London that Baghdad needed both Basra and Mosul for Iraq's existence.

Before returning to the events in Kurdistan, which entailed the appointment of Shaikh Mahmud as Governor of Sulaymaniyah, and the disruptive outcome of that decision some months hence, it is first necessary to discuss the varied condition of the levies in some of the Political Divisions, as seen through the eyes of the P.Os and A.P.Os, and to include those in the more remote areas.

Major Dickson, P.O. of the Muntafiq Division, whose reports on Levy local organisation and detail proved to be enlightening, was also informative on local conditions under his responsibility. His report covering the winter of 1918-19 is chosen because of his insight into tribal ethos.[12] The Shabanah force of his Division was then so organised as to enable musketry training to be started in Nasiriyah, resulting in daily improvement in marksmanship. Dickson intended to include Suq in this training programme; this had been made possible by the arrival of three British O.R. instructors, sufficient for one instructor to each Squadron of the "Muntafiq Horse". There was no mention of Mounted Infantry Training; perhaps it was not then mandatory.

On the Muntafiq tribes, Dickson found them all to be well-armed with good rifles and plenty of ammunition. In this context he stated:

> I think that if the Arab is left alone and given a fair amount of law, order and justice and if, especially, roads and railway follow quickly, he will soon find a rifle a useless thing, and existing arms will gradually find their way into the Arabian desert, where they will always fetch good prices.

Nevertheless, at the moment he felt that a "stronger British Garrison was required at Nasiriyah—able to move out quickly, and to strike hard at the first signs of trouble, within a 50 mile radius". In this his judgement and foresight proved prophetic.

Dickson's views on the immediate improvement of his Levies was confirmed in Wilson's comments in a memorandum to G.H.Q.M.E.F. on 23 December 1918.[13] They were important in proving the progress the

[12] L/P&S/10/619, F.291.
[13] L/P&S/10/619, F.447.

"Shabanah" were making during the last few months by taking on the duties of imperial troops to release them for repatriation and demobilisation. Their increased efficiency "has made possible a reduction in the number of troops on various lines of communication without anarchy resulting". Wilson's final words also echo those of Dickson in respect of the need for mobile troops able to strike hard and quickly in the event of trouble, in view of the weakening of the imperial garrison then in progress. There were still elements in the country who resented the British occupation.

Wilson's memorandum included praise for the work being done by Boyle at Hillah: "The greatest credit is due to Captain C.A. Boyle to whose energy and initiative much of this improvement is due and to Lieut. A.R. MacWhinne at Najaf". He made no reference to Major Dickson, and his work with the "Muntafiq Horse". This may have been, perhaps, the first noted clash of personalities in the creation of the Iraq Levies. According to Philby,[14] Wilson wanted Dickson out of Suq some time in mid April 1917, and had tried to get him sent as Deputy Director of the Department of Local Supplies, while Cox was C.P.O. However, Dickson declined.

The following various reports show the variation of conditions in some of the Shabanah in the Political Divisions at the end of 1918. The problems varied by type. There was no "pattern"; one would be in need of uniforms, while another would find recruiting difficult. Captain Carver, A.P.O. Anna, expressed grave concern for the condition of Shabanah horses under his command in December 1918.[15] They were then still the property of their riders; the main problem being that those horses of reasonable quality were underfed. In view of the official move towards training as Mounted Infantry then being undertaken by Boyle, the problem of poor mounts could only be overcome by the issue of Government animals and rationing them, if reliability and uniformity were to be achieved. It is clear that the poor condition of levy mounts continued for some time.

With regard to the men, there was the common lack of uniform, without which they could not look smart, and in consequence would lack morale. But he too had received help, by way of British O.R. instructors, and

[14] W. St. John Philby, "Mesopotage" (unpublished), p.168.
[15] L/P&S/10/628, F.561.

those Shabanah free of other duties were made available for drill every afternoon, "...and this was stiffening them up a bit".

The Kifri Division's P.O., Major W.C.F. Wilson, had recently received an A.P.O, Captain Machan, to take charge of the Kut Shabanah. This enabled all the Divisional outstations to be visited more frequently, and in consequence their performance was to improve.

By January 1919, the Shabanah of this Division[16] had received the 1914 Pattern Rifle. Also, the issue of clothing and equipment was improving. However, there was a problem experienced in obtaining good recruits. But as Major Wilson commented: "...as the price of foodstuffs have dropped and are still dropping rapidly, it should not be long before the present rate of pay is sufficient to attract the right class of men".

These Divisional reports indicated that the Force was slowly progressing on the right lines. The availability of British officers to serve as A.P.Os and British O.Rs as instructors, inevitably improved the general standard and performance of the men. Inadequate supervision and lack of regular training quickly caused troops to lose heart. Lack of uniforms remained an essential factor, which required urgent attention. Also, a resumé of pay and allowances was required in view of the high cost of living, to ensure they were comparable to other forms of local employment; and, for mounted men, sufficient to feed their horses as well as themselves.

In the meantime, it soon became apparent that all was not well in Sulaimani and Kirkuk. Because they feared Mahmud, many of the tribes had agreed to his governorship but later they broke away because British protection was offered to them. The Jaf insisted on direct dealing with the British Civil Administration, and others followed suit. By April 1919, many tribes had deserted Shaikh Mahmud. His supporters were considerable, and included the Hamawand and the Mikhaili section of the Jaf. These constituted a substantial following.

In view of these disruptions, Wilson thought that perhaps there was a personality problem between Noel and Mahmud,[17] and agreed with Colonel Leachman, then Military Governor of Mosul, to replace Noel with a Kurdish-

[16] L/P&S/10/628, F.494.
[17] A.T. Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917-1920*, p.134, para.3.

and Persian-speaking officer. The officer chosen was Major E.B. Soane, who had had extensive pre-war experience of Kurdistan and its people round about 1908, and was fluent in Kurdish, both spoken and written. He replaced Noel as P.O. Sulaymaniyah on 24 April 1919. Noel was then sent on tour in Iraqi Kurdistan to evaluate Kurdish opinion on self-determination.

Soane gradually regained control of Mahmud's Kurdish irregulars, which comprised two half companies of infantry and fifty sowars. There were no details given for the levies allowed to Mahmud, but they may have been approximately 150 in all. In the original agreement arranged by Noel they had been under the control of Shaikh Mahmud, which differed from the Shaikh's request to have British officers for his levies, made during his discussions with Wilson in December. It appears that during Noel's tenure as P.O. he had allowed Mahmud to place the sons of his local Aghawat (minor leaders and their sons) in command of these levies. This proved to be a grave error of judgment because, by this action, the sons gained complete control of this small force, and so it became the personal bodyguard of their respective fathers, the local Aghas. Hence government-paid and armed groups were controlled by self-interested Aghawat until Soane's intervention.

It may be appreciated from these events that the general situation in Kurdistan at this time was far from satisfactory, and was somewhat delicate politically. This was at a time when G.H.Q.M.E.F. remained preoccupied with demobilisation, and disinclined to garrison too far north, for reasons already discussed. This situation was to prevail for the next four months, thus leaving many newly-appointed P.Os in some areas of Kurdistan very vulnerable.

Perhaps because of the new responsibilities of the Mosul wilayat, the need for more P.Os and A.P.Os became urgent. In response to this shortage, the Civil Administration published a General Circular in January 1919,[18] requesting that regular officers of the Indian Army, reserve or temporary, who desired to remain in the Civil Administration and to take their discharge in Iraq, were to submit their particulars to the Civil Commissioner as soon as possible.

[18] L/P&S/10/619, F.246.

Not only was there need to clarify the British Officers' employment situation, but there was also the Irregular Force to be improved by all means possible. To this end, it appears that Wilson and his advisers felt the Shabanah were in need of a new designation, and a Circular was issued, dated 12 March 1919,[19] raising the issue:

SHABANAH DESIGNATION

The Shabanah Forces of the Tigris and Euphrates will be known in future by the following designations; there will be no change in their functions as already laid down:

Dulaim	Division	Shabanah	1st Euphrates Militia
Hillah	"	"	2nd Euphrates Militia
Shamiyah	"	"	3rd Euphrates Militia
Diwaniyah	"	"	4th Euphrates Militia
Nasiriyah	"	"	5th (Muntafiq Militia)
Samarra	"	"	1st Tigris Militia
Kut al Amarah	"	"	2nd Tigris Militia
Amarah	"	"	3rd Tigris Militia
Qurnah	"	"	4th Tigris Militia
Basrah	"	"	Basrah Shabanah
Ba'qubah	"	"	Ba'qubah Militia

This document also stated that the whole Force, apart from those stationed in the "Basrah Shabanah", will be known as the "Arab Militias". Also, that "Capt. C.A. Boyle, I.A. A.P.O.i/c Shabanah, is appointed Inspecting Officer of Arab Militias, his office and headquarters will be in Baghdad in the office of the Civil Commissioner". The designation for A.P.Os i/c Militia was "A.P.O. Commandant Militia".

Although this helps to better understand the developments which were taking place, there was still no indication of any establishments for units. Captain Boyle's training ability had been recognised, enabling him to continue on the successful lines he had adopted at Hillah. However, "Contracted" Irregulars were still to be found in service, as may be noted below.

An annual report for the "Muntafiq" by Dickson, dated 12 February 1919,[20] was passed to the India Office by Wilson, with the following comment: "It is of exceptional interest". The report was headed "Nasiriyah

[19] L/P&S/10/619, F.39.
[20] L/P&S/10/619, F.92.

Division", but in Wilson's covering letter it was designated the "Muntafiq Division". Such minor anomalies were common in the documents, and could be confusing. However, the first point of interest was that at least one unit of "Arab Irregulars" was still extant on "contract". Dickson mentioned that Thamir Beg Sa'dun continued to maintain thirty horsemen on a monthly subsidy of Rs.1,500/-, and that the "Muntafiq Horse", with its strength of 400, was continuing training with British O.R. instructors. There was no mention of this Cavalry unit being trained as Mounted Infantry at this time (January/February 1919).

There was much more Divisional administrative detail of interest which did not concern the Levies, with the exception of the following which demonstrates the character and the ideas of what was, and what was not, honourable in the eyes of Dickson's men of the "Muntafiq", as recounted by Dickson and included in his Report. It had proved almost impossible to get the men of the Muntafiq to agree to be hired for any menial task; they considered such labour beneath their dignity, and the Shaikhs would refuse "point blank"; "were they, the men of the Muntafiq, considered as common coolies for hire?" However, the P.O. of Nasiriyah was in urgent need of help to complete work on the Sayih Channel, and the Suq tribesmen were asked to provide 4,000 men. On the request being put to them, a unanimous decision to "Faz'ah" (call to arms) was decided upon.

The result was most successful. On the appointed day, all tribal banners were unfurled and each tribe in the district provided its quota of men, led by their Shaikhs to Sayih (about 1.5 miles above Nasiriyah). The tribes took with them all their coffee pots and household stores, and camped near the work site. Unfortunately influenza broke out, taking many lives, and hampering the work considerably so that it had to be temporarily abandoned.

Nevertheless, the "experiment" was successful. The psychological approach had proved its worth when dealing with men who fiercely guarded their independence. Dickson was a good Arabist; he gained his knowledge while living among Arabs as a child, but he was no academic. His "street Arabic" caused some of the elders to exchange glances when in "mejlis" with him.

In the context of Kurdistan, and its proneness to unrest, it may be recalled that the northern frontier with Turkey remained unresolved, and there was a real threat that the Turks might attempt to retake Mosul by force of arms, although every effort was being made by the British government to find a solution during discussions in both London and Paris. The future of Iraq, as discussed, was unavoidably affected by the outcome with regard to the alignment of the northern frontier. Perhaps in this context, Wilson was called to Paris and London for consultations during the period March to May 1919, in his capacity as Officiating Civil Commissioner.

While Wilson was away, he received some disturbing news from Baghdad on 7 April 1919.[21] The telegram stated that over the past three weeks, reports had been received regarding both anti-British and Christian intrigues in Kurdish tribal areas to the north of the Mosul wilayat. This information had been passed to the High Commissioner in Constantinople, where it was believed some of these disruptive movements had their headquarters. Also, that on 4 April, Captain Pearson, A.P.O. Zakho, was proceeding from Bilu, where he had established a gendarmerie post for maintaining local order, when he was ambushed and killed at a Goyan village called Karear.

The Governor of Mosul, Leachman, considered that aeroplanes should bomb the Goyan strongholds. He urged this action regardless of the cost of infringing the frontier (the Armistice Line). His view was shared by Wilson's deputy in Baghdad (the originator of the telegram) if the trouble was to be contained. However, the bombing was disallowed, it is assumed by G.H.Q.M.E.F., possibly because of the discussions then being held in Paris and London on the Turkish treaty. (The source of this veto and its origin was not discovered in the records.)

The lack of a firm policy for the northern region of Iraq was perhaps giving Kurdish leaders an opportunity to misinterpret British intention in their mutual struggles for local power. Whatever the cause of Captain Pearson's murder, it created great concern in Baghdad. This is indicated by the

[21] L/MIL/5/798, F.98.

following urgent and secret signal sent by the G.O.C-in-C.M.E.F., then Sir George MacMunn, to the War Office on 5 May 1919,[22] stating:

> ...Finding myself fully in accord with General Cobbe's views as to volcanic possibilities of situation here and divergent location of possible storm-centres, I trust these measures will be approved and full consideration be given to various requests re assistance in drafts of officers and men. I am impressed with the following points:-

1. Increasing unrest of Kurdish border.
2. Possibilities also on Lower Euphrates as shown by recent unrest there.
3. Well-armed state of tribes in Lower Mesopotamia.
4. Increase of Wahabism amongst the Ibn Saoud's tribes.
5. Increasing intrigue by agents of Sheriff and C.U.P. (Committee of Union and Progress).
6. Unsettling effect of events in Egypt and in India.
7. Inefficient state of several units in this force while under transition.

Without any suggestion that there is cause for alarm, the possibilities of the situation must not be disregarded.

This document shows that British Army Intelligence had given the authorities in London a very fair forecast of the pending regional troubles which were to beset the Mesopotamian Command.

Wilson returned to Baghdad on 9 May 1919, to find the Kurdish situation still simmering. Shaikh Mahmud was indulging in bellicose activity in an attempt to recover his local prestige. He was taking advantage of the absence of Soane, who was on leave (Captain Greenhouse temporarily replaced Soane at Sulaymaniyah). Mahmud had gathered a Kurdish force of some 1,500 men on the Persian side of the frontier.[23] On 22 May 1919, he crossed back into Iraq and attacked the township of Sulaymaniyah. The local levies resisted, but were routed, leaving Mahmud victorious. He at once imprisoned Greenhouse and other British area officers, looted the treasury, and declared himself ruler of Kurdistan. His flag (a red crescent on a green ground) was raised on the government office in Sulaimani, and his retainers appointed to control districts. He even began to issue postage stamps for his acclaimed region.[24]

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[22] L/MIL/5/798, F.72.
[23] L/P&S/10/658, pt.2, F.346.
[24] A.T. Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917-1920*, p.136.

On 25 May it was reported from Baghdad that air reconnaissance confirmed that Sulaimaniyah was in the hands of hostile Kurds, but that Halabja, Koi and Rania had been quiet on the 24th.[25]

The G.O.C-in-C. M.E.F. had responded to the situation by despatching a mixed column to Chamchemal to hold the main pass. At the same time "a strong force had left the Tigris for Kirkuk"(sic).

The P.O. at Halabja had been seized and imprisoned by the Shaikh's followers, but he had escaped, assisted by Adel Khanum, the Agha's widow of that township (better known by the British as the "Lady of Halabja").

The nearest British troops were at Kirkuk (35 miles from Sulaimani). They consisted of a battalion of infantry, a few light armoured cars and some cavalry. Further away at Bai'aiji (about 80 miles) was a brigade and some Divisional troops. As a reconnaissance measure, the commander at Kirkuk was ordered to advance a detachment as far as the Chamchemal plain, while the Bai'aiji brigade was ordered to Kirkuk.

The Kirkuk detachment commander disregarded orders, and, perhaps underestimating the opposition, attempted to penetrate the mountains with his Levy cavalry (the latter perhaps a misnomer, they may have been local Gendarmerie – there was at that time no "Levy Cavalry" so far north), armoured cars and Ford trucks fitted with Lewis guns. A small force perhaps, but with considerable fire power. On reaching Tasluja Pass, some twelve miles from Sulaymaniyah, his force was surrounded by Kurds and compelled to retire, followed closely by the enemy for some 25 miles. During his retreat, he lost four armoured cars and nineteen Ford vans, and suffered severe casualties. The Kurds had proved resolute fighters, and this part of the affair served mainly to give the Kurds a false impression of British military weakness.

But the main local British force was soon in the field—the 18th Division from Mosul, commanded by General Fraser. He assembled the "South Kurdistan Force" at Kirkuk on 17 June 1919. The force then began its advance against Mahmud's men, who were holding the Darband-i-Baziyan Pass, in the Qara Dagh range, twelve miles east of Chamchemal. The Kurds

[25] L/MIL/5/798, F.68.

expected a frontal attack, but the surrounding heights were seized, and the Kurds encircled on the 18th. During the operations, Shaikh Mahmud was wounded, taken prisoner, and removed to Baghdad, where he recovered. He was tried with his associate, Shaikh Gharib, and sentenced to death by a military court martial for rebellion, but this was commuted to long-term imprisonment. (This, in turn, was commuted in 1921 to banishment to India.)

This affair has been discussed in considerable detail because it is necessary to demonstrate that although the "enemy" was represented by a band of Kurdish brigands, they possessed considerable fighting ability, especially in their own territory. Indeed, they proved, as did the Arabs in their later "insurrection" of 1920, to be a match for regular troops—no commander confronting them could afford to make mistakes.

Meanwhile, the Political and Intelligence Officers remained concerned with the murder of Captain A.C. Pearson, the A.P.O. Zakho on 14 April 1919. According to Wilson, he was an experienced "Political", an excellent linguist who had shown great skill in previous negotiations with Kurdish and other tribes. The Goyan had invited him to meet them for the purpose of their enrolment in the list of tribes within the sphere of British military occupation. Pearson accepted the invitation and started off to meet the chiefs on their own ground, accompanied by a Kurdish orderly and a few local men of the Goyan. Before reaching the agreed meeting place, he was ambushed and killed. In Wilson's opinion,[26] The Goyan were "perhaps the wildest of the tribes with whom we had to deal...". They dwelt in an inaccessible valley, both from the south and from the Turkish side of the disputed frontier. The crime remained unpunished.

There is one important contention in the following document, which has been discussed previously in this chapter. It would seem to confirm the previous Kurdish fear of European-backed Armenian rule in their region.

In August, the Army Council made known to the India Office the considered opinion of their Department (M.I.2) on this affair (Pearson's murder) by telegram.[27] It was pointed out that the Goyan were the original

[26] A.T. Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1914-1917* (London, 1931), p.147, para.2.
[27] L/P&S/10/658, pt.2, F.346.

perpetrators and murderers of Pearson, and that it had not been possible to punish them.

Further, it was felt that Shernakhi and Jazirah Ibn Umar were the trouble centres, but controlled from Constantinople. Also, that Major Noel, in about the middle of April, reported that "the anti-British movement in the Nisibin-Mardin area, had little foundation except fear of Armenian rule, and pointed out that "a definite British policy was required".

Noel's assessment was concurred by Admiral Calthorpe in Constantinople on 12 May, by telegram. It appeared that reports were being received regarding the millet, and that these reiterated Noel's opinion that the main cause of Kurdish agitation was the fear of falling under Armenian rule.

The Kurdish fear of Armenian rule was based on Armenian pressure for self-determination. They were Christians on whom the Kurds had inflicted repeated atrocities and so the Kurds anticipated a situation in which European-backed Armenian retribution might be exacted. As these contemporary documents show, the situation was one of great complexity, and public order remained very fragile.

The Kurdish situation remained a threat for further unrest. Mahmud was not the only leader who was prepared to seek unrivalled dominance, if only within his own tribal region. The British military were hard pressed to meet the demands for demobilisation, while still being essentially responsible for maintaining internal security. It seems the Civil Administration remained unnecessarily preoccupied with changing, yet again, the designation of its Civil Corps of Irregulars, while its functions remained for the most part unchanged.

Later, the Levies were once again involved in a change of designation. In July 1919, the officials in Baghdad rescinded the designation of "Militia" in a General Circular [28]

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[28] L/P&S/10/619, F.29. Arab Levies. C.D.O. 51 of 12 March 1919 is cancelled and the following substituted: the Shabanah Forces on the Tigris and Euphrates will be known in future by the following designation: there will be no change in the functions as already laid down.

Dair-ez-Zor	Divisional	Shabanah	Dair-ez-Zor Levy
Dulaim	"	"	1st Euphrates Levy
Hillah	"	"	2nd Euphrates Levy
Shamiyah	"	"	3rd Euphrates Levy
Diwaniyah	"	"	4th Euphrates Levy

The whole force was to be known as the Arab (or Kurdish) Levies. Major C.A. Boyle was appointed Inspecting Officer of the Arab Levies, including the Mosul Gendarmerie and Sulaimaniyah Levies. His office and headquarters were to be situated in Baghdad, with the office of the Civil Commissioner. Commandants Militia would be known as Commandants Levies, and Assistant Militia Officers would be known as Assistant Levy Officers.

The obsession with designations for the irregulars is difficult to understand, and no explanation has come to light. The earlier "Guides and Scouts" of the Field Intelligence were understandable. Levies" is descriptive for the conditions of service and source of personnel for the majority of the force (some, it may be remembered, were still "contractual").

It may be noted that there were also a few changes in the Political Divisions since the previous relevant document "Shabanah Designation" (see p.72). Nasiriyah had become Muntafiq and Basra omitted—perhaps a clerical error.Those added were Dair-ez-Zor. Khaniqin, Kirkuk, Sulaimani (Kurdish for Sulaymaniyah), and the Mosul Gendarmerie. The term "Gendarmerie" would appear to indicate District Police, or the old Shabanah.

Although the dispositions in the Corps are clear, as yet there was still no reference to unit organisation, nor any Political divisional strengths. Regular army organisation of parent units were usually by regiments or battalions. These were composed of sub-units of squadrons or companies, troops or platoons, and then sections. This grouping of troops under a parent unit, of, say, a battalion, facilitated their tactical use in the field. Also, in the event of a serious breakdown in internal security, it would have enabled the Levies to be more easily assimilated by a commander of British troops with his forces. The prevailing situation represented various groups of men, known

Muntafiq	"	"	5th Euphrates Levy
Samarrah	"	"	1st Tigris Levy
Kut al Amarah	"	"	2nd Tigris Levy
Amarah	"	"	3rd Tigris Levy
Qurnah	"	"	4th Tigris Levy
Ba'qubah	"	"	Ba'qubah Levy
Khaniqin	"	"	Khaniqin Levy
Kirkuk	"	"	Kirkuk Levy
Sulaimaniyah	"	"	Sulaimaniyah Levy
Mosul Gendarmerie	"	"	Mosul Gendarmerie

mostly by their geographical locations, of varied strengths – with the exception of Leachman's "battalion" of Gendarmerie at Mosul.

In the context of internal activity, although Shaikh Mahmud had been dealt with effectively, he alone did not constitute the "Kurdish problem". There were many other potential and rival leaders ready to ferment unrest. The opportunity for another insurrection by the Kurds was unwittingly afforded by Leachman, Military Governor of Mosul.

With the general aim of extending Baghdad's control over the Kurdish area, Leachman decided to send a small group of officers and men to Amadiyah to raise, equip and train recruits to join the gendarmerie. Those selected were Captains R.H.D. Willey and H. Macdonald (the former as the P.O. Amadiyah) together with Sapper Troup and two Indian telegraphists. The party left Mosul 28 June but it was to provide the Kurds with yet another opportunity for armed protest and violence.

The Gendarmes were duly recruited from both Muslims and Christians to try to generate local confidence in the force. However, the G.O.C. had withdrawn the military detachment from Amadiyah in June, in line with M.E.F. policy already discussed.

Neither Leachman nor Willey appear to have been concerned about the prevailing Kurdish situation. Perhaps long service in the country had contributed to their over-confidence. But the Kurdish political climate remained unsafe, and Leachman must have been aware of this. It was reflected in a telegram from the G.O.C.M.E.F. to the High Commissioner Constantinople, dated 9 April,[29] which pointed out that the leaders of the "Kurdish National Committee" at Constantinople, Sheikh Abdul Qadir and Dr. Abdullah Jojat, had passed through Mosul on about 25 March for Sulaymaniya with letters for the tribes calling on them to cast off the British yoke and declare their independence under Turkish suzerainty.

However, as will be recalled, Captains Willey and Macdonald, with Sapper Troup, were then in Amadiyah. The three had returned from a week's tour in the Raikan district east of Amadiyah, and had telegraphed to Mosul that all was quiet.

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[29] MIL/5/798, F.37.

This situation was soon to change, and a telegram from Baghdad to Simla dated 21 July 1919,[30] announced that all five men had been killed on the evening of 14 July. It was officially considered that the two officers and their party were killed by local Gendarmes at the instigation of the local people, and that nearly all the leading Muslim notables were more or less involved. It further states: "It is yet to estimate probable effect of the event on Kurdish communities in other portions of Mosul Vilayat, but there is every probability, unless drastic punitive measures are undertaken, similar outbreaks will occur elsewhere".

Willey had been a "Political" since 1915, and was experienced. Wilson stated the posting was without reference to him,[31] but, "Once done, however, nothing but harm could have come from a withdrawal...".

The incident prompted a quick retaliatory response by the British Army. H.Q.M.E.F. decided with Wilson that the Barwari and Guli were the tribes most implicated in this affair. British Generals Nightingale, Wooldridge and Cassels with their brigades from 18th Division, were ordered by General MacMunn to assemble two columns at Suwair and Zakho, and a third to traverse the whole northern area respectively. The purpose was to take punitive action against the rebellious tribes and to punish the murderers. However, it took time to organise this operation because the force, in part, had to be drawn from Baghdad—but all was ready by the end of July. It was intended to reassert British authority and prestige throughout the region. Because of rapid repatriation, the M.E.F. then lacked troops experienced in mountain warfare (in which the Kurds excelled), and were for the same reason below strength. Faced with mountainous terrain, especially around Ser Amadiyah, someone in G.H.Q.[32] remembered the fine performance the Assyrians had put up against the Turks for some two years in Urmia.

Consequently, the G.O.C. ordered that two Assyrian battalions be immediately reformed in Ba'qubah and, together with their former British and Assyrian officers, sent to join and so augment the 18th Indian Division on 30

[30] MIL/5/798, F.37.
[31] A.T. Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1914-1917*, p.147, para.6.
[32] L/P&S/10/889, F.24.

July 1919. This is confirmed in a despatch from G.H.Q.M.E.F. to the War office on 7 October 1919:[33]

> ...after several days difficult mountain fighting in which the enemy lost considerably, our troops assisted by Assyrians occupied Keroar exacting punishment and destroying defences.... They proved a most valuable addition to our force quite equal to the Kurds in their own tactics.

The Assyrians had performed exceedingly well and with valour in these operations. This was another example of an "ad hoc" decision which was to have considerable repercussions in the history of the Levies.

It was a hard lesson learnt, and it was to be some time before it was considered safe for British P.Os to be placed in isolated posts so far north, without adequate protection.

By 15 September 1919, the majority of the hostile tribes in the Amadiyah region had made their submission. The Assyrians had received their first "blooding" under the command of British officers, and alongside imperial troops during the operations, and had proved their mettle. It was the first of many subsequent occasions when the Assyrians were to be used to impose British authority on their traditional enemy, the Kurds.

After the recent operations, General MacMunn on 4th December[34] expanded on his previous communication to the War Office, stating that the firm response to the revolt, which included operations against the Zibari Kurds, were then completed, and, "as far as possible, punishment for murders exacted". The authority of the Civil Administration was restored, and British prestige in the region re-established. Casualties had been trivial, and MacMunn was withdrawing troops to Mosul, but leaving a post at Aqra, consisting of four Indian battalions, a Mountain battery and three companies of Assyrians. These were to support Political and other Civil Officers in the area.

This brief interlude was a very important and significant event in the background of the commencement of the "Iraq Levies", because the Assyrians were destined to play a lasting and important role in that force. It was also a lesson for all concerned in planning the future of Iraq. Iraqi Kurdistan was

[33] MIL/5/798, F.20.
[34] MIL/5/798, F.4.

going to prove a problem to control. A firm policy for the region was now overdue.

It was after these operations that the Civil Administration in Baghdad took a more purposeful step towards regularising their Force, but it was still not organised on a recognisable military structure although previously it was not desired to train the Shabanah to act as a military force. This policy was contradictory, because the levies were, in fact, very clearly being used in those military roles—taking over many duties from the imperial garrison, regardless of the fact that they were really insufficiently trained to undertake the duties urgently imposed on them.

Nevertheless, there is evidence pointing to the Force being slowly brought into line with British army procedures by means of a series of Orders. A study of these now follows:

A Memorandum on the "Arab and Kurd Levies in Mesopotamia", dated 12 August 1919,[35] is also interesting because of the statement that it was "approved" by G.H.Q.M.E.F. on 26 July 1919. This appears as the first time G.H.Q.M.E.F's approval had been sought prior to promulgation of a Levy Order/Memorandum. Also, there is at last mention of squadrons and companies and the strengths of which these units were composed, together with the number of troops/platoons in each squadron or company and their strengths, and sections.

Forces at the disposal of the P.Os remained in two parts:

i) Levies, and

ii) The Town Police (meaning Shabanah or Gendarmerie).

"Each Levy is organised in Companies or Squadrons (of 100 men each) and Platoons or Troops (of 25 men each)."

The Levies were not to be involved in "definite hostilities" without reference to the British military authorities. Levies were to be used, wherever possible, to relieve the military of patrols, guards and escort duties.

Organisation: The Levy Force is to be organised into corps, each with a British Officer in command as follows:-

Political Division	Levy
Dulaim	1st Euphrates
Hillah	2nd Euphrates

[35] L/P&S/10/874, F.170.

Shamiyah	3rd Euphrates
Diwaniyah	4th Euphrates
Nasiriyah	5th Euphrates
Samarra	1st Tigris
Kut	2nd Tigris
Amarah	3rd Tigris
Ba'qubah	Ba'qubah) Amalgamation under
Khanikin	Khanikin) consideration
Basrah	Zobeir
Dair-az-Zor	Dair-az-Zor
Kirkuk	Kirkuk
Sulaimaniyah	Sulaimaniyah
Mosul	Mosul Gendarmerie.

This list indicates that there had been some small changes and exclusions. Muntafiq changed to Nasiriyah; it is assumed that Basrah had absorbed Qurnah and Samawah; there were four extra Divisions, namely, Diwaniyah, Dair-az-Zor, Sulaimaniyah and Mosul: Baghdad was previously included, but no longer listed as a Political Division.

The use of the term "corps" in this document could be misleading. A corps is a military formation that usually applies to two or more divisions, or a military body with a specific function, such as the "Medical Corps". More importantly, there was as yet no indication of "parent units" such as battalions of infantry, or regiments of mounted infantry or cavalry. The strengths of squadrons/companies and those of their troops/platoons indicate that there were four troops/platoons per squadron/company, and therefore it may be assumed that there were three sections to each troop/platoon of eight men each, plus a section leader.

There is no detail on how the "1st Euphrates Levy" or the "2nd Tigris Levy" were organised. The designation "corps" gave no indication of this. It appears that they were named after their geographical locations, but no strengths or structure were given for any of these units.

The duties listed were similar to those previously published. Levy Commandants were responsible to the P.Os for discipline, training, and interior economy and promotion in accordance with orders contained in General Circulars. They were to deal direct with Boyle, Inspecting Officer Levies, keeping the P.Os informed as necessary.

There was an interesting section on "Compensation". A Commandant could award Rs.100/- to a Sowar if his horse died "actually on duty"—it was a fifth of the amount a Sowar's family would receive if he were "killed in the execution of his duty". The awards went up in approximate increments of Rs.100/- from Rs.500/- for Nafars, Sowars and Ombashis, to Rs.1000/- for an Assistant Native Levy Officer. These sums were payable to a man against total disablement, or half if only partial.

The document also covered clothing and equipment scales, and rates of pay. From pay scales it has proved possible to establish some projected strengths. The total Force was 5,965 all ranks, excluding British officers and N.C.Os. There was no strength given for the Mosul Gendarmerie, but 1,500 was "under consideration". There was no figure for "Railway Levies", but they also were "under consideration".

It may therefore be estimated that in August 1919, the projected strength of the Levies (including the Mosul Gendarmerie) was approximately 6,000; and if the Railway Levies were implemented, then 7,500. The Force was intended to achieve quick growth over a twelve-month period if it continued taking on duties from the imperial garrison.

As discussed above, there were still many omissions in the conception of the Force in view of its obvious future role, which was to support the depleted imperial garrison.

Another relevant document[36] was the "Notes on Training of the Arab and Kurdish Levies and Gendarmerie", of 26 September 1919. It appears that this was published locally. It was obviously only a stop-gap, pending the arrival of the current British Army Training Pamphlets, which were soon to be available and put into use. However, it was gleaned from the local pamphlet that a Recruits' Course would be for three months at Hillah, under the supervision of Boyle.

Whereas by 1919, the Civil Administration had, for some four years, experience with their Arab irregulars, the addition of Kurds to the corps was, as yet, a relatively untried experience. The performance of those under the command of Soane in his "Kurdish Horse", it could be said, was influenced

[36] L/P&S/10/874, F.154.

by his exceptional personality and knowledge of them and their homeland. Soane, however would need more British officers as his force continued to expand. It would require those officers to have a knowledge of Kurdish – no doubt difficult to find; and they would lack Soane's exceptional knowledge of Kurds and their particular psychology.

Fortunately for the Civil Administration another British officer, Captain C.E. Littledale, showed great aptitude with these difficult, fierce and independent people. He was possessed of a "wall eye", which it was said was held somewhat in awe by those fearing the "evil eye"—this may have impressed the less sophisticated, but he was also a courageous and determined officer, as shown by his commitment in the following action, involving the newly-raised Kurdish Gendarmerie, which were to be in many minor operations from 1919.

As a further introduction to the Gendarmerie element of the forces, employed by the Civil Administration in maintaining law and order, the following examples are worthy of mention.

Captain C.E. Littledale, attached to the Mosul Gendarmerie, was awarded the Military Cross for "A splendid example to his men"[37] in early August 1919. The unrest in the north had involved Rowanduz, where a small party of officials and police were surrounded. Littledale, with 15 mounted and 32 dismounted Gendarmes and 30 dismounted Levies, marched from Arbil to Batas via Shaklawa (some 30 miles), during which he was ambushed near the village of Batas. The whole country being hostile, he was forced to fight a withdrawal on Arbil, during which action the column was fired on by the surrounding villages throughout the line of his withdrawal. Nevertheless, he managed to bring 31 of his original strength of 77 back to Arbil.

The next episode is discussed in support of the above action. On 1 November of the same year, the acting P.O. Mosul, Mr. J.H.H. Bill, and the A.P.O. of Aqra, Captain K.R. Scott, were attacked and killed by Zibari Kurds at Barzan, near Bira Kapra. These Kurds then attacked Aqra, which was defended by Lt. Barlow and some Gendarmerie. After a fight, the small garrison was forced to retire from the township, The Yuzbashi Hasoon Ibn

[37] L/P&S/10/889, General Circular No. 43.

Falayfil, who later received a reward for gallantry, rallied a small party of Levies at Jujar, and so managed to deny the Mosul road to the insurgents. In so doing, he also gave support to local loyal Kurdish chiefs. This action enabled Aqra Dagh to be reoccupied without opposition from the Kurds.

It has been recorded that the performance of the Levies owed much to the ability and tenacity of its British officers, under the most trying conditions. Without doubt, the men under their command were inspired by them, as indicated in the above affair. The best of the troops would also have tried to emulate these acts of courage.

These troops were most likely to be Kurds. Not every Kurd felt that self-determination for the Kurdish people was possible; some, perhaps the more realistic ones, understood that tribal factions would be difficult to unite. Also, and importantly, the Levies were slowly developing a strong "Force identity" which, in turn, promoted morale.

While all these military activities were taking place in northern Iraq, Levy operations had given rise to some interest in the House of Commons. On 15 July 1919, Lieut-Comdr., Kenworthy put the following question in parliament to the Secretary of State for War, Mr. W.S. Churchill:

> ...whether native levies are being raised and trained in Mesopotamia; and when it is expected that native levies will be able to relieve the greater part of our troops in Mesopotamia and what is the future policy as regards the Army of Occupation in Mesopotamia?

Mr. Churchill replied:

> The answer to the first part of the question is in the negative. Future policy with regard to the policing of Mesopotamia cannot be definitely laid down until we receive a mandate to administer the country. The possibility of using native levies to some extent is, however, under consideration.[38]

Churchill had, perhaps, in this case, to be economical with the truth, because the mandate was not granted until May 1920. In those circumstances it was perhaps a matter of protocol—Churchill's reply indicated that the League of Nations had not yet been informed of the existence of the Levies.

Nevertheless, the Levies continued to make headway in their search for improvements in the structure of the Levy Force. A new Memorandum

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[38] 118 H.C. Deb.55 (1919); A.T. Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917-1920*, p.163.

was issued by the Civil Administration in Baghdad dated 31 December 1919,[39] as an Annexure to the previous Circular of 31 July 1919 on the change of the Levy designation from "Militia" to "Arab or Kurdish Levies".

This document is important because it marked the creation of a Levy "Striking Force". It was an unambiguous move towards a military force, but without parent units based on a recognisable military structure. Nevertheless, because so many more changes were due to take place by the following April, when a more comprehensive reorganisation would be implemented, only the main points of this document have been selected for discussion.

> MEMORANDUM REGARDING THE RECONSTITUTION OF ARAB LEVIES IN THE HILLAH DIWANIYAH AND NAJAF DIVISIONS
>
> 1. The 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Euphrates Levies will be divided into:
>
> (a) A Striking Force to be known as the 2nd Euphrates Levy;
>
> (b) District Police Forces in the Hillah, Diwaniyah, and Najaf Divisions.

The total authorised strength was to be 5,965, plus 1,500 for the Mosul Gendarmerie, which remained under "consideration", together with the Railway Guards. Thus the proposed strength had not changed since the previous instruction of 31 July 1919. None of these figures included British personnel.

The main instruction stated that the headquarters of the 2nd Euphrates Levy would be at Hillah, and that the previous duties of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Euphrates Levies would be undertaken by the District Police. This was to enable the newly-formed "Striking Force" (designated the "2nd Euphrates Levy") to maintain uninterrupted training for a period of six months, with effect from the date the scheme came into force.

After the specified training period, the 2nd Euphrates Levy would undertake the usual duties of "Treasure Escorts", and "Guards for P.Os", but their special task was to....

> ...be at the disposal of Political Officers for minor military operations and punitive expeditions considered by him to be beyond the scope of the District Police, and not sufficiently serious to warrant the employment of the imperial troops; and as a first line for

[39] L/P&S/10/621, F.372.

reconnaissance and an auxiliary arm to the Imperial forces in major operations.

Without doubt, the latter required military training for a military role.

The Striking Force was to consist of mounted infantry, trained for mobility and rapid action, mounted on government horses and armed with British rifles, as proposed by Boyle, rather than the cavalry concept adopted by Dickson.[40] In this context, the decision taken to issue the mounted infantry with government horses was most necessary for consistent reliability in type, and availability of replacement. It is assumed that "issued animal rations" would, where possible, take the place of Horse Maintenance allowance—a necessary innovation.

Other issues covered were: that tribesmen could be enlisted, but men of Turkish nationality could not. The initial period of enlistment was two years—a bonus of two months pay being given on re-engagement for a further three years. Leave would be 31 days per year, plus casual, at the discretion of Commandants and, eventually, that quarters in cantonments outside towns would be provided.

The total strength of the 2nd Euphrates Levy (the new Striking Force) for that period is shown below. The fact that this Levy was divided into three geographical areas, namely, Hillah, Diwaniyah and Sukhair, was perhaps a necessary expedient, but not a tactical dispersion, because of insufficient accommodation to billet the whole Striking Force at any one of these locations. Hillah was being developed as a training depot.

It may be remembered that in the previous Memorandum of 12 August, the total Levy strength was given as 5,965. This figure included the Striking Force, which was divided into mounted infantry and infantry, based on 100 men per squadron or company.

Mounted		Dismounted	
Hillah:	Sowars352.	Total Arab ranks	458
Diwaniyah:	Sowars176	Total Arab ranks	230
Abu Suqhair:	Sowars176	Total Arab ranks	230
Totals:	704		918

[40] See Appendix p.259, for Note: "Cavalry versus Mounted Infantry".

The H.Q. was at Hillah, and so that establishment would have been larger than the other two.

In addition, there were to be added the B.Os and B.N.C.Os, also the clerks, medical personnel, drivers and sweepers, making a total of 22, and therefore a grand total of 1,644. There were also twelve horses and 704 ponies (a military pony is a horse not usually exceeding 14 hands), and eight mules with carts.

The fact that Wilson sent copies of this document to the India Office on 29 December 1919[41] is interesting, because during its circulation it acquired some informed "minutes". The first of which read:

> This is a commencement of a practical attempt to form local forces to maintain internal order. The purely police work, necessarily entailed separation from headquarters and isolation in small parties and is therefore incompatible with any attempt to get a disciplined and trained force to suppress disorder.

Another comment stated:

> The Concentration of the proposed levy force, its six months initial training, living in barracks and issue of rations are the only way to get discipline which will make the force a useful one and will save the calling out of the military on every small disturbance. We may hope it will in time, develop into the Arab Force to support the Arab power which we are pledged to work up to, and to dispense with a large portion (and presumably eventually all) of the foreign mil garrison.
>
> Signed A.S. [Shuckburgh?] and Cobbe, 13.11.20.

The second comment implied that the Levies might in future form a nucleus of trained manpower for the establishment of an Iraq National Army, perhaps indicating the understanding of the implications of the coming Mandate, and the tasks which lay ahead. But the remarks which implied that the "Striking Force" could be housed in a barracks was lacking in detailed knowledge of conditions in Iraq. The problem was that the whole Striking Force lacked adequate permanent accommodation. This, as has been suggested previously, was the reason for the "Striking Force" being split between three locations. Permanent barracks/camps with necessary amenities were a serious deficiency in the Force as a whole.

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[41] L/P&S/10/874, F.134.

The next few Minutes covered a visit by Major Boyle to the India Office while on leave, and the bureaucratic comments on discussions held with him in relation to the Levies:

> I have recently had a long conversation with Major Boyle, who is in Command of the Mesopotamian Levies.
> (This was never an official designation.)
>
> He takes a sanguine view of the future utility of the Levies for garrison and other purposes, but anticipates the development will be rather slow, and that a garrison of regular troops will be required for some time to come, initialled E.G.D.[?] 19/2.
>
> Gathered from Major Boyle that one of the main difficulties at present is to get the right type of British officer, thinks they are all too…[young?], initials indecipherable, 16/2.

Although London appeared to be satisfied with the progress being made with regard to the development of the Levies; on the ground, the Kurdish problem continued to give concern. Security of the P.Os was and continued to be a worrying issue.

In view of the recent troubles, which included the murders by Kurds of British P.Os and A.P.Os, one a temporary civilian acting as P.O. (Mr. Bill), it seems to have been rather a rash policy to have an irregular party of Kurds as escort for a British officer. Nevertheless, Captain P.J.R. Wigley's Monthly Report as A.P.O. Zakho for December 1919,[42] mentions the existence of a troop of 15 local Kurdish Levies, raised some months previously by Captain Walker in Zakho. They were led by Rashid Agha, a brother of Mohd. Agha, the Rais Baladiyah, and assisted by his son Abdul Kerim. Their duties were to provide an escort for the A.P.O. when on tour. Also, they were to undertake "special missions, such as recovery of stolen property etc.". Thus it seems that expediency still remained the rule in the Civil Administration—Kurds still being employed as guards for P.Os.

A serious incident took place on 11 December 1919, and could be considered the first of many in 1920, the year of the "Arab Insurrection". During the latter part of November 1919, in response to a request by the inhabitants of the township of Dair-ez-Zor, which had been an old Ottoman Mutasarriflik, a P.O., Captain A. Chamier, was posted there, together with

some 60 Levies, to maintain law and order.[43] Neither the G.O.C.M.E.F. nor Wilson wanted that township to be included in the eventual limit of Mesopotamia because the frontier between Syria and Iraq had not yet been defined. Dair was situated on a trade route, some 400 miles northwest of Baghdad, connecting that city with Aleppo. In the interim period, pending a political decision, the P.O. and his men remained there and managed the Customs post.

Although the Dair-ez-Zor affair was not considered by the British as the beginning of the "Arab Insurrection", the research for this thesis, regardless of this official opinion, would seem to indicate that the incident could be seen as an event extending into the Arab Insurrection of 1920. Because these two disruptive events continued through 1920, it is proposed to discuss them together in the next chapter.

At the end of Shaikh Mahmud's insurrection, General Fraser spent six weeks exacting punishment from the rebellious chiefs who had supported Mahmud. The imperial column was dubbed "Fraser's Force", and Soane was posted to it on 1 June 1919. This ended Soane's service with the Civil Administration. Thus other British P.Os had to be allocated to Kurdistan in the wake of Soane's period of pacification.

Captain G.H. Salmon replaced Soane in Kirkuk as P.O. on 13 June 1919. His reports provide evidence of continued variation in the condition of Levy units in the districts, regardless of the published establishments for men, uniforms and equipment which were approved for these troops in the Memoranda published during 1919. Some of the reports from the Political Districts continued to indicate serious shortages of many items. Delays in delivering the necessary stores to troops in the outlying areas could have been caused by lack of transport and long distances over difficult terrain.

