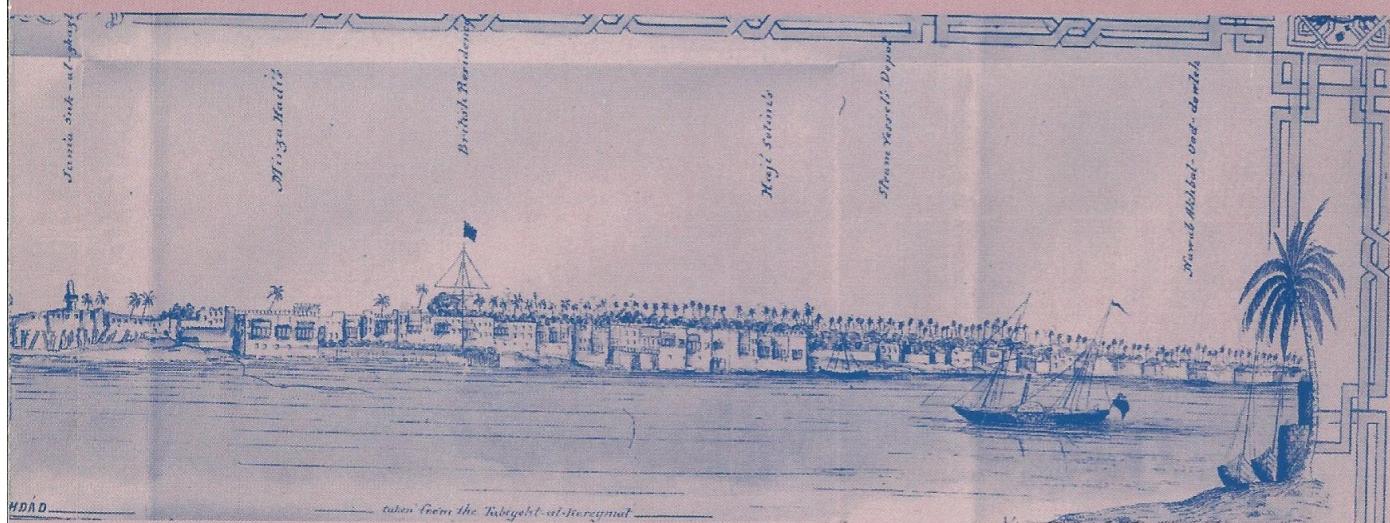




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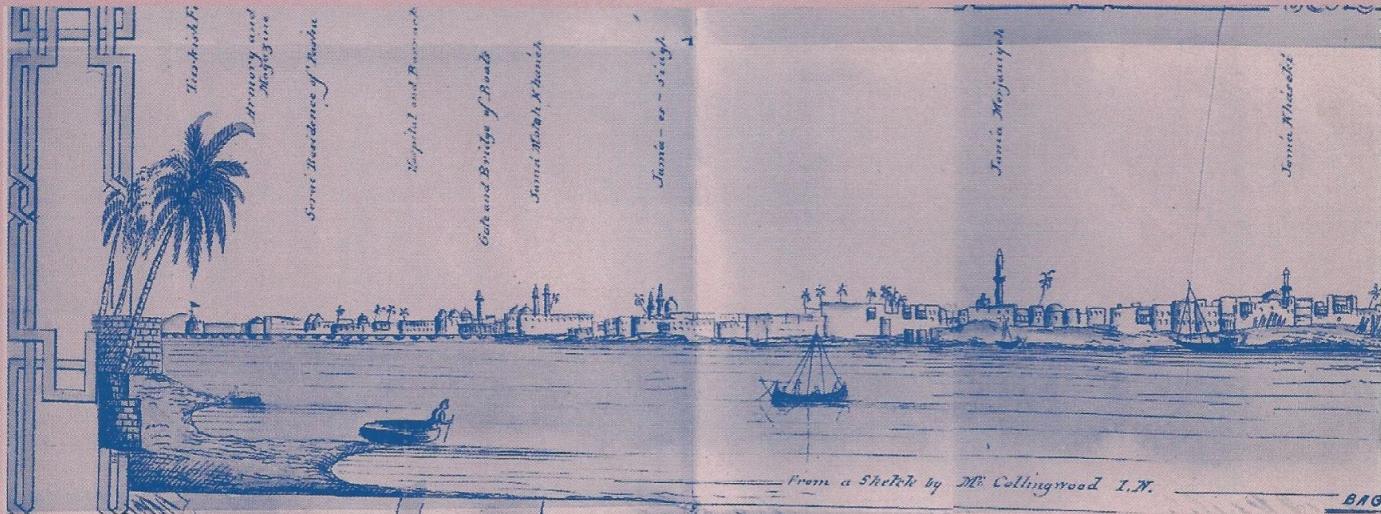


