

The Golden Square and the Genesis of Iraqi Instability: Military Coups and Political Transformation in 1936

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Abstract

The change in civil-military relations in Iraq during the period 1936-1937 marked the transformation of the military from a state defense institution into a political actor that played a direct role in the transfer of power. Although the 1936 military coup is recognized as the first coup in the Arab world, the factors driving this change and its impact on the development of Iraq's political system still require comprehensive historical study. This research aims to analyze the main causes of the 1936-1937 military coups, evaluate their influence on the evolution of Iraq's political system, and examine the relationship between domestic and external factors that shaped the success of military intervention. The research uses a qualitative historical approach through archival research, analyzing official British and Iraqi documents, memoirs, and various secondary historical sources. The results show that the weakening of civil institutions, the increasing politicization of the military, competition among political elites, and external interests created conditions that enabled the military to take on a political role. The 1936 coup not only changed the government but also legitimized military intervention as a mechanism of political change, thereby weakening constitutional government and altering the balance of power between civil and military authority. This research contributes to the understanding of the dynamics of civil-military relations and the origins of political instability in Iraq and developing countries in the Middle East.

Keywords: Iraq, Military Coup, Political, Society.

1. Introduction

Coup d'état have become a recurring phenomenon in Iraq's tangled political narrative, each leaving an unmistakable impact on the country's turbulent history. To understand the substance of the twentieth-century coups in Iraq, one must first navigate the larger historical context. Iraq gained independence from British colonization in 1932 but struggled with political instability, external pressures, and regional rivalries throughout the twentieth century. Iraq, a country rich in history and complexity, has frequently been at the heart of regional and global geopolitics. This coup, which will be remembered throughout Iraq's political history, has far-reaching consequences.

In this research, *coup d'état* is defined as an unconstitutional transfer of political power carried out through the use or threat of use of force by state actors, particularly the military, to overthrow the incumbent government without following the prevailing constitutional mechanisms. This definition adopts a broader approach found in the comparative literature on coups, which emphasizes the aspect of unconstitutional seizure of executive power and does not limit it only to a complete takeover of power by the military or a thorough regime change. Based on this understanding, the 1936 Bakr Sidqi coup is categorized as a military coup because the armed forces directly used military pressure to force King Ghazi to dismiss the



cabinet of Yasin al-Hashimi and install a new government outside constitutional procedure, even though the monarchical institution was retained. This conceptual clarification is important because it places the Golden Square/Bakr Sidqi event within the framework of international literature on coups, which shows that many coups aim to replace political leadership without necessarily dissolving the entire structure of the state or abolishing the existing system of government.

The Iraqi military was involved in the first coup in the history of the new Arab military following the collapse of the Ottoman state. Bakr Sidqi's coup (1936) was backed by the Ahali Association, a Fabian group of Iraqi intelligentsia. Under the command of Bakr Sidqi the army had already undergone politicization. He suppressed tribal revolts in the Middle Euphrates region at the start of the 1930s and destroyed the Assyrian uprising in 1933.

The 1936 military *coup d'état* in Iraq was a crucial historic turning point for not only the history of Iraq; but also all the Middle Eastern politics too. On 29th October 1936, Bakr Sidqi led commander of the armed forces in Iraq to first military usurpation of civilian government within Arab World. This watershed would establish a dystopian *modus operandi* for military machinations in Iraqi politics that echoed across regions for generations to come. The coup was taking place in Iraq at a time when the newly emerging country from British mandate rule was already fighting for its independence (although it would only formally gained this in 1932), shaky political institutions and trying to forge itself out of a tribal politics with significant sectarian and colonial legacies.

The 1936 coup was carried out against the backdrop of educated strata in society viewed military might as a savior from political, economic crisis of the country. The military was seen as a modernizing entity that could save the state from its backwardness. As a military officer Bakr Sidqi is symbolic of a new generation of leaders who intended to leverage army power to help change the political scene. His coup is emblematic of the assumption that military leadership will affect the necessary political reforms and development initiatives.

The coup of 1936 is no less an iconic moment in the development of Iraqi politics, signaling for all subsequent generations a transition from civilian constitutional governance, flawed though it was, to the ongoing system by which regular, non-regular military intervenes in order to find political solutions. It also served as a template for the coming military coups throughout the Arab world resulting later in Syria, Egypt etc.