The P.Os' reports continue to provide the best information of the overall progress being, or not being, made. They indicate how unprepared the Political Divisions were for the coming Arab onslaught of 1920. Shortages of clothing and mules without pack-saddles were typical example of the deficiencies. Many problems remained in the districts, of both a political and

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[42] L/P&S/10/162, F.140.
[43] MIL/5/799, F.330.

administrative nature, especially in Kurdistan, where units of Kurdish levies and Gendarmerie had not long been established.

The A.P.O. at Kirkuk, Salmon, casts an interesting light on the troubled situation in his area of responsibility in his half-yearly report for June 1919-January 1920.[44] It stated that discipline had been maintained throughout the troubled times of summer, but,"Three men had been killed on duty and eight wounded". These casualties in mid-summer could have occurred during the insurrection of Shaikh Mahmud.

The report showed that many earlier problems persisted, including the usual list of short supplies, which impeded progress. Examples include rifles, which finally arrived in October, and government horses, of which 40 came up in September without saddlery. Salmon was still awaiting supplies of winter clothing. More serious were the conditions he considered beyond the control of any organisation—the alarming cost of living throughout the Division, and of fodder in particular, rendered the men's pay almost below the living minimum. This meant that horse rations were not yet being issued to Salmon's area, although government horses/ponies were reaching his district.

Referring to the potential of his recruits, Salmon noted that recruiting had been good and the Turkoman among them, he considered, were "better material by far than the Arab, and readier to be trained than the Kurd". This, perhaps, because many of the Turkoman had previous military or gendarmerie training (no doubt under the Turks).

> Finally, and importantly, Salmon found the year's work had made clear the impossibility of expecting a single body of men, with a simple training-programme which they are bound to observe, to perform incompatible duties. The Kirkuk levy of April to December (1919) were Police, messengers, escorts, bailiffs and soldiers. These manifold duties, of which Police in particular is a specialist's work, interfered with the levies' training as a military Striking-Force, at times almost to vanishing point.

It was for these reasons that the D.H.C. (Wilson) consented in December 1919 to the conversion of this levy into a "Divisional Police Force" in early 1920.

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[44] L/P&S/10/621, F.92.

Before leaving Kurdistan, there is another document worthy of attention, because it was, perhaps, his last. It is Soane's Annual Report for 1919.[45] It included references to other issues not relevant to this work. But in regard to his Kurdish Levies, he described the steps he was taking in connection with the training of his "Cavalry" (not mounted infantry). They were receiving troop, followed by squadron drill, and he had hoped to introduce a competitive spirit by mounting the infantry and cavalry guards together in the Square. "But in the present threadbare state of their clothing, this is impossible." His "Cavalry" disregarded official Levy training policy in mounted infantry. It will be remembered that Soane, like Leachman, enjoyed a free hand in his Division, and not even the Levy Inspecting Officer, Boyle could interfere he could only advise – as Wilson had ordered.

The third and last of these Annual Reports for 1919 has been selected because it was by an experienced senior officer, Major C.K. Daly, P.O. Diwaniyah, dated January 1920.[46] He provides an insight into his Division, which was longer established than the two previously mentioned Divisions, and closer to Wilson's office and Levy headquarters. He described an unfortunate occurrence during the disarmament of one of the tribes, the result of which involved London.

He began, somewhat sarcastically, with a brief introduction on the irregular police—Shabanah—describing their duties, which were those of mounted messengers, escorts to touring officers, and as guards, "of whom too exact services were neither expected nor obtained". Also, they were called upon to make occasional arrests of offenders. But, in his opinion, they were a mixed blessing and occasioned much annoyance to inhabitants by petty oppression of the ignorant, "resulting from the majesty with which they were invested by reason of their khaki uniform and rifle". It will be remembered that other British officers had mentioned this tendency.

Early in 1919, when the Force was remodelled, armed with British rifles and placed under the command of a British A.P.O with British N.C.O Instructors, the situation improved. Notably, their drill as embryo soldiers improved and esprit de corps began to manifest itself. However, he felt that

[45] L/P&S/10/621, F.147.
[46] L/P&S/10/622, F.454.

oppression increased correspondingly, "they were bad soldiers and worse policemen". It appeared that recruits of the "right stamp" would not enlist. This was because the terms of engagement were not sufficiently attractive; Levy pay, did not compare with the wages obtainable in other walks of life.

The most important description in this report was the incident which happened in December 1919, when a fracas occurred between the Levies of Samawah and the Al Suffran tribes during an official attempt to disarm that tribe. This action resulted in the death of three levy men—by the rifle fire of two of their comrades.

The official report stated that:

> The two accused were members of a party under an Arab Officer, sent to collect rifles from the tribe. The tribe offered armed resistance, shots were fired and the two accused deserted to the enemy and actively engaged against the Levies. The Levies sustained the following casualties; 3 killed and 1 wounded. Thaqil ibn Daqash was seen to fire on the Levies. The Court sentenced Thaqil ibn Daqash to death; and Dakhil ibn Selman to penal servitude for 15 years. The Death Sentence was carried out on 10 March 1920.

As the author of the final investigation stated: "The Arab who sells his rifle, according to tribal etiquette, loses caste". No matter how the owner lost his personal arms, his "loss of face" was the same. Hence the reluctance of Arabs to give up their weapons. This tribal code perhaps motivated the three men to side with the tribe being disarmed.

Daly's final comment was that:

> On the whole, whether under the designation of Shabanah, Militia, Levy or Police, all of which have been applied during 1919; the irregulars have filled a gap which could not otherwise have been filled and have been useful, although expensive.

However, the "incident" caused the India Office to issue an instruction dated 10 June 1920 to Baghdad. The draft signed by J.E. Shuckburgh (Under Secretary Political Dept.),[47] stated that in future any incident of a similar nature involving armed force in matters connected with the internal administration of Mesopotamia would be made the subject of a special report. This instruction appears to be devoid of substance. The India Office must have known about the incident, or they would not have commented. If

[47] L/P&S/10/889. No folio

anything was to be said on the matter, it should have stated that no similar confiscation should be carried out except under the supervision of a British officer. Also, if the general situation allowed, the local regular Army Commander should have been requested to make a "show of force", and so discourage any resistance. But it seems that London was not really "en rapport" with Mesopotamia.

These reports convey the feeling of the men on whom the entire success of the Force depended. They were mostly "out on a limb", and the P.Os had more than enough to do administering their Division, which entailed almost every aspect of rural life, from valuation of crops for revenue, to local courts, and even health and education. Before help was received, by way of A.P.Os and British N.C.O Instructors, it is a wonder that the Force performed so well as it did. Before passing judgment on the progress of the Levies during the early years, it is necessary to remember the conditions prevailing in the country, and the myriad tasks performed by the Civil Administration.

In a similar context, it is necessary to return to the continued attempt to reorganise the "Striking Force" of the Civil Administration over the previous six months. A number of documented innovations on the subject had gradually improved in detail. Browne mentions that the Hillah headquarters had "A" and "Q" branches by September 1919; meaning that there was an Adjutant's branch for personnel records, discipline and general orders, together with a Quartermaster controlling the majority of supplies. However, they lacked a "G" branch for operations, planning, organisation and establishments. These were all long overdue and perhaps contributed to the continued rash of inadequate orders on the Levy reorganisation. The policies seldom appear to have been thought through prior to publication. Hence the series of subsequent changes which retarded the original intent.

Further evidence regarding the often confused attempt to reorganise the Levies is to be found in another Memorandum on the subject, although it is dated 24 March 1920. The reason for this is that the intention for further adjustment to the previous instructions on the Levy reorganisation were not to be implemented until 1 April 1920, when the Arab Insurrection was just beginning. It was too late; the Levies were, by then, fully committed to the prevailing operations, in one way or another. It was not until the autumn of

1920 that the Levies acquired their first Senior Commander, and their situation changed for the better.

The Memorandum in question was headed "Reconstitution of Arab and Kurdish Levies in Mesopotamia".[48] The next statement is only important because it confirms the reasons for discussing this Memorandum in this chapter. It stated that with the exception of the Levy and Gendarmerie forces, "Arab and Kurdish Levies in Mesopotamia are to be Reconstituted from 1st April 1920, as follows:...".

The existing Levies were divided into (a) Striking Forces, and (b) District Police". This new division of the Force was an improvement on the previous memorandum of 31 December 1919 (p.88) on this layout, in that the "military" portion was now separate from the District Police, each with distinct functions. "The "Striking Force" was now the military arm of the Civil Administration. It appears that attempts were being made to centralise the Striking Force, although there was an acute shortage of accommodation. Previously the units had been more widely dispersed.

It is assumed that it was intended to bring these changes about gradually before the chosen date of 1 April 1920, when Reconstitution was due to be implemented. But it is more probable that these were the approximate dispositions of the Striking Force at the commencement of the coming Arab Insurrection.

Levy	Headquarters	Sanctioned Strength
1) 1st Euphrates Levy (a)	Ramadi	2 squadrons
2) 2nd Euphrates Levy (b)	Hillah	8 squadrons
3) 3rd Euphrates Levy	Nasiriyah	4 squadrons
4)1st Tigris Levy	Mosul	3 companies
5) 2nd Tigris Levy	Kut	2 squadrons
6) 3rd Tigris Levy (c)	Amarah	1 company
7)Diala Levy	Ba'qubah	2 squadrons
8) Arbil Levy	Arbil	(1 squadron (2 companies

[48] L/P&S/10/889, F.Nil.

Of the remaining details, there are only a few worthy of note. The training as "Mounted Infantry" not Cavalry, remained unchanged.

However, at least the structure of squadrons and companies were indicated. These are worthy of note, regardless of the fact that later the strengths of the squadrons and companies were to change, perhaps because of budget restrictions:

> Mounted Infantry (M.I.):
> M.I. Squadron is composed of 4 Troops; a Troop is composed of 6 sections of 4 men each. Total all ranks including H.Q.: 108. Riding Horse 1. Ponies 107.

(This organisation of sections is odd in the extreme. When the mounted infantry went into action, their horses would be taken to cover in the rear. Thus they had to be led away by one man. In this case, it would have left a maximum of three men to form a rifle section—quite inadequate. Had they had three sections of eight men, two would have taken the eight horses to cover, leaving a section of six men—more realistic.)

> Infantry Company:
> Company is composed of 4 Platoons; a Platoon is composed of 4 sections of 8 men each. Total all ranks including H.Q.:- 140.

The details of sub-unit strengths shows an improvement, in that it provides a more comprehensive picture of the proposed Levy Force. But it still required parent units such as regiments or battalions.

The Levy Force was to form an armed reserve at the disposal of Political Officers for minor military operations and punitive expeditions considered to be beyond the scope of the police, and not sufficiently serious for the employment of regular troops. It was to provide a first-line reconnaissance and an auxiliary arm for the regular forces in major operations. District Police were not to be used for quasi-military duties.

Levies/Gendarmerie in the Mosul, Sulaimaniyah and Dulaim Divisions were not due for revision. It appears that they retained the special arrangements granted to Soane and Leachman.

There was provision for farriers, armourers, tailors, saddlers, drivers and medical personnel. They were allocated according to requirements, so no firm establishment for units. They were allocated on the basis of one artisan between two appropriate units (saddlers and farriers for mounted units only).

In addition, four pack-mules and two A.T. (animal transport) carts for the Levy headquarters.

According to the "Sanctioned Strengths", as detailed above, totals were as follows:

Striking Forces	
One Levy H.Q. of	21
Eight H.Qs of nine	72
Twenty-two squadrons of 108 all ranks	2,268
Seven-and-a-half companies of 140 all ranks	1,050
Total Striking Force	3,411
Gendarmerie /Police	
Three detachment H.Qs of nine	27
Five squadrons of 108	540
Ten companies of 140	1,960
Total Gendarmerie/Police	2,527
Total Forces of the Civil Administration:	5,938

This total is little changed from the previous one under reference above, of 5,965.

Proficiency pay for the trained men in the Levy Force of Rs.5/-, was approved. Regarding rations,

> Where it is not possible to provision in kind; following allowances are to be given in lieu:
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | Ration allowance (man) | Rs.15/- |
> | Ration allowance (horse) | Rs.25/- |

Authorised Scale of Pay for Arab and Kurdish Levies[49]

Arab Officers		Rs.p.m.
Bimbashi		250/-
Yuzbashi		200/-
Zabit		150/-
Arab Adjutant (Zabit)		200/-
Mounted		
Bash Chaoush	90/-, 80/-)	If in possession
Chaoush	85/-, 75/-)	of government
Sowar	70/-, 60/-)	remounts

[49] L/P&S/10/621, F.184.

Dismounted	
Bash Maullumchi	65/-
Bash Chaoush	60/-
Chaoush	50/-
Armourer	70/-
Nafar	40/-
Clerk	120/-
Sweeper	25/-
Bhistie	30/-
Bootmaker	40/-
Tailor	40/-

British N.C.Os (rs.)	
Sergeant-major	250/-
Quartermaster-sergeant	200/-
Assistant Instructor	175/-

The pay structure remained the same, except for two or three rupees less for a couple of tradesmen.

It will be noted that the main difference between this Memorandum and the previous one, was that the division of the role of the Striking Force from that of the District Police was more defined. The new overall approved strength was only 27 less than that previously published. However, the strengths often varied as the Civil Administration struggled to meet each budget.

The Levy Force was improving slowly, and it will be shown that more minor changes were to be published in the ensuing years; some even before those enumerated were implemented.

In reality, the Iraq Levies were now represented by the "Striking Forces". The Shabanah/District Police and Gendarmerie were a force apart. However, for budget purposes they were all "Levies". This became more apparent in the following year when the designation "Levies" encompassed the entire Force of the Civil Administration.

In conclusion, 1919 had certainly been a year of change for the Levies. The year could be divided into two major periods which were interrelated and produced a cause and effect.

Firstly, the commencement of serious Kurdish unrest, which began with the murders of Political officers and their associates in April and ended with the abortive insurrection of Shaikh Mahmud, and with more murders of

P.Os and their staffs during November. All these serious incidents entailed long and costly punitive operations by imperial garrison troops of the M.E.F, assisted by Levies. However, these operations did afford the opportunity for the British to learn of the fighting capacity of the Assyrians, and so introduced the authorities in London and Baghdad to a new source of very desirable military manpower for the Iraq Levies in the years to come.

Second, the Kurdish troubles demonstrated the urgent need for the Levies to expand and, if time allowed, for training to enable the Striking Force to cope better in its new military role. But it was to prove that all had been left too late; the speed of future events left no time for training. With the continuance of demobilisation in the face of anticipated unrest, of which Wilson had given repeated warnings to the G.H.Q.M.E.F., the country was, in some regions, restive and threatening, and the imperial forces were inadequate to deal with any serious unrest.

Matters were not helped by the political events in Syria. These became manifest on the withdrawal of the British troops from there in September 1919, when Britain handed over control to the French. This was followed by hostilities between the French and the Syrians. In the neighbouring disturbed situation, repatriation of British and Indian troops continued in Iraq, dangerously weakening the imperial garrison, and regardless of the vacuum thus created, for which the Levies were neither sufficiently trained nor numerically able to fill. The situation in Iraq had gradually changed from that envisaged by the British government when the plans for demobilisation had been drawn up.

Many troubles were, perhaps, created by slow communications between Baghdad and London; even urgent military problems had to be discussed by telegraph, and as some of the documents show, often with transmission faults which required correction, causing more delays by increasing signal traffic.

Unrest in Kurdistan has been given considerable coverage in this chapter, because the Kurds continued to play an appreciable part in the history of the Iraq Levies for some years to come. Also, Shaikh Mahmud, in particular, became, as so aptly described by Browne, the "electric hare" of the Levies, for he was never caught again.

Perhaps the simple answer to most of the Mesopotamian problems was, in part, created by the British Treasury—financial stringency was politically and economically imperative in the British postwar situation. Further, as has been discussed at the beginning of this chapter, and echoed by Wilson in his book *Loyalties Mesopotamia 1917-20*, p.217: "The problem of Iraq was at the time many-sided, and several Departments of State were simultaneously dealing with various aspects, often without consultation with each other". The research carried out for this thesis would more than justify Wilson's view.

CHAPTER IV

Chapter III dealt with the first Kurdish insurrection, which was followed by the reorganisation of the Levies into two groups: the Striking Forces and the District Police. By the end of 1919, they were still not organised into parent units of regiments or battalions, and therefore had no command structure. Also, the imperial garrison, of necessity, had discovered the excellent fighting qualities of the Assyrians when dealing with the Kurdish insurrection.

This chapter covers the period from the end of 1919, beginning with the Deir-es-Zor incident. It continues with the spread of disturbances until the Arab Insurrection, officially commencing June 1920. This, in turn, led to the Cairo Conference in March 1921; the recommendations of which were implemented in the autumn of that year.

Two political landmarks affecting Iraq were: (i) Britain was assigned the Mandate for Iraq by the League's Supreme Council on 25 April 1920; and (ii) the Amir Faisal was proclaimed King of Iraq on 23 August 1921.

As a background to the events in Mesopotamia during 1920, it is proposed to discuss an important document in the context of Britain's continuing involvement in Iraq, in spite of nationally imposed economic stringency. It was a Memorandum circulated to the Cabinet on 1 May 1920,[1] from the Secretary of State for War (Churchill), who was soon to become Minister for Colonial Affairs. He was deeply concerned with the cost of postwar Middle East commitments, especially Iraq. In essence, it advanced the immediate steps he proposed to take in Mesopotamia to effect a reduction in the escalating expenditure.

In the document, Churchill pointed out that the War Office was not responsible for troop distribution: "...the policy of the Cabinet for Mesopotamia was animated by the Eastern Committee". The Foreign Office, not the India Office, gave the "...directing impulse". On departmental responsibility for the heavy expenditure, he further asks: "How long is this state of affairs to continue? It will continue as long as the department calling

[1] Cab.24/106, F.67.

the tune has no responsibility for paying the piper". He was derogatory of Mesopotamia, calling it "...a score of mud villages, sandwiched in between a swampy river and a blistering desert, inhabited by a few hundred half naked families usually starving...."

After comparison with the costs of garrisoning India, he arrived at his *raison d'être*, which reflected the anticipated Ministerial responsibility for Colonial Affairs. "I hope, therefore, that Mesopotamia may be handed over immediately to the Colonial Office."

In a similar context, the Chief of Air Staff (Trenchard) was writing a paper in March 1920 on the air force taking over control of Mesopotamia from the War Office. In part, it was a matter of inter-service rivalry because previously the navy and the army had a Royal Naval Air Service and a Royal Flying Corps respectively; this status quo they wished to retain. The air force wanted to obtain recognition as a third independent service, and acquiring control of Iraq, from the army was a means to that end.

It will be shown that 1920-21 was a critical period in the history of the Iraq Levies, affecting, as it did, their manpower composition, recruitment, armament and equipment; it also marked the arrival of the Levy's first "Field Commander". Since the end of the war, the Levies had been in the administrative charge of a succession of British officers, and in 1920 comprised "a somewhat disorganised force of odd units",[2] which meant being without an organisation based on parent units of regiments or battalions to enable the creation of a command structure—necessary for functioning as a military force, which role they had recently assumed.

It is now proposed to discuss the Deir-es-Zor affair, which had been a "running sore" moving to a crisis. The problem of Deir-es-Zor was that it lay on an undefined frontier between Iraq and Syria. The township and environs were described by Wilson as a "no man's land". Members of Faisal's Damascus interim government had tried to impose their authority in the township. This caused the townsfolk to request the appointment of a British officer to maintain law and order there. Wilson[3] had referred the matter to London as far back as 13 December 1918 but the issue remained, pending the

[2] J.G. Browne, *The Iraqi Levies 1915-32* (London, 1932), p.17.
[3] A.T. Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917-1930. A clash of loyalties* (London, 1931), Vol.2, p.229.

decision of the Conference to give a ruling "on the same basis as our occupation of the Mosul wilayat".

The Deir-es-Zor affair was an external challenge to British postwar authority in Iraq, and continued to spread through northern Iraq during 1920, the year referred to by the Arabs as, "Am al-Nakba" (the Year of Catastrophe).

A telegram from the G.O.C. Mesopotamia to the War Office on 11 December 1919[4] reporting an attack on Deir-es-Zor was short in detail. It appears that on 10 December a Sharifian Arab officer named Ramadhan al-Shalash made a surprise attack on the town at dawn, with an unspecified number of Sharifian Arab troops, supported by local Arabs from the town and its environs. According to the report, Captain A. Chamier was A.P.O. in the town, with sixty Levies and two British armoured cars.

According to Wilson,[5] on 11 December Deir-es-Zor was entered by tribesmen from the south who together with the townsmen, raided the civil buildings, including the P.O's office, where they broke open the safe, stealing its contents. A British armoured car, sent to reconnoitre the situation, was fired on and badly damaged. Later, fire was opened on the Levy barracks; two machine-guns on its roof returned fire, but were put out of action by the enemy. Soon after, Captain Chamier was invited to "parley" with the Mayor and leading citizens who were anxious for a truce because the tribesmen they had incited were by then well out of hand.

The tribal shaikhs were of an opinion that, having gone so far, they might as well kill the British officer and his staff. But the fortuitous arrival of two aircraft, sent by G.H.Q. Mosul, proceeded to strafe the town with machine-guns, causing the shaikhs to beg Chamier to stop the attack. This accomplished, a twenty-four-hour truce was agreed.

It appears that Ramadhan-al-Shalash was a Mesopotamian from Mosul, an ex-Turkish army Arab officer, and prominent member of the 'Ahd-al-Iraqi secret society. He commenced negotiations with Chamier, which eventually involved the Amir Faisal in Damascus (who, by 11 March was proclaimed King of Syria). He attempted to calm the situation. However, the

[4] L/MIL/5, F.331.
[5] Wilson, op.cit., p.231.

political intrigues continued, incited by other ex-Turkish army Arab officers, and members of the 'Ahd-al-Iraqi. They encouraged the frontier tribes to raid and rob caravans and villages within the Iraq border, and sent threatening messages to the British P.Os in the region.

On 11 January 1920, Ramadhan-al-Shalash attacked Albu Kamal with his tribesmen "who entered the suburbs, looted the houses of Arabs who were in British service, and violated their women".[6]

Ramadhan was succeeded by Maulud Pasha al-Khalaf, another ex Turkish army officer, who, like Ramadhan, was a "Mosulawi", and a member of the 'Ahd-al-Iraqi society. On assuming command of Ramadhan's marauders, he proceeded to spread more hostile propaganda among the shaikhs in the south as far as Amara; even attempting to incite *jihad* along the Euphrates.

At the end of January, the G.O.C-in-C., Lt.-General G.F.MacMunn, decided to deal summarily with Maulud and his raiders by sending a detachment of imperial troops to Salahiya, half-way between Albu Kamal and the Khabur river. Maulud used this as an excuse to indulge in fresh hostilities, claiming he was unable to restrain the fury of the tribes. These, led by ex-Turkish Arab officers, attacked Albu Kamal in mid-February; at the same time raiding the line of communication of the imperial garrison as far down as Qaim.

Wilson,[7] claimed that much of the cause of these troubles could be attributed to the failure of the British government to clarify publicly the intention of the Anglo-French Declaration of November 1918, leaving ambiguity in the method by which it was proposed to administer Iraq under a Mandate. He further pointed out:

> We continued to assume that the Arab Government [at Damascus] was not responsible for what was done by its officers and that a state of war did not exist but that it was an assumption increasingly difficult to maintain.

These events may not appear to be directly in the context of the history of the Iraq Levies, but they are, in the opinion of the writer, of considerable importance as a background to the commencement of the violent disturbances

[6] Ibid, p.235.

which were to beset the whole of Iraq, involving the British imperial garrison and the Civil Administration, both of whom were much dependent on the Levies. The roles and tasks to be faced by the Levies dictated their strength and armament—but usually they obtained this recognition too late to be of use when most needed. Nevertheless, their loyalty to the British Crown was, time and again, proved beyond doubt.

As postulated in this work, the troubles of 1920 had begun and continued in the north, until the Tel Afar incident of June 1920. Therefore the Levies had little or no opportunity to prepare for the forthcoming greater civil onslaught of the "Arab insurrection", which the British imperial garrison found so hard to put down.

The Deir-es-Zor[8] confrontation could have, in part, arisen from lack of early negotiations for the alignment of that sensitive frontier. The matter was raised at an "Inter-Departmental Conference on Middle Eastern Affairs" on 16 June 1920, chaired by Earl Curzon.[9] The Conference was invited to approve a telegram to the G.O.C. Mesopotamia, directing him not to bomb Jeziret Ibn Omar as it was in the French sphere, or the actual town of Deir-es-Zor. Mr. Montagu (Secretary of State for India), pointed out that "Dair-es-Zor being in the Arab sphere, the bombing of that town would be tantamount to a declaration of war on Faisal". Curzon stated that, "...Wilson's reported assurances that the raiding parties...were led by Sharifian officers, but that he [Curzon]...did not know exactly what this expression [Sharifian] meant". Curzon did not appear to approve of Wilson's administration. The content of the discussion also demonstrated the inherent political sensitivity of the area.

There was no adverse comment on the inability of the Levies to defend Deir-es-Zor, nor any mention of desertions. The A.P.O. had only been resident in the township since November 1919, and from the following comment, the Levies he commanded were not from those who had been under Major Boyle's training scheme—they were perhaps locally recruited

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Mutasarriflik of Zor (Deir-es-Zor). Zor was not divided into Sanjaqs, but was administered by a Mutasarrif, hence its appellation; he took his orders direct from Constantinople. The creation of this appointment appears to date from 1874, when the Turks extended their influence over the desert tribes of the area. Admiralty, "Handbook of Mesopotamia", vol.I (Admiralty War Staff, August 1916), p.100.

[9] FO.371/5227, F.52.

Gendarmerie, and fit only for that duty. This is clear from an entry in the Diary for August 1919 of their P.O., Major F.E. Carver:[10]

> At last our Shabanah clothing has come. This should make a great difference in the morale of the Shabanah force. No man can be really smart when wearing an old Turkish tunic out at the elbows and trousers of rainbow hue.

It would seem that much was expected and demanded of these men in return for poor and very few basic military necessities and amenities, and even adequate training, to fit them for the situation which had so quickly developed.

The incident was considered of sufficient concern by General MacMunn to increase the force at Fallujah and Ramadi by six squadrons of cavalry, ten light armoured cars, and a battalion of infantry. The cavalry began to advance up the river on 12 December 1919. By the 13th, civil officials and Levies evacuated Albu Kamal in the face of the advance of hostile tribes upon the town. By the 14th, all M.E.F. demobilisation and leave was suspended. From then on this new affair escalated, in spite of the intervention understood to have been made by the Amir Faisal, ordering his subordinates to withdraw—with no effect—for which no date has been found.

There can be little doubt that both the Military and the Civil Administrations were deeply concerned, especially the former, with so many untrained troop replacements coming in to fill the gaps created by those returning for demobilisation. The G.O.C.-in-C's telegram to the War Office on 14 December 1919 confirms this problem:[11]

> As newly arrived artillery [men] have no training I am retraining able men, both artillery and other services, till situation clears. Arab advance on Ramadi and Mosul may take place and preparations to meet this are in progress.

This proved that the Deir-es-Zor affair was serious, and could spread without sufficient force to stop it.

These extracts may also help the reader to appreciate the political environment which formed a background for the impending insurrection, and the immediate inadequacies of the British military resources to deal

[10] L/P&S/10/621, F.464.
[11] L/MIL/5/799, F.330.

definitively with it. The situation in 1920 required an efficient mobile force with which to maintain internal security. The reorganised Levy Corps of 3,195 partly-trained Striking Force, coupled with some 2,000 District Police, were mostly to be used by the military as guides (a reminder of their beginnings in 1915), reconnaissance patrols, guards on the lines of communication or as garrisons for the protection of Political Officers at Divisional Centres, where they were sometimes besieged. It will be shown how, in the early days of the insurrection, Levies were undervalued by the military; but by the end of 1920, they had engendered respect as both a necessary and promising force. Perhaps it was because the Levies were, at first, undervalued, that their participation in actions with units of the M.E.F. caused their performance seldom to be acknowledged in the War Diaries of the units with which they served.

There appears to have been little operational activity by the Levies or District Police immediately after the Deir-es-Zor incident; but that event seems to have encouraged the opportunism of the Syrians and Mesopotamians to continue their harassment of the long and vulnerable British lines of communication from the Fallujah railhead, through Ramadi, Hit and Anah.[12]

Frequent attacks on this line continued from 14 February 1920 in an attempt to make the British occupation of Albu Kamal untenable. These attacks were serious, often comprising raiding bands of Arabs 300-600 strong, and ending in considerable losses on both sides. For example: on 1 March 1920, 400 Arabs attacked a detachment of the 126th Baluchistan Infantry. The enemy were eventually driven off. Imperial casualties included one British and one Indian officer killed, while Arab losses were 34 killed and many wounded.

Regardless of the continued unrest after Deir-es-Zor, the official report by the War Office dated 26 October 1920[13] maintained that the "Arab Insurrection was timed for the hot weather", and "the initial explosion at Tel Afar" on 3 June 1920 signalled a general anti-British rising in Mesopotamia. It is a long document covering many aspects and raises the question, "...on how far the Arab movement is spontaneous, or how far it forms merely a

[12] AIR/5/1253, p.5324.
[13] WO/33/969, no folio.

section of attack in a general conspiracy against the British Empire". Fortunately the Kurdish situation, in so far as the possibility of further turbulence might have been expected, remained relatively quiet. This can, perhaps, be attributed to the qualities of Major Soane during his period of duty as P.O. Sulamani.

While these disturbances were taking place in the north, the time for the "Reconstitution of the Arab and Kurdish Levies" on 1 April 1920 had arrived. In this connection it may be recalled, that at Hillah, under the "Reconstitution" of the Corps, the Levy Striking Force was to be excused its previous duties to enable it to carry out a period of six months uninterrupted training. In theory, the training programme should have started, and this is indicated in a report by Brigadier-General A.G. Wauchope (Commander, 34th Infantry Brigade),[14] sent to Sir Arthur Hirtzel, India Office, on 4 April 1920. Wauchope had been detailed to inspect the Levies, no doubt by the new G.O.C.-in-C., General Haldane.

His tour of inspection of the Levies started at Hillah, accompanied by Boyle. It covered the "Striking Force", and was to continue with the District Police at Hillah, Diwaniyah, and Shamiyah Divisions. The report is long and very detailed, but its essence is contained in a D.O. letter from Wauchope to Wilson, dated 22 April, giving his impressions gained during his inspection. The D.O. covered a copy of his official report, which was not correct procedure, but a friendly gesture in confidence; usually it would have gone direct to G.H.Q.

The D.O. stated: "The inspection has been a very great pleasure to me...the evidence of so much energy and good spirit and desire to do well by the Levy". He had found that the A.P.Os felt they might expect more support than they got from Political Officers. They certainly received none from the army officers. He thought that a "suggestion" in both cases was all that was required. He was not satisfied with the horses, especially at Sukhair, and took the local P.O. (who endorsed his opinion) with him to see for himself.

He noted that the squadrons at Hillah had not yet received their horses. (They were destined to be trained as Mounted Infantry.)

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[14] L/P&S/10/874, F.94.

> Of the 150 horses at Abu Sukhair, about 50 are India Country bred ponies...with few exceptions...ready for hard work. The remainder are mainly Arab ponies...many are of poor quality. Of this 100, 10 or 50 are suffering from debility and should be exchanged. About another 30 are well under three years old and will not be fit for service conditions for about another year.

Ultimate responsibility for the state of affairs as described would appear to have lain at the doors of British or Indian governmental departments. If approval was given for 2,052 Mounted Infantry to be raised and trained, why were less than half the necessary ponies fit for service? There was a recurring failure to meet official decisions with the necessary supplies—animals, all forms of equipment, clothing and even a standardised rifle. Almost every report by P.Os or Levy officers contained the same complaint—shortage of most supplies. The deficiencies were serious in every respect. As will be seen, these supply problems continued for some time.

Wilson, in the covering letter for the report above,[15] to Hirtzel, India Office, stated in his final paragraph:

> His point about Levy Officers expecting more support than they get from Political Officers is receiving attention. It is probably inevitable that as a result of the division of levies into two forces:
>
> (1) District Police pure and simple at the disposal of the Political Officer, and
> (2) Striking force which is not directly under his orders.
>
> The Political Officers should tend to interest themselves in the Police Force, for which they are personally responsible, rather than on the Levies which are administered direct from Baghdad. However, this will doubtless come right in time.
>
> The Territorial system that we are adopting is, I feel sure, sound and the Levies, whatever their ultimate name may be, will afford a career for some of the younger Arabs.

Boyle disagreed with Wilson's territorial organisation, as will be noted in his memorandum below.

In a similar context, Boyle wrote a memorandum, No.INS/G/1 dated 3 May 1920, to Wilson,[16] giving his comments on Wauchope's report, especially the remarks on the 2nd Euphrates Levy at Hillah and Abu Sukhair.

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[15] L/P&S/10/874, F.91.
[16] I.O. L/P&S/10/874, Fs.88-9.

Incidentally, this designation did not describe a regiment or battalion in the British army sense, because there was no comparable establishment. Their strengths varied. However, Boyle made the following points: he saw no need for more British officers provided the present establishment was maintained, but there was a shortage of staff. He recommended an H.Q. Training Centre be created to remove the "in-unit" training responsibility from the Levy Unit Commanders.

His feelings regarding British N.C.Os was the same as for officers; he saw no need for an increase. He also wanted a well-staffed Central School for Arab officers, to enable them to be given more responsibility at Hillah. Boyle required a "better stamp of recruit"; the latter could be obtained by British officers touring the districts. He especially favoured good tribal men, feeling they would increase *esprit de corps*; but he accepted it might incur tribal spirit—a disadvantage to be overcome. "The men must be made to realise that they are all members of one corps rather than individual tribes." His ideas were to enlist men with "antecedents" who would improve "a heterogeneous corps wholly loyal against local tribes, so they may be counted on". If not, they may well turn into "a corps of scallywags, ex-Turkish Gendarmerie system".

He was most keen that every advantage be taken for the Force to train with local British military units at every opportunity. His reasons were: to increase *esprit de corps* and to afford the opportunity for Levy British officers to train in the field with the men under their command.

It was felt necessary to discuss Boyle's comments as fully as possible, because he was the one officer at this stage of Levy development who had their moulding in his hands. He also had Wilson's ear.

Wauchope continued with his inspections of the corps, with further long and detailed reports, which mostly cover the Hillah District Police and the Diwaniyah and Shamiyah districts; plus a supplementary report on Arab and Kurdish Levies, dated 5 May 1920.[17] This was as long and detailed as the former, for he was an astute and meticulous officer. He seemed pleased with a few Arab officers and senior N.C.Os. The married families had built a small

[17] L/P&S/10/874, F.72.

village near one camp of which he approved, but felt it would have been better further from the lines. He also felt that whenever possible, issued rations would be better than the practice of a monetary allowance, but that the camp coffee shops helped keep the men from the Bazaar.

When discussing personnel, he noted:

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

In this he was to be proved correct.

It appears that uniforms were made up locally from imported cloth, issued from Force headquarters. Nevertheless, in general, severe shortages remained the rule, the Mounted Infantry were deficient in adequate sound mounts and sufficient saddlery or rifle buckets, without which it was impossible to train, let alone undertake operations as planned.

Wilson, it would seem, lacked a competent centralised military staff with which to maintain co-ordination throughout the Levy Force; Boyle was overloaded. Then, perhaps, matters could have been far better planned. But as the G.O.C. was ultimately responsible, Wilson may have felt he could lose control of his "private army". The fact that he got Wauchope to give him an early copy of his report, perhaps indicates some unease on Wilson's part; indeed, friction between him and Haldane was to follow.

The strength of the Levy Corps was something in excess of 5,000 men, including both the "Striking Force" and the "District Police", and was still rising slowly by mid-1920; and in accordance with military practice, a senior officer was required to command a force of this size. This appointment was long overdue.

Therefore, the following telegram was sent by Haldane to the War Office on 10 May 1920:[18]

> The locally recruited Levies under the Civil Administration have now reached a stage of development at which it is advisable that their organisation and training should be co-ordinated under an inspector

[18] F.O. 371/5073, F.326.

> of standing and experience. STOP. The Civil ask that if you consider him suitable the services of Brig-Gen,.C.,L. Smith V.C., M.C., commanding 9th Indian Brigade of Infantry Palestine should be made available for this purpose. STOP. I consider this would be to the benefit of this country and would be a step in the direction of making more use in future of Arab Levies. STOP. I therefore recommend for favourable considersation. (sic.)

On the 11th, Wilson backed the same request with a telegram to Hirtzel,[19] stating he had ascertained that Smith was willing to come on the terms provisionally offered, namely Rs.1,800 with the "usual concessions and 12 months' contract in the first instance". He continued:

> Improvement in training and status of levies is necessary if reduction of garrison is not to be accompanied by grave disorder and I hope you will see your way to move Treasury and War Office accordingly.

The War Office responded to the above: "No objection if Smith Willing". It therefore remains unclear why this posting never took place; it was urged by Shuckburgh in a telegram to the Secretary of the Treasury, London, on the 21st,[20] stating: "Mr. Montagu is satisfied that the appointment cannot with advantage be held by an officer of lower rank than that of Brigadier-General".

However, it was not until 1 February 1921, that Colonel-Commandant J. Sanders took charge of the "Levy Administration". He worked, it would seem, from G.H.Q.M.E.F. It has not been possible to discover what happened about Smith.

Wauchope's reports clearly indicate that regardless of the order for the "Reconstitution" of the Arab and Kurdish Levies, the Levy Striking Forces were still not ready to take the field. Shortage of horses and equipment would have retarded their progress in the six months' training period allocated. For example, the Striking Forces of the 2nd Euphrates Levy with Boyle's H.Q. at Hillah, produced only 554 Mounted Infantry against an approved establishment of 800. (It is doubtful whether all of the Striking Forces of Mounted Infantry were adequately mounted at this time.)

There was also another important factor, which not only affected the Levies, but more importantly M.E.F. itself, and perhaps the conduct of some

[19] F.O. 371/5073, F.337.
[20] F.O. 371/5073, F.336.

of the operations in which all the imperial forces in Mesopotamia were soon to be involved. This was the apparent clash of personalities between General Haldane (G.O.C.-in-C,m M.E.F.) and Lt.-Colonel Sir A.T. Wilson (D.C.C., Mesopotamia). During his visit to Paris and England, Wilson had an audience with the King on 14 April 1919, when it may be assumed he received his knighthood.

After Deir-es-Zor of December 1919, the operations had continued in and around the Mosul wilayat[21] with some serious fighting, which was not part of this work as the Levies were not involved. Suffice to say sporadic attacks by tribesmen, encouraged by ex-Sharifian officers (as claimed by G.H.Q.) during April and May, kept the M.E.F. troops busy in the Mosul area, between the Euphrates, Tigris and Khabur. Raids were also made on the Baghdad to Mosul lines of communication, including the railway. The Kurds, as previously mentioned, remained relatively quiet.

While these operations continued, the new G.O.C., General Haldane, who, it may be recalled, had arrived at Basrah on 20 March 1920, began a tour of his Command. He had been warned by Wilson that trouble was brewing. Nevertheless, Haldane, with some of his staff, left for Persia, which was a part of the M.E.F. Command, on 5 June 1920. This, it will be noted, was one day after the attack on, and murders at, Tel Afar, soon to be discussed.

That Haldane and some of his staff were in Persia in the early days of the "Arab Insurrection" gave cause for some adverse comment in Mesopotamia, London and Simla. Quotes from the following relevant documents seem to point to an early mutual dislike between Haldane and Wilson, which perhaps boded ill for the Levies at this difficult stage, both for their development and the increasing threat of major civil disorder.

The A.C.C. (Wilson) had acquired considerable spheres of regional responsibility, appointments hitherto held by Cox, whom Wilson had temporarily replaced. In an Annex to the General Circular No.492 of 20 April 1920,[22] under "Central Administration", he suddenly took a somewhat unusual step by officially publishing the responsibilities of his appointment: they were considerable.

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[21] AIR/5/1253, F.73, pp.5326-7, respectively.
[22] L/P&S/10/751, F.Nil.

Over and above the administration of the Mesopotamian Occupied Territories, Wilson's responsibilities included: Political Resident, Persian Gulf; Consul-General, Fars, Kuzistan, Bushire and general supervision over affairs in the Persian Gulf, to include Muscat, Bahrein, the Mekran Coast, Bandar Abbas, Kerman, Persian Baluchistan, Fars, Arabistan and Luristan.

He was also Chief Political Officer for G.H.Q. M.E.F., and supervised Political Officers with troops in north-west Persia, acting in such matters as Representative of His Majesty's Government at Tehran with the G.O.C.-in-C. in Mesopotamia, and as a mouthpiece of the latter's views.

He was also responsible to His Majesty's Government for negotiating with Ruling Chiefs in Central Arabia, taking his orders from the India Office. He co-ordinated information on Kurdistan, for advising the British government on the region. With regard to questions arising in Arabistan, Bakhtiari Country and Luristan, the Civil Commissioner exercised general supervision over the Consular and Political Officers concerned under orders of and in communication with:

1. G.O.C.-in-C.
2. His Majesty's Minister, Tehran (Cox)
3. Government of India, Foreign Department
4. Secretary of State for India.

Under existing arrangements Kuwait was supervised by him in his capacity as Civil Commissioner, rather than a Political Resident in the Persian Gulf.

To speculate on the reasons for publication of this apparently self-aggrandisement is tempting. Wilson, as a much younger man than Haldane, was also "outranked" by him and could well have found it difficult to impress the general with the seriousness of the volatile political situation. In such circumstances, if things went wrong, as they did, Wilson could have been accused of failing to impress on Haldane the problems he faced. Thus, by "trailing his cloak", Wilson perhaps hoped to impress Haldane by the many responsibilities with which he was entrusted by both London and Simla—a man of consequence.

In his book, *The Insurrection of Mesopotamia, 1920*, p.2, Haldane wrote:

> Besides congratulations on my new appointment, I was the recipient of more than an equal number of condolences; and although no official hint was breathed that Mesopotamia might prove to be something other than the proverbial bed of roses, I had many private warnings which induced me to believe that those flowers would not be unaccompanied by their usual crop of thorns.

In Wilson's book, *Mesopotamia, 1917-1920*, p.273, he wrote of Haldane:

> By this time the political situation both in Baghdad and elsewhere had become alarming, and I pressed him urgently yet again to defer his departure. He felt, however, that his long-delayed tour of inspection to Persia should have precedence, and took a more optimistic view of the position in Iraq than I was able to do. On grounds of health too, he needed the change of climate and scene that the Persian plateau could afford. It is clear from his book that his hopes and desires warped his judgement. His optimism was not shared by the General Staff in the "Operations" and "Intelligence" branches, nor by his Divisional Commander, but their representations were not heeded.

From these recollections, it is not difficult to discern there was, or had been, considerable friction between these two important and central personalities.

The Tel Afar affair, as mentioned, was officially considered the signal for the start of the "Arab Insurrection" and had begun the day before Haldane, with some of his staff, left for Persia on 4 June 1920.

The most concise report on the incident, although not definitive, is contained in a document circulated by the Secretary of State for India. It was based on the report of the P.O. Mosul (Lt.-Colonel L.F. Nalder) to Wilson, dated 25 June 1920, in which he described the affair from the beginning.[23] It was the "official" spark which ignited the whole conflagration, and is considered worthy of adequate coverage because a unit of the Levies was involved. Colonel Nalder stated that ever since the occupation of Deir-es-Zor by the Sharifians in December 1919, there had been a good deal of restlessness in the desert, with raids on British lines of communication. This culminated in the killing of Major MacDonald (ex-Mosul Gendarmerie) by a party of the Albu Algah.

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[23] L/MIL/5/799, F.55.

On 21 April, the first caravan for some months arrived at Mosul from Deir-es-Zor. This appeared to inflame a fresh period of sedition in Mosul, with raids increasing, leading to a train being destroyed near Ain Dibbs on 24 May. The P.O. (Nalder) had toured Tel Afar in early May, and the district Shaikhs had come to meet him expressing loyalty in the tents he visited—they had even attended a race meeting in Mosul prior to Ramathan.

On 26 May, reconnaissance by the Levy A.P.O. Tel Afar, made it clear that attempts were being made to raise the tribes in the name of the Amir Abdullah ibn al Hussein. Reconnaissance by armoured cars and aircraft reported nothing suspicious—however, the British army posted a Vickers gun with gunner at Tel Afar. The P.O. considered evacuating Tel Afar, but, first, he had no grounds for doing so, and secondly, the Tel Afar Gendarmerie detachment was one of the best he had. Furthermore, the Tel Afar mound afforded excellent opportunities for defence. The P.O. felt that to abandon the district would create a bad image among the tribes, and cause an adverse impression in Mosul.

On 3 June, Major Barlow (Mosul Gendarmerie) reported by telephone from Tel Afar that the Sharifian Agents were holding a meeting in the town to herald the arrival of the Sharif with a force. Barlow also reported that his Gendarmerie Yuzbashi (captain) had left the town, and that the telegraph line was cut. Eighteenth Division sent aircraft and armoured cars to Tel Afar every day; and on the following day, pigeons were to be sent there in case of a breakdown in communications.

The attack on the town commenced early next morning (4 June). Tribesmen rode into the town, which rose in response. Lt. Stuart was shot deliberately by one of his own native officers, and no resistance was offered to the attack by the Gendarmerie. Sergeant Walker, the Indian clerk, and the machine-gunner, held the roof of the barracks until the Sharifian troops arrived, when the three defenders were killed by a grenade.