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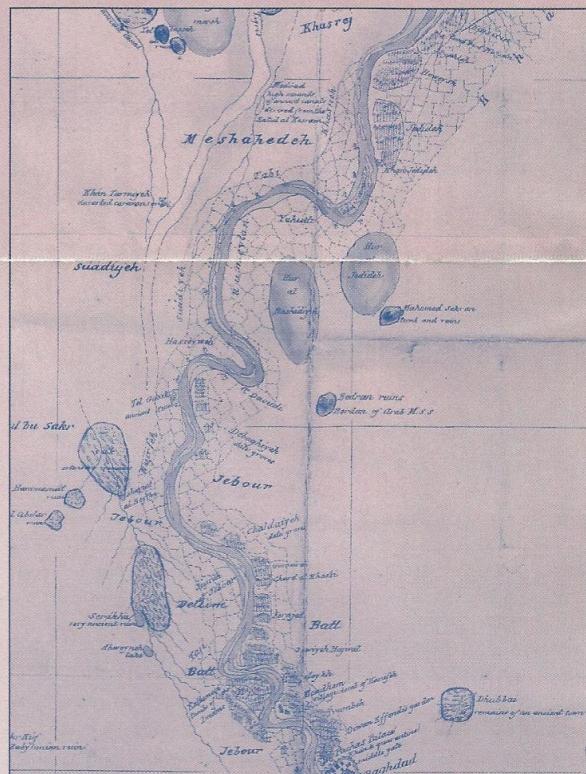


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Bibliographic description

Title:	Records of Iraq 1914-1966
Editors:	A. de L. Rush and J. Priestland
Extent:	c.12000 pages in 15 volumes
ISBN:	1-85207-820-0
Binding:	Library bindings, acid-free paper

Orders and payments

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King Faisal I

King Ghazi

King Faisal II

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Iraqi-Kuwaiti relations: opposition of Shaikh Abdullah al-Salim (Ruler of Kuwait) to closer association with Iraq or U.A.R.; cross-frontier restrictions; labour problems in Al-Sabah date gardens near Basra etc., 1958-1960

Extracts from the Editor's Preface

The documents reproduced in these volumes relate how, in the course of the twentieth century, three provinces of the Ottoman Empire - Baghdad, Basra and Mosul - became the nation-state of Iraq. ... The introductory sections of this work provide glimpses of the region just before the First World War when it was known as Mesopotamia, or Turkish Arabia. In 1831, the Ottoman Sultan, Mahmud II, extended direct rule over the area. Soon afterwards, steps were taken to modernise it and develop its commercial potential. The relationship with Britain became more contentious during the First World War when Arab leaders, aiming to advance their regional and dynastic interests, joined forces with the Allies in their war against Germany and Turkey. In the event, despite the defeat of Turkey, few Iraqis felt inclined to celebrate. Many of them had remained loyal to Turkey and disliked an alliance with non-Muslims. ...

The outstanding event at this time was, of course, the Cairo Conference of March 1921 at which British army officers and officials headed by the Colonial Secretary, Mr Winston Churchill, decided to convert the region into a Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq led by Amir Faisal bin Hussein whom the French had recently evicted from Syria. Faisal's debt to Britain for an Iraqi throne would, it was assumed, ensure respect for British interests in the area. These could be further promoted by using British bomber aircraft for policing. It would then be possible to withdraw British troops from Iraq and save millions of pounds for the British taxpayer, thus removing the chief criticism of those opposed to British involvement in the area. ...

In the event, the plan was only partly successful. Within weeks of Amir Faisal's enthronement in August 1921, the High Commissioner, Sir Percy Cox, and his Oriental Counsellor, Gertrude Bell, were becoming impatient; by 1923, almost everyone was exasperated. "Faisal is not playing the game," complained Sir Percy's successor, Sir Henry Dobbs. "... The memoranda and reports are packed with evidence that King Faisal was right to behave as he did. The King's resistance to foreign control and encouragement of Iraqi nationalism edged Iraq ever closer to independence - a process that ended when Britain's mandate was finally relinquished in October 1932.

The attainment of independence in 1932 signaled a negative phase in Iraq's national development. Without British involvement, the King, the Council of Deputies and indeed the whole constitutional system soon manifested weakness in maintaining the rule of law. When the protecting arm of British influence was removed, the Assyrians, who had already isolated themselves by assisting the British occupation forces, antagonised the Iraqis yet more by demanding autonomy. In 1933, armed clashes provoked intervention by General Bakr Sidqi who now earned a fearsome reputation by allowing his troops to slaughter Assyrian men, women and children. Far from being reviled for the Assyrian atrocities, we read that Bakr Sidqi became a hero, as did King Faisal's son and successor, Amir Ghazi (reigned 1933-1939). By joining in the celebrations of Sidqi's deeds, he gained great popularity while King Faisal, by condemning the massacres, weakened his position so much that he was eventually obliged to tolerate the prevailing mood.