The Ottomans lost Mesopotamia to the British at the close of World War I, and the British set about establishing a new state ruled by an imported monarchy, traditionally the most educated minority. The British established a parliament, a judiciary, a modern bureaucracy, and permitted the creation of political parties. However, the new state was far from a liberal constitutional monarchy (Hashim, 2003). The new state would also need a national army, and the first formations were formed on January 6, 1921. However, the British would continue to be in charge of the new country's defense against external assault for the foreseeable future. The Iraqi army was established from the start to serve as an internal security force. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, it carried out its duties with zeal, with full British assistance (Heller, 1977).

The Iraqi military exhibited noninterventionist traits between 1921 and 1936. The British authority, dependent on the Royal Troops, Royal Air Force, and Iraqi Levies, was the dominant force in Iraqi politics until Iraq gained independence. In addition to British power, (Perlmutter, 1977) the absence of a strong framework due to the Hashemite regime's inability to legitimize the conscription law, along with King Faisal's individual impact, were the key factors behind the Army's non-interventionist position during this time, which fostered an environment conducive to the Army's involvement in the nation's politics (Elliot, 1996). The

newly formed army emerged as the strongest force in the Iraqi monarchy, enabling the King to establish governmental authority over the nation's diverse ethnic and sectarian communities. The officer corps, as the most educated and refined 'class' within Iraqi society, enjoyed the king's personal favor and thus obtained considerable privileges and benefits (Parasiliti, 2001).

Although the army became the most important institution in the political environment, and army commanders emerged as the most powerful political force in the country, the Iraqi military did not actively dominate the country throughout this period. They also did not seek to amend the 1924 constitution to strengthen their position (Tarbush, 1982). As the army grew and accepted officer cadets from the middle and lower classes, the officer corps became more politicized. Iraqi political life at the period provided personnel with numerous opportunities to influence in the political process (Hashim, 2003), these officers grew politicized as a result of the national humiliation of British dominance, the corrupt and "unpatriotic" behavior of the ruling class and senior officers, and the ministers' failure to maintain internal peace. Iraq's complex political and social climate, as well as its weak state institutions, created fertile ground for military conspiracies (Batatu, 1979). As a result a series of coups became a part of an unstable political landscape. Seven cabinet changes in Iraq occurred between 1936 and 1941 as a result of a coup or military coercion on civilians (Elliot, 1996).

2. Literature Review

Studies on the 1936 Iraqi military coup have developed through several main perspectives that attempt to explain the causes of the emergence of military intervention in politics. Most research agrees that the coup led by Bakr Sidqi was a turning point in modern Iraqi political history because it marked the end of civilian government dominance and opened a wider space for the military in determining the country's political direction. Nevertheless, historians still differ regarding the most decisive factor behind the emergence of the coup, whether it originated from the British colonial legacy, domestic political dynamics, or the development of Arab nationalism.

The first group places British influence as the main factor. Hashim (2003), Heller (1977), and Elliot (1996) argue that the formation of the Iraqi state after the British Mandate produced a political and military structure that was highly dependent on colonial interests. The Iraqi army was built primarily as an instrument to maintain internal stability, while Britain retained influence through military missions, defense advisers, and foreign policy. This perspective shows that civil-military relations did not develop independently from the outset, but existed within the framework of a state formed under colonial supervision.

In contrast, Batatu (1979) holds that the roots of military politicization were more influenced by social change within Iraq. According to him, the increasing role of officers from the middle and lower classes gave rise to a military group that was increasingly critical of the traditional political elite. This condition was reinforced by the government's weak capacity to address social conflict, tribal issues, and dissatisfaction with the dominance of an elite considered to have failed to achieve effective governance. Thus, military intervention is understood as a consequence of changes in domestic social and political structure, not merely as a colonial legacy.

Another view is put forward by Marr (2017), Sorby (2011), and Tripp (2002), who emphasize the importance of the weakness of political institutions. They argue that the frequent turnover of cabinets, competition among elites, and the low legitimacy of the monarchical government created a political vacuum that was then exploited by the military.

In this perspective, the 1936 coup did not only reflect the ambitions of the officers, but also the failure of civil institutions to manage political conflict constitutionally. Meanwhile, Dawisha (2009) and Eppel (2019) add that the development of Arab nationalism also provided ideological legitimacy for the military to position itself as the savior of the state from foreign dominance and political stagnation.