The A.P.O., Major Barlow, had left the town the previous day for Bogha, as arranged, and found Sulaiman Agha, who endeavoured to capture him; but Barlow got away on foot only to be recaptured next morning near Tel Afar. As he was being taken into the town, he saw some British armoured cars and, as he broke away dashing to them, he was shot. The cars were ambushed

in the township, none of the crews escaping. This Arab success was a signal for all the tribes in the district to rise.

The P.O's conclusion, in brief, was that the affair had shown the fatal results of P.Os in frontier districts without close military support. Also:

> These functions would normally be performed by levies, but until public opinion in this division is convinced that to serve the Government is to join the winning side, and this opinion is by no means generally held at present, levies will be most difficult to recruit and unreliable when recruited.

This was a shocking affair, in so far as the Levy Gendarmerie was concerned. But they were employed for work which resembled that of District Police. Their ethnic composition was not indicated. It is possible that the Yuzbashi had served in the Turkish army. Whatever the reasons for this debacle, it understandably undermined the confidence of the new G.O.C.-in-C. in the Levies in general, by raising the spectre of the battle of Shaibah (April 1915), which had damned the Arabs in the eyes of many British senior officers.

However, Wilson appears to have seized the opportunity to publicise his lack of confidence in Haldane by somewhat usurping the G.O.C's position as Army Commander during his absence in Persia. It is thus felt important to continue with a little more of the correspondence involved because the apparent friction must have had a negative effect, both in the quelling of the insurrection, and in retarding the growth of the Levy Force.

Wilson informed the India Office of the worsening internal situation by telegram on 9 June 1920, supporting the contention that all was not well between these two key men.[24] In it he stated that:

> 1. Recent developments have caused review of whole situation of Mesopotamia, arising out of the announcement of grant of mandate and its reception by public in this country. 2. During the last 18 months progress of demobilisation, withdrawal of experienced civil officers and their departure on leave have given men of all classes in this country reason to doubt whether we are prepared or are in the position to give effect to our obligations under mandate. 3. Our Army is now...incapable of defending...frontier divisions of Mosul and Dulaim against aggression...or restoring internal order. 4. Both above divisions were protected from Sharifian aggression up till October last by

[24] L/P&S/11/175, F.12.

> the Dair-ez-Zor division; its separation from Mesopotamia by the Peace Conference...its seizure by Arabs, led to a succession of incidents...latest...being the outrage at Tel Afar. 5. Last February I warned Government that we must hold what we then had with the troops then in the country, or clear out, and that there was no middle course. Events have shown that this was not an over-statement.

The text continued with political discussion, and ended with:

> The above telegram has not been shown to or discussed with General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, firstly because he is in Persia and, secondly, issues are of such vast importance that I consider it best to place my views before you on my own responsibility.

This despatch caused the War Office to send a rather punctilious letter to the Under-Secretary of State for India, dated 3 July 1920,[25] stating:

> I am to say that the Army Council are of the opinion that the time has now come when the Secretary of State for India will appreciate an expression of desire on the part of the Council that Mr. Montagu may see his way to indicate to Lieut.-Colonel Sir Arnold Wilson, K.C.I.E., the advisability of leaving expressions of opinion on military matters to the responsible authority viz., the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Army of Occupation.

The affair caused quite a flurry in the government departments in London. A minute stated: "I suspect they were put up to it by the F.O., whose consistent policy it is to 'go and see what Wilson is doing, and tell him not to'". (Initialled J.E.S. [Suckburgh].)

Wilson's telegram, dated 9 June above, had pre-empted Haldane's of the 12th to the War Office,[26] in which the latter stated:

> Reference Civil Commissioner's telegram 6948 of June 9th to India Office and telegram of 11th from Baghdad to you. Portions of these as worded may cause undue concern. My full views will be wired after I arrive Baghdad on 18th. Request however sanction for bombing Dairezzor. [This request was refused, as it was in the French sphere.] Sent from Kasvin. (sic.)

From this it may be surmised that in spite of the incidents of Deir-es-Zor and Tel Afar, coupled with the incursions by the Sharifians and tribes down the Euphrates, the G.O.C.-IN-C. M.E.F. seems to have remained relatively unconcerned. But he showed his frustration with the "Civil" in the

[25] L/P&S/11/175, F.11.
[26] L/P&S/11/175, F.Nil.

following telegram to the War Office, dated 23 June 1920.[27] After reference to Persia, he stated:

> Regarding the Levies and their progress please ask India Office for their latest report on their state. The levies are of no military value and for 2 years their value is likely to be of doubtful quality. They cannot be counted on in questions of reduction as a factor. In the Tel Afar incident as in some others previously the levies have either led the way or joined in withdrawal from enemies. I do not consider they are likely ever to be reliable in cases where religious fanaticism is the cause of disturbances.

(Haldane appeared to disapprove of Wilson's "private army". By the year's end, he had to concede its worth.)

Wilson's final statement on the matter is in the first and last paragraphs of his telegram No.8422, to the India Office, dated 14 July 1920:[28]

> I am sorry War Office take exception my action, but I beg to point out that as I explained at the time, General Officer Commanding in Chief was absent in Northern Persia, and in any case had changed his Headquarters for the Summer to Persia(n) [sic] hills and did not contemplate returning to Baghdad till Autumn unless in special emergency.

Last paragraph:

> I confirm my telegram of July 10th No.8312 which crossed your telegram under reply, and assuming you give me discretion requested above, I am content to abide by the consequences.

The Secretary of State for India noted, "I think Wilson is right".

Throughout this period of contentious exchanges between the personalities and government departments concerned with Iraq, the Arab insurrection continued to gain pace. The Army of Occupation was to be involved in almost continuous fighting over an ever-increasing area; but the Levies were not really involved in these initial operations until July 1920.

However, many small district detachments were besieged with their P.Os and A.P.Os. in Rawandiz, Diwaniyah, Abu Sukhair, Kufah, Hillah, Khidr and Nasiriyeh. Perhaps the Force was not considered ready or reliable by Haldane, other than initially as guides or for reconnaissance, until the worsening situation made all troops valuable. It was a bad time for the Levies who, in the vast majority it will be shown, remained faithful to the

[27] L/P&S/10/874, F.68.

government throughout the rebellion in spite of constant attempts by the rebels to subvert their loyalty by appealing to their tribal and family affiliations. In this latter context, according to Browne and Wilson, rumours were circulated that their women were being assaulted, carried off, or even killed. In coffee shops, cups used by Levy personnel were broken by other local customers.

By July, the Insurrection had become a real trial of strength between the insurgents and the British and Indian troops of the M.E.F.; the imperial troops were hard pressed in trying to contain the situation. The long lines of communication were vulnerable, railways tracks were torn up and trains derailed. A further example of the increasing confidence of the insurgents is evident in their successful attack on part of a column of the 2nd Battalion of the Manchester Regiment, sent to relieve Kifri, during the night of 25 July 1920. The debacle occurred during an ill-timed withdrawal, during which the Manchesters' casualties were 20 killed, 60 wounded, and 318 missing. Those of the insurgents are not known.

It is considered of value to discuss the views of Major Boyle on "his" Levies at this time, with regard to their possible performance in the operations. Boyle wrote a D.O.to Wilson on 17 June 1920.[29] Although Boyle was a Levy enthusiast, as a soldier he was a realist; this will be discerned in his following remarks.

> Memorandum Reference our conversation last night regarding my opinion as to reliability of Levies with reference to the present political situation.
>
> (1) It must be borne in mind that the Levies are very young troops and that their discipline is as yet but skin deep.
>
> (2) "Loyalty" to the British Government is non-existent—their Loyalty is to their B.Os so in this respect their reliability varies with the efficiency of their B.Os.
>
> (3) Generally speaking religion means nothing to them, and is only used as a means to a political end.
>
> (4) The men are essentially orientals and therefore want to be on the winning side—The sight of a few aeroplanes or Lambs supporting

[28] L/P&S/11/175, F.4.
[29] L/P&S/10/874, Fs.47-9.

them will have more influence on them than promises of God's pleasure and Heaven. ["Lambs" were light armoured motor batteries—in today's parlance, armoured cars, A/Cs.]

(5) I do not think that Sherifian propaganda, unless backed by hard cash, will have much effect on the Rank and File—We have most to fear from the effendi type of officer to whom the dreams of National Independence and greater personal power will appeal very much vide Sulaimaniyah Levy—Mosul Gendarmerie, where only 11 effendi officers remain out of the original 30 odd.

It must be borne in mine that each Arab Officer who becomes disloyal will be followed by such of the men as were in his "clique".

I append details of the Levies.*

Sgd. Captain H. Buck for Major, Inspecting Officer Arab and Kurdish Levies.

*Only extracts concerning composition and strengths of units, together with pertinent comments by Boyle are included.

2nd Euphrates Levy Hillah
with—Detachments at Diwaniyah and Abu-Sukhair

Composition:	Arabs: tribes 250, Towns 170 = 420)	Proportion
	Kurds 100)	Shia-Sunni
	Persians 20)	roughly 3:1

Possible sources of trouble

(a) Sherifian propaganda
(b) Religious propaganda emanating from Najaf, Karbala and Baghdad
(c) A mixture of (a) and (b)
(d) Tribal troubles in Diwaniyah Division.

In this, Boyle pointed out that the Levy was composed of widely differing elements of varied political ideals where, if any, existed. He reiterated his previous remarks on religious ideals: "except for political ends is conspicuous by its absence". He was concerned for the detachments: they were being isolated from the main body, and were susceptible to local intrigue. He proposed changing them every two months dependent upon barrack construction, "a lengthy business", and feeding arrangements. (Troops were used to build their own barrack accommodation—a false economy. Their time would have been better spent in training.)

His next concern was for the 3rd Euphrates Levy at Nasiriyeh. They were composed of 200 Muntafiq, a few Marsh Arabs and Nasiriyeh townsmen. Anticipated sources of trouble were similar to the above. However, he made a most interesting comment on another danger he foresaw in its composition: "...this Levy is in danger of becoming too definitely the 'Muntafiq Horse', and not in line with the other Levies...." It was a perfect example of an "established unit", acquiring its own identity (it will be remembered it had developed roots in 1915, as the "Nasiriyeh Arab Scouts", the N.A.S. under Major Eadie). They were later trained as cavalry under Major Dickson, and not as mounted infantry, the officially approved arm. It seems they acquired the *esprit de corps* of the "*arm blanche*" and, in so doing, had maintained their identity during the "Reconstitution". Boyle's response to this problem was to suggest that a squadron of Kurds be enlisted into that Levy, resorting to a bi-ethnic composition to break the tribal unity of the Arab element.

The Diyalah and Baqubah Levies were composed of 40 Arabs, 50 Kurds and 10 Kirkuklis. The anticipated main source of trouble was on the Kurdish border. Boyle added: "This force is very young and I think that the Commandant is doing everything he can to ensure the loyalty of his men". But to this end, the Marjana camp needed to be made more comfortable, with improved feeding arrangements.

The 2nd Tigris Levies, Kut, comprised 30 Arabs, 120 Kurds and 10 Kirkuklis. This unit, together with the Arbil Levy, composed of 200 Kurds and a few Christians. The latter force was considered too young to be relied on. Their Commandant, who was developing the unit on sound lines, was very popular with his men. Trouble could be expected from two sources: Kurdish nationalist propaganda and local trouble in Rowanduz.

The Gendarmeries were described as primarily District Police, "which they do well. It would be unreasonable to expect reliability of them in the event of serious operations". (The "Tel Afar" affair was an example.)

It would appear from this memorandum that the available fighting force of the Levies at the commencement of the Insurrection was approximately 1,200 men, excluding Gendarmerie, of which perhaps one-third were suspect with regard to loyalty and reliability.

It should be noted, especially with regard to the overall Levy strength, that Haldane in his book claimed that there were no "Railway Police".[30] (Perhaps for Police read Guards.)

At almost the same time that Boyle was briefing Wilson on the Levies, Haldane was briefing the War Office on them in a telegram dated 21 June 1920.[31] He stated that the disturbances in Mesopotamia were purely sporadic, but there were definite intrigues on the Upper Euphrates and in the Mosul Wilayat. Those responsible were members of the Young Arab Party, encouraged by Sharifian officers, subsidised possibly from Syria and in the Middle Euphrates, from Baghdad. He claimed the intrigues effectively worked on religious fanaticism, the seed of which had been sown to foster anti-British sentiments. He also felt that there was an understanding between young Arab Turkish Nationalists and the Bolsheviks.

Haldane claimed that he based his intelligence regarding the internal situation chiefly on Political Officers' opinions and, in areas where the threat of unrest was strong, on those of the Civil Commissioner. The latter had stated that "he was unable to place any limit upon the possible development of the present unrest". It was considered that it might become necessary to withdraw Political Officers from areas where the threat of disturbance was strong. The communication ended with a warning that the railway from Mosul to Baghdad could be cut at any time, and so reduce military efficiency.

The next affair to be discussed as relevant to the development of the Levies is the relief of the siege at Rumaythah, some 200 miles south of Hillah, and the same distance north-east of Basrah. It is important because it shows the strength and tenacity of the Arab insurgents, who opposed powerful relieving imperial columns three times, inflicting heavy casualties before the imperial troops broke through to the township. Levies were attached to these columns.[32]

The incident began with the arrest of a Shaikh of the Bani Huchaim by the Political Officer of Rumaythah, on 30 June 1920, for failing to repay an agricultural loan. The Shaikh was forcibly released by his tribesmen on the

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[30] Sir Aylmer L. Haldane, *The Insurrection in Mesopotamia, 1920* (London, 1922), p.13.
[31] L/P&S/10/874, F.65.
[32] AIR/5/1253, pp.5331-3.

same day. The success of the latter action kindled the flame of insurrection in the area of the Middle Euphrates, and duly spread to other parts of Mesopotamia. Haldane despatched 308 Indian troops with four British officers the same day, to restore order; but these troops were also invested in the township by 4 July, together with 153 railway staff, and 60 Indians. A final total of 527 (including the Political Officer) remained besieged, and had to be supplied by airdrops. Although the insurgents were bombed and strafed repeatedly by air, their determination remained firm.

The 1st Relief Force consisted of a mixed column of a cavalry squadron, a battalion of infantry, 30 Kurdish Levies, and a mountain battery section, under Lt.-Colonel McVean. On 7 July, from 3 to 5,000 Arab insurgents surrounded the column six miles from Rumaythah. McVean attempted to break through to relieve the township, but was forced to retire under cover of a dust storm. The insurgents harassed the column for 20 miles, until it reached the shelter of Imam Hamza on 8 July. Casualties were: killed, 1 British officer and 47 I.O.Rs; wounded, 1 British officer and 166 I.O.Rs. No mention is made of the Kurdish Levies.

Worthy of note is that the insurgents resisted these M.E.F. columns, although they were supported by artillery and air cover.

A second relief column was ready by 18 July, and concentrated at a point close to the railway, some 16 miles north-west of Ramaythah. This column comprised one cavalry squadron, one British and five Indian infantry battalions, one sapper and miner company, two machine-gun sections, one mountain battery, 1 howitzer battery and one R.F.A. battery. The column was commanded by Brigadier-General Coningham.

Because of having to repair an insurgent-damaged railway line, the column's advance was delayed until 19 July. At 1310 hours, the column attacked an estimated 5,000 insurgents, deployed in groups along a canal embankment, and another second line; both positions were directly across the relief column's intended line of advance. The insurgents repulsed the first attacked headed by the Sikhs and Mahrattas. At 1750 hours, the Gurkhas, supported by two guns of the R.F.A., plus a section of the machine-gun company, pressed another attack in an attempt to gain access to the river

before dark. It seems this also failed. British/Indian casualties were: killed, 2 B.Os, 32 I.O.Rs; wounded 2 B.Os, 150 I.O.Rs. Insurgents killed, 150.

Suffice to say the column had achieved little by nightfall; gun ammunition was by then low; the infantry, having fought after a 12-mile desert march, were short of water. However, on the following day (the 20th), the insurgent resistance was much less, and the Gurkhas were able to turn the insurgents' flank. This, coupled with further air attacks, caused the enemy to fall back. On the same day the cavalry entered Rumaythah. Although the besieged garrison had been relieved and evacuated, as the column withdrew towards Diwaniyah on 22 July, its rearguard was repeatedly attacked under cover of a dust storm. It reached Diwaniyah on the 25th.

The details of this operation show the ferocity and determination of the insurgents. Also, that the performance of the Levies originally besieged, and those in the relief columns, was not mentioned in this report. This practice, as previously discussed, may perhaps reflect Haldane and other regular offers' prejudice against irregulars in those early days of the Insurrection.

However, Boyle mentions this operation in an Administrative Report on the Arab and Kurdish Levies for the year 1920-21, dated 1 April 1921.[33] The report stated: "The Gallant Defence of the Levy Barracks at Abu-Sukhair and the story of the Levy operations with the columns detailed to relieve Rumaithah". This was fourth among five operations mentioned. Others were in greater detail. The total Levy casualties for the five affairs mentioned were: "107 killed and wounded, 5 officers and 10 other ranks were awarded the Medal of the British Empire, for gallantry and devotion to duty in the field". The Levies could not "shine" without a real opportunity. But the chance was soon to come, as will be seen shortly.

Briefly, by July, Haldane claimed he had committed the majority of his mobile reserve to the last operation. Four trains had been destroyed near Rumaythah. The railway was an essential element for operational supplies and its vulnerability was not lost on the insurgents. Dirt tracks were the only alternative. The situation was now getting out of hand.

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[33] CO 696/3, F.41.

Hillah, the training centre of the Levies, the township with its Jarbuiyah Bridge over the Hillah part of the Euphrates, was part of Haldane's defence scheme for Baghdad. A post had been constructed to protect the bridge and the railway line. The line from Hillah to Baghdad was unprotected through lack of troops, but the line from Diwaniyah to Hillah was partly guarded.

On the evening of 1 July 1920, the last ammunition train reached Hillah from Baghdad, but the enemy cut the line behind it the same night. On the 30th, a column of troops was ordered to evacuate Diwaniyah by rail for Hillah, and escort 1,120 railway staff, together with a large quantity of ammunition, and taking six days' rations. The insurgents harassed the column all the way, tearing up the track behind and in front of it, a mile or more at a time—slowing its progress to $5^{1}/2$ miles a day. The train consisted of 200 trucks and five engines. By the time it neared Hillah on 8 August, troops from the township went out to meet the column with a construction train to help repair the disrupted line, enabling the column to reach Hillah the next day.

The success of the delaying tactics of their brother insurgents on the column, encouraged the Albu Sultan tribe to rise, and they destroyed the line south of Hillah. On the night of 27/28 July, Hillah was attacked. Again on the night of 31 July/1 August, tribesmen broke into the town, but were driven out by the Rajputs. A second attack was made in considerable force by the enemy, who lost 149 men.

The aforementioned details are an extract from a long report by Haldane,[34] who does not mention that the Levies played any part in the defence of Hillah on the night of 31 July/1 August. There is also little mention in the War Diary of the 8th Rajputs,[35] with whom the Levies fought in defence of the town.

Major Boyle took part in the action, and by good fortune we have his report in the form of a D.O. to Wilson, from Hillah, dated 24 August 1920,[36] in which he stated:

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[34] AIR/5/1253, pp.5336-7.
[35] WO 95/5229, 1 August 1920.
[36] L/P&S/10/874, F.41-2.

Dear Colonel,

> Thank you very much for your wire re the discharged levies from Diwaniyah—it has had the desired effect. The levies here have justified all our aspirations of them. Their patrol work is most gallant. Since I have been here to date the total casualties are 11 killed and 22 wounded though many of the latter were mere scratches. I was with the levy picquet on the night 31 July/1st August during the attack on Hillah and we had to defend about 100 yards, from the river bank through the palm gardens to an Indian picquet on our right. The attack lasted three hours and the Levies fought very well indeed. At about 4 a.m. the enemy rushed the point at X and thus enfiladed both picquets. I saw the left of the Indian picquet beginning to go and we had two men on the right of our line hit. I got a bullet through the shorts which helped me to make up my mind so I gave the order to retire. The men retired in good order and there was no doubling. A counter attack by the 8th Rajputs at 5 a.m. regained the position. There were a good many enemy dead in front of our position.
>
> The chief point of interest was the fact that the enemy were chiefly Khafaja-Kiflawis and from Shamiyeh and some of the Levies were also from those tribes and towns. The enemy raised a shout "We are your relations (akhwal) why have you gone over to the infidels?" One of the Levies answers, "Ehua awlad ul levy wa talaqua kum" (We are the sons of the levy and have divorced you). This cry was taken up and turned into a "hausa" by the whole lot!...the Levies appear to have put up a good fight.
>
> Yours sincerely, C. Boyle.

This is the only first-hand report from a British officer who was fighting side-by-side with his Levy troops—and Boyle had been directly responsible for their training. It has therefore been quoted almost in full, as an important document on Levy field performance.

The Levies, from then on, earned considerable praise because of their well-demonstrated loyalty, especially from the senior officers commanding columns and Divisional Commanders.

While the pacification of Iraq continued, the India Office was compiling a memorandum on the latest information they had on the Levies; no doubt because Haldane's complaints of having insufficient troops, and the Inspection Reports of General Wauchope would by then (July 1920) have filtered through to them,. In the same month, the Levy Adjutant, Major

Channing Pearce, on leave in London, received a memorandum from the India Office on 23 July 1920,[37] to be returned with his comments.

Only a few points on the then current strength of the Levies are worthy of note, because most of their memoranda comprised the "Reconstitution of the Levies", which has already been discussed. There were a number of mathematical errors in the strengths of individual units, and attention is drawn to these here. The procedures for the use of the Levies by P.Os had not perceptibly changed.

At the time of General Wauchope's inspection in April, already discussed, he recorded the total Levy force as follows. It is included for comparison with the "proposed" strengths for the force.

General Wauchope's Figures

Nomenclature:	Mounted	Foot	Combined
Levies, Mounted &Infantry	1,900	750	2,650
Gendarmerie	500	900	1,400
Totals: Mounted and Foot	2,400	1,650	4,050

((£) This figure may have excluded the "District Police".)

There were three points of interest in the memorandum. The first, the proposed strength for the Force, is as follows:

> The "corrected" Grand Total was: 6,520.
> In Addition: 1,500 Railway Levies - Under Consideration
> The Approximate "possible": Total Strength of all Ranks: 8,000.

Secondly, Channing Pearce acknowledged, it had proved impossible for the Striking Forces to carry out the projected training period"

> Actually, owing to the political situation, little opportunity has occurred to give practical effect to this scheme: e.g. the 1st Euphrates Levy has been actively engaged to have time for intensive training or opportunity to pass on its police duties, which it will (like the 2nd Euphrates Levy) eventually shed, to the Dulaim Gendarmerie.

and,

> Similarly in the Mosul and Sulaimaniyah Divisions it has been decided to leave things as they are till April 1921 at any rate.

Thirdly, there was a proposal regarding the Levy Striking Forces,

[37] L/P&S/10/874, Fs.52-7.

> (to which should be added, as part of the Arab forces of the country, the district police which will continue to perform many of the duties hitherto executed by the original levies).

This bracketed statement indicated the possibility of using the Arab Levies as a nucleus for a future Iraqi National Army.

Both the India Office and the deliberations of the War Office were appraising the Mesopotamian situation. This was made apparent in their letter to the Under-Secretary of State for India, dated 22 July 1920,[38] which stated: "They must ask Mr. Montagu whether he is confident that the local policy pursued by the Political Staff in Mesopotamia, is such as to minimise the chance of the repetition of such practical demonstrations of Arab discontent". This was also, perhaps, an indication that the War Office had not forgotten nor forgiven Wilson for his intervention in Haldane's absence in Persia, after the Tel Afar affair. There was also further anti-Wilson innuendo in the letter:

> ...they would ask Mr. Montagu whether he is satisfied with the system adopted by the Political Staff in Mesopotamia is sufficiently elastic to enable local political officers to give timely information and assistance to the nearest military commander.

In the context of the Levy situation being reviewed in London, Wilson telegraphed the Secretary of State for India on 30 July 1920.[39] Firstly, he pointed out that recruiting was difficult because of other attractive forms of employment, and the Arab dislike for discipline. There was also the fear of associating with a government whose tenure might be short-lived. "The difficulties in obtaining equipment.... In these matters we have received little assistance from the military authorities who, until Armistice, viewed growth of Levies with disapproval for obvious reasons." This last remark may have referred to the battle of Shaiba, 12-14 Aril 1915, which showed the Arabs in a bad light as allies, as previously discussed.

Wilson accepted that the Levies lacked tradition and experience on which to build. There was a reluctance of locally-enlisted men to leave their homes. Finally, Arab officers of good family status were almost uniformly unsatisfactory. Those promoted from the ranks did well—but they took time to train and gain experience in leadership.

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[38] Cab.24/109, F.478.
[39] L/P&S/10/874, F.50.

Wilson felt most of the factors listed would continue to operate for some time. He also feared that an Arab force could be used politically. In support of which contention, he cited the arrest of Yaisin Pasha in Syria, prior to his attempt at a *"coup d'état"*. His final comments were: "I find it almost impossible to imagine local Arab army in Mesopotamia would be of value for purposes of offensive against Turks or Kurds who have infinitely better material to draw on" (sic). In this observation, Wilson perhaps realised that if a National Iraqi Army was created, then local politics would not allow British officers executive commands, and this was the inherent strength of the Levies.

While the future of the Levies was pondered in London, the Force continued to give valuable assistance to the M.E.F. in quelling the remaining unrest. A final example of the operations in which the Levies were engaged was connected with the siege of Kufah.

A column of troops from Diwaniyah, on reaching Hillah, were then despatched to relieve a siege at Kufah, in which a squadron of the 2nd Euphrates Levy, under the command of Lieut. F.J. McWhinnie and Lieut. Matthews, had been joined by another Levy detachment, which had escaped from Abu Sukhair. Together, these Levies then formed part of the besieged garrison at Kufah. This siege lasted 90 days before relief on 17 October 1920, during which time the Levies were forced to eat their mules. A difficult decision for the senior officer, because without animal transport, had the chance occurred for the Levies to break out, they would not have been able to carry sufficient ammunition with which to fight if attacked again. Their casualties were five killed and fifteen wounded in the siege.

There are several other recorded operations, some of which were quite serious, but those discussed should suffice to explain Haldane's reluctant, but favourable change of heart on the value of the Levies. In his letter to the War Office dated 25 September 1920,[40] his last paragraph stated: "Mr. Levy has done well in several instances, and if Arab-speaking British officers can be procured, good progress could quickly be made in augmenting the force". Also in his book,[41] he stated,

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[40] Cab 24/116, F.59.
[41] Haldane, *The Insurrection in Mesopotamia, 1920*, op.cit., p.302.

> I think in all fairness it may be said that in the annals of the British Empire no young force, a force in this case of only a few months' standing, has ever passed through so high a trial. Deserters there were a few, for everywhere men of mean spirit will be found; but when the temptations to which the Levies were daily subjected, and which almost passed endurance, are weighted against those of them who proved faithless, the number is insignificant.

It would appear from all the available independent records, that the Levies had given an excellent account of themselves, with inadequate training, arms and equipment. Their casualties during the revolt were 107, of which 73 were killed. Awards of British Empire Medals for gallantry were 15.

Wilson also joined Haldane in high praise for his force, and gave generous and well-earned praise to Major Boyle and his qualities of leadership, in a telegram to the Secretary of State for India on 5 September 1920,[42] when the Insurrection was all but over, and stated:

> I continue to receive most satisfactory reports from Hillah Nasiriyeh and elsewhere as to behaviour of Arab Levies and Police wherever they are employed with and under their own British officers whom they know. In Hillah in particular they have done most enterprising and gallant work at heavy cost in killed and wounded against their own people, in spite of every temptation and appeal to their tribal, family and religious feelings, thanks largely to the personality of Major Boyle, Inspecting Officer of Levies who has a remarkable hold on them.

Indeed, Boyle had done more than well to get so much out of the new Levy Striking Force. Their only arms were a rifle and bayonet and, as has been discussed the promised six months training—free of other duties—never materialised; they were thrown into battle wherever the need arose. Shahraban, was a fine example, where a British officer and sergeant-major fought side by side with their Levies, and died together with 35 of them. A story as good as many told of gallant stands made by detachments in the British army.

A suitable extract on which to end the considerable praise the Levies had earned among the senior British officers during the hostilities, was sent by Major-General Saunders, Commander 17th Division, to the 2nd Euphrates Levy on 9 February 1921, stating:[43] "The highest praise I can give is that

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[42] L/P&S/10/874, F.44.
[43] CO 696/3, F.Nil, p.18.

whenever a Column Commander has been considering the force to take out he has always said, 'Let me have some Levies with me'".

By October, hostilities were at an end in Iraq, and on 4 October 1920 Sir Arnold Wilson restored the office of Civil Commissioner to Sir Percy Cox, the permanent incumbent, for whom he had acted over the past two-and-a-half years, and went on leave. Cox would have needed some time to reacquaint himself with the detail of the much larger Administration than the one he had left. The tasks before him were forming a Council of local Ministers, with British advisers, and the creation of an Iraq civil service for the future.

As far back as 16 June 1920, at a departmental conference on Middle East affairs,[44] chaired by Curzon, the tide had begun to turn against Wilson. Curzon referred to:

> ...an unpleasant impression of Colonel Wilson's incapacity to deal with the situation. He must ask the Secretary of State for India to say whether he considered that the policy on which they were in perfect agreement, and which they would have to defend against a powerful attack in the Cabinet on the following day, as likely to be carried into effect so long as Sir Arnold Wilson remained control in Mesopotamia.

An extract from Montagu's reply stated:

> ...he had never held the view that Colonel Wilson, with his marked inclination to concentrate power in his own hands, could fairly be asked to carry out the policy of His Majesty's Government in Mesopotamia.

The latter statement supports the writer's contention that some of the administrative problems in the Levies could have been caused by Wilson's failure to delegate, or to ask for G.H.Q's help, for fear of losing his direct control.

In late November Montagu sent a paper relating to War Gratuities to Earl Winterton,[45] a matter the earl had previously raised with the Secretary of State for India. The document concerned the rules regarding "Grant of Gratuities" to the inhabitants of Iraq killed or injured while in government employment. In brief, Political Officers and Heads of Departments were

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[44] FO.371/5227, F.52.
[45] L/P&S/10/874, F.25.

authorised to pay gratuities admissible under this regulation on the certificate of a medical officer, duly appointed, up to a limit of Rs.1,000. Claims for gratuities amounting to over Rs.1,000 required the sanction of government prior to payment.

An example of this order in practice is found in an Administrative Circular dated 11 November 1920,[46] detailing the compensation for death awarded to the dependants of some of the Levies killed in action.

2nd Euphrates Levy, Hillah

One	Zabit	Rs.1,000
One	Ombashi	Rs.1,000
Four	Ombashies	Rs.500 each
One	Nafar	Rs.700
Eight	Nafars	Rs.500 each
One	Sowar	Rs.500

Another example of the British government's wish to administer Iraq "on the cheap" is plainly manifest; "death" being considered equal to one year's service, and recompense based on the rank to which it applied.

Another issue of interest concerning the Levies was raised by Colonel Yate (retd.), MP, in a letter in parliament dated 20 November 1920,[47] to the Secretary of State for India concerning the Assyrians (then not yet serving in the Levies).

Yate wanted to know if levy recruits were being taken from the "Chaldeans or Ba'quba Refugees", because he understood they had furnished two battalions which did excellent service in Kurdistan (two "Urmia Battalions" resuscitated by the British, as discussed). Yate had mixed up the refugee Assyrian Nestorians from Urmia with the Mosul Chaldeans. Montagu's secretary explained, "There are certain Assyrian Nestorians who were refugees at Baqubah and are being repatriated to their homes in the Urmia District". Also, that none of these had been enlisted as permanent levies. (Meaning that those who fought in Kurdistan were employed directly by the M.E.F., as previously explained.)

The letter ended:

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[46] I.O. L/P&S/10/874, F.25.
[47] L/P&S/10/874, F.18.

> As far as the Assyrian refugees are concerned, these are all being repatriated to their country at their own wish, and the fighting members of the race are required to act as protectors to the others on the journey and on arrival.

The content of the last paragraph was in part true; but the attempt by the Assyrians to return had failed, owing to the winter conditions and disagreements between the tribes. Nevertheless, Yate's query excited the imagination of Montagu (Secretary of State for India) when his approval was sought for answering Yate's queries. His reply was: "I agree. But the Mosul Chaldeans are not going away and never were. Ought we not to suggest their further recruitment? Would it not be worthwhile to make sure?"[48]

Yate's question had provoked a minute[49] to Shuckburgh from a member of staff (signature illegible), extract as follows:

> Prima facie, Col. Yate's suggestion is a good one, now that the Assyrians have failed to repatriate themselves. Both hillmen and plainsmen have given a good account of themselves in recent fighting against Kurds and Arabs. In fact for the purpose of fighting Kurds, they are an adequately bloodthirsty body of Christians. They are however Christians. How far then would it suit the National Arab Government to enlist "Kurdish" (as opposed to "Arab") Christians?
>
> There is not much justification for conscripting them. And if conscription is to be adopted, it does not seem probable that the National Government will be prepared to pay considerable sums of money in wages to alien Christian mercenaries. If H.M.G. were seriously running the country, it would be a different matter.

The minute continued:

> With regard to S. of S. (for India) minute. Mosul Chaldiens are employed in levies where they wish to be. But very few recruits have come from them, and are distinctly bad. If however the Government orders conscription, no doubt a percentage of men will be conscripted from the Mosul Chaldiens.
>
> It is suggested that the official letter submitted should issue it seems, the purpose of an enquiry: (a) whether the Assyrians can be used in any way for Levies, and (b) how the matter of levies in general is proceeding.
>
> Initials not legible. Dated 30 November 1920.

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[48] L/P&S/10/874, F.12.
[49] L/P&S/10/874, F.10.

These queries concerning the Assyrians as prospective Levy manpower almost coincided with events in Iraq, for on 20 November Cox telegraphed Montagu,[50] to state:

> I have reason to (suspect that?) French Government is about to ask that Assyrians be invited to settle between Marden and Jazirah and it is rumoured that certain Assyrian leaders have been heavily bribed to secure their consent. [Sic.]

Cox also understood that the French would bear all the costs of the scheme and guaranteed to arrange matters to the satisfaction of both Kurds and Assyrians. Finally, Cox required to know urgently what were the wishes of the British government concerning this move, should it develop further.

From this it would appear that the French were thinking of inserting a Christian minority of proven fighting ability into their newly-mandated territory of Syria, perhaps to try to increase the Christian minority element; which, in turn, might be relied upon to support their mandatory power.

It will be seen that the need to recruit Assyrians for the Levies would be confirmed in April next year, at the Cairo Conference. In the meantime, serious Levy deficiencies in strength were being experienced. This was highlighted in a telegram from Cox to the Secretary of State for India, dated 1 February 1921,[51] in which he pointed out a shortage of Levies created by their taking over garrisoning the Euphrates Railway from the M.E.F.; and that therefore the need to recruit up to "sanctioned strength of 5,000". This appears a low figure when compared with previous prognostications. Also, the immediate strength of British officers was inadequate.

However Cox mentioned in a second telegram[52] that there was a "scheme" for the progressive reduction of British officers "from the end of the first year". This he felt could be met by short-term contracts of one or two years. For the future, it would be necessary to retain fourteen of these officers on three-year contracts, perhaps longer, or the "right type" would be difficult to secure.

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[50] L/P&S/10/874, F.9.
[51] L/P&S/10/874, F.5.
[52] Ibid.

Sir Arthur Hertzel backed this request to the War Officer by a letter on 14 February 1921[53] in which he pointed out that unless the requirement was quickly met the development of the Levy Force would be retarded. This, in turn, would mean that the withdrawal of British regular troops would be correspondingly delayed.

In the middle of February 1921, a minute indicated that a telegram was sent to Cox by Montagu[54] stating:

> Possibility of recruiting levies from Assyrian refugees. Should be glad of your comments early. You will of course take into account urgent necessity of disposing of these refugees and of extreme reluctance of H.M.G. to incur unproductive expenditure on them any longer. (Sic.)

The position with regard to the future of the Levies was daily becoming more important, but, as may be deduced from these telegrams and various minutes, it remained an unplanned evolvement. A government was to be established in Iraq, and it would require a nucleus of trained men from the Levies with which to establish a National Army. It was evident from the recent insurrection that the mandatory power would have to ensure internal security until the National Army could assume the role. If the Levy strength was depleted by providing men for the proposed National Army, from where could good manpower material be found with which to rebuild the Levy's depleted strength? By good fortune, the attempt by a large number of the Assyrians to repatriate themselves to their homelands in the Hakkiari, was frustrated by bad weather and inter-tribal disagreements.

The Levies had done well in fighting the Kurds with the imperial troops of the M.E.F. in 1919. Now, in 1921, they represented the best possible manpower pool, if H.M.G. could entice them to enlist. It was also an opportunity for the British Treasury to see a return on the money expended in "maintaining unproductive refugees". If the opportunity was not taken, together with the urgent recruitment of British Arabic-speaking officers to serve with the Levies, then delay in British demobilisation was inevitable.

The tumultuous year of 1920 had come to an end; the "Insurrection" had been a serious setback for the British government's thinking on

[53] L/P&S/10/874, F.3.
[54] L/P&S/10/874, F.6.

maintaining security and influence throughout the region at the least possible cost to the Treasury. Although the insurgents' fighting was mainly conducted by the tribes, their scattered forces had contained an organised army infinitely its superior in equipment.

The Arab irregulars had directed their main effort against highly vulnerable British lines of communication. Their adopted tactic was a succession of violent local actions. As soon as the first failed, it was immediately followed by another, rather than a concerted attack by one striking force. Thus they were able to compel the M.E.F. to be extensively reinforced from India, thus taxing that country's military resources to the utmost. British air support had been considerable, and at one point doubled. Haldane had telegraphed for permission to use gas on 18 August 1920,[55] this was refused.

The main military characteristics of the irregular Arab insurgents had been:

a) The employment of loose, irregular formations, with great mobility.
b) Independence of an organised supply system, and freedom in maintaining one.
c) Inability to concentrate an army in the field, but able to maintain a local force engaged for an adequate period, and to move it quickly out of its local zone of operations.

The heads of the services had to seek an answer to these problems, with the least possible cost to the British exchequer.

The Arab and Kurdish insurrections had provided the War Office with perturbing experiences, but they also created an excellent opening for the air force, in proving the latter's cheaper and far superior mobility. This situation had been pre-empted by Trenchard in a paper mentioned in the first page of this chapter. His counter-proposals showed that the air force was desperately fighting to maintain its independence as a third service under an air ministry. This was receiving opposition from the navy and army, who wished to return to the pre-war status quo when British military aviation was divided between two separate services, the Royal Navy and the Army—the "Royal Naval Air Service" (R.N.A.S.) and the "Royal Flying Corps" (R.F.C.). Trenchard's plan

[55] FO 371/5229, F.20.

prevailed, not only for Iraq, but for Britain's colonial security commitments in general. During the Arab Insurrection air power had pointed the way by maintaining communications, carrying out punitive operations and by breaking up the grouping of irregular fighters and raiding by tribesmen.

Perhaps the most important recommendations in the debate on the future control and defence policy for Mesopotamia, by the man who would implement it, was contained in a Memorandum of 1 May 1920 by Churchill,[56] previously touched on in the first page of this chapter. He stated:

> In my opinion, we should start on the control and development of Mesopotamia from an entirely different point of view. We should hand the country over immediately to a Department of State which has real knowledge and experience of the administration and development of these wild countries, which is accustomed to improvisations and makeshifts, which is accustomed to measure the territory it occupies by the amount of force at its disposal, and to measure the amount of force at its disposal by the exiguous funds entrusted to it.

Churchill continued:

> In the second place, I recommend...as soon as the administration of Mesopotamia is transferred to the Colonial Office I shall be given full authority to arrange with them (War Office and Air Ministry) the scale of the garrison in accordance with the policy decided on, and the grant-in-aid, and subject to Cabinet approval of a detailed scheme I shall be entitled to transfer the military responsibility for sustaining the policy of Colonial Office from the War Office to the Air Ministry, and to take the necessary steps to form the additional air forces required and generally give directions which will result in the effective diminution even during the current financial year of the enormous forces and charges now involved.

However, all these political and economic strategies were still in the planning stage. In reality, during December 1920, the imperial forces in Mesopotamia and Persia amounted to 17,000 British and 85,000 Indian troops, the annual cost of which to the British taxpayer was well over £30million. A Memorandum prepared by the Director of Military Operations (D.M.O.) and concurred by the C.I.G.S., had been circulated to the Cabinet by the Secretary of State for War on 10 December 1920.[57] The document concerned problems encountered by the imperial command in Iraq during the

[56] Cab 24/206, F.67, pp.1-3.
[57] Cab 24/116, F.272, pp.1-2.

Arab Insurrection, and the reasons for the length of time it took the G.O.C.-in-C. to put it down. Extracts from this document stated:

> ...it is clear that we ran things too fine and that a great disaster was only narrowly avoided...and General Haldane is at present under orders to reduce his force by 1st April 1921, to the same dimensions as it was before the reinforcements arrived from India.

and,

> Under the most favourable circumstances, the minimum garrison required for Mesopotamia, during 1921-22, will be the equivalent of three divisions and 6 cavalry regiments, or approximately 15,000 British and 65,000 Indian troops.

This was on the basis of withdrawing British forces from Persia.

Throughout the early part of 1921, there was a series of government departmental meetings concerning Mesopotamia and its security. These discussions covered many issues, but only those directly relating to the Levies will be considered here. The appointment of Churchill to the Colonial Office was confirmed early in 1921, and the setting up of a new "Middle East Department" within the Colonial Office, to concentrate the existing responsibilities of the War Office, Foreign Office, India Office and Colonial Office in a single department for the region, took effect from 1 March 1921. The essential part of Churchill's brief was to co-ordinate government policy in Palestine, Mesopotamia and Arabia, and to effect substantial cuts in military expenditure throughout the Middle East.

The Cabinet decided to hold a Middle East conference in Cairo between 12 and 30 March 1921. The discussions on Mesopotamia were recorded under Section 2 of a document printed in April 1921,[58] which presented the main Mesopotamian agenda due for discussion by two committees: a Political Committee, presided over by the Secretary of State, and a Military and Financial Committee, presided over by Sir Walter Congreave. Those matters concerning the Levies will be discussed in general terms only because so many of the deliberations of the subcommittees failed to come to fruition in the way they prescribed.

[58] FO 371/6350, F.167, no.2.

The estimated saving (including Palestine) was £5million for 1921-22. This was considered by the Secretary of State to be insufficient on 15 March.[59] The document stated:

> The savings resulting from the immediate reductions now arranged are only estimated by Mr. Crossland to amount to five millions. This is quite insufficient. It is therefore, indispensable to consider now the second stage of reduction this year. This stage will begin on the 1st October, assuming that a further review of the situation in September renders it possible.

The Cairo Conference indulged in much prognostication, and this is but one example in support of the statement that many failed to come to fruition.

The Conference decided that political conditions in Iraq were best served by the selection of a Sharifian ruler; and that the most suitable candidate was the Amir Feisal—on the assumption that the Amir would be successfully elected by the people of Iraq.

A scheme for the "control of Mesopotamia" by the RAF was submitted by the Chief of Air Staff,[60] and approved in principle by the Conference. When brought into operation, the imperial garrison would eventually be reduced to "1 Brigade and 1 Pack Battery". The alternative was "12 Infantry Battalions, 1 Cavalry regiment, 1 Field Battery, 1 Pack Battery, 1 Sapper and Miner company and five Squadrons of the R.A.F." (increased to six squadrons under the RAF scheme). The G.O.C.-in-C. would remain in command until the air force was in a position to take over.

Concerning policy in Kurdistan, and having regard for Article 62 of the Treaty of Sèvres, southern Kurdistan had hitherto not been brought under the Provisional Government of Mesopotamia. It was further considered that any attempt to force Kurdish districts under Arab rule would meet with their resistance. Therefore Kurdistan would be directly under the High Commissioner, separate from Iraq, He would be empowered to recruit Kurdish units, under British officers, as an "improvised force" (later referred to as a "Kurdish Frontier Force" in their discussions). This force was

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[59] AIR/5/555, F.8A.
[60] Cab 24/126, F.120.

considered more suitable to take over from the British than an Arab army, officered by Arabs, in that region.

It was recognised that the existing force of Arab Levies under British officers, must, for the present, remain in existence, though political considerations demanded that measures should at the same time be adopted for the raising of a purely Arab army. It was accordingly decided that the existing Arab Levies should be expanded by the addition of Kurdish and Assyrian units. By this means it was intended to effect the early withdrawal of the imperial garrisons in Kirkuk and other frontier districts. Speed and efficiency were the object of the arrangement and it was anticipated that as the contemplated Arab army grew and became capable of taking over the whole country the Levy organisation, except in Kurdistan, would gradually disappear. The cost of Levy organisation would be borne by the Colonial Office, subject to a possible contribution by the Mesopotamian government.

When Cox was chairing a subcommittee meeting concerning a National Army in Iraq, he received a telegram (no date) from the P.O. Mosul, stating,[61] "the menace from Turkey has by no means ceased to exist". The P.O. contemplated with grave concern the withdrawal of the Mosul-British outposts in two months time. The committee considered that a senior officer should be sent to report on the situation. This troubled frontier was but one of the subsequent problems which had considerable adverse effects on the decisions taken. It has therefore been considered best only to discuss decisions affecting the Levies, as they occurred after the conference in order to avoid confusion.