Iraq's attempt to seize Kuwait in 1990 lends special interest to the documents concerning Kuwait. Both Volume 7 and Volume 8 of this work contain references to Iraqi contacts with Kuwaiti dissidents. No one took a keener interest in Kuwait's internal problems than King Ghazi who, inspired by Hitler's occupation of Austria, ardently supported plans to annex Kuwait. The British, with important interests in Kuwait, were as anxious to prevent this, as were most Kuwaitis.

Iraq's importance in the Second World War rested on her strategic position linking Europe, the Levant, India and Central Asia. Though Iraqi oil was not yet a major consideration, Basra in the south was only a short journey from vitally important oil installations at Abadan. Increasingly resentful, the Iraqi nationalists decided to use their links with the Axis powers to drive the British

out of Iraq once and for all... Soon a new Hashemite regent had been appointed and a new Government formed under the premiership of the lawyer and politician, Rashid 'Ali. The success of the rebels was short-lived [but] it would not be long before shifting loyalties would contribute to the downfall of the monarchy.

Iraq's system of government, adequate in theory, was constantly undermined by the corruption and ruthlessness of its own politicians. In terms of development, however, good progress was made in the 1950s thanks to the work of a Development Board and large revenues resulting from the expansion of the oil industry. [Also] Iraq was becoming more prominent internationally. Alarmed by the growth of communism and by Iraq's proximity to the Soviet Union, Nuri Sa'id antagonised Gamal 'Abd al Nasir by ardently championing the 'Baghdad Pact' which, in its full flowering, required Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan, Iran and Britain to coordinate their defence policies. ... Surveying the correspondence and reports of this period, we cannot doubt that Iraqi participation in the Baghdad Pact was a grave mistake since it aligned the régime closer to Britain at a time when the British Government was intensely unpopular.

Although the revolution of July 1958 largely resulted from these regional and international tensions, the evidence suggests that injustices within Iraq were the more immediate and decisive cause. The documents concerning the establishment of Qasim's régime relate how this eccentric, charismatic personality established his dictatorial powers and pushed aside his former friend and co-conspirator, Colonel 'Abd al-Salam 'Aref, who would later cause his downfall. They also show how Qasim survived for five years by manipulating the nationalists and the communists in the desperate struggle that now arose between them. Though each group threatened him, he rightly considered the nationalists and Ba'thists as the greater danger to his leadership and to the wellbeing of Iraq. The plot of the veteran trouble-maker, Rashid 'Ali, to unseat him, the Mosul revolt of March 1959 and the Ba'thist attempt to assassinate him four months later were all major crises in this period. The Mosul revolt was certainly the most serious since it combined anti-communism with bitter racial, class, sectarian and tribal feuds. After reading the reports on that appalling, never-forgotten episode, we cannot be surprised that it planted the seeds of later conflicts dedicated to the settling of old scores. When the forces of the Ba'th Nationalist Guard and elements of the Fourth Tank Régiment advanced on Baghdad on the morning of that day, the pro-Communist populace paid [Qasim] their ultimate compliment by rushing forward in their thousands to defend his régime.

The last volume of this work starts with references to the reign of terror caused by the removal of Qasim's restraining influence. As the Ba'thists consolidated their position, thousands of communists and other suspected 'leftists' were imprisoned or put to death. ... These excesses eventually turned on the Ba'thists themselves. The central figure in the ensuing showdown was 'Abd al-Salam 'Aref who, though not a Ba'thist, had become President of the Republic by reason of his popularity in the army and of his role in bringing down the monarchy and then the régime of 'Abd al-Karim Qasim. ... In November 1963, army units loyal to 'Aref succeeded in arresting prominent Ba'thists, including their leader, 'Ali Salih al-Sa'di. Although this development was widely welcomed, neither British nor Iraqi observers felt optimistic about the future. 'Aref was not only a powerful army officer and ex-revolutionary. He was also cautious and inclined to adopt not so much the best measures as those most favoured by the Iraqi followers of President Nasir - the so-called 'Nasirites' - who had succeeded the Ba'thists as the main force in the land.

This work ends with the death of 'Abd al-Salam 'Aref amid the wreckage of a crashed helicopter in April 1966. From that day to the present, Iraq would be led first by Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr and then by Saddam Hussein, [and] it would be wholly committed to the retention of power and - unsuccessfully - the pursuit of glory.

Alan de L. Rush, London, October 2001