Although producing varied explanations, most previous research tends to focus on one particular factor, so that the relationship between colonial influence, domestic political conflict, and the dynamics of civil-military relations has not been analyzed in an integrated manner. In addition, most studies rely more on secondary historiographical interpretation, while the use of primary sources, such as official British and Iraqi government documents, diplomatic correspondence, political memoranda, and the memoirs of the figures involved, remains relatively limited in explaining how political actors made sense of the coup event at the time.

This research seeks to fill this gap by integrating evidence from primary sources in the form of official archives, diplomatic correspondence, and memoirs with various historiographical studies that have developed. This approach allows for an analysis that not only explains why the 1936 coup occurred, but also how the interaction between British influence, political elite rivalry, Arab nationalism, and the increasing role of the military together shaped the change in civil-military relations in Iraq. Thus, this research does not view the 1936 coup as the result of a single factor, but as the result of the interaction of various structural and political factors that then became the foundation for the pattern of military intervention in Iraqi politics in the following decades.

3. Methods

This research uses a historical research approach by utilizing primary and secondary sources. Primary data was obtained through archival research covering official British and Iraqi government documents related to political dynamics and the military coup in Iraq during the period 1936-1937. In addition, this research also uses secondary sources in the form of memoirs, historical literature, books, and relevant scientific articles to enrich the interpretation of the events studied. The combination of archival document analysis and memoir study allows the researcher to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the conditions underlying each coup attempt, while also identifying the structural factors that drove military involvement in Iraqi politics. The analysis was conducted qualitatively through content analysis technique by examining, comparing, and critically interpreting various historical sources to produce a complete reconstruction of the political transformation and civil-military relations during that period.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Political and Military Conditions Before the 1936 Coup

4.1.1. Military Participation in Political Affairs

The Iraqi state has been governed by a military worldview from its foundation. King Faysal and his Sharifian loyalists which is all former Ottoman officers distributed both civil and military jobs among themselves in what could be defined as a British-sponsored military coup against Iraq's primary social groups (Kadhim, 2006).

However, the first military intervention in political matters occurred after Faysal handed over control to his son, Ghazi. In the final year of his reign, Faysal sent the army, led by General Bakr Sidqi, to put an end to the Assyrian revolt in the north. During WWI, the Assyrians rose to power under British tutelage, serving as a loyal auxiliary force on the British side and settling in substantial numbers in Iraq following the occupation (Maško, 2021). By 1932, Mar Sham'un, the Assyrian Patriarch, petitioned the League of Nations to grant his community an administrative autonomy in an area whose vast majority was Kurds. The British, who had no further use for the Assyrians, resisted providing such autonomy because it would have jeopardized British important interests in Iraq (Donabed, 2010). The League of Nations dismissed Mar Sham'un's requests, presenting the Assyrians with two choices: agree to the Iraqi government's promise to relocate them "under appropriate circumstances," or request support from the Iraqi government for resettlement beyond Iraq. Mar Sham'un rejected collaboration with the British and Iraqi authorities to implement this decision, leading to a deadlock between the government and his community, ultimately resulting in an Assyrian revolt (Bishara, 2017).

By 1933, the circumstances had escalated, prompting King Faysal to send General Sidqi to employ military action to address the growing conflict. Faysal's action garnered broad backing because of the earlier horrors inflicted by Assyrians while they were allied with the British. In June 1933, Mar Sham'un was imprisoned in Baghdad as his followers crossed the Iraqi-Syrian border to seek resettlement in Syria, a request that the French authorities rejected (Marr, 2017). While the Assyrians re-entered Iraq, Iraqi troops were told that these 'refugees' posed no threat as they were unarmed. Nevertheless, Iraqi soldiers observing their return discovered that the French had indeed supplied them with weapons. While they started to disarm them, shots were fired. The two factions clashed in a confrontation, leading to the fatalities of approximately 30 Iraqi troops and 15 Assyrians. The military subsequently killed several Assyrians and allowed around 500 to pass the border (Tarbush, 1982). Bakr Sidqi directed his forces into the Assyrian settlements, roughly 40 villages were being targeted. Once the chaos ended, approximately 300 Assyrian men lost their lives, and their villages were looted. This "achievement," although presenting a difficulty for King Faysal, received endorsement from his son, then-Prince Ghazi, who swiftly took over his father's role (Dawisha, 2009).