On the question of an Arab army, a scheme was formulated "...for raising a nucleus army of 5,000 men, officered entirely by Arab officers with British inspectors, to be recruited within a year from date of permission being given, to start recruiting". Also it was hoped that if recruiting started by 1 April 1921, it might be possible to have 4,000 troops ready to take over the Kirkuk area on 1 October the same year. However, it was not mentioned that by this decision, the Levies would lose almost all their trained Arab troops to the army.

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[61] Cab 24/126, F.149.

The cost of the Arab army would be borne entirely by Mesopotamian revenues, and would constitute for 1921-22 the contribution of that government towards the cost of Mesopotamian defence. It was pointed out that as the proposed National Arab Army would be raised by voluntary enlistment, the pay of both the army and Levies should therefore be similar.

In connection with the RAF scheme for the control of Iraq, the Conference also considered the opportunities it would provide. These were; the vital necessity of training the RAF for possible war requirements; the importance of testing the potentialities of the air force; and the need to provide superior officers and staffs with the experience of independent command and responsibility. It would also afford the opportunity for an all-British military and commercial air route to India.

Finally, in the context of possible Levy manpower resources, the Conference discussed the Assyrian refugees, who had been warned by Cox that no funds were available for their maintenance during the financial year 1921-22, and that their refugee camps would be closed down on 1 April 1921.

The Assyrians fell into two main categories: plainsmen (Urmians), and mountaineers (mostly ex-Hakkiari). Some Urmians had attempted self-repatriation, approved by the British, and had failed (discussed on p.137). It was considered there was no prospect of them being received by the USA, or by the French in Syria (ignoring the warning by Cox of French overtures to the Assyrians on p.137 of this chapter); nor could they be absorbed into the local Mesopotamian population. The Conference decided

> ...there was no alternative but to give the Assyrians some arms for personal protection, and turn them out to make their way back to their own country. A small number might possibly be assisted by American charity, and some might enlist in the "new levies".

On the other hand, the "mountaineers", it was recommended, should be

> ...settled locally in conjunction with the new levy scheme. It was proposed that a few Assyrian companies should be raised under British officers and distributed along the frontier, in localities where there appeared to be reasonable prospects of small Assyrian communities being settled down.

It was anticipated that this involved a "maximum expenditure of £200,000". The sum was to provide them with agricultural implements, and items such as seed. The Conference recommended that this should be done, and the cost included in the grant-in-aid to Mesopotamia.

Other, more important issues relating to the future of the Levies, were discussed at another subcommittee on 19 March.[62] Cox was again chairman. Members were: Major-Generals Ironside and Ja'afar Pasha, Lt.-Colonel Slater and Major Eadie.

The Committee considered the accommodation required for the new Levy Force; they anticipated little expenditure, provided that any Turkish military buildings in Levy areas were handed over to them as soon as possible.

The new Levy establishment would amount to 5,000, plus 30 British officers and 15 British N.C.Os (considerably less than the previous estimate of 8,000. The question, with or without the District Police?).

DISTRIBUTION OF NEW LEVY FORCE

Rowanduz	3 companies	
Erbil	1 squadron	*
Kirkuk	2 battalions	)Doubled unless
	1 regiment cavalry	)reinforced within
	1 battery	)7 days
	**1 section of lambs	
Mosul	2 companies Akra	
	2 companies Dohuk	
	2 companies Zakho	
Reserve	2 companies	
Tel Afar	2 squadrons cavalry	
	2 guns, pack battery	
Totals	19 companies infantry	
	6 squadrons	

Companies at 200 Two officers per battery

* It remains unclear from where these troops were to come; perhaps from the imperial garrison.
** "Lambs" are armoured cars, but there is no evidence that the Levies ever received armoured cars.

[62] Cab 24/126, p.64.

The cost of the Force was estimated annually at "about 70 lakhs". The existing force of 2,500 (it is assumed meaning the "Striking Forces) would be amalgamated with the new Force above, at an estimated cost of 40 lakhs. This indicated that the District Police and Gendarmerie would no longer form part of the Levies. the total cost for the new Levy Force would be 110 lakhs, "approximately £750,000, replacing a British force costing far more". It will be noted that the "New Levy Force" had two important changes: the mounted infantry had been replaced by cavalry, and armoured cars were under consideration. (Subject to correct nomenclature.)

At another meeting immediately following the one above, Cox undertook to accept "...the withdrawal of the existing British detachments from four Mosul outposts, and replace them by levies", dependent on the "removal of Turkish hostility and menace", which had been the subject of a series of discussions in London.

It should be noted that the Cairo Conference had consisted of between 40 and 50 committee meetings, held between 12 and 24 March 1924. Much of the detail then contemplated was later changed due to unforeseen political and economic factors – not uncommon to the Middle East. Planning was one thing, implementation quite another.

Reappraisals and clarifications continued by telegraph. In one such document from Cox to Churchill on 20 May[63] (in this context it will be recalled that Col.-Commandant Sanders, on the staff of Haldane, "administered" the Levies until July 1921), Cox stated that he had been on a local tour, and after consultation with the G.O.C.-in-C. (Haldane) and the local P.Os, Sanders had submitted a detailed scheme for the organisation and distribution of the New Levy Force, claiming that it was in accord with decisions taken at the Cairo Conference. It entailed raising the Levy establishment to 60 officers (assume British and local), and 7,500 men at an estimated cost of £1 million per annum.

The suggested distribution of these troops was: "(a) Euphrates (Nasiriyeh to Hit) 3,150. (b) Mosul out-posts 2,400. (c) Kirkuk area 950. (d)

[63] FO 371/6351, F.24.

Sulaimani area 1,000. Total 7,500" (plus 60 officers). This presupposed Mosul and Kirkuk were garrisoned by British troops.

As to (d) Cox commented that the substitution of levies for British garrisons at Kirkuk and Mosul would be the next phase. Therefore, either 900 additional temporary levies must be raised to relieve Kirkuk, or it was necessary to wait until that number was made available by the relief of the Levy garrison on the Euphrates by the "Arab army". When the time came for relief, the same alternative would arise. Numbers required for the Mosul garrison would be 1,600.

When the Levy garrison on the Euphrates had been relieved by the Arab army, 2,400 to Mosul outposts, 1,600 to the Mosul garrison, 950 to the Kirkuk garrison, and also over 1,000 to Sulaimani omitted, a total of 6,850 would be required until the Arab army became sufficiently effective to take over the Mosul garrison and outposts. This would continue to be the accepted strength. Cox continued:

> I think you will recognise that from a military point of view, it would be a totally unsound arrangement for Levy detachments, manning difficult Mosul outposts, to be based upon an Arab army garrison at Mosul, or vice versa.

Cox further stated that his proposals would fall within the estimated expenditure of £1million, and added:

> I am of the opinion time has been lost owing chiefly to the fact that refugee policy remains undefined, the closure of the Minden camp has not been affected, and Assyrians will not come while they are fed by Government and can dream of repatriation. Unless immediate action is taken, I am convinced that already the most difficult task of carrying into effect the Cairo recommendations, will become impossible.

and:

> I have therefore in anticipation, approved detailed scheme...and have sent sanction and instructed Colonel-Commandant Sanders to proceed therewith. As regards details and recruitment of officers, I will address you separately.

Subsequently, it should be realised that there were to be many misunderstandings between London and Baghdad. These emerged as early as

May, and can be seen in a telegram from Churchill to Cox of 25 May 1921,[64] covering a number of issues. It appears that Cox had thought that the Levies would substitute the imperial garrisons at Mosul and Kirkuk. Churchill stated that this was not contemplated at Cairo, but that, "...areas falling within the Arab State of Iraq, should never be garrisoned by Kurdish or Assyrian units". Churchill had assumed that "...all posts that will be eventually taken over by the Arab Army, will be garrisoned either by British troops or by Arab levies until they can be handed over.

Further, Churchill understood that Tel Afar and Mosul, and possibly Kirkuk, "should remain within the Arab sphere, while Suleimaneiyah, the Kirkuk area, and the Kurdish outposts of Mosul, should be permanently garrisoned by Assyrian and Kurdish levies", and pointed out that if this had been the intention, then the levies at Acra, Zakho and Dohuk should be supported by the Arab army at Mosul. The question of Kirkuk had not been finally decided, and Churchill wanted to know if Cox felt that "...Kirkuk should be treated as part of Mesopotamia, or as part of Kurdistan?".

In this last context, Churchill clarified the principle that:

> (a) In a post which is eventually to be garrisoned by Arabs, no Kurdish force should relieve British troops. (b) In a post which is eventually to be garrisoned by Kurds or Assyrians no Arab force should relieve British troops. (c) Unless it is quite certain that their formation will entail a net reduction in the military expenditure during this financial year no additional Arab or Kurdish levies beyond those contemplated at Cairo should be raised.

After the proposals made in Cairo, recruiting of Assyrians from among the refugees had commenced in August 1921 at Minden refugee camp. At first, the endeavours of recruiting officers met reluctance by the Assyrians to come forward. To a certain extent this was overcome by the intervention and eloquence of the missionary, Dr. Wigram.[65]

The Cairo Conference decisions were not quite so easy to implement as they perhaps had seemed while sitting round tables in Cairo. It appeared that the time required to recruit men (assuming they were prepared to enlist), kit them out, and give them basic training, had not been taken into account,

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[64] FO 371/6351, F.26.
[65] See Biographical Sketches.

nor had the fact that British Officers and N.C.O.s and the necessary stores would be needed. The urgent need to cut expenditure is understood, but, not for the first time, matters had not been thought through in detail.

The situation in Iraq in 1921 remained unstable, and the punishment of rebellious tribes had continued by way of punitive operations, which involved the existing Levies. Also, another Kurdish rising in July to some extent incited by the Turks, involved the Levies in conjunction with the RAF in putting down what could have been a most serious conflagration. This is made clear in the following reports.[66]

One such action is described in detail in a long report from Major Goldsmith, P.O. Kirkuk, dated 20 August 1921. It informed Cox that the object of the expedition was to destroy the villages of Batas, Harir, Karwaian and Bawiyan; the villages of Golan and Burgunga had been burnt. The Lashkar had been fed from village grain (in emergencies it was official practice to call upon friendly tribal chiefs to raise a "lashkar" or "contingent"). The villages were empty, the inhabitants being afraid of the bombing, even though they had not taken part in the Insurrection. They were told to return to their homes. The Lashkar and Levies returned to Bania; the former dispersed.

Batwata had been bombed for five days and reported empty. It was assumed that the villagers had fled to the local mountains. Goldsmith was reluctant to let the Levies return to sack the village in case they were fired upon; and in the event of their retiring, it might be twisted by rumour, or interpreted as a defeat of government troops. On the 17th, when Derbend and Rania were practically empty of fighting men, the Levy force, having marched up the Shawr valley, had caused the local Pishdur under Saleh Hamid Agha and Baiz Agha to form a Lashkar to march on Rania to sack the place. But the timely arrival of planes demonstrating over them, made them alter their minds and they dispersed at once in all directions. Some of them even went so far as to come in to offer themselves to fight for the government.

> Babekr Agha received news yesterday, that the Mangur over the Persian Border were forming a Lashkar which could only be for two reasons: (a) To attack Babekr's Summer quarters at Kailin or (b) To come over the border and attack Kaler Diza. Throughout the

[66] These reports are on file in AIR 5/1253, no folio numbers.

> disturbances here the aeroplanes have been most successful, it is astonishing how frightened the tribesmen are of them.

Goldsmith reiterated the value of aircraft in another memorandum to Cox in September, in which he commented on the successful use of aircraft in punitive operations and dealing with raiding tribesmen (later to be the continuing role of the RAF in Iraq). Goldsmith found the use and effect of aircraft during the Rania disturbances between 14 to 22 August 1921 of great value because the regular troops were rapidly being withdrawn from that area and he was committed to the risk of maintaining law and order among people who understood no other policy than that of the whip. With aircraft supported by a handful of untrained and untried levies this was a difficult operation,

> and it is obviously impossible for the Royal Air Force to profit by experience and thus reduce the risks to a minimum, unless they receive full reports from the Political authorities after each action. I have commented and made suggestions very freely in the hope that they will be found of use. (Copy sent to Group Captain, Commanding Royal Air Force, Baghdad.)

The India Office series L/P&S and AIR/5 contain many similar reports, one of which is of particular relevance, because it concerns a punitive expedition against the Surchi Kurds by a combined force of the Levies and Police, backed by aircraft (one of which became a casualty) on 12 September 1921.

Major Goldsmith commanded the column, assisted by Captain Littledale and Commandant Arbil Police (Kurds) with his 72 mounted rifles and a Lewis gun. Also in the column was "C" squadron of the 4th Regiment Levies. The operation entailed considerable action with casualties. One aircraft force-landed. The pilot was trying to destroy his machine with a tracer bullet in the petrol tank, when the machine exploded. He was severely burnt. The resulting fire caused the bomb load to explode, and the aircraft was blown to pieces. Levy casualties in the operation were three Levies and four horses killed, plus one horse wounded and three others missing. Levy Mulazim-Thani (2nd Lt.) Hider ibn Kerim was recommended for a military decoration.

"Comment: Both men and Officers showed great keenness in fulfilling their duties and the Levies were particularly deserving of praise." Enemy casualties were given as: Batas, destroyed by fire with all personal property,

one insurgent killed, and 70 cattle; Harir destroyed by fire with all personal property. Local casualties: 18 insurgents killed, together with 15 women and children, by aircraft bombing.

Qalaia Sur: mill and machinery destroyed by dynamite and house burnt; one insurgent killed and 15 women captured but released on retirement of force. Karwatan, destroyed by fire with all personal property; killed: 20 cows, 10 goats, 4 donkeys and 1 colt.

Later in this work it will be shown that the authorities in Baghdad became concerned over these somewhat indiscriminate and ruthless punitive air attacks on civilians, and imposed various controls.

As already mentioned, the Sulaimani Division had remained relatively passive throughout the Arab Insurrection, perhaps because of Soane's legacy of firm rule. This is reflected in the content of a long report which Cox sent to Churchill in October 1921.[67] The document revealed that armed Turkish incursions into Iraq had begun, and that the Turkish government was believed to be inciting the Kurds in northern Iraq to revolt.

The report stated that the origins of the recent disturbances at Rowanduz and Batas which, in turn, extended to include the Rania Qadha, could be traced back to a petition sent by disruptive elements of Rowanduz, in June 1921, through Muhi-al-Din Effendi, ex-Yuzbashi of Gendarmeries, to the Kamalist administration, asking for their help to gain freedom from the British yoke. As a result, a force of Turkish irregular soldiers, under the command of an officer named Mahmud Fadhil, was raised by Muhi-al-Din.

Orders for this had been given by Nihad Pasha, but it was considered that the authorities of Van were much involved. It appears that the first Turkish troops arrived at Rowanduz on 29 July 1921, to be joined by some ex-officers from Sulaimani. They comprised a Turkish lieutenant, some 60 men, 2 machine-guns, 1 gun (Arty.), and 20 ammunition mules. Reliable locals stated that the men were old Turkish soldiers, under military discipline; the remainder were tribesmen.

On the night of 30 July, there was a small disturbance between the police of Iraq and some hostile Kharwatan villagers near Batas. On the arrival

[67] This report on AIR/1253, no folio numbers.

of the Turkish infiltrators, their Girdi tribesmen attacked Batas. Some of the police deserted to the Turks, the rest surrendered, except for the Post Commandant, who was murdered. The police were stripped of their arms and set loose. The Turks then proceeded to Rowanduz, where they established contact with tribal chiefs of the Arbil district and many of its notables—the majority of whom rose in rebellion.

The ringleaders established a local government in Rowanduz, and collected revenue, with which they paid a retainer to the Turks. A military column was sent to Arbil, where it arrived on 12 August 1921, to impress the tribes by a demonstration of force. There followed operations, which ended in the punitive actions described on the previous pages.

Cox pointed out that had Rania fallen, then insurrection could have spread in uncontrollable proportions. The main military column at Arbil was too far off to be in time to attack the insurgents; and rather than lose the chance of teaching them a lesson, Captain Littledale, with his Kurdish Police and the Levy contingent with other officers and supported by aircraft, decided to take the risk of a reverse—which decision proved highly successful. Cox praised the gallant initiative and the performance of the Levies: "...the gallantry and endurance of the Levies in particular, in view of their comparative lack of training, more than justified the expectations of their commander".

It appears from this report that as a direct result of these operations, the Surchi chief, "who had been in rebellion since March 1919", made his submission to the government. But reports from Rowanduz remained conflicting. Anticipated Turkish reinforcements failed to materialise, which disgusted Rowanduzis for the Turkish lack of support. They were also "...worn out by the continual bombing".

Nevertheless, the penultimate paragraph of the report states: "On the other hand rumours continue to circulate that the Rowanduzis do not intend to surrender, but are making preparations for a new attack in the Arbil direction". This rumour proved to be correct.

It was at this time that the levy's first senior Field Commander arrived in Iraq. According to Brown,[68] this was in September 1921. He was Brigadier L.W. de V. Sadleir-Jackson, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., who took command of the Force, as Inspector-General, relieving Col.-Commandant Frith. Sadleir-Jackson at once commenced the complete reorganisation of the Force from Levy headquarters, Baghdad, "which had already been partly put in train on paper".

Sadleir-Jackson took the necessary steps to equip the Force with light automatic weapons. Lewis and Hotchkiss guns were ordered; the former for the infantry, the latter for the cavalry.

Also, according to Browne, the Levies had undertaken few operations since the early part of the year (1921), except for a minor skirmish at Dohuk on 4 October. However, on 14 December the same year, an Arab Levy cavalry escort to the A.P.O. was attacked by Kurds near Babachikchek. The attack resulted in Lt. Bois being wounded, and nine men and their horses killed—forcing the escort to retreat.

Sadleir-Jackson issued orders for operations against these Kurds on 16 December. A cavalry column some 700-800 strong was ordered to assemble at Arbil under his command, to march via Shaklawa on Batas, while an infantry column under Lt.-Colonel Barke marched on Batas via Kandil, to co-operate with the cavalry. After some 110 miles of hard marching, collecting other Levy units on the way; the whole force arrived at Arbil on 22 December 1921.

Suffice it to say, Kurds were found in occupation of Harir and Batas on 26 December. An advance party had already arrived at Isteria village on the 24th, where, while making rafts to cross the Greater Zab, they came under Kurdish fire, wounding an Assyrian officer.

During the night the rafts were completed, and on the 26th the first raft with 50 men crossed the river under cover of rifle and machine-gun fire. Although enemy fire was heavy, they successfully crossed to find the opposing force, a mixture of Turkish soldiers and local Kurds from Ruwanduz, who soon retired. The crossing was by then completed. Two

[68] Browne, *The Iraqi Levies 1915-32*, op.cit., pp.17-20.

aircraft from 55 Squadron RAF arrived, of which one landed; but on trying to take off again, it crash-landed. The pilot was taken off by the other machine, while his mechanic with the plane's Lewis gun, joined the columns.

One column burnt the village of Khorra on the 27th, and advanced close to Batas. The cavalry attacked Harir, where they met stiff resistance and were held up. The fight continued through the day, during which Captain Carvosso was killed with five of his men. Lieutenant Burridge was killed next morning.

On the same day, Batas was attacked with air support, and by midday the town was occupied, with only two Levies wounded. Very heavy rain then commenced. At 1730 hours, a party was ordered to attack Harir Dagh, under cover of darkness, but the ground conditions caused by the rain proved too much for progress. Next morning, the party reached the top, capturing a Kurd on the way. They pushed along the top to a point overlooking Batas, where they built sangars. Small parties of enemy were seen, but did not offer fight. By the afternoon, Sadleir-Jackson, unable to obtain air support, owing to the bad weather, ordered an attack on Batas. Two men killed and two wounded, one of whom later died. The town was burnt, ending the operations. The Force was back in Arbil by 31 December.

It may be appreciated that by the reorganisation of the Levy Force, and the creation of a command structure by giving the odd squadrons and companies parent units of regiments and battalions, their new commander had made considerable improvements in a very short time. Also, he had arranged to improve the armament of the Force, by ordering light automatics, and conducted difficult but successful operations in Kurdistan—all in the space of some fourteen weeks from his arrival. He was not a man to let "grass grow under his feet". His actions invite speculation on what effect his continued command might have had on the force, given more time.

The Levies, throughout the Arab Insurrection of 1920, had proved their worth. They had attained a semblance of military structure, but were afforded no time in which to carry out the promised six-month training period. The Striking Forces, which then represented the Levies, were permanently divorced from the District Police and Gendarmerie, together with any railway guards who may have been enlisted. It was the old Striking Force which

would form the nucleus of the "new Levies" planned at Cairo, and it was contemplated they would undertake the security of the northern frontier.

A later document by Cox—the Iraq Administration Report[69] for the period 1920-22—gives a valuable overall view of the extent to which the Cairo proposals were, or were not, being put into effect. This document stated that after the Cairo Conference in March 1921, the Levies consisted for the greater part of men of Arab nationality. The decision was to raise the strength to an estimated 7,500 (well above the estimate for the "New Levies" shown on p.156 of this chapter).

Their responsibilities had extended to Kurdistan, in addition to Iraq. The strength of the force at that period numbered 4,000 rank and file. Although a small proportion of Kurds had been introduced into the force, and the Kurdish Levy in Sulaimani had been incorporated (assume the latter were remnants of Soane's Levies), it was not until the end of August (1921) that the raising of Assyrian units was begun, and a Christian element introduced.

With the flow of imperial troops out of the country, Levies were called upon to shoulder still heavier responsibilities for finding reliefs on the Kurdish frontiers, and replacing imperial troops. In the above report Cox further stated that the Levy strength was approximately that of a weak brigade, without artillery or light machine-guns (as will be recalled, the new commander had put these on order); but they were called upon to relieve the equivalent of two weak imperial divisions. The manner in which they filled their obligations was shown by the fact that the frontier remained intact. "The casualty roll was eloquent of the readiness with which they responded when called upon to assert Government authority by force of arms."

Before beginning the next chapter, it is considered important to present the following extract from the report of the Levy Inspector-General, Sadleir-Jackson, in the above Administration Report (Appendix II) for the period September 1921 to March 1922, in order to keep the reader informed of the Levy strength, organisation and dispositions.

The report stated:

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[69] FO 371/8998, F.208.

On September 1921, Levies were disposed as follows:
Euphrates Area 12 Squadrons Kurdish Area 9 Squadrons
Euphrates Area 3 Companies Kurdish Area 2 Companies
Strength 4,000. (Four Companies of Assyrians raised.)

By March 1922, the amalgamation of the various Levies had just been completed.

> The Force comprised four mounted Regiments each of 4 Squadrons, 4 Assyrian Companies. Two Companies Sulaimani Kurds, 3 Companies of Marsh Arabs. Companies and Squadrons were below establishment. Troop, Platoon, and Section organisations were not in force; no Headquarters existed in units.

(This would have been how the majority of the Force was comprised in 1920 during the Arab Insurrection, and at the time Sadleir-Jackson assumed command—"a somewhat disorganised force of odd units".)

> On 28 February 1922, the Force was reorganised and consisted of:
> 4 Mounted Regiments 4 Battalions
> 1 Pack Battery (Assyrian) 1 Vickers Gun Company
> 1 Wireless Section

(It may be assumed that as the Force had four "Battalions" of infantry, the "Regiments" would by then be cavalry, and not mounted infantry.)

Regimental, battalion and battery organisation, on the lines similar to those at present in force in the British army, was introduced. A Record Section and Horse Register were maintained. Acquittance role system was superseded by a Pay and Mess Book System.

The role changed from police force to that of a military force, and additional responsibilities for safeguarding the frontier from Faishkhabur on the Tigris to Halabja were added to the duties for maintaining internal order.

Terms for enlistment: a period of one year, extendable.

Courses were being held continually at Levy headquarters for officers in the mounted units, infantry and trade services. Training instructions were translated into Arabic. Depots were formed at Baghdad for recruit training. A remount system was organised; but accommodation was, in the main, still tented. Hospitals and veterinary centres were established.

Armament had improved with the S.M.L.E. rifle, and approval given for Vickers machine-gun and Lewis gun instruction.

The strength of the force on 1 March 1922, was 5,000, and Assyrian recruits were coming in freely. Indeed, this total was exceeded by 400. This excess was disposed of by weeding out non-efficients.

The two years covered by this chapter (1920-21), had presented a considerable trial for the British government, the imperial garrison and the Levies. Indeed, the troubles of 1920 had even raised the question as to whether British interests in Mesopotamia lay only in the Basra wilayat, to which they should retire, and leave Baghdad and Mosul. Clashes of personality between key men in 1920 had also played a debilitating role, at a time when the optimum co-operation was essential.

At the Cairo Conference of March 1921, an attempt had been made to resolve far too many issues, the error of which became clearer as time progressed. The most important achievements of the Conference were the decision to hand the future control of Iraq to the air force, and the creation of a National Iraq Army. The latter may have appeared simple during discussion, but proved to be far more complicated than envisaged in the planned four-year period.

Other salient matters discussed included the production of a timed programme for the reduction of the imperial garrison, but it was ultimately delayed by more considerations than had been visualised. It could be said there had been a substantial Levy revival but, as was their usual fate, it will be shown that considerable problems lay ahead for this important, proven and willing Force. The Assyrians, on whom, in reality, the future of the Levies depended, were being taken for granted by the British because of their apparent dependency on Britain's goodwill for their future. Their national pride and fierce independence had failed to be recognised, which boded ill for their future co-operation.

The Turko-Iraqi frontier problems began to take a more serious turn with the intervention of well-armed Turkish quasi-regular troops, whose object was to encourage and support Kurdish insurrection against the British administration—with the unresolved question of Mosul as the *raison d'être*.

In the next chapter, more examples of Levy military operations will be discussed. There is no doubt that the acquisition of senior commanders for the Force was responsible for the Levies finally achieving a regular military

organisation, with better central control providing improved tactical application and supporting arms, as detailed above. But artillery and the Vickers machine-gun were technical weapons, requiring a reasonable understanding of mathematics—how these problems were overcome has not come to light. Nevertheless, efficiency in all these weapons was obtained—especially on the Vickers gun. Supporting weaponry was manned by Assyrians, under the command of British officers and N.C.Os.

It will also be shown in the following chapter that personality problems quickly robbed the Levies of their first senior field commander. A further setback was the loss of so many of their trained and experienced men to the Iraq army. The Assyrian recruits, although good material, provided an initial language problem. Also, shortage of funds was to cause recruiting and enlistment problems, which not only slowed progress, but fostered resentment among the Assyrians.

Regardless of the Arab ex-Levy troops, to be supplied as a nucleus with which to form the Iraq army, the army was to fail to meet the target of four years, set by the Military protocol in the Anglo-Iraq Treaty, which laid down that Iraq should be responsible for its own internal security on completion of that period. It is proposed to discuss this and the Air Ministry's replacement of the War Office for the interim control of Iraq, in the following chapter.

CHAPTER V

In the previous chapter, the first year—1920—was taken up almost entirely with the Arab Insurrection and the considerable issues attending it, which had included the acceptance of the Mandate for Iraq by Britain in May of that year. It also covered the Cairo conference of March 1921, and the main decisions taken there concerning the urgent need for an Iraq army, the implementation of which entailed the loss to the Levies of almost all their Arab personnel. In turn, the first attempted enlistment of Assyrians to replace the Arab element, commenced in August 1921. In September of the same year, the first Senior Field Commander, Brigadier-General L. de V. Sadleir-Jackson, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., was appointed to the Levies.

This chapter, the longest in the thesis, covers the four years from 1922 to the end of 1925. Among the new issues to be considered will be: the dismissal of Sadleir-Jackson; matters on Levy administration; H.M.G's Kurdish policy; the arrival of the A.O.C. to implement the Air Ministry's assumption of responsibility for the control of Iraq from the War Office and further Kurdish troubles backed by the Turks. These complex and sometimes interrelated events were all to affect the evolution of the Levies in this period.

Several changes in historical perspective will be encountered by the reader in this chapter. The history of the Levies is, to a considerable extent, connected with the development of the new state of Iraq, and also the original concept of British imperial air power. The Levies remain the main theme of the thesis, and issues affecting the Force will be discussed, and chronology maintained where possible. The Levy history covering these four years cannot be considered neat and tidy, any more than the political environment in which the Levies operated; they served in a region in which the surrounding countries, as well as Iraq, were mostly in a state of unstable transition.

The chapter opens with the aftermath of the Cairo Conference, which was fully discussed in the previous chapter when, it may be recalled, the continued existence of the Levies was confirmed with a strength of 7,500. But they were to lose their trained Arab personnel to the newly-developing Iraq army. This, in turn, caused a decision to be taken to replace the Arab element with Assyrians (then refugees). It will be shown in the following discussions

that there were many interrelated fundamental issues which shaped the continued evolution of the Levy Force, some of which were broad in conception, while others were localised, and sometimes created by unexpected events.

In this early period, Levy history was heavily influenced by conflicting demands being made by the authorities in London and Baghdad. Hitherto, the various government departments in London had found it difficult to agree on any clear and consistent policy with respect to the Levies. Once again, the progress and performance of the Levies depended heavily on the discipline, courage, ability and often the ingenuity, of the British officers seconded to them.

At the Cairo Conference, a period of four years had been agreed in which the Iraq army was expected to become efficient enough to undertake the country's internal security. This period was inserted, in the form of a Military Protocol, within the Military Agreement of 25 March 1922. However, it will also be shown that it was later realised by the Air Ministry that this target would not be achieved.

In this context, the British Treasury was trying, by every possible means, to reduce expenditure on Iraq. Thus almost any method by which the Iraq government could be cajoled and persuaded into assuming greater financial responsibility for internal security, was seen as a potential financial saving for Britain; but with the proviso that any increase in expenditure by that government on their national defence was not to reduce Iraq's share of repayment of the "Ottoman Debt".

The manpower of the Levy Force in 1922 was increasingly represented by Assyrians, to replace the Arab personnel lost to the Iraq army. The role of the Levies was to continue to fill the vacuum created by the diminishing British imperial garrison, wherever possible. This was to continue until the Iraq army was large enough and adequately trained to replace them. The area which had been proposed for the "new Levies" was in the north of Iraq, while the imperial garrison progressively withdrew south. Ultimately, the plan was for the Levies, coupled with the Iraq army, and backed by the air power of the RAF, to maintain internal security without the imperial garrison.

A British Military Mission was sent in early 1922, to help train the Iraq army, in an advisory capacity. However, the Iraq government had rejected British officers in a command role, because the army could be seen as a British and not a national force, and might be used in other than Iraq's interest.

Recruiting of Assyrians had tentatively commenced on 17 April 1921. A recruiting party of Levy officers, together with the missionary Dr. Wigram, had commenced attempting to recruit Assyrians from refugee camps around the Mosul area in April 1921. However, the men showed great reluctance in coming forward, and they persisted in requesting repatriation under British protection. This was deemed to be impossible by the relevant government departments in London.

With much eloquent persuasion by Dr. Wigram, and the promise of pay at Rs.50 per month, some 50 men enlisted and a start was made. Some of the men had second thoughts and tried to break away, but were prevented by the British Levy officers, helped by some local British troops. The parties were then marched off to their respective holding camps. By June 250 were enrolled, with considerable reluctance on the part of the Assyrians. Nevertheless, progress was made in this important new British undertaking. If this scheme had failed, there was no ready alternative source of manpower under British control.

The proposed strength for the Levies, projected at the Cairo Conference, was approximately 7,500. This was soon to be watered down to 5,000, based perhaps on a budget reappraisal which, in turn, may have caused the first breach of faith by the British with their new Assyrian recruits. This had resulted from them being informed that their monthly pay of Rs.50 was arbitrarily reduced to Rs.45, mentioned above. The reason for this is not clear, but it may be assumed that hasty budgeting at Cairo had proved over-generous, and an adjustment was therefore needed if the number of men required were to come within the permitted financial ceiling.

However, after this unwelcome information had been given to the Assyrian officers and men, it did not lead to trouble at that time; but from then on, men refused to re-engage after their one-year service contract during 1922, which promised to denude the Force of the majority of its new manpower, as

will be discussed in due course. Also, the new Levy Commandant, Sadleir-Jackson, had called for a further 1,500 Assyrians to be recruited from 7 January 1922.

It is necessary to recall the tensions which existed between the Christian Nestorian Assyrians and the Islamic peoples of the region. The Hakkiarians had formed a "millet" within the Ottoman empire, living under Islamic sufferance, but never treated as "equals". Much of the area was inhabited by Kurds, with whom confrontations of a violent nature sometimes took place—resulting in later reprisals. These Christians, now the mercenaries of another alien Christian nation, the British, were to be used to impose the rule of law upon Islamic peoples, sometimes with force. It is little wonder that high tensions were to prevail in the future.

It will be confirmed later, in a personal letter by a British Levy officer, that "mixed" sub-units had been tried for a few months, but the Assyrians, unlike the Kurds and Arabs, had proved to be poor horsemen. However, the Assyrians were to make excellent machine-gunners and artillery men. There was also the matter of religion, and perhaps old feuds, which could in some cases cause friction between these men within the same unit. Therefore, the practice of mixed units was dropped as soon as the rearrangement of personnel could be organised.

The unfortunate dismissal of General Sadleir-Jackson on 14 March 1922, resulted from another clash of personalities, which the Force could ill afford; especially because during his brief sojourn in the Force, he had achieved a very great deal. It will be seen that he appeared popular among many of the British Levy officers.

Sadleir-Jackson's parent regiment was the 9th Lancers. He had just completed commanding successful operations with a British brigade on the Divina in north Russia—under the overall command of General Ironside at Archangel. The object of this "Russian Relief Force" was to assist "White Russian" (Barishnyas) forces in preventing the Bolsheviks (Bolos) from capturing north Russian territory. The operation lasted until 27 September 1919—therefore Sadleir-Jackson must have been posted to the Levies after these operations almost immediately. These facts reinforce this officer's suitability to command the Levies.

However, it will be shown how this "battle-tried" officer, apparently popular with many British Levy officers, had his reputation undermined by one of Churchill's aides who was perhaps possessed of a far less distinguished "operational" career—Lt.-Colonel R. Meinertzhagen.

The latter in his *Middle East Diary 1917-56*,[1] mentioned Sadleir-Jackson in derogatory terms: "London 7/12/21:...Freddie Guest came over to see Winston...to read...to him a private letter from Sadleir-Jackson...the letter comprised violent abuse of the whole Administration in Mesopotamia, from Sir Percy Cox downwards".

No doubt "the letter" also contained many home truths about the deficiencies in the Levies at the time Sadleir-Jackson assumed command. It may be recalled from the last chapter, that after he had taken his Force out on operations against the Kurds on 16 December 1921, he had ordered light machine-guns and artillery for the Levies. They had indeed been short of adequate weaponry.

The diarist further stated that Churchill had called Meinertzhagen to hear the contents of the letter, stating, "he did not mind how he got his information so long as he got it". Churchill listened to the letter, and directed Meinertzhagen to write to Cox, with all the points raised in the letter. Meinertzhagen said that no notice should be taken of a private letter, and "that its tone was most insubordinate". Churchill answered that "such scruples did not worry him".

In final confirmation of the proven value of Sadleir-Jackson, his letter to Guest appears to have contained more "home truths" on the signs of administrative neglect he had found in the Force he had accepted to command. This reflected badly on Cox and members of Churchill's staff, about which Meinertzhagen was particularly concerned.

As a result of the umbrage created by this letter, but not taken by Churchill, Sadleir-Jackson was to be lost to the Levies, and in the writer's opinion, for no adequate reason. This contention is supported by the following private letter.

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[1] R. Meinertzhagen, *Middle East Diary 1917-1956* (London, 1959).

The letter, of 25 June 1922, written by a British cavalry officer, Captain P.S. Hornyold, serving in a Levy cavalry regiment stationed in Dulip Camp, a few miles from Mosul, to Lt.-Colonel J. Parker, O.C., 1st Regiment Levies, Kirkuk, stated:

> On Tuesday 125 new remounts arrive & in consequence of our protests they have ordered the 3rd Assyrian Btn. to transfer 111 men over to us at once. It has of course yet to be seen whether said Assyrians are prepared to be transferred, for they enlisted as Infantrymen in an Assyrian Force & not in a mixed one containing two third strength of their hereditary enemies, the Kurds. [The problem was created by the loss of the Levy Arab element to the Iraq Army, as seen in the previous chapter.] We failed, like you, to find any time in which to train the men...I have never imagined that such a show as Levies could exist—the whole business amazes me more & more as I learn more about it & am made perforce to realize that nothing matters at H.Q. as long as the I-G (Inspector-General Sadleir-Jackson) gets cleared out by hook or by crook. Whether in the process the Levies are reduced to such a pass that the only thing left is to disband them—worries no man. That every contract to the men &to the white officers who have come out to give of their best—is broken, is of no importance whatever, Even if I had never met the I-G before landing at Baghdad, I should still be a partisan & a very warm one. For his one crime appears to be that he had fought, despite every adverse circumstance, to obtain that which we needed &to help.
>
> What a farce the whole show is—I never imagined that anything could be quite so hopeless under British rule. I wonder what—knowing the real situations; Lloyds would insure the life of a British officer for three months hence—or the prestige of the British for that matter either. (Sic.)

Meinertzhagen was successful in removing Sadleir-Jackson, as may be seen from the above letter, for no better reason than that Sadleir-Jackson had bypassed the usual chain of his immediate superiors, who were, again according to the content of the above letter, failing the Force by neglect. The Levies, in view of their increasing responsibilities, were important in the scheme for maintaining internal security in Iraq, especially during the steady departure of the British imperial garrison. Also the lack of adequate progress being made by the new Iraq army was slowly being recognised by the executive of the Air Ministry, who was now the responsible body for Iraq's security.

The question remains, why were the Levies allowed to remain in such a poor state during 1921-22, when those responsible were acknowledging their importance and performance? The Levies, regardless of their lack of material support from the executive, continued to perform their duties. Cox had made this abundantly clear in his Administration Report for 1920-22 (mentioned in the last pages of the previous chapter).

The writer has concluded that the most important faults lay with London. Many documents clearly indicate that the problem lay in lack of funding. Although the Exchequer was under pressure to reduce expenditure by the reduction of the British imperial garrison, the vacuum thus created had to be filled. The RAF could not undertake their new responsibilities for the control of Iraq without some supporting ground troops. This task the new Iraq army was unable to assume at this juncture, regardless of the hopes expressed at the Cairo Conference. Therefore the Levies were the only alternative force available to fill this gap. They were also cheaper than the departing British imperial garrison. But the Levies lacked the necessary arms and equipment with which to undertake the role of their predecessors. This important fact was not being recognised, and thus the whole plan was being put at unnecessary risk. The question, why the Levies could not have loaned the required arms from the departing imperial troops, is not understood—it would have entailed no extra costs to the Treasury.

On the departure of Sadleir-Jackson, Cox requested G.H.Q. M.E.F. to take over the temporary administrative control of the Levies. This was done by G.H.Q., who then tried to install a member of their staff (Colonel Vincent) as Col.-Commandant. This officer was rejected by the Air Ministry for reasons not revealed; but was perhaps due to inter-service rivalry.

On 2 September 1922, the Air Ministry cabled Air H.Q. Baghdad,[2] stating that, "Colonel Sadleir-Jackson, should...have left Iraq before Sir J. Salmond arrives". It was further suggested that the Levies should be placed under the temporary command of an officer with rank of colonel. It was considered this arrangement was conducive for Levy training, discipline and administration, but did not sever G.H.Q's operational control, and was

[2] All on AIR 5/295, no folios.

preferable to either an Inspector-General independent of G.H.Q., or reverting to control by the High Commissioner. The arrangement would continue until 1 October 1922, when the A.O.C. and staff would replace G.H.Q. Iraq. (Meinertzhagen's meddling had created havoc. Had he not undermined Sadleir-Jackson, the A.O.C. on his arrival could have come to his own conclusions regarding the value of that officer.)

The responsibility for the Levies had been a problem since 1920, and perhaps explains why there are so many gaps in Levy records. The following changes are a summary of a complex and sometimes confusing situation:

CHANGES IN RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE LEVIES

October 1920	The Civil Commissioner.
December 1920	Ministry of Defence
7 January 1921	Minister of Interior
10 January 1921	The High Commissioner
8 February 1921	Minister of Interior
June 1921	The High Commissioner

Six different administrative government departments in eight months was not conducive to the maintenance of good records, or of consistent growth.

Nevertheless, the departed Levy Commandant had left an inheritance by way of M.M.Gs (Vickers guns) and a pack battery (2.75 inch howitzers); also light automatic weapons, such as Hotchkiss for the cavalry, and Lewis guns for the infantry.

The advent of so large a body of Assyrian recruits, coming in over a period of about six months, brought its own serious problem—that of language for communication in training. Newly-appointed Assyrian officers and N.C.Os had no knowledge of English, and the British officers and British N.C.O. instructors had no knowledge of Syriac. That they managed to train so many men, regardless of this serious impediment, in so little time, reflects great credit on those men of the British army then serving with the Force. It is doubtful whether this problem had been voiced at the Cairo Conference, when the decision was taken to discharge the vast majority of the trained Levy Arab officers and men, and to replace them with Assyrians, with all the problems that would follow.

As usual, it was not officialdom, but the initiative of a British officer, Lt. R.H. Hart, who wrote a useful handbook on *Colloquial Syriac*, finally printed in Mosul in 1926, which filled the gap.

During the training periods for Assyrians, British officers selected and appointed native officers and N.C.Os, usually men with tribal status (maliks and the sons of leaders), who were given a trial period in their proposed ranks; any found unsuitable were "broken" at once (reduced to the ranks).

Sadleir-Jackson, during his short tenure, had organised the force which had comprised a number of disorganised individual "sub-units" (for example, squadrons and companies without "parent units"), by brigading them under "parent units" (for example, regiments and battalions). The Inspector-General had created a command structure. This allowed for squadrons and companies to be dispersed on detachment when necessary, and facilitated their use when united under their parent units, or in co-operative operations with the imperial garrison.

By 29 February 1922,[3] according to the "Iraq Administration Report for 1920-22", the Levy Force had comprised:

4 mounted regiments (perhaps mixed cavalry and M.I.)
4 battalions of infantry
1 machine-gun company (also with pack transport)
1 pack battery
1 wireless section.

As usual this organisation does not quite tally with that given by Browne, and for that matter, in the early history of the Levies, many official reports fail to tally in detail. Nevertheless, they all provide a reasonable guide to what had taken, or was taking place.

This document also mentioned the levy "Strength on 1/3/22 was 5,000, with Assyrian recruits coming in freely". It may be recalled that the suggested strength mentioned at the Cairo Conference was 7,500. But once again, when the costs had been reappraised, reductions followed. No Force headquarters establishment was mentioned in the above document, but its location was Baghdad.

[3] FO 371/8998 Appendix II.

This document by Cox shows the division of command, up to the first part of 1923

(a) From 1st April 1921 to 1st October 1922, the Levies were under G.H.Q. M.E.F. for administration.
(b) From 1st October 1922 to 31st March 1923, under the A.O.C.

Cox also stated, "The first period was, to a certain extent from the point of view of the Levies, an unsatisfactory one". Amongst other issues mentioned were:

> that the complete elimination of the Arab element by compulsory discharge—although essential [politically]—somewhat dislocated unit organisation; and many regrets at the departure—against their will—of valuable Arab officers and N.C.Os were felt and expressed.

No date is given for this discharge, as mentioned previously. The retention of the Levy lst Marsh Arab Battalion contrary to declared policy, will be discussed later in this work.

> In the second period (1 October 1922-31 March 1923), the Report stated that during the winter (1921-22), mud and plaster huts had been provided for the British personnel. Also, that there was "considerable anxiety" for the future of the Assyrian Levies. The reduction in pay from Rs.50 to Rs.45 per month, was seen as a breach of faith, together with the disbandment of 400 men in the weeding-out process mentioned earlier.
>
> These had been factors in contributing to their almost unanimous refusal to re-engage on the completion of their one-year service contracts. This would have meant that by the spring of 1923, the Assyrian units would have ceased to exist.

(This is but one more example of maladministration of the Force.)

In the context of the "on-going" Kurdish trouble in the approaching period of the change-over of the Iraq command from the War Office to the Air Ministry in October 1922, trouble had continued from June in Kurdistan. The anti-British feeling, successfully promoted by the Turks, had resulted in sporadic unrest among many of the Kurdish tribes in northern Iraq. One of the Kurdish chiefs, Karim Fattah Beg, regarded as a notorious trouble-maker by the British authorities, and who was in collusion with the Turks, murdered two British officer P.Os, Captains Bond and Makant, on 18 June 1920. Karim Beg was pursued from late June by a mixed column of imperial forces and Levies, until, finding no respite, he fled his area and escaped to Ruwanduz.

In view of the gravity of the situation in the area of Sulaimaniah, Cox decided to reinstall Shaikh Mahmud as governor of the township, and then to evacuate all British, Indian and pro-British officials by air to Kirkuk. This was after Cox had obtained from Mahmud his solemn oath not to attempt to usurp official authority again. Many of the local population had called for Mahmud's reinstatement, in spite of his previous record.

Nevertheless, regardless of the solemn promises previously given by Mahmud to Cox in August 1922, Mahmud, on his return to Sulaimaniah, at once renewed contact with the Turks. Until such time as a political settlement could be reached between the Turks and the British, the threat of Turkish infiltration remained. Officially-encouraged Turkish agents, aided by ambitious Kurdish leaders, were making incursions into Kurdistan to spread anti-British propaganda in the name of Kurdish independence. These Turkish emissaries offered vague promises of military support for the Kurds in fighting the "oppressive infidel". Singly, or together, the Turks with many Kurdish leaders promised trouble. Cox had made an error of judgment in reinstalling Mahmud in Sulaimaniah.