The new king won significant popularity by backing the Army and General Sidqi, who also received respect. But, more importantly, the Assyrian affair and King Ghazi's accession to the throne elevated the soldiers into the political elite (Kadhim, 2006). Bakr Sidqi, who had earned a reputation for his merciless use of force against the Assyrians, was tasked with putting down the southern revolt in 1935 (Hashim, 2003).

Sidqi possessed formidable artillery and the Royal Iraqi Air Force (RIAF) at his command, yet throughout his campaign, the RIAF base experienced flooding, and the Iraqi Army's battles with the tribesmen were mostly ineffective. Once the aircraft were ready for takeoff, they dealt a significant setback to the "insurgents" (Al-Marashi & Salama, 2008); utilizing the RAF for internal suppression would characterize the newly autonomous Iraqi state. One author described this approach in this manner: "The state, due to its reliance on air power, not only became estranged from society but also hovered two hundred feet above it, striking people when they did not conform to the state's desires" (Dodge, 2003). By 1935, southern tribal uprisings had been temporarily subdued, yet they would reemerge a year later to be suppressed again by Bakr Sidqi. Sidqi's standing among officers and Arab nationalists increased further due to his involvement in quelling tribal revolts (Batatu, 1979).

4.1.2. Deterioration of the Political Situation

Starting at the close of 1934, the current political framework began to break down. The increasing rifts among the political elite between various factions and figures worsened, rather than resolved, the tribal issue, weakening the state's power. The leading figures of the National Brotherhood Party quickly began their campaign against the government (Tarbush, 1982). Much more troubling was the transfer of revolutionary information from Baghdad, which stirred tribesmen to feelings that would result in anti-government unrest. In January 1935, unrest erupted in the mid-Euphrates area. In March 1935, the authorities received tribal complaints regarding land and irrigation rights, along with concerns impacting the entire Šī'a community. It recognized the Iraqi government but highlighted the insufficient representation of the Šī'a in both parliament and the judiciary. It further promoted free elections, freedom of the press, and reductions in taxes (Longrigg, 1956).

Tribal instability arose from the transition from a society centered on tribal organization and values to one focused on settled agriculture. The shaykh's influence and control over the tribe were greatly diminished due to this change. Initially, the shaykh's main function was military: he protected the tribe from neighboring groups and an aggressive central authority. The shaykh had now taken on the role of the government's agent and, in numerous instances, main representative, even though the government had long assumed responsibility for internal defense. The shaykhs promptly urged the ruler to dismiss Ali Awdat al-Ayyubi and dissolve parliament; when this proved ineffective, they resorted to direct action (Sorby, 2011).

At this moment, Hikmat Sulayman, an opponent of the prime minister and a major member of the National Brotherhood Party, persuaded his old friend Lieutenant General Bakr Sidqi commanding commander of the southern region, to refuse to repress the tribal disturbance. Ali Awdat al-Ayyubi resigned due to opposition within his government. No alternative appeared to the formation of another cabinet under Kamil al-Midfai. A new cabinet led by Kamil al-Midfai was the only option. On March 4, 1935, the National Brotherhood Party's Yasin al-Hashimi faced a growing tribal uprising in the ad-Diwaniya region, commanded by two powerful tribal shaykhs. The administration then decided to engage with the rebels, but nothing worked to bring the situation back to normal. Kamil al-Midfai used force to suppress the uprising, but it was too late to prevent more damage (Khadduri, 1960).

The premier's doubts about a conspiracy were validated, and confronting unavoidable loss, he stepped down on March 15, just thirteen days into his term. In March 1935, the monarch invited Yasin al-Hashimi to form a government after he successfully executed a coup against his opponents. He was depicted as the only individual capable of "rescuing" the scenario. Yasin al-Hashimi and his tribal allies revived a previously muted political awareness. They mapped out a new course in Iraqi politics. For the first time, a government has assumed power due to a grassroots movement (Sorby, 2011).

Once the cabinet was formed, Yasin al-Hashimi faced the challenging task of delivering on the lavish pledges made to his supporters. An initial step towards this goal was the disbanding of the National Brotherhood Party on April 29, 1935. Consequently, during the general elections on August 4, 1935, he ensured that numerous tribal shaykhs were elected to the Chamber of Deputies, which expanded from 88 to 108 members (Longrigg, 2009). Nonetheless, this would not stop resistance to conscription (often serving as a focal point for additional issues) from emerging in the provinces. Newspapers aligned with the prime minister started to assert that Iraq was undergoing a crisis of national identity, which was diminishing the nation's capacity to unite in addressing its problems. They advocated for a national agreement rooted in Arab and Islamic customs, claiming it should precede "social reform," implicitly referencing leftist ideology (Marr, 2017). Cohesion would require order,

both among individuals and within the parliament and media. The military was intensely nationalistic, with leaders convinced that robust military governance in Iraq was necessary to eliminate foreign influence, foster pan-Arab unity, and support fellow Arab nations in their fight against imperialist power (Sorby, 2011)

Though he aspired to rule fairly, Yasin al-Hashimi limited political engagement and centralized authority in him. The ability to associate freely was limited, and the surveillance network seemed to grow larger each month. The network concentrated its resources on the leftist Al-Ahali group, the main challenger to the administration. Numerous individuals believed the group was promoting communism due to its support for social and economic changes (Batatu, 1979). In reality, the communists in Iraq opted for an alternative path. The initial central committee of the Iraqi Communist Party was established in May 1935, but by year's end, numerous members had been imprisoned, and the publication had ceased operations. The Al-Ahālī group faced allegations of communism, indicating a danger to both the current social structure and to Islam, regardless of Sunnī or Šī'ī affiliations (Sorby, 2011).

Yasin promoted his brother Taha Hashmi to the rank of general officer. Furthermore, Yasin al-Hashimi's government sought to remove disagreeing voices and viewpoints, disband political parties, and expel some of those who presented activities, aside from banning some periodicals and silencing tribes' voices. These were his works inside the country. Outside the country, the administration primarily advocated for Arabic nationality and supported Arabic movements, particularly in Syria and Palestine. However, Hikmat Sulayman, the Iraqi political figure outside of this authority, had a good relationship with Baker Sidqi. At the time, Sidqi was the Iraqi army's general officer and agent. As a result, they both agreed to overthrow Yasin al-Hashimi through a coup (Yetişgin & Faraj, 2017).

4.2. The Coup 1936

Bakr Sidqi took on the role of acting Chief of the General Staff in October 1936, during Taha Al-Hashimi's time in Turkey. Once Taha left, Sidqi and Sulayman were able to execute their plan. On October 25, Sidqi met with Abd Al-Latif Nuri, leader of the First Division, and seems to have talked about coup strategies (Al-Marashi & Salama, 2008). Sidqi subsequently departed Baghdad to head to his base at Qaratappa, situated between Baghdad and Kirkuk, and disclosed his strategy to a select group of trusted officers. Sidqi's Second Division would advance from the north toward the capital, while Abd Al-Latif Nuri's First Division, located northeast of Baghdad, and would offer assistance (Tarbush, 1982).

On October 28, 1936, Sidqi's forces moved to Baaquba, located north of Baghdad, severing all telephone and telegram connections with the capital. They intended to execute their last action the following day. On the morning of October 29, Sidqi and Abd Al-Latif Nuri instructed their accomplice, Muhammad Ali Jawwad, head of the Royal Iraqi Air Force, to get ready for the "eleventh hour," when eleven aircraft would soar over Baghdad; scattering leaflets urging King Ghazi to substitute Yasin al-Hashimi with Hikmat Sulayman as Prime Minister (Tripp, 2002). The importance of the bombs released on Baghdad that day is that they were deployed in the name of the armed forces. "The military, made up of your sons, has grown tired of the current Administration that has focused solely on their own interests, neglecting the well-being of the public." This message utilized a national entity, the Army, which had transformed into the patriotic symbol of Iraq, to undermine the legitimacy of the existing cabinet and prime minister (Wehrey, 2002). Like Sidqi's triumphant address after the Assyrian murders, the Army's call initially asserted its power while highlighting its connections to the populace. The coup organizers indicated that their aim was not to abolish the monarchy but instead to reform the governance (Jones, 2013).

It was the goal that demonstrated how a part of Iraq's army initially exercised its veto authority. Sidqi and his associated officials dismissed Yasin al-Hashimi's administration and suggested an alternative leader. The Army exhibited no intention to govern in its communication but instead aimed to work alongside its fellow citizens for the welfare of the nation. The military has therefore requested His Majesty the King to terminate the existing cabinet and substitute it with one made up of genuine individuals led by Hikmat Sulayman, who is esteemed and respected by the populace (Tarbush, 1982).