The next most important event in the newly-agreed control of Iraq by the Air Ministry in place of War Office, was the arrival of the A.O.C. Sir John Salmond in Iraq, to assume his duties of command by 1 October 1922. Incidentally, a new Levy Col.-Commandant H.T. Dobbin, arrived in Iraq about the same time.

On learning of the problem concerning the refusal of the Assyrians to re-engage, Commandant Dobbin called an urgent conference at Dohuk, with the Assyrian maliks and religious leaders, in the autumn of 1922. The discussions covered the offer of better terms of engagement, and extending service contracts from one to two years. Also, the terms offered included "the gift of a rifle and 200 rounds of ammunition, to each man on the termination of his period of engagement". The maliks were invited to co-operate not only in ensuring the re-engagements, but in raising another Assyrian battalion to replace the 4th Kurdish, which was handed over to Shaikh Mahmud on his reinstatement by Cox in August 1922. It was felt that "...a distinctly favourable impression had been created..." at this conference.

The Turkish-backed troubles with the Kurds were still smouldering, and because of the vulnerability of the British garrison in Sulaimaniah, G.H.Q. M.E.F., with the agreement of Cox, decided to evacuate the area in September 1922. The H.C. wrote to the A.O.C. on 14 November, stating,[4]

> ...reference to the 4th Levy Battalion...Kurdish officers and men...were definitely to be handed over to the Sulaimani government with their arms and equipment on the date of the evacuation. It was arranged that they would be paid...from the Levy budget.

Some men were on leave at the time, and if they chose not to return, they were to be struck off the Levy payroll.

The evacuation by air on 5 September 1922, of 101 personnel,[5] was probably the first operation of its kind, and used approximately 20 aircraft. The latter comprised De Havilland 9As and Vernons. Two of the aircraft were badly damaged in accidents during the operation, and had to be burnt because recovery was impractical under the prevailing conditions. During the evacuation, the Sulaimaniah landing-ground was guarded by 19 Assyrian Levies with two Vickers machine-guns, together with three Bristol fighters. The latter were parked "in a position from which their Lewis guns could command the town". The operation began on 4 September, ending on the 5th. Approximately 26 aircraft had been involved.

It appears that in the context of the continued trouble on the Turkish-Iraq border, the A.O.C. had done his "homework" by writing an "Appreciation on the Military Situation", with special reference to the possible attempt of a "Turkish Invasion of Iraq", dated 1 October 1922, and addressed to the Secretary of State for Air.[6] This document is important because it marks the R.A.F's first operational plan for the defence of Iraq against external aggression. The Appreciation contained considerable detail, which it is felt unnecessary to discuss in full. However, his main considerations were a possible attempt by the Turks to retake Mosul, and are covered in the following extracts.

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[4] AIR 23/572, Pt.I, F.79.
[5] AIR 5/1253, no folio.
[6] Cab 24/140, Fs.244-5.

Although the defence of Mosul, with its long lines of communication to Baghdad and Basrah, was not considered "sound militarily", the A.O.C. felt it was justified because of:

a) Prestige, and obligation to the Iraq Government.
b) Possibility of defeating the Turks, if they invaded, with only a small force of 5 Battalions and 2 Batteries, combined with the R.A.F., our prestige would be vastly increased and Iraq secured.
c) Ground to the north of Mosul, on the Tigris left bank, lends itself in skilful manoeuvre to our ground forces, any force advancing from Jezire-ibn Omar or Nisibin, would be most vulnerable to air attack.
d) Any danger of Turkish forces backed by Turks advancing west of the Aqra-Erbil-Kurkuk-Kifri line, against our L. of C. on the Tigris right bank, is a danger the Levies with the R.A.F., could counter.

The only "friends" to be counted on were the Assyrians north of Mosul—especially those "settled near Dohuk (about 2,000 men partly armed) could assist us". He had even considered an attack by the Turks from the direction of the Dardanelles. (Perhaps he had "Chanak" in mind.) He also felt that the Kurds would support the Turks if it were seen that they might succeed.

The forces the A.O.C. considered to be at his disposal were:

(a) What was left of the British imperial garrison, drawn from Mosul and Baghdad:

Brigade Headquarters	1 company sappers and miners
5 battalions	1 signal section
1 pack howitzer battery	1 field ambulance section
1 field howitzer battery	1 veterinary section
3 armoured car companies	

(b) Assyrian Levies in their outpost dispositions:

2 battalions	)	
1 pack battery	)	Zakho and Aqra
2 squadrons	)	

Supports located near Dohuk and Minden—unspecified.

The Levy Forces consisted of:

1 cavalry regiment (less 1 squadron)	Arbil
1 cavalry regiment	Kirkuk Alton Keupri
1 cavalry squadron	Khanikin
1 battalion (less British officers)	Sulaimaniah
1 battalion	Nasiriyah

There was also the 1st Levy Marsh Arab Battalion, which the A.O.C. stated, "if politically necessary, could garrison Kut and Amarah". In his opinion, this was not necessary, because the Tigris lines of communication were defended by four defence vessels and armoured barges.

The RAF comprised:

3 squadrons De Havilland 9A	Mosul
1 Snipe squadron)	
1 Bristol squadron)	Kirkuk
2 squadrons Vickers Vernon	Baghdad
1 squadron De Havilland 9A	Shaibah

The Iraq army, although included by the A.O.C. has been excluded because they were thought to be hardly "battle-worthy" at this time. Indeed, not capable of maintaining internal security.

It may be seen that the strength of the British imperial garrison was about on a par with the Levy Force, except for artillery. The main power for defence lay with the RAF, with which the A.O.C. intended to attack the enemy before their forces reached the temporary frontier, then still in dispute.

The A.O.C. would have been well briefed in the United Kingdom before leaving for his command. Therefore, there is every indication that the British government felt that the threat of a Turkish attempt to retake Mosul was being treated seriously, and this is reflected in his Appreciation.

To confirm this opinion, a comment by the Air Council on the A.O.C's Appreciation was sent to him on 1 November 1922[7] in which it was stated that, "...the determined attitude" the A.O.C. was proposed to adopt, and "the offensive role assigned to the Air Units", was in full accord with the Air Staff in London. However, the Air Council considered that, in certain circumstances, as for example, in case of an attack by still larger forces than those envisaged by the A.O.C.; H.M.G. viewed with apprehension his plan which placed the bulk of the garrison in an advanced position. They felt his operations should be limited to a closer radius of strongly defended points.

This document has been presented because it provides the reader with a clear idea of what was involved in the face of continued Turkish aggression,

[7] Ibid.

mostly by irregulars, to disrupt the northern frontier, the exact delineation of which was still under discussion between Britain and Turkey.

This period of Levy history should be seen in the broader context of British government policy in respect of the Kurds, and the aggressive posturing of the Turks. This is borne out by a document raised by Churchill to Cox, on 27 July 1922,[8] in which he stated:

> The policy of His Majesty's Government in southern Kurdistan was defined by myself in the House of Commons on 11th July in the following terms. As far as Kurdistan is concerned, we have not the slightest intention of getting ourselves involved or entangled there. We are doing the best we can for southern Kurdistan, but we are not committing ourselves in any serious way. I have given explicit directions which will prevent anything of that kind arising. We do not wish to force the people of southern Kurdistan under the government of King Feisal. They are free to take part, or not, in the elections which are about to take place, as they choose. We are most anxious to study their wishes and to develop any local bearing of the self-government which has been given to Iraq, that may commend itself to them.
>
> We firmly believe that the interests of southern Kurdistan are so closely involved in Iraq that, without any compulsion from us, these two territories will ultimately come into harmonious accord.

It may be seen that H.M.G's declared policy in no way met the aspirations of a large proportion of the Iraqi Kurdish population for self-determination offered by the League of Nations.

The situation faced by the A.O.C. would have been daunting to a lesser man. He had immediate control over the air force, the Iraq Levies and what was left of the British imperial garrison; but the Iraq army was another matter. The British government, it seems, was prepared to include it in the forces at the disposal of the A.O.C. in the event of an external attack on the sovereignty of Iraq—if for no other than financial reasons (it was funded by the Government of Iraq). However, as mentioned previously, it was far from being a national army other than in name in 1922-23. Thus the A.O.C. had to count on the efficiency of the Levies and the fast receding strength of the British imperial garrison—backed by his airpower.

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[8] CO 730/22, F.594.

In the context of the A.O.C's Appreciation, which included his proposed use of the Levy Force, a letter from the Levy Commandant on 31 December 1922,[9] to the A.O.C., based on Iraq Report on Iraq Army and Levies, gave the current composition and ethnic structure of the Levy Force, as:

Units	Personnel	Animals
H.Q. staff		
1st regiment	Kurds/Turkomen	Horses (Arabs/Wailers)
2nd regiment	2:1 Kurds/Assyrians	" "
3rd regiment	Arabs/Kurds/Turkomen/Persians	" "
1st battalion	Marsh Arabs	
2nd battalion	Assyrians	
3rd battalion	Assyrians	
4th battalion	Assyrians being reformed	
Pack battery	Assyrians	Mules

Also: depot, remounts, and medical team.

It may be noted in the previous report, that no Machine-gun Company is mentioned. This is perhaps because the guns were dispersed among the regiments and battalions where, as previously, they were "brigaded" within the Machine-gun Company. This new arrangement perhaps simplified getting the guns to units on detachment. The Force was, it may be recalled, often distributed over large areas.

The ethnic distribution of personnel noted in this report, shows the Assyrians being weeded out from the cavalry, and there were a few Arabs in the 3rd Regiment (Cavalry). These Arabs were not mentioned as an anomaly, because like the 1st Battalion of Marsh Arabs, they were perhaps only a handful of "tribal men", whom the Iraq army did not enlist. The reforming of the old Kurdish 4th Battalion with Assyrians, as may be recalled earlier in this chapter, was promised to the maliks at the Dohuk autumn conference.

There was one considerable improvement noted in the document. Levy Headquarters staff would consist of: Commanding Officer (H.T. Dobbin), an orderly officer, G.S.O.2 (Ops.), D.A.Q.M.G., D.A.A.G, and staff captain—six officers, two of whom were to be "p.s.c." (passed staff college). Also, because the operational area allocated to the Levies was north of Mosul, it was

[9] AIR 23/572, F.274.

suggested that their headquarters be moved from Baghdad to Mosul, where the depot was established. With regard to recruiting and training, the G.O.C. had proposed to abolish the depot, and to decentralise by "inter-unit" training. After careful consideration, he decided not to burden unit commanders with recruit training, they having sufficient work with their commands. A depot was thus to be established in Mosul to handle both recruiting and initial training. The objective for the Levies was "to rank as first class irregular troops". But no attempt was to be made to turn them into a "Brigade of Guards". The new policy for the Levies was slowly beginning to take effect, but continuing inadequate financial support remained a serious problem.

Other noteworthy points in the document stated that each battalion had eight Lewis guns and four Vickers guns to each of the 2nd and 3rd Battalions only; and four Vickers guns to each cavalry regiment. The 1st and 2nd Cavalry Regiments were armed with rifle and bayonet, and trained as mounted infantry, but the 3rd Regiment was trained for "mounted shock tactics" (traditional cavalry) for which "swords" were on order to replace the bayonets. The Pack Battery was armed with four by 2.75 inch mountain guns, with a total reserve of 20,000 rounds. However, the men's clothing was patched, and most of the tentage remained in a "shocking state".

In the same context, Commandant Dobbin again wrote to the A.O.C., on 31 December 1922,[10] stating the "proposed" Levy strength was 5,463. However, his present native strength was 4,531 – 137 over the "old" G.H.Q. establishment, and 932 below the newly-proposed one. He suggested, therefore, that in view of the fact that the 4th Battalion (with the exception of 70 men) drew no pay for three months, and that the establishment for British other ranks was 91, whereas only 35 were on strength. Thus the money saved by these deficiencies in personnel provided sufficient funds to prevent an excess expenditure in 1922/23.

Therefore he proposed to recruit up to his new establishment because "it would be...disastrous to stop recruiting at the present time", and "especially as the G.H.Q. establishments had never been sanctioned by the Colonial Office". There was also the need to re-establish the 4th Battalion in

[10] AIR 23/572, F.250 and F.76.

accordance with the wishes of the A.O.C's letter of 9 November 1922[11] to the High Commissioner, in which it was stated: "...the Air Officer Commanding is anxious to enrol another battalion in its place" (as promised at the Dohuk Conference, held between the Levy Commandant and Assyrian leaders).

Yet again, the documents show that the decisions made at the Cairo Conference were failing to be implemented, and it is remarkable to note that a senior officer, who had far more important tasks to undertake, was having to indulge in a "penny-pinching" exercise, while more valuable issues, such as training, required his attention.

The new "chain of command" for the Iraq Levies after the RAF took over control from G.H.Q. M.E.F., was: Colonel-Commandant to the A.O.C., Iraq; A.O.C. to the Air Ministry; and the Air Ministry to the Colonial Office.

The new Levy Commandant (Dobbin) also attempted to change the designation of the Force (a lasting preoccupation it seems) from "Iraq Levies" to "The Iraq Frontier Force", on 15 January 1923.[12] His reasons given were "...that the name 'Levy' is misleading, in as much as it implies a disorganised, unequipped and undisciplined force raised hurriedly for the defence of its own homes". The request was passed to the Secretary of State for the Colonies on 22 February 1923,[13] who refused the request, stating, "After careful consideration, I have come to the conclusion that the present moment is inopportune for making any change in the title of the force".

While discussing Levy problems created by the reorganisation, it should be mentioned that a proposal for the repeal of the Arab and Kurdish Levy and Gendarmerie Proclamation of 1920 had been sent by the Air Ministry to the Secretary of State for the Colonies on 2 November 1922,[14] in which it was desired that the Levies be placed under the Army Act, Section 175, Sub-section 4 and Section 176, Sub-section 3, Article 2 of the Mandate. This was to bring the Force into line with prevailing Service regulations. (Under this Act, it might be noted, the punishment by flogging was not permitted.)

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[11] AIR 23/572, F.250 and F.76.
[12] AIR 5/295, no folio.
[13] AIR 5/295, F.49B.
[14] AIR 5/295, F.45A.

Devonshire replied on 11 January 1923,[15] to the effect that,

> ...provided that you are satisfied that the code of law embodied in the Army Act is sufficiently stringent to secure that the discipline of the Levy Force is not impaired, and that this important change in the conditions of service...can be brought about without causing any dissatisfaction as to impair their efficiency, I approve your proposal....

By the end of 1922 relations between Great Britain and Turkey remained so tense it was feared that the situation might escalate. The Turkish menace on the northern frontier had forced the A.O.C. to meet the threat by concentrating some forces in the Mosul area. By the end of January 1923, the A.O.C. considered that his preparations for defence were adequate to meet any immediate Turkish threat.

The Acting High Commissioner (H. Dobbs) wrote to the Secretary of State for the Colonies on 14 March 1923,[16] regarding the revised establishment proposed for the Levy Force for the coming financial year, in which he discussed some aspects of the Levy reorganisation. He also stated that improvements to accommodation was an urgent necessity. A table showing where savings had been made was also attached. It appears the A.O.C. Iraq was pushing to get the necessary financial approval for the current year—after all, the operational responsibility for the defence and security of Iraq was his. He appears not to have been prepared to try to "make bricks without straw".

Not until 24 April 1923,[17] was conditional approval given, and this had the usual sting in its tail. The establishment for the Levies, as submitted to the High Commissioner, was agreed subject to the following reduction: "...in the strength of Native Officers and Native Other Ranks of 390". This represented a typical "approval", with a rider which almost nullified the purpose of the whole argument for which approval had been sought. Whereas Dobbin had found a financial saving by way of the 4th Kurdish Battalion, which had been given by Cox to Mahmud, causing the official disbandment of that Levy 4th Battalion. Therefore not to be resuscitated with Assyrians. This represented a period of non-payment; also, the salaries saved by 55 British other ranks not

[15] Ibid.
[16] AIR 5/295, F.6115.

to be replaced. These combined savings, Dobbin felt, would cover any excess expenditure in his next budget. In reality, the sums involved were so small in comparison to the entire budget, that the time spent by senior staff in the argument was more valuable than the amount presumed to be overspent.

On 20 March 1923, the A.O.C. wrote to the Air Ministry[18] in the face of the approach of spring, and therefore the reopening of the northern frontier with Turkey. His concern was for the many problems which might have to be faced, especially those on the north-western frontier where the Turks were known[19] to have some 8,000 troops in the Jeziret Ibn Omar-Nisibin-Sairt area. This he considered an entirely different problem from that of Turkish aggressive infiltration in the north and north-east experienced in the previous winter.

The A.O.C. emphasised that the situation was constantly changing because of the uncertainty connected with the political negotiations (British-Turkish). He stated that the position in Kurdistan had deteriorated considerably, and Shaikh Mahmud's administration had produced chaos, "...with consequent acute unrest among the tribes [Kurdish], and their discontent combined them against us". He further stated that, "Captured documents showed definite proof that he (Mahmud) intended to join the Turks in attacking us at the first opportunity". Mahmud had refused to come in to explain his conduct; it was therefore necessary to evict him from Sulaimaniah, and to take precautions against any serious Kurdish tribal menace. A suitable replacement to head the administration had to be found to take Mahmud's place.

The A.O.C. further stated "...that the captured documents confirmed that the Turks intended to instigate an early attack on Erbil, Kosianjack, and Kirkuk; and that they intended to remain in support and were rapidly making their preparations to this end". He stated that late spring onwards was the period for Kurdish unrest and Turkish incursions. The latter, he felt, "...might be beyond the power of our forces to cope with, [and] would almost inevitably result, unless Turkish action, anticipated above, is forestalled". He therefore

[17] AIR 5/295, F.61A.
[18] AIR 5/295, F.45A.
[19] FO 371/9004, F.12.

intended to commence operations forthwith to forestall the Turks' intentions by denying them the Ruwanduz avenue of approach.

The impression given by this correspondence with London, is that the A.O.C. anticipates trouble, rather than waiting for it to happen—also, his intelligence is very active.

The Acting High Commissioner telegraphed the Secretary of State on 20 March 1923,[20] to reinforce his concurrence with the above plan of the A.O.C. and stated the need to maintain tranquillity, "...during the forthcoming negotiations" with the Turks. "Mere rumour of our intentions has produced disintegrating effect on the Kurds and at Kirkuk and Kifri and Arbil where pro-Turkish propaganda had made great progress confidence has already been restored" (sic).

> Jafs of Halabja are believed to be ready to submit to Iraq Government and are separating from Suleimanieh and tribes east of Koi are reported on the turn. I feel confident that we shall be able to get through the summer without serious disturbance and that no dangerous embarrassments will result from prolongation of negotiations with the Turks provided that we persist in our plans.

In the same context, the police had managed to seize a Turkish postbag at Amadiyah, the contents of which confirmed the fears of both the A.O.C. and the A.H.C. This incident was relayed to the Foreign Office by the Colonial Office on 9 April 1923.[21] A Minute stated:

> The main impression conveyed by a perusal of these very interesting documents is the utter lack of any real solidarity between the various leading personalities on either side. The result is a series of shifting combinations, which continually give way to new ones.

One of the letters seized stated that Euz Demir (Iron Shoulder) stigmatised Simko as "the scoundrel", whereas a few months later he is described as "controlling all Kurdistan...an expert and well fitted to be Governor". Also, Shaikh Mahmud was suspected of being a tool of the British. After perusal of all the documents, British intelligence felt that the letters indicated the intense duplicity in these tribal affairs. However, these letters were considered evidence of the success of the British efforts in Kurdistan to prevent the formation of a pro-Turkish bloc, and that although

[20] FO 371/ .9004, F.228.
[21] FO 371/9004, F.254.

Shaikh Mahmud had let the British down badly, Euz Demir's intrigues had been neutralised.

The operations for north-east Kurdistan, as planned by the A.O.C., failed to materialise quite as planned because of heavy rains, which must also have interfered with any Turkish infiltrators' intentions. Nevertheless, two columns of troops were dispatched, and engaged in minor actions in eradicating snipers before Euz Demir left Ruwanduz with his men on the night of 20 April. Finally, Ruwanduz township was attacked by the columns, supported by air action, and occupied by the A.O.C's troops on 24 April 1923.

It should be noted that Shaikh Mahmud, who had been ousted from Sulaimaniah, escaped to Persia, where he usually wintered. But on this occasion, he returned to Iraq in July 1923.

On 20 March 1923,[22] the A.O.C. decided to expel a Turkish detachment, still situated at Ruwanduz, "...before the North-Eastern frontier is opened in the Spring...", by using imperial and local forces. A column of Iraq Levies in co-operation with a column of imperial troops occupied Ruwanduz, after driving all Turkish troops across the border into Persia. The Iraq army contributed to the success of the operations by sending two cavalry regiments and a pack battery. When the operations were completed, the Iraq government installed a Qaimmaqam in the Ruwanduz area. The Iraq army also stationed an infantry battalion at Mosul to augment the imperial garrison there (which had not been affected by the British withdrawal from Sulaimaniah) by one squadron, and an infantry battalion to the northern frontier area.

As may be recalled, the Mesopotamian garrison was only designed for internal security, and maintained on the assumption that there would be no external aggression. Also, Sir Percy Cox had recently been warned by the War office that no reinforcements would be available for Iraq. Thus, any further forced withdrawal would constitute a serious blow to British prestige, and might encourage further Turkish infiltration, followed by another Kurdish rising.

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[22] FO 371/9004, F.231.

The whole concept and scale of the Levy Force was now to provide ground troops in support of the RAF. The greater the threat to security, and the less able the Iraq army proved adequate to shoulder their share in maintaining internal security, the more important the Levies became, especially with the weakening of the imperial garrison. The more trouble the A.O.C. anticipated, the stronger the case for strengthening the Levies, especially in the early years of the R.A.F's new role in Iraq.

On 17 August 1923, there was yet another communication on the subject of the Levy establishment.[23] It appears that the Colonial Office insisted on discounting the 1st Levy Arab Battalion (Marsh Arabs), which they had excluded from the total of 5,463, leaving a total of 5,073. This battalion was seen as a political problem by the author, who stated,

> ...I still feel it should be disbanded, but in view, firstly of the undertaking that we would not enlist further Arabs in the Levies, which we gave to King Feisal; and secondly of the paramount importance of showing to Iraq Government that, in practice, local forces under imperial control, will be reduced *pari passu* with progressive withdrawal of Imperial Force, and of securing some relief to the British Exchequer. I cannot, in any case, sanction increase in strength. On distinct understanding that no excess over proportionate figure based on estimates of £500,000...these establishments are sanctioned from today.

The reader might note that this in no way ended the controversy of the 1st Marsh Arab Battalion.

The following document confirms the continued excessive financial stringencies which often led to the loss of efficacy in the control of Iraq, responsibility for which, Britain was by Treaty bound. In this context, it is proposed to set out an extract from this document, dated 20 June 1923,[24] from the High Commissioner to the Colonial Office, in which he discussed in detail some of the aforementioned problems, and commenced,

> My conclusions are, then, as follows:
>
> (a) the Iraq Government should be permitted to spend more that twenty-five per cent of its revenue on its defence forces, if this can be managed by it within the period of the Treaty, consistently with its financial obligations to His Majesty's Government and in the matter of the Ottoman debt. [The "Ottoman Debt" was Iraq's share of the

[23] AIR 5/295, F.68.
[24] AIR 2/1450, F.200.

> War Debt, incurred by the Ottoman empire, of which Iraq formed part.]
> (b) for the purpose of internal defence alone, a considerably greater expansion of the forces is necessary than would be required to bring them up to the present numbers of the Iraq Army, Iraq Police and Levies, owing to the disappearance of the Royal Air Force as far as internal defence is concerned;
> (c) such an expansion cannot for political reasons be in the direction of an expansion of the Police nor for tribal reasons in the direction of a local tribal Militia system;
> (d) there will be difficulty in securing the absorption of the Levies into the Iraq Army owing to:
> 1. prejudice against a British-officered force
> 2. greater expense of the force
> 3. prejudice against Christians as far as the Assyrians are concerned, and
> 4. the desire for conscription of the townspeople. If, however, it were found possible to continue to form the Iraq Army on a voluntary basis, this prejudice might to some extent be overcome and the absorption be secured by some rearrangement of emoluments and terms of service and by large diminution of British Officers;
> (e) the plan which commends itself to the Iraq Government is the conscription of the town populations and the inhabitants of settled villages and although this would be a confession of weakness so far as the tribesmen are concerned, it would be better than nothing. It would provide for rapid expansion within the present revenues of the Iraq Government, whereas an expansion on the present voluntary basis would have to wait for a problematic expansion of revenues.

There were comments on this document by the Deputy Director of Operations Iraq (D.D.O.I.) to the Deputy Chief of Air Staff (D.D.A.S.) in an Air Ministry file Minute sheet, dated 17 October 1923.[25] These stated that the Colonial office was pressing for the opinions of the Air Staff on the High Commissioner's despatch above.

The D.D.O.I. felt it was

> ...quite obvious that no local forces can be raised in Iraq without an increase of revenue expenditure, and I suggest that the local forces in Iraq should be tried out on the volunteer basis, and, if necessary, an expenditure up to 40% of the revenue might be applied for the first few years.

(Meaning that the men recruited on a "voluntary basis" were usually more expensive than those enlisted under "conscription".)

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[25] Ibid.

> In order to get the army started at all it will be necessary to start reducing the Levies. I think the time has now come when it should be made quite plain to the Iraq Government that for the first few years it is essential for efficiency that a proportion of British officers must be attached to the Iraq Army. This should be made clear, even although it may hurt the feelings of the many late Turkish army officers at present in Iraq.

(Presumably the intention was to take away the Levy element of support, and so make Iraq shoulder the defence deficiency thus created.)

> If a voluntary force was too expensive the only alternative method would appear to be conscription for the towns, and subsidies paid to the tribes provided they keep a certain number of armed tribesmen available for the Central Government when required.

(These Minutes are on the same file above.)

The Next Minute was from D.C.A.S. to C.A.S. (Chief of Air Staff), dated the same day, in which he felt the previous Minute did not carry the Air Staff much further, as they were unlikely to influence the Iraq government on the choice of a voluntary or conscripted army (cost and politics being the main factors). Also, it was seen from the Iraq press that it would raise considerable opposition to continuing the Levies, or to the inclusion of British officers in the Iraq army.

C.A.S. considered that if the policy of reduction continued, then it was necessary to consider if it was safe to leave the RAF in the country without protection of at least four battalions; "and whether we are prepared to accept local forces with or without British Officers, in substitution of any of these four battalions". (This would appear to be a somewhat ambiguous statement, in view of the fact that their intention was to have four Levy battalions officered by British, or that four Iraq army battalions officered by British would be acceptable as a substitute.)

The D.C.A.S. stated that the Colonial Office should "emphasise as strongly as possible the necessity for a proportion of British Officers with the local forces". Also, "subject to the above remarks, we can agree with the conclusions of the High Commissioner's report".

The issue of the future role of the RAF and the proposed Iraq air force, as well as the newly-created Iraq army, continued to form the essential background to the evolution of the Levies during 1923. The general situation

of Iraq's defence progress affected the planning for the future of the Levies. The whole controversy continued unabated throughout the next few years. The Levies were a pawn in this departmental wrangle.

At the time of these particular discussions, it should be noted that Trenchard (C.A.S.) stated in a letter to the Secretary of State, dated 2 November 1923:[26]

> Finally, I must make clear to you my own view, that when the date for final evacuation comes in four years time (1927-28), there is great likelihood of the country lapsing into disorder; for the reason that the native forces under a native administration would prove too incompetent to keep the peace between the different sections.

According to the decisions taken at the Cairo Conference for the combined estimated strength of the "local Iraq forces" (Levies and Iraq army) to be 15,000, this figure had never been achieved.

A draft letter by Trenchard to the Colonial Office of 2nd November 1923,[27] indicated the current trend in Air Ministry thinking on the matters under consideration. It pointed out that important questions were being raised on the way the defence forces in Iraq should develop; and whether those forces were to replace those then controlled by Britain, namely the Levies and remnants of the imperial garrison, when the latter were withdrawn. There were two main points:

(a) the development of the land forces of the Iraq Government;
(b) the possibility of air units being maintained in Iraq in some form or other after the Treaty period has elapsed.

Trenchard anticipated,

> ...racial, financial, and political difficulties in the absorption of the Levies...on any large scale in the Iraq forces. Equally, the employment of British officers in the Iraq army is unpopular with the Iraq government.

But the A.O.C. was,

> ...strongly of the opinion that the Iraq Government should be pressed to recognise the necessity for having a proportion of British officers in their forces...,

if Iraq were to be able to protect itself after the British departure.

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[26] AIR 2/1450, F.5.
[27] AIR 2/1450, Minute sheet 5.

With regard to the RAF after the end of the four-year Treaty period, the question of any squadrons remaining without a new agreement to ensure British control of their use, required urgent consideration by both Sir Henry Dobbs and Sir John Salmond. They felt that in those circumstances, it would be difficult to maintain a British-controlled and financed air force. However, these problems should not apply to the maintenance of a civil aerodrome as part of an air route.

At the end of 1923, the question of the fate of the Levies was clearly the subject of much disagreement between various government departments. The dialogue differed considerably, but it is felt necessary to explore the arguments as they developed, although they remained unsolved.

A telegram from the High Commissioner to the Colonial Office of 7 December 1923,[28] stated that the A.O.C. agreed that British officers would secure maximum efficiency in the Iraq army, if in executive positions. But the request for this should be spontaneous by the Iraq government, or the Constituent Assembly would not agree. He proposed that Feisal might be manoeuvred into making the desired suggestion, and added, "Iraq would certainly seek help from other powers if we refuse".

Cox also stated that he disagreed with Trenchard on the matter of the inclusion of British officers in executive positions in the Iraq army by pressure on Feisal:

> I do not believe that the sincere concurrence of King Feisal or his Ministers in wording desired by Air Ministry can be secured (in the Military Protocol) and if their nominal assent is secured by pressure they will certainly arrange opposition in constituent assembly by subterranean means. By attempting to secure the form we shall then lose the substance.

On 18 December, Trenchard wrote to Churchill[29] in a most resolute tone concerning the requirements of the Air Ministry and its future intentions, in which he stated that,

> As long as the local forces are below 14,000, air action must continue [meaning punitive bombing would have to continue]. The Air Staff wish to reduce air action gradually, so eventually its cessation will pass unnoticed. At this stage, the Imperial Garrison can withdraw without undue reaction. Gradual reduction (of Imperial Forces), can

[28] AIR 2/1450, F.148.
[29] AIR 2/1450, F.163.

only be achieved, when local forces are strong and efficient enough to control the country.

Trenchard contended that it was the wrong principle to keep the strength of local forces low because of the presence of an imperial garrison:

it could only lead to a stalemate as follows:

(1) Imperial Ground Forces will be maintained to guard air bases, because Local Forces are too weak to control the country.
(2) Local Forces will be kept weak, because of the presence of the Imperial Garrison.

He declared:

The above is futile, therefore action must be taken without delay to increase efficiency and strength of local forces. It should be remembered, that local forces will protect the air bases, not by direct guards, like the Imperial troops, but by the fact that they are controlling the country. The more they control the country therefore, the more the Imperial ground forces...and air forces, be spared. The policy to be followed, therefore, is to increase the local forces as quickly as possible.

The Air Ministry regard 9,000 local forces, of which 4,000 are officered by British Officers (the Levies), as sufficient, with the Imperial Garrison.

The Air Ministry,

...emphasise that future reductions in the Imperial Garrison will depend more and more on the size and efficiency of the Local Forces.

The Air Staff would make a tentative proposal on the reduction of the imperial garrison for 1925/26, but the proposal must be submitted to the High Commissioner and the A.O.C. before it can be finalised, and it depends on the following points:-

(i) The settlement of the Frontier with Turkey.
(ii) The Military Agreement. (Meaning Military Protocol.)
(iii) Progressive increase of local forces, in efficiency and numbers.
(iv) State of the country. [Iraq.]

With regard to (iii) above, it is hoped that, not only will the Iraq Government Local Forces be increased, by recruiting from outside sources (assume this referred to tribesmen, as opposed to townsmen), but that they will also absorb the British Officered Levies, either into the Army or as a Gendarmerie force. It must be clearly understood,

> that a transfer of Levies to the Iraq Government, does not constitute an increase in the local forces. It simply means less expenditure for the Imperial Government.

Trenchard's exposition was realistic, but the British Exchequer and local politics were the stumbling block to rational answers in the existing situation. The Cairo Conference of 1921 had decided on two local forces, which were: (a) the Iraq army: officered by Arabs, but with a small number of British military advisers; and (b) the Levy Force: officered by British officers.

The Iraq army was organised to enable the Iraq government to maintain internal security on the withdrawal of the imperial garrison. But it would not achieve military efficiency within the four-year period without British executive control. This had not been anticipated in Cairo. The Iraq government strongly resisted British executive control of the army, mostly on political grounds. This also applied to their absorbing the Levies. The Air Ministry and the Colonial Office still hoped to find a way of overcoming Iraqi objections.

Further light is cast on these issues by notes in a document by the Air Staff on policy, covering the years 1921-23.[30] They are in the context of the issues now being discussed, and help to explain much of the background for Trenchard's expressed concern.

The original Treaty period was for twenty years, which should have been enough time for the Iraq army to become efficient, especially if the Levies were absorbed into the Iraq army with their British officers.

However, the reduction of a twenty-year to a four-year period by a Military Protocol in the Treaty, was signed on 30 April 1923. This caused the Air Staff to urge that British officers with executive powers be accepted into the Iraq army, as quickly as possible, to improve that army's efficiency. The Air Staff also felt that Iraq's expenditure on defence should exceed 25 per cent of revenue. This was also agreed by the High Commissioner, Iraq, and by London, with the proviso that it did not prejudice Iraq's financial obligations to Britain.

The Air Staff could not accept a further reduction of the imperial garrison, unless the British officers were quickly accepted for the Iraq army in

an executive capacity. If this proved impossible, then they required to be informed immediately.

In the context of Trenchard's letter of 18 December 1923, on the matter of reducing punitive air action in Iraq, an Air Staff Memorandum of December 1923[31] to Air H.Q. Iraq on the same subject, said:

> The stated object was: in order to carry out the policy of the Government, for the evacuation of the Imperial Garrison, in four years time, the question of the efficiency of Local Forces is all important. Certain principles, although already understood bear repetition—and must be vigorously applied.

The message was that bombing as a means of punishment should be treated as a last resort and that therefore "all punishment of recalcitrant tribes should be carefully scrutinised". Where possible, every effort was to be made to mete out punishment by other methods without resorting to air action.

> Because British officials are greatly reduced in outlying districts, reliability of information on the tribes, is questionable. The degree of punishment is based on this information, and most careful scrutiny of all applications is therefore necessary.

There can be little doubt that bombing, as a form of reprisal or punishment, could be highly controversial, especially with regard to Britain's position *vis-à-vis* the League of Nations. However, the burning of villages and destruction of crops, together with the seizure of livestock by ground troops was effective, but slow, and therefore costly. Also, in the matter of frontier incursions, or inter-tribal fracas, it was too slow to prevent a possibly very serious incident, which might spread. Internal security methods of the period had to take all these matters into careful consideration before authority was given for such action by aircraft.

In the context of the ground troops most likely to be called for punitive action among other internal security work, were the Levies. The composition of the Levies by the end of 1923, is given in a report by the Levy Commandant to the A.O.C. on 15 December of that year.[32] Then the Levy Forces at his disposal were:

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[30] AIR 2/1450, F.125.
[31] AIR 2/1450, F.166.
[32] AIR 23/574, F.274.

*1st Levy Pack Battery	*1st Battalion
*1st Cavalry Regiment	*2nd Battalion
*2nd Cavalry Regiment	3rd Battalion
3rd Cavalry Regiment	Iraq Levy Depot.

Dobbin stated he was unable to submit a report on the 4th Battalion until after three months, because the personnel (then Assyrians) had been employed "solely on building" over the last three months. It will be remembered that this was the old Sulaimaniah Kurdish battalion, which had disintegrated after Shaikh Mahmud was re-established in the district; and it was being re-formed with new Assyrian recruits. Some money had been allocated with which to try and improve some of the appalling Levy accommodation.

In another point perhaps worthy of note, it appeared an air staff officer had ticked (shown thus*) a number of units listed above, leaving others unmarked. The latter may have been subjects for amalgamation or future disbandment because of lack of money.

The year 1924 began with a conference, held at the Colonial Office on 3 January,[33] where agreement was reached on a number of issues regarding military policy in Iraq. (Those in attendance were not listed, except for the Chairman, the Duke of Devonshire.) Decisions were taken as follows:

a. The Colonial Office agreed that it was essential to have British executive officers in the Arab Army. But this provision could not be inserted in the military agreement. The reasons being, lack of time and political undesirability. However, every effort would be made to achieve it, as it was essential to improve the efficiency of the army, before expiry of the four-year Treaty. The High Commissioner, together with the A.O.C. of Iraq, would be telegraphed to this effect, and urged to make strong representations.

b. Colonial Office agreed that every effort should be made to increase the strength of the local forces up to 14,000 or 15,000 as early as possible. The A.O.C. to be informed of this decision.

c. The vexed question of the wording of Article 8 (of the Treaty) was considered, and a compromise of the wording, as follows, was agreed: "That neither Government shall undertake any military operations without previous consultation and agreement with the

[33] AIR 2/1450, F.11.

> other Government". The A.O.C. Iraq should also be urged to accept it.
>
> d. Agreement was also reached on some other points (not mentioned), but included the disbandment of the Arab Levy Battalion (the 1st Marsh Arab Battalion) should be postponed.

(This was taken from the Minute Sheet which, according to the initials, was signed by Shuckburgh, and addressed to C.A.S.)

In an attempt to clarify the continued discussions on the fate of the 1st Levy Marsh Arab Battalion, the following points may be recalled. Firstly, it was agreed Arabs would not be enlisted for service in the Levies in order not to deprive the Iraq army of recruits. However, the army did not enlist tribesmen, and the Marsh Arabs were of this group. Therefore, the army was not being deprived of men. Secondly, the 1st Battalion had developed a history of service while in Nasiriyah. From the remnants of Major Eadie's "Muntafiq Horse" they became Captain Dickson's "Nasiriyah Arab Scouts" (the N.A.S.). Thirdly, they were considered one of the finest of the Levy battalions and finally, the area of the "Muntafiq" was restless and rather volatile; therefore, in the interest of internal security, it was desirable that the resident force comprised men of that area. These were more than sufficient reasons for the A.O.C. to wish to maintain the unit.

Having attempted to clarify the position of the last Arabs in the Levies, it is now proposed to discuss the immediate Assyrian situation because they now formed the bulk of the Levy Force.

An interesting Confidential Report, passed by the High Commissioner Iraq to the Colonial Office, and then passed on to the Foreign Office on 5 January 1924, was headed "Note on Assyrian Refugees".[34] (The author was Air Staff intelligence.) It is important because it indicates the British policy of connecting the settlement of the Assyrians with the attempt to acquire an adequate Turkish-Iraq frontier settlement. The report stated: "Recent enquiries go to show that influences are at work trying to exploit the somewhat natural discontent among the Assyrians". This

> ...anxiety is reflected in high Assyrian quarters, where there is now a distinct feeling that they can no longer trust the British, and that the

[34] FO 371/10088, F.11.

> latter are quite capable of being willing to hand back the Assyrian country, if not the whole Mosul Vilayet, to the Turks, while continuing to deny any such intention.

This,

> ...is, of course, aggravated by the Arab Assyrian feeling, which goes so far as to say that the Assyrians, assisted by the levies, are planning to seize the Mosul Vilayet for themselves.

Further, it had been openly stated by responsible Assyrians that: "...the French have strongly invited the nation [Assyrian], including the levies, to immigrate bag and baggage to their mandatory area". The arrival in Beirut of Captain Ducrocq, who was interested in the project, and Agha Petros in Paris (the latter no doubt presenting the Assyrian case to the French), showed that at least the rumours had some foundation. These reported Assyrian assertions, it will be seen, expressed a desire for an Assyrian-Chaldean state, which strongly appealed to the French. Furthermore, reports from Mosul stated it was known that the Persian Consul in Mosul, who had held appointments in Bolshevik Russia and had a Russian wife, was in correspondence with the Bolshevik Minister in Tehran. The latter had been active in trying to induce the Assyrians in Mosul to return to Urmia or Russia, promising them assistance from the Bolshevik Consulate in Kermanshah. If all was to be believed, subversive intrigue was rife. It will be shown, in due course, that at least some of these seeds of Levy subversion came to fruition.

Next, the Secretary of State for the Colonies wrote to the High Commissioner Iraq on 19 January 1924[35] on "1. The Question of Assyrians". He concurred with the suggestion that Assyrians of Persian origin should be returned to Persia. Also, the Foreign Office was being consulted on the appointment of a British vice-consul to Urmia; and "2. His Majesty's Government propose at forthcoming frontier negotiations to press in any case, as regards the Assyrian area...for the 'extreme limit' frontier proposed in your secret despatch of the 18th October". This was for "making provision for all Assyrian communities" in northern Iraq.

It appears that the real intention was to use the settlement of the Assyrian refugees (especially the mountaineers of the Hakkiari, then mostly

serving in the Levies), who could not return to their homelands in Turkey, as a political lever to achieve the best possible settlement with Turkey on the question of Iraq's northern frontier. The pertinent extract reads:

> Our case before the League of Nations would be greatly strengthened if it could be shown that sufficient territory would be available within proposed frontier for ultimate settlement of all Assyrians; including those communities scattered outside Iraq at present.

Under paragraph 3 it was stated, "It would not be possible for any section of Assyrian community to be supplied with arms by His Majesty's Government". Also, that if Assyrian settlements in Iraq were to be armed, this could only be done as part of an organised defence scheme by the Iraq government. However, Assyrians intending to settle outside the frontier of Iraq could not be armed by either government (namely, Britain or Iraq). This would apply to those being returned to Persia, for example. Nevertheless, Assyrians, on completion of two years service with the Levies, were being armed, as may be recalled at the Dohuk meeting.

The High Commissioner was requested to press the Iraq government to settle Assyrians on the lines proposed above:

> under loose Iraq control and to provision of enough land for accommodation, if and when they come, for further returning Assyrians.... The Iraq Government should be told:
>
> a. That from a diplomatic standpoint best and perhaps only prospect of securing strategically defensible and really satisfactory frontier for Iraq is afforded by this.
>
> b. That Iraq would secure excellent military material for defence of northern frontier by settlement of Assyrians.
>
> c. That there is risk, if the Assyrians are not satisfied with their treatment by Iraq, of their being tempted to throw in their lot with the French or the Turks.
>
> d. That we expect Iraq Government on general grounds to give us assistance in doing what we can for a people to whom we are under obligation for services rendered during the war.

During research in the primary sources it is rare to find the British government expressing such a truth as at (d) above, in writing. Many senior

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[35] FO 371/10088, F.37.

officers had expressed their thanks and admiration for the efforts of those known as "the brave little people". Nevertheless, in this case the stakes were quite high in the British interest. Because if the Assyrians left Iraq, then Britain would have lost the manpower source for the Levies, which was vital for the British plan for the immediate control of Iraq. The settlement of the Assyrians was a lever to be used in negotiations concerning the Turkish-Iraq frontier.

In the same context, the Secretary of State for the Colonies telegraphed the High Commissioner Iraq on 19 January,[36] stating:

> Would it not be possible to mitigate present unhealthiness of Dohuk area in which it is proposed that Assyrians should be settled by relatively inexpensive measures against malaria. Please ascertain to what extent Iraq Government would be prepared to assist in such measures.

Further, he (Devonshire) thought that a representative from the School of Tropical Medicine in England could examine the problem, and that such a mission should not cost more than £1,000, "...which might be regarded as money well invested by Iraq Government". There was no explanation why the Iraq government should offer to finance the resettlement of Britain's former allies—although it was being pointed out to the Iraq government that they should not miss the opportunity of having such excellent military material, situated between themselves and the Turks, on their northern frontier.

This example, together with the following, shows the British government's parsimony being carried too far. It demonstrates how the Levies (a) had their tactical and operational ability severely reduced; and (b) a considerable portion of Iraq's civilian livestock was at risk.

The latter refers to a :"Veterinary Memorandum" of 5 March 1924,[37] issued by the Director of Civil Veterinary Services Baghdad. It stated:

> I wish to call your attention to the fact that practically every Squadron of the Levy Force has for more than a year, until recently been kept in working isolation, on account of their animals being infected with "Epizootic Lymphangitis" [glanders].

[36] FO 371/10088, F.164.
[37] AIR 23/574, F.181.

> At present, the Levies have no British Veterinary Officer. Only one Indian Veterinary Assistant remains to do the work of the whole Force—an impossible task.

(Indeed it was, spread as they were over northern Iraq.)

> I shall be enforced to prohibit the movement of any Levy horse or mule within the boundaries of Iraq...their being a source of serious danger to the health of the animals of the Civil Community, to the Police force, and to the Iraq Army.

Locally, this must have been devastating to British prestige.

Having dealt with the immediate Assyrian situation, with all its implications for the morale and, in turn, the reliability of the Levies, it is now intended to discuss the same issues in relation to Levy Persian and Kurdish personnel.

These matters are embodied in a letter from the Levy Commandant to the A.O.C., British Forces Iraq, dated 31 March 1924.[38] He claimed he possessed no definite information as to disloyalty among Persian Kurds; but he was of the opinion "...that their position (meaning an Iraq minority) and racial tendencies, made them peculiarly liable to be influenced by hostile propaganda".