The document, revealed to the Iraqi people, bore the signature of General Bakr Sidqi, and Hikmat Sulayman directly presented the leaflet's contents to the King at the Royal Palace but included a few extra lines warning of a bombardment on Baghdad in three hours if the King did not comply. Following three hours, in a display of power, aircraft released bombs close to the prime minister's office, signaling to Yasin the coup conspirators' determined intentions. Yasin and his team felt compelled to resign to prevent what they thought would lead to a civil war (Al-Marashi & Salama, 2008).

While these events unfolded within the capital, Sidqi and his forces advanced toward Baghdad from the north. Jaafar Al-Askari attempted to converse with Sidqi to prevent the scene of troops invading the city. Bearing a letter from the King, Jaafar approached the forces under Sidqi's control to stop their attack on the capital; however, Sidqi believed Al-Askari was trying to undermine the revolution and commanded his soldiers to kill him. Even Sidqi's soldiers were reluctant to take the life of a man referred to as "the father of the Iraqi army," yet Al-Askari was captured, forced to stop on the roadside, and killed by Sidqi's troops. Ironically, Al-Askari, who became Iraq's first Minister of Defense in 1921 and aimed to create a nationwide army through conscription, fell victim to the institution when it rebelled (Tripp, 2002).

Although the pamphlet was crafted as a communication to the Iraqi populace, the monarch, who was addressed with respect, remained the primary focus of the message. This politeness, however, was not meant to diminish the demands; "those who do not comply with" the demands were warned that they might encounter "inevitable consequences." Nonetheless, the statement was meticulously crafted to avoid instigating an unwarranted conflict with the sovereign, who was, in any case, vital to Sidqi's rise, let alone his appeal (Kadhim, 2006). The alert about danger was intentionally included in the appeal to governmental authorities, distinct from the section aimed at the king; thus, the king was provided sufficient chance to back out of the conflict. In addition, the pamphlet contained all the standard elements of this kind of rhetoric, including the power of the people, the corruption of the ousted government, and the increasing frustration of the military (Sorby, 2020).

Worried about meeting Jaafar's end, ex-Foreign Minister Nuri Al-Said fled to Cairo. The former's move was wise since the coup perpetrators alleged that Al-Said was constructing a palace using funds from the British Oil Development Company in return for a concession to extract oil in Iraq. The coup conspirators charged Rashid Ali Al-Gaylani, the Interior Minister, and Yasin al-Hashimi with unlawfully acquiring land during their time in office. They both escaped to Syria (Lukitz, 2005).

The king agreed, and a government was established by Hikmat Sulayman. The new regime ruthlessly expelled its adversaries and initiated a policy favoring Turkey, delivering severe blows to the pan-Arab elements of the Iraqi elite. The new government engaged in its own type of corruption, featuring clear personal misconduct by prominent figures like Sidqi and Sulaiman, which offered ammunition for adversaries to provoke public animosity toward them (Afza, 2023). Sulayman became Prime Minister in November 1936, and he established a government with allies from the social reformist Ahali Group. Sulayman, Sidqi, and the Ahali

Group had to justify their military actions to overthrow the Yasin al-Hashimi government. The reality that their action marked the inaugural military coup in Iraq, not to mention the Arab world, highlighted the necessity for legitimacy. It was likewise uncommon in regional politics. In a radio address in November, the Sulayman administration defended their collaboration with the “brave army of officers” by committing to enhance national pride, the military, and implement reforms in education, joblessness, and land allocation (Amin, 1980).

This history illustrates that the Iraqi monarchy could not fully handle Iraq’s ethnic and sectarian diversity. Nonetheless, a conflict between the institutional state and nomadic and pastoralist communities in Iraq has continued for decades, if not thousands of years. It was not a conflict stemming from Arab nationalists’ reluctance to accept diverse, complex identities, but instead a much simpler clash between the state and tribal or sub-national identity groups (Franzén, 2011).

The coup, as indicated by the wording of the “appeal,” was not meant to completely topple the regime. The request was to remove only the cabinet and change the individuals, while keeping the institutions intact. Nonetheless, General Sidqi was resistant to any changes influenced by the king’s desires. He specified his selection for prime minister, suggesting Hikmat Sulayman, a Turkoman politician who allied with Bakr Sidqi in opposing the Arab nationalist stance of the ousted government (Sorby, 2011).

The Sidqi coup marked a crucial moment in Iraqi history; it breached the constitution and opened the door to greater military engagement in politics. It similarly eliminated the elite that had ruled since the state’s beginning; the new regime featured limited Arab Sunnis and excluded advocates of a pan-Arab cause (Eppel, 2019). This arrangement led to a foreign policy focused on Turkey and Iran instead of the Arab nations. The newly established government swiftly came to an arrangement with Iran, momentarily settling the border contention between Iraq and Iran in the Shatt al Arab (Metz, 1993).

The coup represented a pivotal moment in the history of Iraq. It caused a significant violation of the constitution, which had already been undermined by the National Brotherhood Party’s leaders, and enabled the military to engage in political matters. The military experienced power and quickly started to control political affairs (Kinney, 2018). The coup’s most important outcome was the exit of the previous regime’s leading politicians from Iraq. Politicians such as Hikmat Sulayman, who did not align with the ruling elite’s pan-Arab perspectives and objectives, pursued different avenues to establish a unique Iraqi foreign policy (Sorby, 2011). Sulayman and Sidqi shared a comparable viewpoint regarding the military’s involvement in politics: “Their framework, along with their motivation, was indeed Kemalist Turkey, as they contended this nation had preserved its autonomy solely through restructuring its military.” Republican Turkey seemed to serve as an inspiration for Sulayman due to his Turkish ethnic background, and for other Iraqis like Sidqi who aspired to replicate developments from the core of the former Ottoman Empire (Al-Marashi & Salama, 2008).

The coup created an opportunity for the military to abuse its authority. The coup in 1936 was succeeded by a number of less notable military interventions, which became the most prominent aspect of political life during the years from 1936 to 1941 (Sorby, 2011, p.25).

4.3. British’s Position towards the 1936 Coup

The coup by Bakr Sidqi facilitated the formation of a new government headed by Hikmat Sulayman, which stood in stark contrast to the former cabinet under Yasin al-Hashimi. The aspirations of the Marxist Ahali Association were crushed once more as Iraq’s military-supported government declined to conduct democratic elections or execute social reforms (Bishara, 2017).

For the British, the coup represented the takeover of authority by the army they had created. The Foreign Office was assured that its influence and presence in Iraq would not be impacted by the coup. The Embassy's work in Baghdad contrasts with other posts because remnants of the High Commission (i.e., mandate) era are still present. The Royal Air Force and the British Advisory Military Mission are present, and His Majesty's Government has the authority to be consulted and does consult on all significant matters impacting Iraq's foreign policy (Al-Marashi & Salama, 2008).

The British had consented to the coup, and it was anticipated that the military would go back to its barracks and avoid meddling in political matters. Conversely, British reports condemned Prime Minister Sulayman for not restoring the army "to its rightful position." Sidqi, acting as a praetorian, exerted power from the shadows, mainly by advancing the officers involved in the coup and recommending thirty of his acquaintances for government positions (Haddad & Ḥaddād, 1973). However, the British officials were unsettled by the coup's extraordinary brutality, highlighted by the assassination of their close associate Ja'far al-'Askari, and the extreme attitude of its backers, who indicated a wish to move past "the typical 'rotativist' reshaping of the Cabinet," and were additionally troubled by the presence of several individuals in the new administration who were linked to groups outside the British Empire's influence. Clark Kerr considered Abu al-Timman, known for his "extensive history of selfish and unscrupulous nationalist schemes," and Chadirchi, "a youthful individual with strong nationalist inclinations," to be especially harmful figures (Khadduri, 1960). Usuf Ibrahim, conversely, was largely overlooked, as Britain showed minimal concern for Iraq's educational system until the decade's conclusion, when it became evident that pan-Arabists were developing an anti-British curriculum. Due to the initial doubt and suspicion regarding the new government's motives, the British War Office sent two infantry battalions to Cairo to be ready if British military action became necessary. Only two days later, Clark Kerr received private guarantees from Hikmat that the new leadership, even with its more extreme statements, did not plan to jeopardize British interests in Iraq (Jones, 2013).

The British were worried about the new administration's close ties to Turkey. One source states that "General Bakir Sidqi was a genuine Turk who consistently revered M. Atatürk." Hikmat Sulayman, an Arab from Turkey, has consistently maintained comparable opinions regarding M. Atatürk. Although many sources recognize Sidqi as Kurdish, the British believed he was Turkish and expressed worries about "a fragile government in Iraq, reliant on a pro-Turkish faction of the military." This communication disclosed that, although the Iraqi-Turkish border was drawn to secure the UK's investment in the northern oilfields, the British continued to perceive Turkey as a possible risk to their interests in Iraq, and that Ankara could increase its sway in Iraq via supportive Iraqis in the military; there were also worries that Iraq might not support business interests linked to the oil facilities. (Al-Marashi & Salama, 2008) The British choice to refrain from diplomatic intervention led the coup organizers to believe that the UK mainly prioritized its military bases and Iraq's oil assets. The British thus prevented a confrontation with Sidqi and the Sulayman government, allowing for the creation of a military mediating regime (Saeed & O'Sullivan, 2006).