It was not easy to determine their exact international status, and their enlistment was consequently liable to objection under Article 2 of the Mandate. This point had been raised by the High Commissioner with the former Inspector-General (Sadleir-Jackson) when the question of recruiting Persian Kurds was vetoed by the High Commissioner. This decision had also been concurred with by the A.O.C. The commandant was, therefore, issuing instructions to that effect. Nevertheless, he considered the immediate discharge of all Persian Kurds would be detrimental to morale, let alone dislocation, in the units. Thus he would gradually eliminate them.

The letter concluded with the usual reference to funding. Because of the financial cuts, he was unable to maintain the Force at its present strength during 1924-25. In order to rationalise the enforced cuts in personnel (it may be recalled that a reduction of 390 had been demanded, p.177), he suggested the following course of action: (a) The amalgamation of the 2nd and 3rd

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[38] Ibid.

Cavalry Regiments. The newly-amalgamated Regiment H.Q. and one squadron at Mosul, and the remaining two squadrons to be stationed at Arbil; (b) the reduction of the cavalry to a two-regiment establishment, by the gradual elimination of the Kurdish element, as suggested; (c) cavalry personnel to be confined to Chaldeans for the present. (The three squadron regiments replacing the more usual four.)

In the context of ethnic problems, the Levy Commandant had another case to resolve. On 9 April 1924, he wrote to Air H.Q. on an unusual matter[39] (this is the only case discovered). It concerned a letter in the *Baghdad Times*, perhaps derogatory, about the Levies; or concerned the existing predicament of the stateless Assyrians. Its content was not mentioned in the communication. The cutting had been sent on to the Commandant by Rab Khaila David d'Mar Shimun, but is not on file.

The letter in question had been signed by "Mr. Nibbad". In point of fact, the letter was written by Mr. E. St. J. Hebbard, at that time employed by Messrs. Orasdi Back, who was an ex-Levy British officer—a Company Commander stationed at Aqra, and lately in the I.A.R.O. (Indian Army Reserve of Officers). His services had been "terminated" in the summer of 1922 by the G.O.C.-in-C. because he had married an Assyrian woman, a dependant of one of the men in his company. In those days this breach of conduct could not be tolerated.

The Assyrian question arose again in an important letter from the Acting High Commissioner Baghdad, to Prime Minister Jafar Pasha El Askari, dated 2 April 1924.[40] The letter reveals how the British government proposed to use the "Assyrian Question" in their interests, by trying to ensure the Assyrians remained in Iraq—available for enlistment in the Levies. Further, the security of the northern frontier involved topographical considerations to provide a suitable line for the defence of Mosul—the latter issue was perhaps in the interests of both Iraq and Britain.

The letter had stated that the British government had the Assyrian question under review for some time; not only because of their services

[39] AIR 23/574, F.162.
[40] FO 371/1089, F.18.

rendered and sacrifices made during the war, but also because of the importance to Iraq of

> ...having on the Iraq side of the frontier and attached by gratitude and loyalty to the Iraq State this small but warlike people and the districts which they occupy. In negotiating the Mosul frontier, the British Government is therefore disposed to press for the frontier to be fixed as far north as possible so as to include the greater part of the Assyrian people other than those that belong to Persian districts, that is to say, so as to include the mountains occupied by the Taiyari, Tkhuma and the Jelu and Baz tribes.
>
> The advantage of this to the Iraq State need not be enlarged upon, but His Majesty's Government has also to consider the interests of the Assyrians themselves, and it cannot support Iraq's claim to the extreme northern frontier unless it is assured, and can satisfy the world, that the Iraq Government will do its part in assuring a prosperous future to those Assyrians who will be settled within its borders.

The letter referred to the Assyrian diaspora as follows:

From Persian territory	5,000 persons
From territory which was formerly Turkish and which the British government proposed to claim for Iraq	14,000 persons
From Turkish territory not to be claimed for Iraq	6,000 persons
Total, men, women and children	25,000

It was claimed that some 7,500 Assyrians had found their own way back to the Taiyari and Tkhuma country, most of whom would return if the border region was assigned to Iraq. Those Assyrians in Persia would also be pressed to return to northern Iraq.

Another incentive was offered to encourage the Prime Minister of Iraq to accept the plan:

> Lastly, looking still farther ahead to the time for the admission of Iraq to the League of Nations, what better proof could she offer of her ability and desire to deal justly and wisely with persons of different race and faith than to point to a friendly and satisfied body of Assyrians settled within her borders?

Regardless of these subtle political machinations, it would have been better had the British kept in closer touch with the patriarchal family while planning what might, or might not, be done for the resettlement of the tribes. At this juncture, it will be shown that the Assyrians contrived to upset the situation.

In the meantime, on 7 May 1924, the Secretariat of the High Commissioner passed to the A.O.C.[41] the approved Budget for the Iraq Levies for the financial year 1924-25; this was £580,000. The Treasury stated that expenditure was for 87 lakhs, and subject to "such modifications" as were required to meet the following charges, "while keeping the expenditure within the sterling figure of £580,000", detailed below:

a. Revised medical organisation
b. Disbandment of the 3rd Cavalry Regiment
c. Possible appreciation of the rupee
d. Movement of units
e. Non-effective charges
f. Extraordinary expenditure, resulting from the Ruwanduz operation, as will not be covered by the amount provided to meet that expenditure during the current financial year.
g. Any expenditure incurred in 1923-24, which has not been accepted during that year, pending receipt of further explanations.

It also had to cover a temporary house allowance for British other ranks of Rs.45 per month. (Their tentage had been reported by Meinertzhagen as "rotting".)

However, if the content of these financial restrictions can be understood, it appears to imply from item (f) above "Extraordinary Expenditure", that if, for example, the Commandant had to put down trouble in Iraqi Kurdistan, the cost of those operations would be set as a charge against his budget. The order that the limit of £580,000 could not be exceeded would seem to imply this. If so, then the financial imposition was hardly rational in view of the whole purpose of the Force, which was to maintain internal security in a turbulent emerging country.

Although there had been much correspondence on the burgeoning of Assyrian fears for their future, which could cause serious unrest, it would appear that little had been done to allay the fears of the local populations in the Mosul Vilayet, or in Kurdistan, on the anticipated influx of Assyrians into the region, and rumours were rife.

The following disturbance concerns the local population of Kirkuk. In May 1924, the 2nd Battalion of the Levies was stationed, with their families, in Kirkuk, during the operations in Sulaimaniah. By 4 May, only two

[41] AIR 23/574, F.91.

companies remained. There had been enmity between the townsfolk and the Levies (Kurds with the Assyrians), and on seeing the bulk of the battalion reduced, the locals started to intimate how they would deal with the Assyrian women when all Levies had departed.

A fracas was reported in the bazaar at 9.30 a.m., and a native officer with the Regimental Police went to clear any Assyrians from the area. They brought back two wounded Levies, and reported the bazaar clear of troops. By then, the remainder of the depleted battalion were on parade under their company officers. The men were told that shopkeepers who had caused the trouble, would be arrested and tried. The men were instructed not to cause further trouble, and the town was placed "out of bounds". A Regimental Police piquet was posted on the bridge leading to the town.

Nevertheless, on leaving the parade the men had to pass a tea-booth (chai-khana) from where the occupants shouted some offensive remarks. The men rushed the place, breaking it up, together with the contents. They then ran to cross the bridge, overcoming the resistance of the police piquet. They pressed on, only to be fired on from the town and suffered casualties. Some Levies then stormed back to the camp, returning to the town with rifles and ammunition. They captured a large house on the edge of town and started firing in all directions from the roof.

British and native officers caught as many men as they could, disarmed them and put them under guard in camp. By then, four Levies and one Arab employee had been killed, and seven Levies wounded. The townsfolk of Kirkuk suffered some fifty killed. The Levy Commandant, who was in Baghdad at the time, was telegraphed about the events, and arranged for British armoured cars from Mosul to move to Kirkuk. In the meantime, a British officer went into the township, and by moving from house to house under fire, managed to collect small parties of the men as he went. Eventually, he recovered some eighty men and three native officers, whom he returned to the fort, together with around a hundred Christian civilians. By 5.00 p.m. all was quiet, and a platoon of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers arrived, and took over the fort.

The situation remained critical, with feelings bitter and running high. On the 6th, the remnants of the battalion, together with their families, were

marched away towards Chemchemal. The column consisted of 23 old men, 404 women and 172 children, escorted by two Levy companies, using any transport, including that acquired on the march. On the evening of the 7th, they were at Qara Anjir, when Kurds attacked one of the piquets—but were driven off.

The march resumed next morning, and the Kurds attacked the Levy column from all sides, and continued firing on them until it was three miles from Chemchemal. The column had lost one man killed and one missing. The attacking Kurds were fired on by aircraft, and at one point, the Levies managed to get to close quarters with their attackers, killing fifteen of them—their bodies were later taken to Kirkuk. A court of enquiry was held, and those Levies found guilty of the violent fracas were punished. No details of a court martial are available. In mitigation, it was agreed they had been under great pressure.

The consequences of the affair are important. A Foreign Office Minute, dated 8 May 1924,[42] stated:

> Transmits copy of telegram of May 6th from Baghdad informing that Council of Ministers have accepted proposals for settlement of Assyrians north of Mosul, but massacre perpetrated by Assyrian Levies at Kirkuk has changed situation.

This was followed by the following comment in manuscript:

> The Assyrians will only have themselves to thank if the ultimate solution of the problem is not to their liking. The massacre will doubtless make the Iraq Govt. loath to commit itself in favour of the formation of a quasi autonomous Assyrian unit, and the effect of this will be to weaken Sir P. Cox's hand at Constantinople....

The general tenor of Assyrian concern for their future is, to a certain extent embodied in the following extract of a letter from the Levy Commandant to Air H.Q. of 25 June 1924,[43] regarding a petition from Assyrian officers of the 4th Levy Battalion. The extract reads:

> The opinions expressed therein, are general throughout the Assyrian Levies. They are due not only to distrust of the Iraq Government, but also fear of a combined Turkish-Persian and Kurdish attack against them, which they expect will occur on the British departure, and

[42] FO 371/10089, F.1.
[43] AIR 23/574, F.43.

against which they could not hope to compete without British assistance.

It is perhaps useful to enlarge on the situation resulting from the "Kirkuk Massacre", because further trouble of this nature in 1924 had yet to occur. The discussion now considers Foreign Office extracts from a letter received from the Rev. E.W. McDowell and Mr. R.E. Speer, of 3 July 1924.[44] The following extract read:

> Word has just come from Tiary to the effect that a Turkish army has appeared in the neighbourhood of Julamerk.... Certain Kurdish chiefs are in conference with the Turks in Julamerk. The Turks refuse to grant any of the Mosul territory to Sir Percy. The army...is in sufficient strength to warn the English to keep hands off. We may expect them, therefore, to push as far south as the English will allow them at this time. This will probably mean the whole of Tiary and Tkhuma [territory?].... It is probably one of the chief purposes of that Turkish army to sweep all the Tiarians and Tkhomians out of the mountains.
>
> You will have noted that the treaty between Iraq and England was signed in Baghdad recently, but only after prolonged opposition on the part of the Iraq Mejlis Assembly. Two clippings from the *Baghdad Times* will indicate something of the temper of both sides.

Reference is then made to the "Kirkuk Massacre".

> The Iraq Assembly demanded the removal of all the Assyrians from their territory, and especially the Assyrian army [the Levies]. The Government had to confess that they could not dispense with the services of the Christian army in defending Iraq from the Turks.
>
> But the incident ["Kirkuk Massacre"] proves conclusively the utter impossibility of the Assyrians dwelling anywhere in this land without the presence of the English.... The Arab is as bitter an enemy of the Assyrians as the Turk and just as dangerous, but he is depending upon these Assyrians to save him from the Turk. That once done, the Arab will turn on the Assyrian and rend him.

(A prophecy which materialised in August 1933.)

This letter raised the question of whether the British government ever sought the opinions of the "men on the ground". Had they done so, and perhaps listened to their advice, many such political cul-de-sacs might have been avoided.

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[44] FO 371/10089, F.100.

The real fear of the Assyrians for their future is aired in a letter from Air Staff Intelligence to the C.S.O., dated 4 July 1924,[45] stating:

> The Assyrians have realised for some time past, that owing to the hostile attitude to Muslims generally, which they adopted during the war; it would be practically impossible for them [the Assyrians] to occupy their former homes without strong British backing.... The policy recently announced to them by the High Commissioner has been received with the greatest dismay.... They fear that in many ways they will have fewer privileges than they enjoyed under the Turks who at least allowed them a certain amount of semi-independence.

Some of the main points also commented on were:

1. No guarantee that the mountain districts of Tiari-Tkhuma-Jilu and Baz will not be ceded by Turkey,.
2. The deserted lands, the property of the Iraq Government North of Dohuk are rumoured to be waterless and unhealthy.
3. The payment of regular taxes to the Iraq Government, as opposed to the old system of a yearly tribute free from Turkish supervision.
4. No official recognition of the Patriarch and Maliks.
5. Non-exemption from service in the Iraq Army.

Emigration is now regarded as the only solution to an impossible situation.

There followed some hoped for destinations, for example, Canada and Cyprus (the Greek Orthodox Church being sympathetic to them).

The Assyrian situation in early 1924 was highly problematic, and in turn, their problems were, in reality, those of the High Commissioner and A.O.C. Together with the imperial garrison, the Assyrian Levies formed the only ground troops under the direct command of the A.O.C. There was also the anomaly of the 1st Levy Battalion Marsh Arabs during this difficult political period in Iraq.

The Assyrians were becoming increasingly restive and fractious. From all the documents reviewed, it is clear their lot was not an easy one. Few months went by without them being involved in operations in which they suffered casualties, fighting people (Kurds in particular) with whom it was suggested they were to live cheek by jowl in the near future when the fighting was over.

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[45] AIR 2/1450, F.34.

Also as discussed, the future of the Assyrians, as a people, had become increasingly uncertain. British hopes on the subject were unrealistic for the long term. Their pay as mercenaries was poor, with bad accommodation for themselves and their families—the latter living four families to a tent. They were well-officered, but there was little the British officers could do for the comfort and welfare of them men and dependants—the British Treasury cared little for what it could not see nor understand. But their excessive meanness usually led to more expense than it ever saved, as has yet to be shown.

On 6 July 1924, there was another "near call",[46] this time in Mosul. At about 10.15 a.m., a row took place in the meat bazaar between two Muslim shopkeepers. As it was getting serious, the Assyrian Levies in the bazaar started to return to their camp in accordance with Standing Orders.

As they returned to camp, a mob of townspeople, ignorant of the source of the trouble, pursued the Levies, assaulting them with sticks and stones. "However, all returned to camp in an orderly manner." Levy casualties in this incident were two seriously injured, and eight Levies and one Assyrian civilian slightly injured. This was a good example of the discipline which could be achieved with these "hot-headed" troops.

While the Assyrians feared for their future, and their presence was causing local resentment in the Mosul wilayat—the concerns of both parties—being born of ignorance, the progress of the Iraq army was under review.

On 26 June 1924, a conference was held at the Colonial office on "The Proposed Increase of 2,000 men for the Iraq Army.[47] (It may be recalled that the Iraq government had to obtain British Treasury permission for expenditure, because of the Ottoman Debt.) Representatives were: Shuckburgh and Meinertzhagen, Air Commodore Steel, Colonel Joyce (Iraq army), Squadron-Leader Graham, Mr. Vernon and Mr. Headlam. Joyce proposed that the sooner new units were formed, the sooner greater efficiency would be obtained by the end of the Treaty period. Further,

> ...The Iraq Army will be sufficiently efficient to maintain internal security against Arab tribes. They would be a doubtful quantity against the Turk but in 10 to 20 years they should be all right for

[46] AIR 2/1450, F.27.
[47] AIR 2/1450, F.236.

> defence against external aggression as by that time the Army will have a reserve built up.

D.C.A.S. stated, "...if Iraq Army is increased there will be no money left for Iraq Government to take over Levies". Meinertzhagen said, "...Iraq Government would not take over the Levies, officered by British".

Shuckburgh said that the need for a 2,000 increase in the Iraq army was agreed, but with some reduction in the Levies, as the new Iraq Army units were efficient. He also urged the disbandment of the 1st Levy Arab Battalion, as their work could be done by the Iraq Army. (This only proved he did not understand the need for tribesmen in the area of Nasiriyah—desirability for like policing like.)

The D.C.A.S. countered, saying, "It must not be thought that levies should be disbanded, simply because the Arab Army was being increased".

In the writer's opinion, the meeting was little more than a farce, as problems clearly expounded in Trenchard's letter to the Secretary of State for the Colonies of December 1923 (p.185) had not been addressed. However, it has been included as a means of emphasising the apparently casual and ill-informed way important issues of Iraq were being dealt with in London. Nothing had been achieved.

This is an example of the lack of co-ordination between London and the British executive in Iraq, at a time of considerable British perplexity in the country—the following provides ample proof of "the left hand not knowing what the right was doing".

Concern was created by a telegram to the High Commissioner Iraq from the Colonial Office, dated 8 August 1924,[48] calling for the cessation of the issue of a rifle and ammunition to Levies on their discharge after two years service. The High Commissioner responded, explaining that the order would "...upset the whole morale of the levies at this critical juncture, and involves breach of expressed terms of enlistment". Also, that in November 1922 at Dohuk, the new defence scheme was communicated to the Assyrian chiefs, and the privilege was categorically promised them. Therefore, urgent reconsideration was requested.

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[48] AIR 2/1450, Fs.81, 80 and 63.

The Levy Commandant then telegraphed the Colonial Office the next day, pointing out that on taking command, he had renewed the promise in a final effort to dissuade the Levies from taking their discharge; to this Cox and Salmond agreed. The Assyrians were serving on the formal understanding, that "If the pledge is repudiated enlistment of all Assyrian personnel, who must presumably be offered their discharge with the option of re-enlistment on new terms, will automatically terminate".

Dobbs, the High Commissioner, was on leave when this commotion began. He wrote a D.O. to Young at the Colonial Office, pointing out the following: Assyrians could purchase rifles from savings on discharge; Iraq was full of rifles of all kinds, but with little uniformity of type. With regard to ammunition for British rifles, this was less easy to come by in Iraq, unlike ammunition for other types of rifle. Discharged Levies would be no less a menace to the Turks, but there would be no British responsibility for their armament.

Further, he deprecated the prohibition on the engagement of new recruits at the present moment while the result of the frontier question with the League of Nations was yet unknown. The proposed edict would certainly be interpreted by Mosul Christians and population as a sign that we were expecting to have to abandon the Mosul province and the Assyrian mountains to the Turks, and a very unsettling effect produced. He felt that the League might insist on a plebiscite, and anything throwing doubt on our desire to retain the whole area for Iraq should be avoided.

He continued by saying that if the result of the League's decision gave the Assyrian mountains to Turkey, then the whole Assyrian question would change, and so would the question of their armament. On the other hand, if we gained the frontier we desired for Iraq, and the Iraq government carried out the generous policy towards the Assyrians which it had officially accepted to do, and took over the Assyrian Levies as a frontier force, as it was then inclined to do, then their armament question would have to be reconsidered.

Finally, he felt that after the frontier question had been settled, the cessation of the practice would not affect recruiting. However, before the frontier settlement it would imply that we intended to abandon the Assyrians.

Regardless of this correspondence, Ramsay MacDonald decided to enter the fray, with a letter on 8 September 1924, addressed to the Colonial Office.[49] He appreciated the force of Dobbs' contentions (these were enumerated), nevertheless, the Treaty obligations with the Turks required, as far as possible, that "...no direct British responsibility for the discharged Levies being in possession of arms".

MacDonald continued with his view that "unfortunate consequences" might occur if the practice ceased immediately—this was noted, and it would therefore be preferable to take no action until the League's decision was known. However, if the League decided to make enquiries on the spot or hold a plebiscite, all of which might cause considerably delay, then

> During this period His Majesty's Government are bound by the Treaty of Lausanne to do nothing to disturb the *status quo* and the danger of such disturbance will inevitably increase...proportionately as the number of armed ex-levies increases.

But because of the grave consequences anticipated by Dobbs, Ramsay MacDonald had "reluctantly agreed not to press for the immediate and total cessation of the existing practice".

But this aspect of the matter could not be held to relieve H.M.G. of the duty to take some immediate measures, as the Turks had officially complained, regarding the "provision of arms to Christian natives". The matter was to be further discussed with Dobbs, prior to his return to Iraq.

The Air Council then took up this subject, writing to the Colonial Office on 23 September 1924.[50] They had not yet been informed of the period of grace allowed above. They stated:

> In view of the serious situation which may develop if the incursion of the Turks is not completely stopped at once; the Air Council view with some alarm the withholding of this permission (gift of rifle and ammunition) without prior consultation with themselves, and desire to bring the following considerations before the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

Their concerns were, first, that the garrison in Iraq was insufficient, and was never intended to secure Iraq from an invasion; this had been emphasised repeatedly. On the occasion of the last threat, permission was

[49] AIR 2/1450, F.39.
[50] AIR 2/1450, F.44.

given to raise a corps of local camelry to assist in dealing with any Turkish invasion (this was not implemented).

Secondly, in view of the changed theatre of immediate operations, the Council considered local inhabitants should be armed and organised to resist an invasion. This did not suggest the force should invade Turkish territory, the intention being that most vigorous action should be taken against any Turkish incursions over the boundary.

Thirdly, in view of the unsettled state of the country, Mosul could at any time be fraught with grave danger to the garrison, followed by similar eruptions in others places, such as Sulaimaniah district. It could add very seriously to the problem of extricating such forces.

Fourthly, the Air Council desired to make it clear they did not view the situation with undue anxiety if absolute freedom was given to the A.O.C. to take vigorous action by all means in his power. But they were convinced this permission must be given before the situation developed, and it would then be too late.

In the light of the continued Turkish threat of armed incursion, and even of invasion, and the then current attempts to counter such actions, it is necessary to assess the strength of the ground forces in Iraq in August 1924, which was:

Iraq army	6,300
Iraq Levies	4,700
Imperial troops	3,400
Total	14,400

From these figures it may be seen that the Cairo Conference estimate for the combined strengths of the Levies and the Iraq army of 15,000 during the last four years of withdrawal of the imperial garrison, had not been met. Also, in the four-year period, the Iraq army was supposed to gain in efficiency so as to allow the programmed reduction of the imperial garrison. Trenchard and the A.O.C. considered that this necessary military excellence would not be achieved in the period allowed. Therefore, the Levy's strength should have been at 7,500 and that of the Iraq army the same—regardless of who paid. The RAF would also have to continue to support these ground troops until such time as an Iraq air force could be established to take over.

Issues connected with Iraq were becoming increasingly complex. The Kamalists in the postwar period were prepared to resort to any means to maintain national prestige in the face of those perceived as their former enemies. The Iraqi nationalists felt their government was in the British pocket. The country was also divided between townsmen, villagers and tribesmen. The Kurds wanted independence in some form, but failed to speak with one voice. The Assyrians were divided into mountaineers/herdsmen and plainsmen/cultivators; the former provided the best material for the Levies, but both had lost their homelands and were expressing a "refugee complex". All parties held suspicions regarding British intentions concerning them.

In the same context, it is proposed to enlarge on the subject of frontier incursions, as viewed by the Air Council above.

Because Shaikh Mahmud refused to leave Sulaimaniah the township was bombed in July, and occupied by units of the Iraq army, together with some British armoured cars. Mahmud retired to Barzinjar. From the time of the occupation of Sulaimaniah, operations against Mahmud began, and were to last for the next three years.

It may be recalled that some Assyrians of the Upper Tiari and Tkhuma people had managed to infiltrate back into their old homes inside Turkish territory. Some time in August 1924, the Turkish Wali of Julamerk, while touring his district with his escort, accidentally came into contact with some of these Assyrians. Some firing took place, and the wali's baggage was seized by the Assyrians. On being informed of the affair, the Turkish government decided to take action.

On 13 September 1924, a Turkish force crossed the Hazil river and appeared to threaten Zakho. The following day, they were attacked by British aircraft. On the 18th, the Turks attacked Bersivi, some nine miles north-east of Zakho. At this juncture, the A.O.C. placed the Levy Commandant in command of Mosul, Zakho and Amadiya.

There were also ready Levy detachments in Amadiya, which were:

One company, 3rd Levy Battalion
One company, 4th Levy Battalion
One section of machine-guns (two guns).

By chance, Levy Colonel Barke was on inspection at Amadiya and took command of the township. It was rumoured that the Turks had advanced, and because small arms and artillery fire was heard near Ashita, Barke sent two platoons under a British office to Ain D'Nuni.

On the 17th, Barke moved to Ain D'Nuni with the remainder of his scratch force, but leaving two platoons at Amadiya. The same day, the Turks crossed the Khabur river near Merga, and fired on a British air reconnaissance patrol east of Chellek.

Some Irregular Assyrians[51] were at Ain D'Nuni, and were able to help hold up the Turks; but being concerned for their families, they returned to Bebadi. The colonel's small force was now isolated, with Turks in front and on his left flank. On the 18th, Barke moved his scratch force to Benawi, where he was joined by 70 Irregular Assyrians under a native officer.

It is assumed that these "Irregular Assyrians" were perhaps receiving some financial support from a fund which had been granted to the A.O.C. some time in September, for raising a "Frontier Camel Corps". They were therefore armed settlers with their families. The safety of the latter would have been their first concern. Perhaps some of them were ex-Levies.

As well as the problem of the Turks, there was concern for what action the Berwari Bala Kurds might take in supporting the Turkish attack. They had caused much trouble during the insurrection in 1919. On the 19th, news was received in Constantinople that Turkish police were in action against brigands who had attacked the Wali of Julamerk—but subsequently proof was obtained that the police were supported by troops.

The RAF bombed the Turks at Hauris, but the Turks took Ashita. The refugees from there came into Ain D'Nuni, where Barke was with his mixed force. He had left the native officer with the 70 Irregular Assyrians in Benawi. In response to a signal from Barke, Levy H.Q. ordered two more companies of the 3rd Battalion from Diana to Amadiya, and a company from the 4th Battalion took over Diana on the 20th. Two 3rd Battalion platoons under a British officer also left Mosul for Dohuk.

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[51] J.G. Browne, *The Iraq Levies 1915-32* (London, 1932), pp.39-42 and 48.

The occupation of Ashita by the Turks had caused a general Assyrian retreat of families from the Hakkiari area of the fighting and many, with their maliks, took refuge in Ain D'Nuni. After a meeting with these maliks, Barke persuaded them to establish piquets towards Ashita with two platoons in support. The RAF, in spite of artillery and rifle fire, bombed the Turks on sight, enabling some Assyrians to occupy Zawitha village by 22 September.

A system of ground-to-air signalling,[52] which had been developed previously by means of canvas strips, was understood by all native officers and N.C.Os, and proved invaluable in maintaining RAF support.

It will be appreciated from this introduction to the developing affair, that the Levies were being marshalled into this frontier section as quickly as possible, as the need developed. The terrain being mountainous, this took considerable time. The Levy pack battery started for Amadiya on the 22nd, escorted by a troop of the 1st Cavalry Regiment. The affair lasted until 11 October 1924. During this time, the Kurds of Hajji Rashid Beg (already mentioned) had joined in helping the Turks, and the latter had driven the Tiari from Naramik and occupied it. A letter from the High Commissioner Iraq was delivered by a British captain to the Turks through their lines to Ora, where a junior Turkish officer received it. The British officer was ordered to return to his own lines.

There were two more incidents worthy of note, which perhaps help to convey the flavour of this border clash. An RAF intelligence officer, together with "Lady Surma" (aunt of the Patriarch), assembled 400 Irregulars for Barke. She also harangued the maliks, calling upon them to fight the Turks., For her work she received the M.B.E. In an attack on the Turks holding Hayas, the Bishop Mar Yoallaha handed his cassock to his deacon, seized a rifle, and went into the attack with the Irregulars, pushing the Turks back, to reoccupy Benawi, Mai, and Ain D'Nuni.

It is ironic that this affair occurred while Ramsay MacDonald was seeking to end the gift of a rifle and 200 rounds to all Assyrians on completion of two years service. By 23 September, authority was granted[53] by H.M.G., for

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[52] FO 371/5229, Fs.149-51.
[53] AIR 2/1450, F.37.

> ...recent events may make it desirable to give as free a hand as possible to the Air Officer Commanding to take military measures to meet military demands. Authority...to issue rifles and ammunition...to Assyrians organised for defensive purpose under responsible British control.

Only a maximum of 2,000 Irregulars could be armed, and they were to be organised and supervised. The financial allowance was £6,000, less arms and ammunition.

An extract from a telegram from Trenchard to A.O.C. on 23 September 1924, stated, "In view of various serious questions involved, action against invaders well inside our boundary should be reduced to a minimum".

As soon as the problem of this Turkish incursion was behind them, H.M.G. recommenced the pressure for cost-cutting in the Levies. The Levy Commandant, in response to a letter from the Colonial Office demanding at least the reduction in strength of the 1st Levy Battalion of Marsh Arabs, wrote to the A.O.C. on 21 October on this subject[54] in the following terms: "...it is necessary at least as a temporary measure to shorten the period of enlistment and re-enlistment for the native ranks". However, he baulked at the Financial Secretary's request that "...this period should be shortened from 2 years to 6 months". The Commandant's argument against this proposal was:

> A similar experiment with the Assyrian units in 1922 proved an absolute failure, the loss of confidence and keenness among the rank and file and the impossibility of carrying out any form of continuous training seriously affecting both the morale and efficiency of the troops.

Once again officials, apparently without any military experience, were trying to impose their ideas, regardless of the effect they might have.

The Commandant suggested that the minimum period for enlistment or re-enlistment might be one year; this he was prepared to attempt. However, he pointed out that the disbandment of a cavalry regiment was enforced to meet the economies considered necessary by the Colonial Office, without having to disband or reduce the fighting strength of the 1st Battalion. He further stated that he was in no position to pronounce on the possibility of the officers and men of that battalion being prepared to serve in the Iraq army, which, he

[54] AIR 2/1450, F.39.

understood, was being contemplated by the Secretary of State and he strongly recommended the retention of the battalion in view of the existing uncertain situation. (The annual cost of the battalion was Rs.8,52,053.)

The A.O.C's response was a strongly worded letter to the High Commissioner Iraq, dated 27 October,[55] in which he considers "...that the Commandant has gone rather too far in his efforts to meet the wishes of the Treasury". The reduction to one year would entail loss of efficiency. Also, it was out of the question to hand over the 1st Battalion to the Iraq army in view of the latter's state of inefficiency, and would "...dangerously deplete the forces at his disposal". He suggested the High Commissioner should send a wire "urging" the enlistment period to remain at two years. (This action was taken.)

The proposed reply to the above by the Colonial Office is on file in draft form, dated November 1924,[56] the essence of which was: as will be recalled, the policy for the reduction of imperial troops was not proceeding as quickly as originally planned. The longer imperial troops were in the country in considerable force, the longer it would take the Iraq army to become adequately efficient to maintain internal security. This was to be achieved before the end of the Anglo-Iraq Treaty (the Military Protocol dictated four years).

Finally, it was suggested that the 1st Battalion (Levy Marsh Arabs) be transferred to the Iraq army to form the first of the new "exemplar" battalions, the existence of which, it was understood, had been agreed with King Feisal and the prime minister.

Generally, it has been the practice of this work not to devote too much space to details of the actual actions in which the Levies were involved, as these are well covered by Browne; but to concentrate on the background and circumstances which contributed to their commencement and continued existence—cause and effect. Nevertheless, it is felt necessary to recount a number of operations which illustrate certain events and the areas in which they took place, as they help to indicate the problems of distance and type of terrain over which the Levies had to operate.

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[55] AIR 2/1450, F.27.
[56] AIR 2/1450, F.35.

An Air Staff Internal Minute of 27 November 1924 to C.A.S., signed by C.S. Burnett,[57] with enclosures, stated that the A.O.C. Iraq could neither agree to the disbandment or less of the 1st Levy Battalion (of Marsh Arabs) to the Iraq army, nor to the lowering of the Levy period of enlistment to one year. Also, that the transfer of those Levies to the Iraq Army would not lead to its improved efficiency. The battalion, as it stood, was "good value as an exemplar battalion". His repeated requests for British officers to be placed in executive positions in the Iraq army had not been executed, and this was the most effective way to its improved efficiency. Finally, the withdrawal of the Levy pack battery and an armoured car company was agreed, but on the understanding that the 1st Levy Battalion remained. It was also time that the newly-projected "exemplar battalions" were implemented, and that the Colonial Office (which had again raised the issues), "must not expect too many changes at once".

The "enclosures" headed "Air Staff Notes on Garrison in Iraq" and dated 15 December 1924, as mentioned above, compared the decisions taken at the Cairo Conference, which merit inclusion at the end of 1924:

Cairo Conference Garrison	Garrison 1923-24
One British Battalion	One British Battalion
Three Indian Battalions	Three Indian Battalions
1 Indian Pack Battery	1 Indian Pack Battery (leaving)
8 Squadrons R.A.F.	8 Squadrons R.A.F.
4 to 6 Armoured Car Coys.	4 Armoured Car Coys. (one leaving)
15,000 Local Forces	10,000 Local Forces

> Thus, by 1st April 1925, the Force will be less; Indian Pack Bty, 1 to 3 Armoured Car Coys., and 4 to 5 thousand Local Forces; less than laid down at Cairo. We are therefore ahead of the programme.

The Air Staff considered the minimum imperial garrison should be: one British battalion; three Indian battalions; eight squadrons RAF; three armoured car companies; and 5,000 Levies.

> Together with the Iraq Army of 5,000, in its present state of inefficiency, before further reductions can be considered, this Army must have British Officers in executive control; and its strength considerably increased.

[57] AIR 2/1450, F.122A, inc.318-21.

> The estimates for 1925-26, show a saving of £660,000 for Iraq. It is suggested that part of this sum, should be expended on furthering the organisation of the Iraqi Forces, which is an essential part of our policy of bringing up Iraq to look after itself.

The document continued with the need for three exemplar units in the Iraq army, one for each arm, together with their British officers; and if paid for by Britain, this would still leave a saving of £500,000, or 10 per cent of that year's cost of the imperial garrison. It pointed out that a transfer of Levy units to the Iraq army would be a paper transaction; the local forces thereby would not be increased, nor would it help the efficiency of the Iraq army (but the British Exchequer was concerned only with transferring all the costs it could to the Iraq government's pay roll). The document further stated:

> Bricks cannot be made without straw and if we are going to keep the binding material away from Iraq, the structure which we have started will be certain to collapse. Such a collapse may take our small garrison with it and at any rate it would mean that the expenditure of ten years would have been thrown away. We would not be able to recover our position without the expenditure of millions where thousands would suffice at present.
>
> The Summary, main points:
> a. British Officers must be employed in executive control in the Iraq Army.
> b. His Majesty's Government will have to spend money to assist the organisation of the Iraq Army.
> c. The Iraqi military forces cannot become efficient within four years.

Regardless of the forthright and positive expositions by the Air Staff on the problems faced by Britain in Iraq and of the logical remedies, the Treasury and Colonial Office appeared to keep on representing their own answers to the same problems, which in reality only replaced one problem with another. If there was a weakness in the Air Staff remedies, it was the demand for British officers to be placed in executive control of the Iraq army. The Iraq government would not accede to this, and politically could not do so.

1924 had been a year of little progress in so far as Iraq's capability of maintaining internal security was concerned. Nor had the pacification of Kurdistan been achieved. The defence against frontier incursions remained a running sore.

In the face of the continued foregoing problems, and the inability of the Air Staff, Colonial Office and Exchequer to agree with each other's suggested solutions, the following document in the form of a Cabinet Memorandum on the "Defence of Iraq', of 14 January 1925, by the Secretary of State for Air,[58] is considered important. It presents a resumé of some of the issues on which the departments were still in contention over Iraq. It is a long document, but discussion will be limited to only those areas directly affecting the Levies.

It stated:

> When my colleagues remember that at the Cairo Conference, twenty years was the accepted period for the continuance of the Imperial garrison, they will realise the need for quick action, if in so short a time as four years, Iraq is to be put into a position to maintain order and to defend its own frontiers.

The policy of Bonar Law's Cabinet, on which the Air Staff had attempted to act, was the gradual substitution over a period of years of local defence forces for the imperial garrison. The C.A.S. gave a tentative estimate on how this principle might be carried out. In his paper of 15 February 1923, he had presupposed three necessary conditions, namely:

a. That a satisfactory peace is concluded with Turkey before the 1st April 1923 [this was not achieved]; and
b. That a stable policy is decided on forthwith to govern our relations with Iraq, providing definitely for the continuance of a measure of British control; and
c. That Iraq revenues provide sufficient funds for the maintenance of an efficient Arab Army or the formation of additional levies, or a combination of these two measures.

He pointed out that "If these three assumptions are not fulfilled", with particular regard to (a) and (b), it should be clearly understood that the whole programme will be correspondingly set back. None of these three conditions had been met.

Trenchard continued:

> The peace with Turkey was not ratified until the 29th July 1924, stability cannot be attained whilst the Mosul frontier question is still open and the last 12 months have not been any material improvement in the efficiency of the Arab Army...

[58] AIR 2/1451, Fs.269-73.

Also, the High Commissioner for Iraq claimed "they have witnessed a serious deterioration in Iraq for resources supporting it".

It was the latter issue which was presented as the fulcrum for progress, namely, "...that Iraq revenue provide sufficient funds for the maintenance of an efficient Arab Army or the formation of additional levies, or a combination of these two measures". It was pointed out that,

> If therefore, things go on as they are going on now, we shall be faced in 1928 with the same dilemma that faced us in 1923, namely, the continuance of heavy and unpopular commitments or the surrender of the country to chaos and foreign intrigue.

It was accepted that the imperial forces in Iraq were as planned in Cairo. But the strength of local forces, the Iraq army and the Levies, on which further Imperial reductions depended, were 5,000 short of the total approved at Cairo. Therefore, irrespective of Turkish incursions and Kurdish problems, imperial reductions were on schedule. However,

> ...unless definite progress can be swiftly made with the improvement of the local forces, no substantial reductions in the Imperial garrison can be effected until the time arrives when all the Imperial units will be simultaneously withdrawn.

The key to the situation, therefore, was seen as the strength and efficiency of the local forces.

The document continued,

> The local forces...are the Arab Army, paid out of the Iraq revenues and commanded by Iraq officers, and the Iraq Levies (mainly Assyrians) paid by the British taxpayer and commanded by British officers. The continuance of the dyarchy is contemplated under the Military and Financial Agreements signed between the British and Iraq Governments on the 30th April 1923. (Sic.)

There had been created a constant British demand for the disbandment of the Levies, or at least their transfer to the Iraq army, where their cost would be borne by Iraq.

> Militarily, however, the weakening of the levies would delay still further the creation of a self-supporting Iraq defence force. For not only are the Assyrians better fighters than the Iraqis, but the levies have the predominating advantage of being commanded by British officers.

It was therefore suggested that the problem should be resolved by bringing the joint strength of the two forces up to 14,000 men, with as little delay as possible, thus making them both equally efficient, "...without penalising the Iraq Treasury".

However, this objective solution still retained two thorny points, which continued to persist. The British taxpayer would have to pay for some 2,000 more levies, and the Iraq army would have to consent to British officer executive control. Also, this paper had a six-year detailed programme, to be presented to the Bonar Law Cabinet, of which only the Levy element will be discussed. It is not proposed to go into the suggested financial machinations by which it was hoped Feisal could be inveigled into allowing British officers to adopt executive command in the Iraq army.

Under "Iraq Levies", the following was proposed:

> The Iraq Levies to be transferred to the Iraq Government in about two years time, as follows:
>
> (i) Arab Infantry Battalion (1st Marsh Arab Bn.), to Iraq Army, on Iraq Army scale of British Officers.[59]
> (ii) The two Cavalry Regiments, Pack Battery and Assyrian Infantry Battalions, with their present scale of Officers and British N.C.Os, to be transferred as a "Frontier Force" on special rates of pay.
>
> To enable the transfer of the Assyrians to be carried out successfully, it will be necessary to settle the whole Assyrian Community within Iraq as a contented body.

The scheme in its entirely depended on the following assumptions:

> 1. That H.M.G. intend to remove the Imperial Troops from Iraq as soon as possible without prejudicing the present policy of making Iraq entirely a self-governing country.
> 2. That the Frontiers of Iraq will be settled before the 31st December 1925, without serious modification of the present position.
> 3. That H.M.G. pay a grant-in-aid to Iraq for defence purposes, in addition to paying for the British Officers. This means that after the withdrawal of the Imperial Garrison the Imperial expenditure will be approximately £840,000.
> 4. That British Officers are in executive control of all units in the Iraq Army by the 1st October 1926.

This memorandum was signed by H. Trenchard, Chief of the Air Staff.

Here are to be found further echoes of previously frustrated plans. The majority of this proposal was based on three premises: (a) That the Iraq government would accept British officers in executive positions in the Iraq army (b) that the Assyrians would be prepared by majority, to serve in the Iraq army, under Arab officers, and (c) that the Iraq government was to give the Assyrians lands in which to settle—and the Assyrians would accept those areas designated for them.

Items (a) and (b) had been presented over a year ago, and yet no documentation has been found to indicate that these "urgent" requirements had been put to the Iraq government. If they had, and were accepted, then there would be no need for further prognostication. Had the government refused, there would be no need to go on planning on these hopes. It would seem that no one would grasp the essential nettle of confronting the Iraq government with these issues and requirements.

The scheme was yet subject to "Cabinet approval"—but in essence was probably known to all departments. The whole business was considered an urgent and vital matter—but was, it seems, "too hot to handle".

In 1925, as far as operations were concerned, the only one of note was a brief Kurdish rising in the area between Qaradagh and Baranand ranges during August. This was initiated by Shaikh Mahmud and assisted by Kerim Futteh Beg and his band of brigands. They attacked Qaradagh village, driving out the police and burning houses of families who were known to support the government. The A.O.C. ordered a composite column to march into the area to restore order and reimpose government prestige. A new Mudir was appointed, a site for a new police post chosen for Qaradagh with which to impress the Jaf settled there and other posts established at Sarao and Sayid Ishaq.

The column was composed as follows: 2nd Battalion Iraq Levies (less one company); 4th Battalion Iraq Army (less two companies and one platoon), and a detachment W/T Section, RAF.

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[59] The "scale" of British officers it was "hoped" to get Iraq government to agree to was five per cavalry regiment, six per infantry battalion, and two per pack battery. There was also much more detail, but as the plan mostly failed, half this document is not included.

It is evident that units of the Iraq army accompanied the Levies on some of these minor operations in order, it may be presumed, to gain "field experience" as part of their much needed training.

The column carried six days rations and was supported by the RAF. Only a few snipers at long range harassed the column. Air strikes were made on villages known to house rebels, and houses of rebels were burnt by the troops. The Iraq army sent out cavalry with extra rations, and the task was completed by 26 August 1925. There were other similar small "composite" columns of Levies and the Iraq army chasing either or both Mahmud and Kerim Beg, in which a few casualties resulted, both by the Levies, the army and the trouble-makers. The latter were not prepared to have their activities curtailed without a fight.

By now (1925), the Levy Medical Branch was organised, with a pack ambulance of "Cacolets". It also cared for the Levy families and dependents. The latter had been arranged with the Assyrian leaders. In the period of July 1925, the introduction of Yezidis was tried, but they were found unsuitable—the tenets of their religion being the problem.

Trenchard wrote a D.O. to A.F. Higgins, the A.O.C. Iraq, who had replaced Salmond in about October 1925. The letter of 19 January 1925,[60] was in reply to a series of queries and observations raised by Higgins, which included the Cabinet Memorandum on "Defence of Iraq", above.

Higgins felt that unless the Assyrians were guaranteed British protection somewhere, they would emigrate in a body to Russia or Syria. To which Trenchard had answered that for the British government to give such a guarantee as this and for an Assyrian community to be formed in Iraq, directly under British control, would be impossible. However, he felt that the Assyrians, if properly handled, with British officers in command, might agree, as a tentative measure, to serve in the Iraq army under a British G.O.C.

Further, he suggested that time would show whether or not they would be reconciled into becoming part of Iraq. Trenchard said:

> ...if the Iraqians are wise they will nominate most of the officers in the frontier forces from the Assyrians, and perhaps in years to come this will result in a contented Iraq. If not, I do not know what will

[60] AIR 2/1451, Fs.230 and 236.

> become of the Assyrians themselves. They are a more warlike nation than an agricultural one...it would pay them better to take some part in the defence of the Frontier which is their own country than to allow it to be overrun by Turkish irregulars.

On 30 March 1925, a discussion was held with the Prime Minister of Iraq and his Deputy Commander-in-Chief, and the Secretaries of State for the Colonies and Air, the High Commissioner Iraq, and the A.O.C., with their staffs. The Minutes of the meeting are very lengthy,[61] only a few extracts of which will be quoted. The purpose was to discuss the proposals contained in Trenchard's letter to Churchill, discussed on p.185. The Prime Minister of Iraq stated that,

> (a)...there was no necessity for the British officers in units (then Advisers) to have executive command. (b) The scheme put forward would be opposed by a general spirit of nationalism. (c)...under British control...the people of the country would say it was not an Iraq but a British force, and might even suggest that it might possibly be used otherwise than in the interests of Iraq. (d) ...he and his colleagues had accepted the principle of British executive control in exemplar units.... They had, however, come to the conclusion that the carrying out of this scheme should be postponed until conscription had been enforced.

The High Commissioner explained that he had opposed the passing of the Conscription Bill until after the elections, as it was exceedingly unpopular with the townsmen.

The crux of much of the scheme was finance. This was quickly dispensed with by the question posed by the Air Minister to Iraq's Finance Minister: "Can the Government carry out its treaty obligations to produce an army of 15,000 men?" Answer: "No, especially considering the Ottoman Debt".

Thus there was no hope of British taxpayers' money being saved by the absorption of the Levies into the Iraq army, even if the Assyrians would agree to serve.

Some of the results of the above discussion were mentioned in a D.O. to Trenchard of 6 April 1925,[62] by the A.O.C. Iraq on the question of British officers in executive control in the Iraq army. The High Commissioner said,

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[61] AIR 2/1451, Fs.107-24.
[62] AIR 2/1451, F.163.

"...if this was done a very difficult political situation would arise which might have disastrous results on the country". It had been agreed with the Iraq government that an Inspector-General was necessary for the Iraq army, under the A.O.C. As a result of discussions, Trenchard felt he "...could not see any considerable reduction...in Imperial forces during the next few years".

A Minute Sheet[63] carried a note from D.D.O.I. and D.O.S.D. A.M.P. dated 2 January 1926, stating:

> Our whole policy for the future is to allow the Iraq Army to gradually absorb the levies, and although there will be many difficulties with regard to this, especially with the Assyrians, I do not feel at this stage...we should increase the establishment of British officers.

The need to keep the Assyrians employed was on two main counts: (a) it kept them quiet, and (b) for many of their tribes it was an economic necessity.

A very considerable document of thirty pages was raised by the High Commissioner, and addressed to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, covering the period 16 September-22 November 1926.[64] The subject was "Comprehensive Scheme for the Organisation of the Defence Forces of the Iraq Government", based on discussions which had taken place between himself, the A.O.C. and the Iraq Ministry of Defence. Only those items referring to the Levies will be discussed. But because between 1925 and 1926 there were few changes in the Levies, their future and that of the Iraq army required some serious attention by those concerned—the terms of the Treaty were forcing the pace.

The document stated:

> ...the only prospect of substantially increasing revenues of the Iraq State seems to lie in the future royalties on oil....
>
> IV. The Iraq Levies
> The proposals outlined above must definitely envisage the ultimate disbandment of the Levies and a measure of absorption of the elements contained therein.... Of the seven units composing the existing Levy Force, i.e., two cavalry regiments, one battery and four infantry battalions, the two cavalry regiments and one battalion of infantry are composed of Kurds and Arabs and Turcomans (leaving out of count any Persian elements in the cavalry). The personnel of

[63] AIR 5/295, no folio.
[64] AIR 2/1452, Fs.61-75.

> these latter are then definitely Iraq subjects, and their continued existence as Imperial troops constitutes a serious complication were the Iraq Government to introduce conscription... The 1st Battalion of the Levies, for instance...has its personnel drawn from precisely the same sources as the bulk of the Iraq army.[65] That special treatment as regards pay, legal rights, etc. should be meted out to a limited number of Iraq subjects who serve in their own country and practically side by side with their own countrymen, but under the aegis of a foreign Power, can scarcely be other than harmful to the military efforts of their own Government.... Similar remarks...apply to cavalry regiments.
>
> As regards the Assyrians, the question is obviously very much more difficult and, in fact, must trench largely on the purely political reasons.
>
> It is precisely these political reasons that hamper a satisfactory military solution.... The far greater bulk of the Assyrian man-power at present serving in Iraq have served or are serving in the Levies (in addition to those drawn from across the frontier) on which they have been for some time dependent for their means of livelihood. Economically the Assyrian people are so identified with the Levies that any dissolution of that force would be a matter of grave consequence to them, quite apart from the waste of such valuable military material which, properly manipulated, would be a source of considerable strength to Iraq, forming as they do now almost a caste of professional soldiers.
>
> It is believed, then, that with the proper safeguards the incorporation of the Assyrians in the Iraq army would not present any insuperable obstacles.

There were about a hundred Assyrians at that time serving in the Iraq army; they included two officers—it is assumed they were Iraqi nationals.They formed part of the "Frontier Company" stationed in the northern posts. (This company was not part of the Levies.)

> For the absorption of the Levy Force, detailed and well-considered plans would need to be elaborated if the process was to work harmoniously...it would seem that by far the most satisfactory method would be that which involved the disbandment of the existing Levies and then re-enlistment the same day under the voluntary system and under the terms of service as defined by the Iraq Government. This procedure should lead to the minimum of friction were all the circumstances thoroughly explained beforehand.

[65] This is an error; they were Marsh Arabs, a "tribal" group, not then being enlisted into the Iraq army.

> It is to delay the absorption of the Levies until conscription was in force in the remainder of Iraq that would lead to confusion and, it might be expected, [to lead?] to a considerable measure of dissatisfaction on the part of the personnel, who might be either incorporated in the Army in a disgruntled state or lost to the Army altogether. [Sic.]

These extracts are taken from Appendix (E) to enclosure No.1, which was signed by A.C. Daly, Major-General, Inspector-General the Iraq Army, dated 7 March 1926. They were chosen because they dealt in some detail with the proposed Levy transfers to the Iraq army. However, the proposals in their entirety drew the following comment from H. Dobbs, the High Commissioner Iraq in his covering letter, as follows:

> 24. It seems clear that the adoption of General Daly's full scheme would cost so much (whether under a voluntary system or under conscription) that after the cessation of Imperial contributions in 1931 it would be beyond the strength of the Iraq Government to maintain it...his scheme has grown far beyond what was contemplated at the time of the visit of the two Secretaries of State....

The High Commissioner's remarks were directed at Daly's proposed major reorganisation of the Iraq army on European lines, of which the Levies constituted only a small part, mostly as exemplar units. Because the future of the Levies was under constant review and change, it has been most difficult to maintain the "Levy theme", clear and separate from the overall planning of the "Defence Forces of Iraq". For example, it was then still proposed that Iraq should have the nucleus of an air force.

There were also comments by the A.O.C. Iraq on Daly's proposals, which included the Levies :

> Paragraph 6. General Daly's remarks (on p.5) that the levy battalion furnishing the guards is practically able to do no training at all is quite erroneous. A great deal of training *is* done and the results are extremely satisfactory. At the same time I am now inclined to think that one battalion will not be enough to do guards both at Baghdad and Hinaidi having due regard to facilities for training, and I should propose that the infantry battalion proposed at Kirkuk should be stationed at Hinaidi instead. Signed by J.F.A. Higgins, Air Vice-Marshal, A.O.C. British Forces Iraq, on 19th October 1926.

There is evidence that some friction existed between the Inspector-General and the A.O.C., as the following further quote indicates:

> I entirely disagree with General Daly's remarks on page 16. I consider that, for reasons which I have alluded to before in these notes, that an up-to-date officer of responsible rank *is* wanted at the head of affairs. For the same reasons a number of really good and efficient officers are required. The former state of affairs in the Iraq army is the best evidence of this.

Perhaps the most pertinent comment on all the proposals contained in Enclosure No.6, in the above document, was a copy of a letter from the Treasury to the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, stating:

> It appears to their Lordships essential at this stage that the Iraq Government should be asked to prepare the most economical scheme possible for land and air forces, on the assumption that there will be no further subsidy from the British Exchequer after 1927-28. Signed G.L. Barstow, 22 November 1926.[66]

Also, at last there had been positive action taken on the transfer of the 1st Levy Battalion of Marsh Arabs to the Iraq army. The intention embodied in a letter[67] from the High Commissioner Iraq to the Secretary of State for the Colonies on 2 September 1926, stated that it was decided to ignore the proposal of General Daly to disband the unit and then re-enlist it on the same day. It appears that because of an agreement between Iraq's Ministry of Defence and the A.O.C., this could be achieved "en bloc" to the Iraq army. The latter was reluctant to see the unit,

> which is formed of excellent material, is well trained and has a service tradition behind it, disappear completely. The Marsh Arabs from whom it is recruited, are a very good stamp of man and their connection with the 1st Battalion extends over a period of seven years.

It was also suggested that the Iraq army should retain this connection and ensure an ample supply of recruits from these tribes.

The O.C. of the unit anticipated that 70 per cent of the men would agree to transfer to the Iraq army and complete their engagements under the new conditions, provided that certain of their British officers were transferred with them, and subject to those officers approving. As it was to be an "exemplar unit" this latter condition offered no problem. The transfer would take effect on 1 January 1927.

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[66] AIR 2/1452, Fs.61-75.
[67] AIR 2/1452, F.299.

Those men not wishing to transfer would be given compensation of two months paid leave, the same as granted on the amalgamation of the two Levy cavalry regiments—provided only that they had two months service left, as from 1st January. Britain was to provide subvention for this unit in the year 1927-28.

Another letter[68] by the High Commissioner to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, dated 16 September 1926, concerned the approved appointment of a British quartermaster for each Levy unit. The letter stated this appointment should be suspended, or cancelled, because the circumstances of the Iraq Levies had altered considerably. "It now appears to be unlikely that the Levies will continue to exist as an Imperial force for a longer period than twelve months from now...." Steps to end the Iraq Levies were quickening in pace.

The matter of rifles and ammunition as a gift to Assyrian Levies on completion of their two-year service contract, was raised again in a Foreign Office letter to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, on 10 November 1926.[69] It concerned a Turkish memorandum to the League of Nations on the position of the Christian population in the Jebel Tur district of Turkey. The Turks had alleged that H.M.G. "had encouraged the natives of the district concerned to rebel against the Turkish Government or, authorised them to bear arms for that purpose". The Foreign Office suggested that "...the discharged Levies should in future only be allowed to retain their arms upon the undertaking, at any time when called upon, to return to the colours, for the defence of Iraq".

Also, "...a further condition should be made that the arms and ammunition concerned are in no circumstances to be carried outside the frontiers of Iraq". It was felt that if this was clearly stated on the "permits" issued, it would be impossible, in future, for those certificates to be quoted against the British government, or to be used for propaganda purposes, as in the Turkish memorandum. It appears that photographs of the original permit had been passed by the Turks to the League of Nations.

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[68] AIR 5/295, F.85A.
[69] AIR 2/1452, F.98.

So ended 1926, during which one of the Levy's "old enemies", Kerim Futteh Beg, received a wound from which he died (24 June 1926).

From the time of the Cairo Conference in March 1921, the fortunes of the Iraq Levies very slowly improved, on the basis of their importance in the reduction of the imperial garrison. They acquired a senior officer to point the way ahead. It was by misfortune that General Sadleir-Jackson quickly upset the feckless Meinertzhagen by his impatience to get things done, and to that end, he was prepared to evade a staff which had allowed the poor conditions he found in the Force to exist.

By early 1922, the force was under the G.O.C.-in-C. M.E.F., except for administration and finance. Cox felt that this period for the Levies was "unsatisfactory". Assyrian enlistments were on the increase in spite of "misunderstandings" over conditions of service, lack of clothing and tentage. There was great urgency for recruits to replace the loss of almost the entire Levy Arab element to the Iraq Army (with the exception of the 1st Levy Marsh Arab Battalion).

The next major step forward came with the RAF assuming control of Iraq from 1 October 1922. Many of the senior RAF officers at that time had considerable war experience, involving ground troops, as well as aircraft. They had organised and carried out the evacuation by air of all imperial personnel, including some families from Sulaimaniyah in September 1922 which is understood to be the first operation of its kind.

During the winter of 1922-23, the Levy Col.-Commandant met the problem of the Assyrian reluctance to re-engage. A conference with the maliks was followed by better terms of engagement, which included the long debated gift of a rifle and ammunition on completion of two years service. This ended their discontent and the failure to re-engage and to enlist. The gift of the rifle and ammunition, in due course, caused the British government to try to rescind this reward for service, but failed. From then on, financial stringency, even more than before, was to plague the Levies—the budget for 1922-23 was not to exceed £600,000. Further, over the years, following the Cairo Conference of 1921, many of the decisions taken there failed to materialise, in spite of remonstrations by the A.O.C. Iraq and the Air Council.

A number of operations were undertaken against the Kurds and Turkish infiltrators in the period covered by this chapter. Shaikh Mahmud was reinstated in Sulaimaniyah, only to break his promises to Cox, and turned to intrigue with the Turkish agent Euz Demir. The latter, with his quasi-Turkish troops together with Mahmud, were soon ousted by RAF air action in co-operation with the Levies and the Assyrian frontier irregulars.

It became necessary to discuss the development of the Iraq army in relation to its effect on the Levies. The Iraq army had made poor progress, with British officers only in an advisory capacity; whereas in the Levies, they were in executive control. The efficiency of the Levies, when compared with the army, provided a stark contrast. Therefore, because the Iraq government felt, on political grounds that they could not have British officers in executive control within their army, the idea of handing over the Levies, with their British officers, to form "exemplar units", was seen as a workable alternative. Britain had promised a financial saving for the Iraq government, by way of paying the salaries of those British officers in the exemplar units for the first year. The first Levy "exemplar unit" sent with its British officers to the Iraq army was the 1st Marsh Arab Battalion, which had roots in the Nasiriyah Arab Scouts of 1917 (the N.A.S.).

Throughout the four years covered by this chapter, the trouble which lay behind the stalemate which alternated between London and Baghdad, could be ascribed to one failure—that was for the British and Iraq governments to get together with the Air Ministry and the British Treasury and to decide, face to face, what could and could not be agreed by all parties to achieve the internal and external security of Iraq, and how their findings were to be financed.

As will be seen in the next chapter, covering the years 1927 to 1932, new problems were soon to arise, but old ones persisted.

CHAPTER VI

This chapter, which covers the period from 1927 to 1932, contains few of the dramatic incidents of armed clashes with rebellious tribes, and Turkish infiltrations on the northern frontier, which played such an important part in some of the earlier chapters. (That fact is perhaps indicative of the gradual expansion and improved competence of the Iraq army and the consolidation of the authority of the Baghdad government.) However, this chapter is far from being without significance—but the major event encountered presents in many ways, perhaps, a sad ending to this history of the Iraq levies until 1932. As was seen in the last chapter, there had been a serious problem concerning the morale of the serving Assyrians, who formed the backbone of the Levies. This is one of the major issues to be considered and its implications are assessed in this chapter.

With the approaching end of the British Mandate, the majority of the Assyrian people in Iraq were, understandably, fearful for their future. They undoubtedly felt themselves to be a nation—but it seemed unlikely that they could, or would, acquire a state of their own. In this matter, the D'Mar Shimun and the serving Assyrian officers and men, formed the only effective voice to express the fears of their people to the British authorities, on whom they relied for their ultimate fate as an effectively stateless people.

The fact that the end of the British Mandate in 1927 was now in sight, created an urgency, meaning that many issues affecting the Levies and the defence of Iraq, had also to be addressed. One of the most important of these was the steady, if slow, improved efficiency of the Iraqi armed forces. Hitherto, their incompetence had been a cause for some concern for the A.O.C., particularly as Iraq was to be responsible for its own internal security, and in view of the steady reduction in the size of the British garrison and Levies. The future role of the Levies, as this chapter will show, was to become a greatly diminished one. They were to decline in numbers and weaponry. This process again was not a "neat and tidy" one, and as with much of their earlier history, the outcome was often influenced by decisions which were avoided, rather than those which were made and implemented.

The main issues, therefore, for consideration in this chapter are the transfer of the Levy Marsh Arab Battalion, the so-called Exemplar Battalion to the Iraq army; and British air policy for Iraq (it will be recalled that the decision that Iraq should create the nucleus of an air force with Britain's help was mooted in 1923). This chapter also considers the continuing problem of the resettlement of the Assyrians in Iraq, and the political issues accompanying that question, together with the Assyrians' concern for their future; also, the change of responsibility for the Levy administration, followed by the reorganisation and distribution of Levy units. Other issues to be considered are: the Iraq army assuming the role of internal security at Sulaimani; and the RAF proposal for the Air Defence Force to be multi-ethnic. This chapter concludes with the "strike" of Assyrian Levy troops and its aftermath, and a new role for the Iraq Levies and their change of nomenclature. Although it may be a rather melancholy chronicle, it is not an unimportant one.

The first event to be considered in this chapter is the transfer of the 1st Levy Battalion of Marsh Arabs to the Iraq army on 1 January 1927. It will be recalled that this important decision had been agreed between the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the High Commissioner and the A.O.C. Iraq, on 2 September 1926. This was the last "all-Arab element" in the Levies; the great majority of the remaining troops were Assyrian. This situation gave the Assyrians a latent power, but one which was also to reveal the "Achilles Heel" in the British control of their hitherto proven reliable native force—as will be shown later in this chapter.

A most important British decision on policy governing the RAF in Iraq and its future tactical relationship with the Iraq army, was contained in a crucial memorandum by the Air Staff of January 1927.[1] (It will be recalled that responsibility for military affairs in Iraq had been transferred from the War Office to the Air Ministry as far back as October 1922.)

The memorandum stated that the Air Staff had no hesitation in maintaining that the future basis of the military forces of Iraq should be air power, and that in considering reorganisation of the Iraq army, it should be

[1] AIR 2/1452, Fs.39-43.

recognised that this must be ancillary to an air force. It was considered immaterial whether that force was imperial or Iraqi—meaning, that until Iraq could afford an adequate air force, Britain would fill that role. It was therefore felt impractical in the circumstances, pending Iraq's ability to finance a state air force, to settle this question at that time. Like Britain, Iraq had to consider the cost of her forces, and in those particular circumstances, air power was considered "cost effective".

All that had been decided in 1927 was that British air forces would remain in Iraq until at least 1928. It was also noted that H.M.G. required that imperial air squadrons would, by agreement with the Iraq government, remain in the country for purposes of imperial defence for the duration of the new Treaty of 1927, by which Britain recognised the independence of Iraq. In this context, the Levies would be required for the "reliable" protection of RAF installations in Iraq in the interests of imperial defence, although it is significant to note that the force is not specifically mentioned in the memorandum.

In that document, the Air Staff presumed that Iraq would be unable to support both an army and an air force for a considerable number of years. However, Iraq's military needs for the future would be those of internal security and the possible repression of tribal raids from across its frontiers. The likelihood of formidable external aggression was considered remote. Nevertheless, it was thought

> ...inadvisable to allow the Iraq Government to regard the external defence of the country as outside the scope of its responsibilities. The fact remains, that this small nation, apart from dealing with the incursions of the surrounding tribes, cannot do more than fight a delaying action until outside reinforcements arrive....

The above Air Staff memorandum stated that the current military situation in Iraq had necessitated the location of ground forces in both small and large detachments dispersed throughout the country. Because of poor communications, created by marsh, desert and the mountainous nature of large portions of the country, control and co-ordination could only be affected by an air force. In confirmation of this fact similar problems had been faced by the much larger and highly organised British imperial garrison in Iraq

during 1920, which, as was seen in Chapter IV, had succeeded, only with great difficulty, in re-establishing internal security.

The Air Staff, no doubt with future Iraqi defence costs in mind, felt that an Iraq Army, together with an introductory element of air power, should be within the financial resources of the Iraq government. The question of the formation of an Iraqi air force would currently be confined to training a certain number of Iraqi pilot cadets at the Royal Air Force Cadet College, Cranwell, and some mechanics at the Royal Air Force depot in Iraq; the cost to be borne by Iraq. It was decided that Air Staff would also continue to monitor Iraq's financial position.

In the context of the consideration being given to the defence of Iraq, and the future of its ground and air forces in 1927, the Levies were still considered part of the former "local troops". However, in view of their impaired morale, a tentative attempt to address the "Assyrian Problem" was made in a telegram from High Commissioner Dobbs (who had replaced Cox on 25 September 1923), to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, dated 24 May 1927.[2] Dobbs stated that the settlement of Assyrians on Iraqi government lands was pressing, because the prospect of Levy disbandment was causing considerable agitation and unrest amongst both the serving Assyrians and their community.

Dobbs had examined the Assyrian problems in consultation with their leaders in Mosul, and concluded that their problems were too difficult for local Iraqi officials to deal with, in addition to their own duties. He therefore suggested that a British Liaison officer in whom the Assyrians had confidence, together with a small staff, be appointed to undertake this role of dealing with their problems. The appointment would be for at least a year, with effect from 1 July 1927. The cost of this appointment, he felt, should be borne by H.M.G.

A reply from the Treasury to the above request, dated June 1927,[3] to whom the matter had been referred, stated they were prepared to sanction the proposal: with, however, the financial proviso that "They assume all the expenses of settlement other than pay, allowances etc. here referred to will fall

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[2] CO 730/116/1, F.40.

upon the Iraq Government and not on the Middle East Vote". (The cost of the officer was Rs.15,000/-.) This was a typical Treasury reply, designed to avoid an ongoing financial commitment.

Dobbs, being aware of the growing Assyrian unrest, had spent considerable time and effort in trying to resolve the problem, and had failed to initiate an urgent and responsible reply to his representations from the Colonial Office. The inevitable delay in obtaining agreement from the already financially overburdened Iraq government, came at a time when every day lost in reassurance put the question of continued Assyrian loyalty in serious doubt. Delay would clearly aggravate the growing Assyrian disquiet.

While the Assyrians' concern for their future continued to smoulder, the Levy disbandment progressed. The reorganisation of Levies and their future deployment was discussed in a letter from the A.O.C. to Dobbs, dated 18 January 1928.[4] In this, the A.O.C. stated "...that in future the administration of the Levies should be undertaken by Air Headquarters and the following Units or Levy Services should be abolished". These were:

(a) Levy Pay Office
(b) Levy Ordnance Depot and Service
(c) Levy Mechanical Transport
(d) Levy Hospital and Medical Officers. (The Medical Subordinates with the Battalions would remain.)

One of the objects of this new organisation was a saving to the British Treasury of £23,000, achieved mostly by the established RAF services taking over the abolished Levy Service units. This new organisation was to take effect from 1 April 1928.

The A.O.C. further proposed that the Levy Units should, in future, be located as:

Levy Headquarters Levy Depot Headquarters Machine Gun Company	) HINAIDI (later moved to) Baghdad in June 1930)
1 Battalion (less 1 Company)	) DIANA
1 Section Machine Gun Company with detachment at	) BARZAN

[3] CO 730/116/1, F.37.
[4] CO 730/133/1, Fs.43-46.

1 Battalion (less 1 Company)	)
1 Section Machine Gun Company	) SULAIMANIAH
Transport Company	) KIRKUK
Detachment, Transport Company	) HINAIDI
2 Companies	) HINAIDI

(This reorganisation revealed the loss to the Levies of one cavalry regiment and one infantry battalion—the dismissal of approximately 1,200 men.) The Levy force was now reduced as follows:

As at October 1927

RAF Ground Troops	Imperial Troops	Levies
2 Armoured car companies	2 inf.battalions 1 engr. company	1 cav. regiment 3 inf.battalions with 3 m.g. sections

It will be remembered that the Levies had lost their last pack battery in 1926, as part of the general reduction and change of role. The guns, ammunition, technical stores and pack mules had been transferred to the Iraq army on 1 March 1927.[5]

Pay, ordnance stores and medical were in future to be undertaken by Air H.Q. Hinaidi, and would meet Levy motor transport requirements. Troops at out-stations would continue to receive rations, forage and fuel found by local contracts. Levy headquarters would be responsible for command, training, discipline and records. Once again, issues of funding were discussed at great length in Baghdad and London.

One of the main issues under consideration was the future location of Levy headquarters. The A.O.C., in his letter,[6] stated that a number of objections had been raised by the Commandant in opposition to the move from Mosul to Hinaidi. The A.O.C. felt that the reluctance was based on the number of years the headquarters had been in Mosul. Whereas, in fact, the

[5] CO 730/118/5, F.1.

main objections of the Commandant were that the change of location might interfere with recruiting (many Assyrian families being located in that area), and would entail the loss of close contact hitherto enjoyed, and regarded as a great advantage, with the D'Mar Shimun and his family.

The Levy commandant's objection to losing contact with the D'Mar Shimun and his family was a most valid point, especially in the disturbed climate of Assyrian fears for their future. The move of Levy headquarters from Mosul to Baghdad would probably have undermined Assyrian confidence still further.

The A.O.C. countered this main objection by stating that:

> An officer in this Headquarters who has long experience of Assyrians considers that, though at first there may be some reluctance to join or re-engage in the Levies, it will soon disappear, and that there is no reason to think that Hinaidi will prove more unsuitable for the Assyrians than Mosul.

It is arguable that the A.O.C. would have done better to have given greater credence to the above wishes of Levy Commandant Browne who, by 1928, had four years service with the Force. Perhaps the motivation of the A.O.C. was, in part, the exuberance of a "new broom".

The A.O.C. suggested that if the High Commissioner agreed with the above proposals, by which the "administration" of the Iraq Levies would pass to the Air Ministry's administration, then the transfer should take place between 1 April and 31 October 1928. (It may be recalled that the Iraq Levies, for "tactical purposes" had been under the direct command of the A.O.C. since October 1922.)

The High Commissioner was no doubt happy to agree to the suggestion, as it would rid his office of the encumbrance of Levy administration. He wrote to the Secretary of State for the Colonies on 16 February 1928[7] to seek approval for the transfer of the Levy administration from the High Commission and Colonial Offices to come under the entire control of the Air Ministry; especially as the move would entail the saving of £23,000 to the British Treasury.

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[6] CO 730/133/1, F.43-46.
[7] CO 730/133/1, F.37.

The High Commissioner also stated:

> I should make it quite clear that this move will be required to take place whether the transfer of control advocated is agreed or not. The Air Officer Commanding must have the two companies of Levies at Baghdad in any case.

This was the first step by the RAF in obtaining full control of "The Iraq Levies", a force which had acquired an enviable reputation for reliable service, with the intention of converting it to "The Air Defence Force". On 1 May 1928, the Air Ministry wrote to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in relation to the content of the High Commissioner's letter above to provide "...a more detailed explanation of the views of the Air Council as to the future policy regarding this [Levy] Force".[8]

This document is most important, and has therefore been quoted almost in full. It encapsulates the future relationship between the Levies and the RAF until final political approval for the proposed "Air Defence Force" could be arranged with the Iraq government. An essential element in the continued retention of the Force (regardless of nomenclature), was that the Force would replace Indian troops of the imperial garrison, and would continue to be funded by HMG. Another important factor was that "...no reference to the absorption of the Iraq Levies into the Iraq Army was made in the final draft of the Military Agreement, and the Council regard the policy as to the eventual disposal of the force, as an open question".

The above letter stated that during discussion with the Committee of Imperial Defence and the Cabinet, in February 1927,

> ...it was decided, inter alia, that Iraq will, in principle, after 1927-28, assume full financial responsibility for all her own forces, whether land or air, and will bear the extra cost involved in stationing British Air Forces (and any British troops necessary to their protection) in Iraq instead of at home, but that the possibility of obtaining some small financial assistance from Great Britain during the period of transition should not be precluded without further investigation.

The Treasury had stated that they proposed to review the position again in 1931, but the Air Council presumed that in the absence of further directions from the Cabinet,

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[8] CO 730/133/1, F.30.

> ...for their part, and so far as they are able to judge at present, they think it probable that so long as British Air Forces are retained in Iraq, it will be necessary to retain the Levies under British control, although as previously stated they are content to regard their future as an open question to be settled in the light of future developments.

Regarding the possible future use of the Levies for the purpose of control and defence of Iraq's frontiers, both the Levies and the Iraq army were considered by the Air Officer Commanding as in the category of "local forces", and not part of the imperial garrison. As has already been seen, between mid-1922 and 1925, the Levies had been involved in the defence of the northern frontier against Turkish incursions, and for internal security in Iraqi Kurdistan. It should be repeated that the Levies were never employed against the Wahabi incursions on Iraq's southern desert. The role of the Levies was now to be curtailed to that of garrison companies, providing security for RAF installations in Iraq.

During 1928, the Levies were engaged in the redistribution of the few troops left in the Force. This had included the move of Levy headquarters from Mosul to Hinaidi (Baghdad), which took place in October. In May of the following year, three Levy companies handed over their outlying security duties to the Iraq army, and those companies thus released, retired to Sulaimani. Other Levy companies were then being deployed to assume guard duties on RAF installations, which included taking over guard and escort duties from the imperial garrison Indian troops in Baghdad. The Levies undertook guard duties on the High Commissioner's Residence and that of the A.O.C.

By the end of 1929, therefore, the Levies had ceased to be a "Field Force", and were, to all intents and purposes, garrison troops. It appears from the three companies left at Sulaimani that they were, nevertheless, still retained in some sensitive areas in Iraqi Kurdistan. Perhaps this is why the Levies had been allowed to retain their Vickers machine-guns—very potent long-range weapons in both attack and defence. The retention of these guns could be attributed to the A.O.C's precaution for dealing with any unexpected threat—these weapons were not normally found in guard companies. Indeed,

the new Levy organisation was still considered by Dobbs as being the equivalent to a weak infantry brigade.

An incident at Sulaimani, resulting from some serious election rioting, took place on 6 September 1930, and troops from the Iraqi army were called in to deal with it. Although there were three companies of Levies in a camp nearby, they were not involved in restoring order. The writer feels that there were two good reasons for this: first, that the riots were political, and therefore the use of British sponsored troops (Levies) would be inappropriate, and secondly, it was a good "training" opportunity for Iraqi troops in the performance of internal security duties. It was, at this time, according to the Iraq Command Report, [9]

> ...a period of transition from control by British forces (with the Iraqi army acting in an auxiliary capacity); to control by Iraqi forces (with British forces remaining in reserve, or confining their actions to co-operation only).

During October 1930, soon after the Sulaimani election riots, Shaikh Mahmud suddenly returned from Persia to lead an attack on Penjvin. It would seem reasonable to assume that Mahmud's henchmen may have had a hand in the Sulaimani riots, as a diversion.

On 3 November,[10] the Air Officer Commanding ordered the Levy Commandant to proceed immediately to Sulaimani, to take command there. His task was to reorganise the defences of the town, and to prepare a defence scheme. In view of the presence of detachments of the Iraq army being in the area, the task should have been undertaken by an Iraqi officer. That a simple military exercise for the defence of a town required the A.O.C. to despatch his Levy Commandant for the purpose, affords proof of the A.O.C's continued lack of confidence in the Iraq army in the field, which has been discussed previously.

During the Sulaimani affair, the Levy Animal Transport Company had marched from Kirkuk to Sulaimani, arriving on 6 November 1930. It had been despatched to provide the Levies with mobility in case of necessity.

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[9] AIR 5/1255, p.3.
[10] J.G. Browne, *The Iraq Levies (1915-1932)*, pp.77-8.

By the end of November, Mahmud had failed in his attempt to seize Penjvin, and the area had been rendered safe again by the Iraq army. The army then took over the defence of Sulaimani, and the advanced Levy headquarters returned to Baghdad. Until the end of Mahmud's uprising, the Levies provided an experienced reserve and assisted in the defence scheme of Sulaimani, finding fatigue parties for the RAF in loading aircraft during these operations, but they did not take part in restoring order. Thus, the Levies had provided an important, if unnoticed "support". Indeed, in view of their previous military successes in confrontations with the Kurds, the presence of the Assyrians would have had a salutary effect upon them.

Perhaps because of the Iraq army's success in putting down the Sulaimani riots, the Iraq Command Report for October 1930 to September 1932, Item 238, p.68,[11] stated that in February 1931, the Levy Machine-gun and Animal Transport Companies had been disbanded, and their elements amalgamated with the two remaining Levy infantry battalions—the machine-guns were allocated on the basis of one section (two guns) per battalion. This was in line with the terms of the treaty with Iraq, which laid down that the effective strength of the Levy Force was to be only 1,250. These reductions in strength involved the dismissal of more Assyrians, which, in turn, would have dealt a further blow to the Assyrian community's morale. Perhaps the Assyrians now felt they were but pawns in a political game, and with the end of the Mandate due in only one year, they would be left without effective British support.

The following extract from the above-mentioned report is quoted because it confirms the act of transference of the Levies from a "field role" to that of garrison troops under the direct control of the Air Officer Commanding, Iraq. It states in the "Iraq Command Report", ch,XIII, paras.236 and 237 above:

> In accordance with the policy of giving the Iraqi Army every opportunity to prepare itself for its responsibilities after the coming into force of the Anglo-Iraq Treaty of 1930, the Iraq Levies were not employed on active operations during the period of this report, except for the purpose of reconstructing defence of Sulaimani in October 1931, during the operations against Shaikh Mahmud. They remained

[11] AIR 5/1255, F.334.

> in reserve, however, and continued to carry out their essential function of providing security for the main bases and for the outlying detachments of the Royal Air Force Staff and Intelligence Officers.

The same report showed that there were still some Levy units on detachment in 1931, and they were in the process of handing over responsibility for internal security to the Iraq army as follows:

> a. Billeh Camp (near Barzan), where a Levy detachment had remained since 1927, was handed over to the Iraq Army on 27 July 1931;
> b. A Levy Company was sent to the Baradost area, in August 1931; in connection with the attempt to settle some Assyrians there. As they were 'under canvas', they had to return to Diana on 1 December 1931, because of the onset of winter.
> c. The Levy 1st Battalion, provided a detachment for guard duties for the summer Training Camp at Ser Armadia in 1931, and again in 1932.

It would appear from "The Iraq Annual Report for 1932", dated 18 May 1933,[12] and issued by the Foreign Office, that at the beginning of that year, the strength of the Iraq Levies was as follows: 22 British officers, 10 British NCOs, and 1,723 native ranks. The organisation consisted of: headquarters, a pack ambulance (section of Animal Transport Company), and two infantry battalions 1st and 2nd. "It was proposed to effect the transition of this Force [Iraq levies] into the 'Air Defence Force' provided for in the annexure to the 1930 Treaty of Alliance." The Report further stated,

> This entailed a gradual reduction in the strength to 1,250 Iraqi ranks, and also fresh recruitment of Arabs and Kurds, in substitution for a proportion of the Assyrians, in order to give 'a better tribal balance' to the force, which was to be reorganised into a Battalion Headquarters, a Subsidiary Headquarters for the Basra area, and eight companies.

This introduction of Kurds into what remained of the Assyrian Levies, would undoubtedly have further upset the morale of the Assyrians. They stood to lose men who would be replaced by Kurds—and the Kurds were unlikely to display natural comradeship with Assyrians, given the bellicose history of these two peoples.

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[12] FO 371/16922, pp.60-92.

The Iraq Annual Report for 1932 also contains a further relevant and interesting reference to the Assyrians. The "Air Defence Force" was initially to be composed of men from various ethnic groups, that is, Arabs, Kurds and Assyrians—the two former groups were Iraqi nationals by birth. As yet, the Assyrian position with regard to their taking Iraqi nationality had not been resolved; yet they are mentioned as "Iraqis" in this document. This may, of course have been an error due to ignorance on the part of the compiler.

The next section of the document is also important, because it states the change of designation for the Levies to "The Air Defence Force", which indicated the stated new role of the force. However, this change required the creation of a draft law for the implementation of the new Force, timed to be simultaneous with Iraq's entry into the League of Nations in 1932. Iraq's entry to the League was delayed for some months, perhaps because of the time taken to ratify the Anglo-Iraq Treaty by the Iraqi parliament. This may have led to a further loss of confidence by the Assyrians for their future as a British "levied" force.

Proof of the growing apprehension on the part of the Assyrians was provided in June 1932, when the Assyrians of the Force, in furtherance of their political aspirations in Iraq, made a collective demand for their services to be terminated. Para.165 from Section 2 of the above-quoted Iraq Annual Report for 1932, headed "The Assyrians" described an incident involving the presentation by the Assyrians of a manifesto, in which were listed a number of demands. This incident, which was later to be referred to as the "Assyrian Strike", was to be a source of deep concern to the British authorities and, as will be seen, it proved to be a rather shameful one.

A report from Air Headquarters Iraq to the Air Ministry on 8 June 1932,[13] stated that on 31 May the Air Officer Commanding had received information that the Assyrian officers of the Iraq levies were about to give one month's notice.

The grievances of the Assyrians were summarised in a manifesto, signed by the Assyrian officers, which was received by Levy headquarters on

[13] AIR 5/1255, Fs.39-43.

1 June 1932,[14] and passed, after translation, to the Air Officer Commanding. Their demands were as follows:

> (1) The Assyrians should be recognised as a 'millet' in Iraq, and not a religious community.
> (2) The Hakkiari Sanjak in Turkey, in which many Assyrians had lived, should be annexed to Iraq, and its villages restored to their former owners.
> (3) (a) If this is impossible, the Assyrians should be found a national home, open to all the Assyrians now scattered throughout the world.
> (b) This home should include all the Amadiya district, and the adjacent parts of Zakho, Dohuk and Aqra districts; to become a sub liwa of the Mosul liwa; with its Headquarters in Dohuk; under an Arab Mutessarif and a British Adviser.
> (c) Existing settlements required revision by a committee, with adequate funds; and that Assyrian lands for settlement, should be registered as their personal property.
> (d) Preference to be given to Assyrians, in selection of officials for the sub liwa.
> (4) The temporal and spiritual authority of the Patriarch over the Assyrian nation, should be officially recognised, and should receive an annual subsidy.
> (5) The Assyrians to have a member of the Chamber of Deputies nominated by the people and the Patriarch.
> (6) The Iraq Government to establish schools, in consultation with the Patriarch, in which Syriac would be taught.
> (7) The League of Nations, together with the Iraq Government, should make a gift of Rs.5,000 for the creation of an Assyrian church waqf.
> (8) A hospital to be established at the H.Q. of the sub liwa; with dispensaries at other places.
> (9) Rifles earned by Assyrians, through their service in the levies, were not to be confiscated.

It seems from these demands that the Assyrians were not aware of the settlement of the Mosul question between Britain and Turkey, of 5 June 1926, by which the League of Nations recommended that Iraq's relationship with the United Kingdom should be extended if Mosul was to be assigned to Iraq. Thus a new Treaty was signed, extending the "relationship" for 25 years, or until Iraq joined the League.

However, the above agreement retained the "Hakkiari" within the Turkish frontier, therefore precluding the return of a large section of the Assyrians to their former homeland (the Hakkiari), "the Assyrians should be found a national home" in the districts as specified in Item (3)b of the above

[14] FO 371/16922, pp.29-33.

manifesto. Had Iraq been prepared to accept the Assyrians in the status of a "millet", the Assyrians would have been granted conditions similar to those previously experienced by them under Turkish jurisdiction. In the event of Iraq not granting the status of a millet, then alternatively, according to Item (3)a of the above manifesto, the League of Nations should find a national home for the Assyrians—but this would involve the agreement of another country. This thesis has attempted to present the probable British objections to the main demands listed in the manifesto.

The Assyrians had wanted their demands to be placed before the Council of the League of Nations for adoption and, by a Royal Iradah, made part of the Iraqi Constitution. The petition concluded with an ultimatum that unless these demands were granted before 28 June 1932, the Levies would not withdraw their resignations, and the national movement would increase.

The High Commissioner and the Air Officer Commanding were faced with a serious situation, because unless the British government agreed to safeguard the interests of the Assyrians, the whole levy Force would cease to exist within one month.

The A.O.C. wisely requested the ex-Levy Commandant Browne, who had completed his tour of Levy service but had not yet left the country, to interview both David D'Mar Shimun (father of the Patriarch), and the D'Mar Shimun (the Patriarch himself) as quickly as possible and report back to him.

Commandant Browne returned from his mission on 6 June to deliver his report to the A.O.C., who then sent extracts of the report as an annexure to his letter of 8 June to the Air Ministry.[15] It appears that Browne had found the Lady Surma D'Beit Mar Shimun at Dohuq on 3 June. She was apparently able to direct Browne to the D'Mar Shimun at Zawita, where he was picnicking with the Bishop and others.

Browne took the D'Mar Shimun aside for an hour's discussion, during which the latter stated that,

> ...the Assyrian officers had not resigned their commissions in any mutinous spirit. They had decided that, now Iraq was about to become independent, and that nothing more would be done for the Assyrians, the time had come to throw in their lot altogether.

[15] AIR 5/1255, Fs.57.

The Assyrians' "dilemma" was a reflection of Iraq's "uncertain" political future.

In response, Browne stated,

> ...that the Air Defence Force was to be formed and that there would be this detachment of 600 Assyrians there for many years, as a link with the British and to provide pay for themselves and dependants.

Browne then reported that the D'Mar Shimun had asked him "...what we would do if we did not get Assyrians?" Browne's reply was, "We should then get other people".

When the D'Mar Shimun asked what Browne wanted him to do, Browne advised him to use his influence as the D'Mar Shimun to get the officers to withdraw their resignations. The D'Mar Shimun, after further questions, said, "Well, I will tell them the truth".

Browne's report further stated that the D'Mar Shimun

> ...intends to hold a conference at SER AMADIA on 15th June to decide what the Assyrians are to do. A scheme will be drawn up and presented to the High Commissioner by 20th June. A scheme which involves the settlement of the Assyrians in an enclave in territory at present occupied by Kurds, and that the Assyrians would willingly remain in IRAQ if they could remain as a united body.

During Browne's visit, David D'Mar Shimun had asked that "the terms of the manifesto might be extended for a month and that in the meantime, discharges from the Levies might be delayed". However, at a subsequent meeting at Arbil on 7 June, it was confirmed that the officers intended to abide by the terms of the manifesto.

In the same document, Browne stated that the situation on the 8th meant that unless some unexpected development took place, the disbandment of the Levies would start on the 18th, and be completed by the end of June. Beyond the fact that the Assyrians intended to concentrate in the north, he had been unable to discover anything of their future plans. Also, rumours were in circulation among the Assyrians to the effect that "men who did not join the movement, would be shot by their comrades".

In the meantime, it appears that London was being kept informed of all developments by the Air Officer Commanding, whose report to the Air Ministry on 8 June concluded with,

> As a result of this decision of the [Assyrian] Council, GREAT BRITAIN has been faced with a problem that has, so far, proved insoluble and has now led to the Assyrian people, in desperation to seek their own salvation.

The fact that the A.O.C. felt it necessary to use capital letters for Great Britain in his report may, perhaps, reflect a measure of concern for the prestige of Great Britain in failing her erstwhile allies.

After Browne's report to the A.O.C., he continued his investigations, and during further consultations, the Assyrian officers explained why they had not requested permission to sign the manifesto, and the reason for maintaining such secrecy over the "movement". They argued that they had to sign the document or become outcasts from their people. Had they asked for permission to sign, they would certainly have been ordered not to sign; they would then have been placed in an awkward position by having to commit the additional offence of disobeying a definite order, and in so doing, they felt they would be "blackening the face" of any British officer responsible for them.

This concern shown by the distressed Assyrian officers for the reputations of their British officers is rather touching. The comradeship developed is evident, and also shows the problem of potentially divided loyalties between a minority ethnic group recruited by an imperial power, and their fear of desertion by Britain.

Browne felt that in the circumstances, as explained, it was difficult to see how the Assyrian officers could have arrived at any other decision. It seemed to them that they stood to lose everything if they did not side with their own people, whilst loyalty to the British government promised only a doubtful future in Iraq. Browne said, "The aim of the Assyrians had always been to keep together".

The Assyrian problem, made manifest by the Levy officers, had a much wider implication than that of their military service—they were presenting the predicament of their people as a whole. This is confirmed in the Air Officer Commanding's Report to the Air Ministry on 8 June,[16] which states,

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[16] AIR 5/1255, Fs.39-43.

> ...the movement was initiated by the large number of destitute Assyrians in the country. The numbers of unemployed men have been increased recently by discharge from the Iraq Levies and the Iraqi Petroleum Company (owing to reductions in staff). These people have been, for a long time, constantly agitating for some drastic action on their behalf.... The fact that the present situation has been created by the poverty-stricken and discontented unemployed must not be allowed to obscure the real importance of the movement in the eyes of the more fanatical tribesmen. They are adamant in their determination to preserve the unity and integrity of their nation and of their religion and they intend now to stake everything in one last attempt to realise their aims.

The tenure of the A.O.C's report clearly reflects his humanistic feelings for these appealing people, who had served the British cause so well.

The threatened Assyrian action had been a well-kept secret. Even Dobbs, the High Commissioner, had not anticipated that the Assyrians would resort to such a serious action to force the issues relating to their national aspirations. In some of the A.O.C's letters to the Air Ministry, it was apparent that he felt that the Assyrians were being taken too much for granted by the British government, which seemed to lack the will, imagination and drive for obtaining a just and permanent solution to the Assyrian question.

On 19 June 1932, the day following his receipt of the Assyrian petition, the High Commissioner despatched a letter to the Patriarch by air,[17] pointing out the impossibility of granting such far-reaching demands within the stipulated time. He urged the postponement of the threatened abandonment of their Levy service until the petition had been referred to the League of Nations, and an answer received.

This letter was discussed by the D'Mar Shimun, with all the leaders, at Ser Amadiya on 19 and 20 June 1932. They replied that they insisted on the acceptance of all their demands, except those which referred to the Hakkiari (Item 2 of the manifesto), as a condition for the withdrawal of the manifesto dated 1 June.

According to "The Iraq Command Report 1932 to 1934" previously quoted,[18] further negotiations proved fruitless. Therefore, under the prevailing Assyrian Levy threat, leading to the possible loss of security which they

[17] AIR 5/1255.
[18] AIR 5/1255, F.60.

provided for RAF installations throughout Iraq, the A.O.C. and Dobbs had no alternative but to proceed with necessary precautions. It may be assumed that it was the A.O.C. who had decided that a British infantry battalion would be required to replace the anticipated loss of the Assyrian Levies, if they still insisted on discharging themselves. No doubt the A.O.C's plan was concurred by Dobbs. The nearest British troops to reinforce Iraq would have to come from Egypt. There was, by then, considerable urgency attached to such decisions—with only some three weeks left in which to deal with the crisis.

In the Command Report quoted above, there are no details on how the decisions were taken in London, or by whom, in response to the plans proposed by the A.O.C. and Dobbs. However, it was mentioned that it required a Cabinet decision for the movement of a British infantry battalion from Egypt to Iraq by RAF Air Transport, which involved overflying Syria; the latter factor requiring French approval.

Among the actions considered was first the possible need to disarm the Assyrians—in other words, to overawe and convince them that resistance was impracticable. The use of Iraqi police or troops was out of the question. In any case, some eight of the ten Iraqi battalions, together with the police, were engaged in operations in the Barzan area. Secondly, it had been considered possible that any attempt to restrain and confine the Assyrians to their cantonments, might lead this formidable armed body to revolt and forcibly break out. However, it was hoped that the Assyrians would accept taking their discharge "in slow time".

However, the following dates and actions taken are available, subsequent to the above quoted A.O.C's letter to the Air Staff on 8 June 1932.

The innovation of transporting troops by air lent a new dimension by increasing the speed by which preparations for the troop movements had to be made. This fitted into the time-scale set by the Assyrians in their manifesto—28 days, or the Levy Force would be inoperative.

The British troops were to proceed from Egypt to Iraq via Syrian air-space—diplomatic approval from the French having been obtained. "The men were to travel unarmed in order to avoid possible objections by the French authorities."

Events then moved quickly. On 11 June, Air Officer Commanding Iraq informed the Air Officer Commanding Middle East Command that a British infantry battalion would be required to replace the Assyrian Levies, which might disband. Also, that a plan for these troops to be moved by air be prepared.

On 12 June, preliminary arrangements had been made for the 1st Battalion, the Northamptonshire Regiment, to be flown by the RAF from Egypt to Iraq to take over Levy duties, pending the recruitment of a special replacement force, the manpower source for which was not indicated in this report.

The A.O.C's proposed plan required the British infantry battalion to be airlifted, using aircraft of Nos.216 and 70 (Bomber Transport) squadrons to Hinaidi, employing a total of 36 aircraft. The move was to be completed in five days—the first two companies to arrive in Iraq on the 18th and the second two by 25 June. Spare kit for the battalion was to be despatched by rail and Nairn motor transport to Baghdad; the convoys to be under guard.

On 14 June, the British Cabinet decided not to reinforce Iraq, and the operation was halted. No explanation is given for this decision. The Air Ministry warned the A.O.C's Middle East and Iraq Commands that the reinforcement might yet go ahead, enabling the preparations to proceed. However, by 18 June, the British Cabinet finally gave approval for Iraq to be reinforced by one British infantry battalion—no reasons are given for this change of policy.

The air-lift commenced on 22 June 1932, and the entire battalion had been moved by the 27th, five days later—a considerable feat in those days, and one day before the Assyrian ultimatum expired. On their arrival, the four British companies were distributed to Levy stations at Mosul, Diana, Sulaimani and Hinaidi. There were strict instructions regarding British soldiers not using force against the Assyrians, "...and arrangements were made, for wherever a show of force might be necessary, or wherever there might be a risk of conflict with the Assyrians, Air Force personnel should be used".

The remarkable speed of the arrival of the British battalion was not without effect on the Assyrians leaders, and on 29 June,

> ...the Mar Shimun, consented to issue an encyclical letter to the Assyrian officers and men of the levies enjoining on them continued loyal and obedient service in the force until the national petition of the 17th June had been considered by the League of Nations and an answer given. Adding that if they then wished to take their discharge they must do so in accordance with the orders of their British officers.

In consideration of the D'Mar Shimun's letter, the High Commissioner promised the Levies they would be maintained at their present strength until an answer was received to their representations from the League of Nations, or until 15 December 1932, whichever was the earlier.

The Levies at Diana, Sulaimani and Mosul submitted without trouble to the injunction of the Patriarch, but those at Hinaidi showed themselves to be less compliant, and for some days behaved in a mutinous manner,

> It was considered advisable to permit the more restless men to go, and for several days a daily quota of about thirty men took their discharge. In all, some 250 men were released from service in this manner.

By the end of the first week of July, the remaining men in all stations had undertaken to obey the Patriarch's instructions. Thus, the strike of the Iraq Levies was, in effect, at an end. In retrospect, it might be argued that had as much energy and determination been put into solving the Assyrian problems when they were first made manifest, as was demonstrated in moving the large body of troops from Egypt to Iraq as a temporary pacification, then this serious and regrettable affair might never have occurred. This was a most unfortunate experience for all concerned and, it might be argued, could and should have been avoided. Perhaps the errors on the British side may be most charitably described, once again, as "taking one's friends too much for granted".

By the second week of July 1932, the situation permitted the return of the British battalion to Egypt by air, and "...it was clear of the Iraq Command, by 11th August 1932".

The disruptive action by the Assyrians, and the fact that, as a minority, their requests for permanent sanctuary in Iraq had not, as yet, been effectively dealt with by the Iraq government, came at a time when Iraq was seeking to become a member of the League of Nations. King Faisal and his government,

who were anxious to acquire membership of the League, could have felt that the Assyrian petition to the League might have adversely affected Iraq's application.

It may be for this reason, perhaps, that it was stated in "The Iraq Annual Report 1932",[19]

> In the meantime, King Faisal had visited Amadiya and had given a long audience to Mar Shimun, at which he discussed the Assyrian petition and their future in Iraq. His Majesty seems to have done his utmost to persuade the Patriarch to trust the Iraqi Government, and promised that he would himself watch over their interests and safeguard their rights. Mar Shimun, however, while thanking the King for his kindness, said that he felt obliged to await the result of the petition to the League.

Considerable progress was made throughout 1932—regardless of the Levy strike—in arrangements for the organisation of the "Air Defence Force", which entailed the changeover from the Levy organisation to that of the new detailed organisation, as laid down by the Air Officer Commanding Iraq prior to the strike.

In "The Iraq Command Report October 1930 to September 1932",[20] it is stated that,

> It is proposed that the new force (Air Defence Force) shall consist of Force Headquarters, a Wing Headquarters and eight companies. Of these companies two or a maximum of three will be composed of Assyrians, one of Kurds and two of Marsh Arabs. This leaves the composition of two companies to be decided later...one of these two companies should be a transport company. The intention had been to reserve four companies for the Assyrians, both because of our long connection with these people, because they are Christians and because they are undoubtedly the best fighters in Iraq. Unfortunately their behaviour in the summer of 1932 demonstrated once more the wisdom of mixing nationalities and religions in an alien force and so avoiding a dangerous preponderance of any one class.

Detailed establishment had been prepared for this new force; terms of service for all ranks had been promulgated, and procedures for recruiting had been worked out. The RAF seem to have done their "Staff Work" well in preparation for the new acquisition of troops.

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[19] FO 371/16922, para.181.
[20] AIR 5/1255, p.70, para.245.

However, an RAF experiment to send an Assyrian company to Margil to take over guard duties for the RAF station Basra from the Iraq army in February 1932, had proved unsatisfactory. The climate of the south was found to be unsuitable for the Assyrians, causing a high rate of sickness. Therefore, the Assyrian contingent was reduced to three companies, and confined to service in Mosul and Hinaidi.

There remained the necessary legal acceptance for the A.D.F.(Air Defence Force) by Iraq. Preliminary discussions between the High Commissioner (Sir Francis Humphreys) and the Iraq government concerning the formation of the A.D.F, had opened early 1932, when a new designation had been mooted. However, further progress on the matter was hindered by the Barzani operations, followed by the "Levy strike". At the beginning of August 1932, it was possible for the Air Ministry, Colonial Office and Foreign Office to resume negotiations with the Iraqi prime minister.[21] A draft law was drawn up for insertion in the Anglo-Iraq Treaty which, it was intended, should serve as a basis for detailed discussion on the creation of the "Air Defence Force".

Because it had been desired to convert the Levy Force into the A.D.F. simultaneously with Iraq's entry into the League of Nations (3 October 1932), the draft was prepared in the form of an ordinance. This was to save time by avoiding passage through the Iraq parliament, which was not then sitting. However, at the beginning of some discussions which followed,

> ...the Prime Minister [of Iraq] maintained the view that legislation was not necessary, and that full effect could be given to the requirements of the treaty, and of his secret letter (the content of which was not mentioned), by means of Army Orders, issued by the Ministry of Defence.

The complex events in the chapter were to have a direct influence on the development of the Iraq Levies, and their immediate future with the RAF. During the years covered by this chapter, the strength and structure of the Levy Force suffered a steady decline, prior to their metamorphosis as "The Air Defence Force".

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[21] FO 371/16922, F.61, Item 16.

As a final tribute to the Iraq Levies in the period covered by this thesis, it is worth noting the words of "The Iraq Command Report of October 1930 to September 1932",[22] which states:

> These unavoidable changes cannot be contemplated without feeling the deepest regret for the disappearance of that magnificent body, the 'Iraq Levies'. Their efficiency and smartness are profoundly impressive, and officers with long practical experience of mountain warfare have often expressed their conviction that it would be difficult to find anywhere in the world better hill fighters than these Assyrian soldiers are when well led. The Assyrian Levies have, during the comparatively short time they have been in existence, earned for themselves a reputation as mountain troops which might well be coveted by the best regiments in the armies of the world today.

It could be said that had the value of the Iraq Levies been appreciated sooner in London, then the course of their early history until 1932, might have been a very different one.

[22] AIR 5/1255, p.70, para.247.

CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSION

> "From what I have seen in different parts of the world, forces of this nature tend to be so-called, 'Private Armies' because there have been no normal formations to fulfil this function—a role which has been found by all commanders to be a most vital adjunct to their plans." Brigadier J.M. Calvert, memorandum, "Future of S.A.S. Troops" 1945, quoted in Strawson, *A History of the S.A.S. Regiment* (London, 1984).

In the long and very rich history of Britain's imperial military forces, the role and importance of the Iraq Levies might seem to be of minor significance. It was, after all, a small force—its maximum strength during the period covered by this thesis was probably approximately 6,500 men in October 1923. When this thesis ends in 1932, the Force had shrunk to around 1,250 men. Such basic figures can, however, be deceptive. As this thesis has tried to show, on certain critical occasions in the creation of the new state of Iraq, the Levies had a major role to play in the maintenance, or re-establishment, of public order and security. So in that sense, the importance of the Levies far exceeded their numerical strength. Not unlike the British S.A.S., their tasks were varied—they were a very necessary "adjunct" to the British garrison.

The size of the Levies is perhaps deceptive in other ways, for within that small force there was, as the thesis has repeatedly shown, a considerable measure of diversity and complexity. Unlike some imperial military forces, raised for dealing with particular events, and in whose creation there was an element of prior evaluation and planning, the origins of the Levies were about as *ad hoc* an affair as it is possible to conceive. The Levies' initial tasks were varied, and this fact found reflection in the diversity of the nomenclature employed in their early years, as discussed in Chapter II. As that chapter and later ones have shown, one of the major problems facing the Civil Administration was that of "rationalising" and "formalising" the Levies in an attempt to acquire a closer "conformity" with the established structure of the British Military forces in Iraq. These changes may have been due to influences in G.H.Q.M.E.F., and were not always suitable. Unlike the British

army, the Levy units were not called upon to fight *en masse*, but more usually as detachments. Thus in the study of the various ways by which the "remodelling" of the Levies was carried out, it appears that not all the changes were successful in meeting "Levy" requirements. For example, the Medium Machine-guns were "brigaded" during 1921-22, after which time M.M.G Sections were distributed among the battalions, thus providing greater flexibility for the battalions on detachment.

The history of the Levies is important in several other ways. Some of the most significant issues in British imperial military history have found repeated reflection in the course of research on this Force. These include the difficulties of recruitment in ethnically very diverse societies where different communities were sometimes deeply and mutually mistrustful and suspicious of each other, often for reasons which were centuries old.

The element of linguistic diversity serves to highlight another important factor in this research into military history—the great value of the learning of the native language, or languages, for the successful command by British officers of such troops. As the bibliography shows, officers, such as E.B. Soane, recorded and published their linguistic knowledge for the benefit of other people.

Yet another major theme which has found repeated illustration here, is the importance of decisions being made by men "on the ground", who had little or no opportunity, and on occasions, no time, in which to refer to "higher authority". This, in turn, casts further light on the debate as to what extent was there something called "British policy" in the immediate post-war period with regard to Iraq. Or were these impromptu "decisions" made "on the ground" later to be regarded and then interpreted as "official policy".

On reflection, an equivalent force to the Shabanah/Levies would have had to be raised in the circumstances created by the Mesopotamian campaign of 1914-18, because international law made it incumbent on any power which occupied territory in the prosecution of a war, to administer the civil population and maintain law and order in those territories occupied by force of arms. Britain simply could not spare regular troops for this task, and so local Arabs, with no obvious affinity for the Turks, were recruited and trained during the Mesopotamian campaign to represent the executive power of the

Civil Administration. It was in these circumstances that the Iraq Levies were born—the sons of expedience—and this factor remained dominant throughout the Force's existence.

The use of local manpower was further enhanced by the availability of British Indian army officers, especially, as has been noted, those possessed of linguistic ability in Arabic, Persian or Turkish, and who had held various posts in tribal areas of India. These qualifications quickly enabled them to establish a rapport with their new charges. In this respect, expedience and experience were wedded in the face of necessity, and so British Field Intelligence Officers of the military, and Political Officers of the Civil Administration, obtained able support from their "Shabanah" in the task of bringing normality to the territories vacated by the retreating Turkish forces.

This thesis has shown that although there were sufficient reports by Political District Officers indicating the use of their "Shabanah" and the conditions under which they served, regrettably there was no such information apparently available regarding the performance of the first recruited "Arab Guides", who worked with the British Field Intelligence in July 1915. However, information on the performance of the remainder of these "Arab Guides" only appears with their change of nomenclature, when they became the "Nasiriyah Arab Scouts" (N.A.S.) on being transferred from the British Field Intelligence of I.E.F. 'D', to the District Shabanah of Major Dickson, P.O. Nasiriyah.

The confused situation in the country following the end of hostilities against the Ottoman Empire, may well have contributed to the several changes of Levy nomenclature in that period. At the same time, Wilson, or senior members of his staff, may have been, and probably were, very unsure of precisely what role the force then had to fulfil. The ultimate name "Levies" was adopted in July 1919, and may well have been arrived at during discussions with G.H.Q.I.E.F. "D". At the same time, it was decided to divide the force into two groups—the "Levy Striking Force" and the "Shabanah or Gendarmerie" of the Political districts, for implementation in April 1920.

In the context of civil unrest, the Anglo-French Declaration of November 1918, which had echoed President Wilson's "Fourteen Points" for self-determination for the Ottoman minorities, opened the way for would-be

political dissidents to oppose the two anticipated Mandates for Iraq and Syria, to be given to Britain and France in April 1920.

The political climate in Iraq during 1919 and early 1920 was not helped by events in Syria. The British had withdrawn their troops from there, and transferred control to France in September 1919. There followed hostilities between the Syrians and the French in December of that year. In this connection, this thesis has tried to show that the incidents at Deir-es-Zor in December were, in fact, the precursors of the Arab uprising in Iraq early in the following year.

The motivation for these violent events and the unrest in Egypt, Syria and Iraq during the period 1919-20 were, in the writer's opinion, broadly the same. The Arabs of Syria and Iraq wanted independence and not the imposition of mandates, which they may have felt were an insult to the Arab psyche, and which they were not prepared to tolerate. In this troubled political climate, the decision to expand and reorganise the Levies was justified for maintaining internal security, but was taken too late.

As this thesis has indicated, had General Haldane been prepared to listen to the warnings of Wilson, his official local political mentor, and those of his own staff, the subsequent insurrection of 1920 may well have been less serious. Also, and perhaps for reasons of political popularity at home, Churchill's often over-parsimonious behaviour and his frequent reluctance to listen to the requirements of the man in the field, aggravated the situation—yet again a repeated theme in military history.

One of the main problems concerning the development of the Levies from 1918, was the lack of single-minded co-ordination for the Force. It might be suggested that once it was realised that the Levy Force would continue to be required for maintaining internal security for the foreseeable future, and on that premise, its strength increased, a senior military officer should have been appointed to plan its reorganisation and development. He could also have instigated the necessary military training for the Force's many different tasks in that role. Such decisions were not, however, made, and the consequences of that omission were examined in Chapter III.

It was not until the Cairo Conference of March 1921, that the Iraq Levies really came into their own as a military force with a distinctive identity

and role. They owed this impetus and growth momentum partly to the aspirations of the Royal Air Force, which had struggled to obtain independence as a service in its own right. This was reinforced by the Air Ministry replacing the War Office in the control of Iraq. The R.A.F. required a dependable ground force with which to co-operate in the field during internal security operations, as well as to secure their installations and encampments. This situation was to continue until the Iraq army, assisted by the R.A.F., was seen to be capable of maintaining internal security, it was hoped by c.1925.

However, at the Cairo Conference in March 1921, the Levies also received a considerable setback in their development, when it was decided to transfer the entire Arab element of their strength to the newly-created Iraq army, for the purpose of hastening its development. There can be little doubt that the impetus for this important decision stemmed from the immediate stringent financial climate which faced the British government—the sooner the Iraq government could maintain internal security, the quicker the imperial garrison could withdraw, but leaving the R.A.F. As was seen in Chapter IV, this decision was the sole reason for bringing the Assyrians (then Christian refugees) into the Levies to replace the lost Arab element. This not only entailed recruiting and training new men, but also produced a new language problem to overcome.

More importantly, there were attendant problems in the use of Assyrians as replacement manpower. They were a warlike people, who had traditional enemies among the Kurds. There was also the more difficult problem of integrating a stateless Christian people into a Muslim country. It is doubtful if the full implications of this important decision for the long term had been considered at the Conference. As far as it was possible to discover from the documentation of the Cairo meetings, the Assyrians had not been approached on serving as replacements for the Levy Arab element; nor were the possible repercussions discussed—only that the Assyrians were informed that the refugee camp at Ba'quba was to close within the year. This fact alone would have left the Assyrians with little or no alternative but to comply with the proposal for Levy service.

The loss of the Levy Arab element to the Force was followed in March 1922 by the dismissal of the Levies' first Field Commander (Commandant

Sadleir-Jackson) through what was, perhaps, no more than personal jealousy. This, without doubt, slowed the impetus for their expansion as a military force. It was not clear on what grounds the dismissal was achieved, in view of Churchill's calm reaction to Sadleir-Jackson's report of December 1921, regarding the neglect of important supplies for the Levies. As even Cox had been mentioned, there can be little doubt that others on Churchill's staff would have been implicated, including Meinertzhagen. An apparently mischievous cover-up appears to have lost the Levies a successful and battle-tried Field Commander.

The years 1920 to 1924 represented a time of considerable change for the Levies. After they had proved, beyond doubt, their loyalty during the Insurrection, they lost, in Sir Arnold Wilson, their original mentor. Nevertheless, they managed to survive the transfer of the majority of their trained men to the newly-initiated Iraq army.

The blame for the Assyrian disturbances in Mosul and Kirkuk in August 1923 and May 1924, could be seen as unfairly placed upon the shoulders of those Levy troops involved. It was but another serious error of judgment on the part of the British authorities, who were responsible for placing two volatile peoples, with "old scores" between them, in close proximity. It appears that no lesson had been learnt from the first fracas of 1923. In May the following year, when the second and more serious incident occurred, the Levies were barracked in an old Turkish fort, which was on the perimeter of the Kirkuk township. This could be compared to "putting a lighted match near dry tinder".

The lack of comprehension and foresight by the senior British Levy Command in this matter, begs the question as to why, for example, did not High Commissioner Dobbs point out the folly of such a practice? This reinforces the contention that throughout the period covered by this thesis, the authorities in London, though less so in Iraq, were both often culpable for the lack of competent direction of affairs in Iraq.

This study has indicated that there remains the question: Why did the British executive fail to maintain closer contact with, and observation of the stateless Assyrians' concern for the future of their people as a whole? Such action may have avoided the resultant "strike" in June 1932. Not only did the

Assyrians represent the best possible fighting material available for enlistment in the region, but their loyalty to the British had already been proved. Although Commandant Browne stated to the Mar Shimun on 3 June 1932 that other manpower would be brought in to replace the Assyrians, this would have been a very difficult task to perform. Britain had failed to obtain the Iraq government's approval for British officers' executive control in the Iraq army, let alone to bring in foreigners to serve as Levies. The R.A.F. in Iraq were adamant on their security being independent of the Iraq army, and as a result, the "Iraq Levies" became the "Air Defence Force" in October 1932.

The A.O.C. Iraq, who showed some understanding for the stateless Assyrians, was, nevertheless, deeply concerned with the possibility of well-armed Assyrians, both civilians and serving Levies, attempting, in their frustration, some desperate armed action. Therefore, the decision by the British government in June 1932, to airlift into Iraq a British infantry battalion from Egypt, enabled the situation to be contained without violence. Nevertheless, a considerable number of the Assyrian levies insisted on taking their discharge, and this was granted.

The result of the "strike" brought a measure of shame to both parties concerned, and achieved virtually nothing. The Assyrians should not have resorted to indiscipline, and so besmirched their hitherto impeccable record of service; and the British should not have taken their war-time allies for granted. The British government could, perhaps, have used its considerable influence in the League of Nations to better effect for the security of the Assyrians' future. But this omission is again indicative of the lack of attention paid in London to the affairs of Iraq.

After this research, some important questions remain unanswered. Why did these Levies of diverse ethnic background and religious beliefs, continue to serve in the Force throughout its 40 years of existence, and what was their motivation? Some may contend that they owed their allegiance to their pay masters. But if that were so, then many sold their lives and limbs very cheaply. Their small financial reward was an inadequate reason to hold these diverse ethnic groups together in support of a foreign power, with little in common to be shared outside military service; for it must be remembered that all were volunteers.

The answer may be ascribed to the fact that all the Levies were more or less warlike peoples, and the British officers under whom they served, had also freely chosen military service for their careers. Thus was created a Force united by comradeship in military service, where admiration for soldierly qualities overcame prejudices. The most efficient of these soldiers became natural leaders, and were then accepted without question by their men, because all lives depended on their military abilities.

Perhaps the most poignant assessment of the Iraq Levies lies in the re-quoted words of Sir Arnold Wilson after the fighting at Hillah in July 1920, during the Arab Insurrection:

> ...they have done most enterprising and gallant work at heavy cost in killed and wounded against their own people, in spite of every temptation and appeal to their tribal, family and religious feelings....

This thesis provides the background to the beginnings and the gradual evolution of a military force, which became the Iraq Levies, and explains the reasons for the retention of the Force in the years which followed World War One. It relates the effects of personalities on its history. It also deals with the loss in Iraq of the British garrison's "ground troops", pending the fitness of the Iraq army, backed by the R.A.F., to maintain internal security. Where possible, this thesis has provided examples of the field operations in which the Levies were engaged. Some of these were to prevent invasion; others were, in the interests of maintaining internal security, but unfortunately necessitated action against the people from whom the Levies were recruited.

There can be few similar forces, raised under such difficult and unusual circumstances, or which were more heterogeneous in their ethnic and religious manpower structure, as the Iraq Levies. It is hoped that perhaps the legacy of this thesis is that the early history of a one-time excellent Force has been rescued from possible obscurity, and that thereby the service of the most important element of its existence—the soldiers—will be remembered.

> Who shall record the glorious deeds of the soldier whose lot is numbered with the thousands in the ranks who live and die and fight in obscurity? (Private Wheeler, letter of 1813, quoted in Liddell Hart (ed.), *The Letters of Private Wheeler* (London, 1951).

APPENDIX

CAVALRY VERSUS MOUNTED INFANTRY CONTROVERSY

During and after the Boer War, a very heated argument was conducted in British military circles as to which possessed the greater efficiency in battle—the "old-school" Cavalry (Arme Blanche), or the "Mounted Infantry". The matter was still under discussion in 1929. The main protagonists in the "Shock" v. "Fire" controversy of 1902-13, were Field-Marshals Earl Roberts and Earl Haig. The latter advocated "shock tactics" (meaning a cavalry charge), in which the "horse's momentum" was considered as important as its rider's weapon. This school felt that as soon as the cavalryman dismounted he could lose his "élan" and the initial ability to establish "moral superiority". On the other hand, the supporters of Mounted Infantry believed in the power of the "controlled fire of the rifleman", the horse being used only for speed in mobility.

For the official definition of "Mounted Infantry" (M.I.) see the War Office manual "Yeomanry and Mounted Rifle Training", Parts I and II, for 1912 (London), p.1. The pertinent extract states:

> By Mounted Infantry is meant, fully trained infantry, mounted solely for purposes of locomotion. Such troops are not to be regarded as horse-soldiers, but as infantry possessing special mobility. They fight on foot only, and are not armed or trained for mounted shock-action, which they are not intended to employ.

SELECTED BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF PERSONALITIES

These biographical sketches are taken from Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, vol.IV, 1916-1922 (London, 1975). The sketch of the Rev. W.A. Wigram, however, was compiled from miscellaneous sources.

COX, Percy Zachariah, 1864-1937. Entered army, 1884. Served in India, 1884-93. Captain, 1892. Assistant Political Resident, Zeila, British Somaliland, 1893. Led an expedition which defeated a tribal uprising at Berbera, 1895. Political Agent and Consul at Muscat, 1899-1904. Political Resident in Persian Gulf, 1904-14. Knighted, 1911. Accompanied Indian Expeditionary Force to Mesopotamia as a Chief Political Officer, 1914-17. Major-General, 1917. Acting Minister to Teheran, 1918-20. High Commissioner, Mesopotamia, 1920-3. (Vol.IV, p.493.)

GUEST, Frederick Edward, 1875-1937. Third son of 1st Baron Wimborne, Churchill's cousin. Served in South African War as captain, Life Guards, 1899-1902. Private Secretary to Churchill, 1906. Liberal MP, 1910-29. Treasurer, HM Household, 1912-15. ADC to Sir John French, 1914-16. On active service in East Africa, 1916-17. Patronage Secretary, Treasury, May 1917-April 1921. Secretary of State for Air, April 1921-October 1922. (Vol.IV, p.16.)

HARDINGE, Charles, 1858-1944. Entered Foreign Office, 1880. Knighted, 1904. Ambassador at Petrograd, 1904-6. Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 1906-10. Created Baron Hardinge of Penshurst, 1910. Viceroy of India, 1910-16. Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 1916-20. Ambassador to France, 1920-3. (Vol.IV, p.291.)

HIRTZEL, Arthur, 1870-1937. Entered India Office, 1894. Secretary to Political Department, 1909-17. Knighted, 1911. Assistant Under-Secretary for India 1917-21; Deputy Under-Secretary 1921-4; Permanent Under-Secretary, 1924-30. (Vol.IV, p.512.)

MEINERTZHAGEN, Richard, Lt.-Colonel, 1878-1967. Of Danish origin. Often erroneously believed to be Jewish. Second-Lt. Royal Fusiliers, 1899. Served in India, 1899-1902. Transferred to King's African Rifles, 1902. Served in East Africa, France and Palestine, 1914-18. Colonel in charge of Field Intelligence Section of General Allenby's army, 1917-18. Employed at War Office, 1918-19. Member of the British delegation at Paris Peace Conference, 1919. Chief Political Officer in Palestine and Syria, 1919-20. Military Adviser, Middle East Department, Colonial Office, 1921-4. Published his *Middle East Diary* in 1959. (Vol.IV, p.582.)

MONTAGU, Edwin, 1879-1924. Liberal MP, 1905-22. Financial Secretary to the Treasury, February 1914-February 1915; May 1915-July 1916. Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, February-May 1915; January-June 1916. Minister of Munitions, May-December 1916. Secretary of State for India, June 1917-March 1922. (Vol.IV, p.28.)

SALMOND, John Maitland, 1881-1968. Entered army, 1901. On active service in South Africa, 1901-2. Instructor, Central Flying School, 1912. Lt.-Colonel, 1915. Major-General, 1917. Director-General, Military Aeronautics, 1917-18. Officer Commanding Inland Area, 1920-2. Air Officer Commanding British Forces in Iraq, 1922-5. Air Marshal, 1923. Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Air Defence of Great Britain, 1925-9. Air Chief Marshal, 1929. Chief of the Air Staff, 1930-3. Marshal of the Royal Air Force, 1933. (Vol.IV, p.204.)

SAMUEL, Herbert Louis, 1870-1963. Liberal MP, 1902-18; 1929-35. Chancellor of Duchy of Lancaster, 1909-10. Postmaster-General, 1910-14. President of Local Government Board, 1914-15. Home Secretary, January-December 1916. Knighted, 1920. High Commissioner for Palestine, 1 July 1920-2 July 1925. Home Secretary, 1931-2. (Vol. IV, p.176.)

SHUCKBURGH, John Evelyn, 1877-1953. Entered India Office, 1900. Secretary, Political Department, India Office, 1917-21. Appointed Assistant Under-Secretary of State, Colonial Office by Churchill, 1921. Knighted, 1922. Remained Assistant Under-Secretary of State until 1931. Deputy Under-Secretary of State, 1931-42. (Vol.IV, p.512.)

TRENCHARD, Hugh Montague, 1873-1956. Entered army, 1893. Active service South Africa, 1899-1902. Major, 1902. Assistant Commandant, Central Flying School, 1913-14. Lt.-Colonel, 1915. General Officer Commanding Royal Flying Corps in the Field, 1915-17. Major-General, 1916. Knighted, 1918. Chief of Air Staff, 1919-29. Air Marshal, 1919. Created baronet, 1930. Commissioner, Metropolitan Police, 1931-5. (Vol.IV, p.199.)

WIGRAM, Rev. William Ainger, 1872-1953, B.D. (Cantab.), D.D. (Lambeth). Formerly Hon. Chaplain to Archbishop of Canterbury; Head of Archbishop of Canterbury's Mission to the Assyrian Christians in the Hakkiari; Assyrian repatriation, Mesopotamia; Chaplain to British Legation, Athens, 1922-8; Canon of St. Paul's, Malta, 1928-36. Publications: *The Cradle of Mankind*; *Assyrians and Their Neighbours*; and *Our Smallest Ally*. Source: *Who Was Who, 1951-1960* (London, 1960).

WILSON, Arnold Talbot, 1884-1940. Entered army from Sandhurst, 1903. On duty in Persia guarding Ahwaz oilfields, 1907-9. Transferred to Indian Political Department, 1909. Consul at Mohammerah, 1909-11. Deputy Chief Political Officer, Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force, 1915; Deputy Civil Commissioner, 1918. Acting Commissioner, Mesopotamia, and Political Resident Persian Gulf, 1918-20. Knighted, 1920., Adviser to Anglo-Persian Oil Company, 1921-32. Author of several works on Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf, including *Loyalties* (1930), and *A Clash of Loyalties* (1931). Conservative MP, 1933-40.

N.B. These notes refer only to the period covered by the thesis. Several of the individuals listed had distinguished careers in later years.

ABBREVIATIONS

A.M.	Air Marshal/Air Ministry
A.H.C.	Assistant High Commissioner
A.O.C.	Air Officer Commanding
A.P.O.	Assistant Political Officer
A.S.	Air Staff
Arty.	Artillery
A.T.	Animal transport
A.V.M.	Air Vice-Marshal
Bde.	Brigade
B.O.	British officer
B.O.R.	British other rank
B.O.I.A.	British officer Indian Army
B.O.I.A.R.	British officer Indian Army Reserve
C.A.S.	Chief of Air Staff
Cav.	Cavalry
C.I.G.S.	Chief of Imperial General Staff
C.O.	Commanding Officer/Colonial Office
Comdt.	Commandant
Coy.	Company (Infantry)
D.C.A.S.	Deputy Chief of Air Staff
D.D.O.I.	Deputy Director Operations Iraq
D.H.C.	Deputy High Commissioner
Div.	Division
D.O.	Demi official
D.O.S.D.	Director Operations Staff Duties
F.O.	Foreign Office
G.O.C.	General Officer Commanding
G.O.C.-in-C.	General Officer Commanding-in-Chief
H.C.	High Commissioner
I.E.F. "D"	Indian Expeditionary Force "D"
Inf.	Infantry
I.O.	Indian officer/India Office/Intelligence officer
I.O.R.	Indian other rank
LAMB.	Light armounred motor battery = armoured car
L.M.G.	Light machine-gun
M.E.F.	Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force
M.M.G.	Medium machine-gun
N.O.	Native officer
N.O.R.	Native other rank
O.C.	Officer Commanding
Pl.	Platoon (Infantry)
P.M.	Prime Minister
P.O.	Political Officer
Pte.	Private (infantryman)
R.F.C.	Royal Flying Corps
R.A.F.	Royal Air Force
S. of S.	Secretary of State
S.D.	Special Duties

Tp.	Troop (cavalry)
Tpr.	Trooper (cavalryman)
Sqn.	Squadron (cavalry/air force)
W.0.	War Office

TERMINOLOGY USED IN LEVY DOCUMENTS

Agha	Kurdish Tribal Chief
Argal	Head-rope to retain kafiyah
Bellam	Local river cargo boat, could carry up to half a ton of stores
Barishynas	White Russians
Bash Chaoush	Sergeant-major
Bolos	Bolsheviks
Cacolets	Pannier-type seats for carrying wounded, one on each side of a pack saddle
Chai-khana	Tea-house
Colchis	Tax collector
Iradah	Royal decree
Kafiyah/chafiyah	Head cloth. Chafiyah - colloquial pronunciation
Kunjar	Curved dagger (Levy badge was crossed kunjars)
Kurta	Long coat reaching to knees
Lakh	100,000 rupees
Lashkar	Contingent/group of irregulars as used in thesis (classical Persian word meaning an army)
Liwa	Arabic for district
Mahaila	Marsh Arab heavy canoe
Malik	Assyrian tribal leader
Mar-shimun	Assyrian patriarch (Nestorian)
Mashoof	Small Marsh Arab canoe
Mejlis	A tribal council/meeting
Millet	A non-Muslim people, or "Simmi" (Turkish) living as a group within the Ottoman state under a bilateral pact which guaranteed religious tolerance and protection, in return for a poll tax of "jizya" collected by official appointed by the patriarch on behalf of the Ottoman treasury
Mujtahid	Senior Muslim cleric (Persian)
Mukhtar	Arab village headman
Mulla	Muslim cleric (Arabic)
Muntafiq	Tribal coalition
Mutasarrif	Arab/Turkish governor
Mutasarriflik	Turkish governorship
Nafar (Nefer)	Infantryman (Turkish)
Piada	Foot soldier or infantry (Persian derivative)
Puttee	Cloth wound round leg
Qadha	Sub-district
Qaimmaqam	Deputy Governor
Sangar	Protective wall of stone/rocks
Sanjaq	District (Turkish)
Shabana	Iraqi coloquial for Turkish gendarmerie
Shabraque	Decorated saddle cloth
Shaikh	Arab tribal leader
Silladar cavalry	Irregular cavalry (Indian) (men supply own horse and equipment)

Sowar	Cavalry trooper
Tarada	Marsh Arab war canoe
Wakil Thabit	Warrant Officer
Wali	District Governor (Turkish)
Waqf	Islamic endowment
Wilayat	Province
Yuzbashi	Captain of 100 men (Turkish)
Zabit	Officer

Native Officer Ranks – Assyrian

Rab Khaila	Captain of 400
Rab Tremma	Captain of 200
Rab Emma	Captain of 100
Rab Khamshee	Captain of 50

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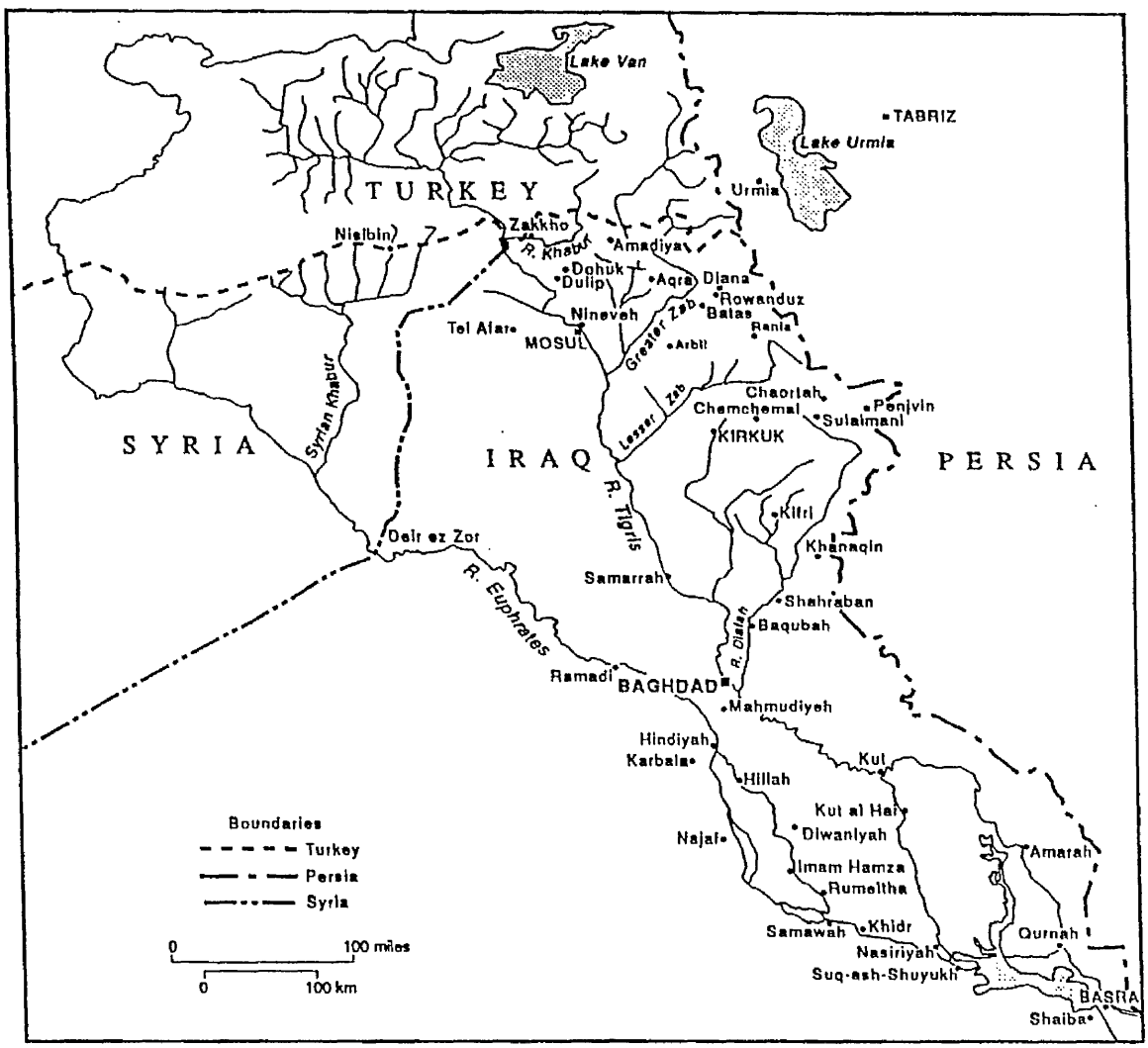
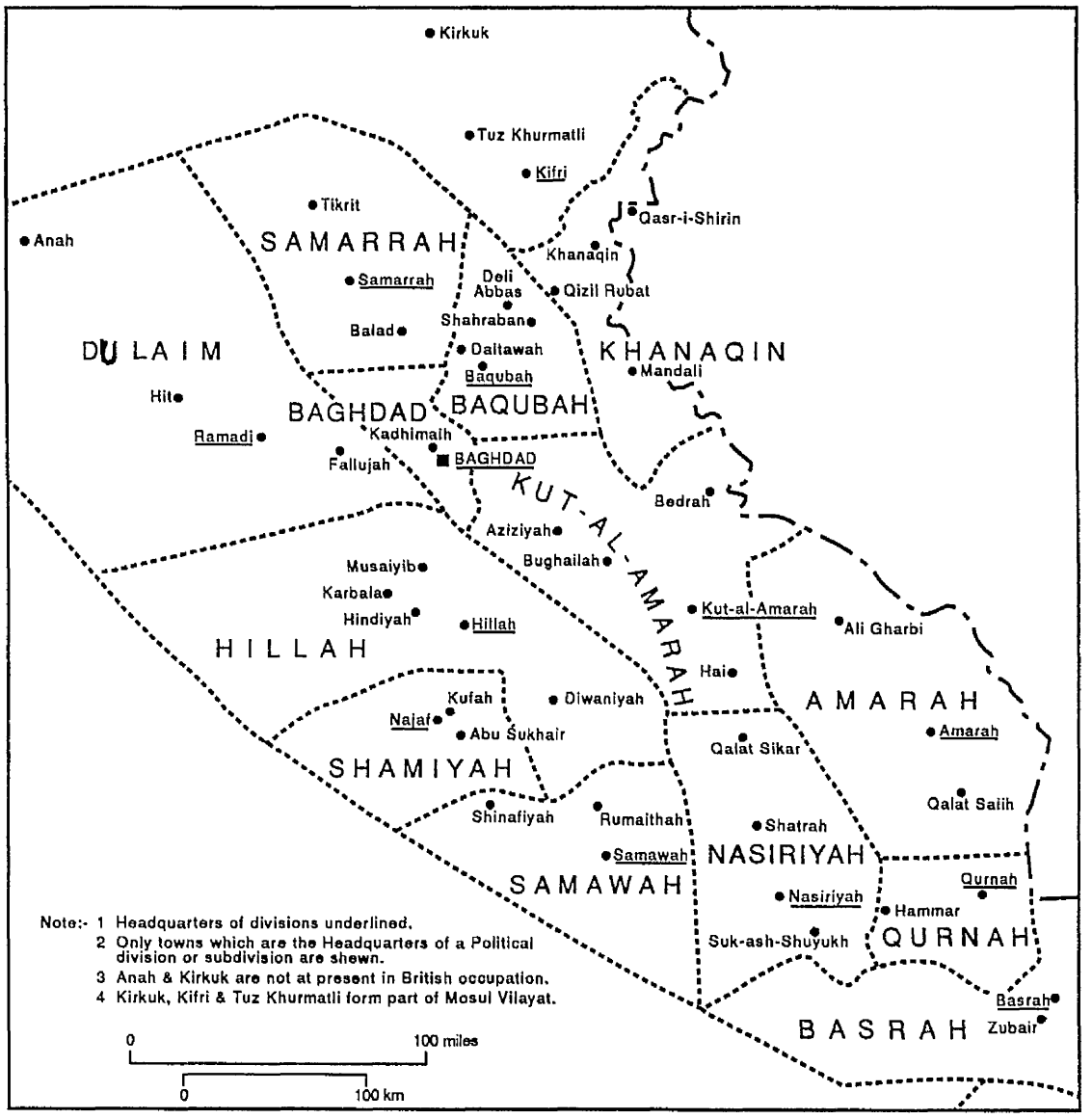
Map 1: Areas of Employment of Levies 1915-1921



Map 2: Civil Administrative Divisions in the Occupied Territories of Iraq, 29 June 1918



Source: S.D.O. No. 2462 November 1918

ILLUSTRATIONS OF SHABANAH/LEVY UNIFORMS

NOTE: It will be recalled that Brigadier-General A.G. Wauchope, together with Major C.A. Boyle, Inspecting Officer Levies, inspected the Levies in training at Hillah on 4 April 1920 (Ch.IV, p.133). The Force had just been divided into two parts: "The Striking Force" (consisting of mounted infantry), and the "District Police". The latter were to carry on the duties of the old Shabanah, under the District Political Officers, while the former were to be trained as a military force. Both were similar in dress and armament at this time. The uniforms, equipment and armament of the Force left much to be desired.

The situation with regard to equipment and small arms was no better than the motley uniforms. There were no "rifle buckets" and so the mounted infantry are depicted carrying their rifles while mounted, and it will be noted that those rifles vary in type. The arms have been identified by the staff of the National Army Museum.

With the exception of Item 1 on the illustrations, which is taken from J.G. Browne's book *The Iraq Levies 1915-32*, the remainder, for which the exact dates are unknown, are by courtesy of the Imperial War Museum, London. The brief captions of the Museum are not correct for these illustrations. They state "Arab Police Training". No doubt the photographer(s) confused the "District Police" with the "Municipal Police" who were a completely different force trained only in police work. They wore a brass number plate over the left breast, and the headdress was a black astrakhan cap with badge.

The last two illustrations have been included to show how the Force had improved and the uniform established by c.1938.

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. The development of the dress and uniform of the Iraq Levies, from 1916-1917.

2. Typical Shabanah/Levy dress/uniform c.1918-20. Note the variations in headdress supplied by the men; also the rifles which, in this picture, are .577 Snider carbines.

Early 1916. 1916–1917. Late 1917.

THE IRAQ LEVIES.

3. A British NCO Instructor adjusting the very ornate headdress of, perhaps, an Arab NCO in basic training, c.1919-20.

4. Recruits' rudimentary musketry training. Note yet another type of rifle in use in c.1918-20: from left to right, the first two men have .450 Martini carbines, the third man has a .450 Remington carbine, and the fourth a Martini carbine. In view of the condition of some of the weapons, they may well have been, in this case, privately owned.

5 and 6. Mounted infantry training 1919-20. The negotiation of a nullah/wadi; also mounted troop and squadron drill in the field. The mounts are mostly Arab ponies of about fourteen hands.

7. Newly arrived Assyrian Levy recruits, still in their tribal dress, being introduced to drill by an Assyrian Rab Khamshee (native lieutenant) c.1938. Note the typical round Assyrian caps, and the Assyrian "Kunjar" (dagger) worn in the sash of the second man in the front row.

8. Assyrian Levies on kit inspection, Habbaniyah c.1938 – a transformation.