4.4. Political Situation after the 1936 Coup

The new administration started its efforts with considerable public backing, yet this could not hide the eventual conflict between its two main elements. Bakr Sidqi, who was both an authoritarian in his outlook and background, was determined to establish the army as the main instrument of power in the state, while liberal democratic reformers aimed to transform the nation's social structure (Sorby, 2011). These distinctions, masked by a shared goal to

topple the former government and momentarily unified by Hikmat Sulayman's character, soon turned into a cause of conflict. At first, the reformers seemed powerful; they established the Popular Reform League and pushed for enhanced democracy, land reform, the acceptance of trade unions, progressive income and inheritance taxes, along with a minimum wage and maximum working hours. In summary, it was a daring assault on entitlement (Al-Marashi & Salama, 2008).

Bakr Sidqi and Hikmat Sulayman started to implement authoritarian approaches and followed a completely distinct path from the Ahali group. Numerous politicians and public personalities were forced to leave the country for their safety, while many of those who stayed were killed by unidentified attackers. Several Arab newspapers commented on the circumstances in Iraq (Al-Hasani, 1988).

Nonetheless, this possibility frightened many. Hikmat Sulayman and the left underestimated the influence of two significant political groups in the nation: Arab nationalists and conservative landowners. The general elections of February 1937 led to a parliament where reformists were greatly outnumbered by a coalition of conservatives, nationalists, and tribal landlord-shaykhs who viewed the Popular Reform League as linked to communism and were unhappy with the cabinet's Turkish focus and indifference towards Arab issues (Jones, 2013, p. 61). The main source of opposition came from the army and Bakr Sidqi's backers. On March 17, Bakr Sidqi formally denounced communism, determining the fate of the whole Al-Ahali group. This was the breaking point for the reformists, leading to the resignation of four ministers on June 6, 1937. They denounced the government for its insufficient dedication to real reform and condemned Hikmat Sulayman for his concealed actions and for the favoritism and nepotism that he tolerated. Soon after, the forces opposing reform launched a campaign against the left, resulting in the disbanding of the Popular Reform League, while its leading figures were either exiled from the country or faced punishment and humiliation (Al-Marashi & Salama, 2008).

Resistance to Bakr Sidqi's cabinet policy increased, especially among Arab nationalist military officers and political figures. Nationalist military officers, supported by pan-Arabists and ex-regime figures, grew more engaged as Bakr Sidqi's supporters declined in reputation. Multiple covert organizations were established, including some linked to the al-Muthannā Club. Political opponents of the regime in exile vigorously backed and guided others. The political actions of the nationalist army officers lacked coordination, and there were no properly organized factions, reflecting an absence of leadership. Certain military officials were resolute in their intention to topple the dictatorship of Bakr Sidqi and Hikmat Sulayman (Sorby, 2014).

5. Conclusion

The Iraqi Military, while an important institution of the Iraqi State, has not served as a tool for Iraqi identity development. It was not an institution in which all members of Iraqi society, regardless of ethnic, religious, or social status, could join and be promoted to high ranks and top positions under formalized norms and procedures. Instead, the military was used as a tool of repression by a minority-dominated dictatorship to maintain power in the country. At this juncture, the Iraqi Military's failure to emerge as a national institution and retain people from all social and demographic divisions of the country in its body with a cohesive perspective of the Military's purpose and missions is far from an institutional collapse.

The 1936 coup d'état in Iraq, which was itself of relatively short duration in terms of its immediate political impact (Bakr Sidqi himself was assassinated less than a year later in August 1937), nonetheless cast a long shadow over both Iraqi politics and the wider Middle East. Its most consequential and pernicious legacy was normalizing military intervention as the means to achieve political change, an undermining of constitutional and civilian governance. Between 1936 and 1941, Iraq would see seven military coups, each further undermining public faith in civil institutions and making the armed forces the ultimate arbiters of political power the norm.

The coup institutionally changed the dynamic between civil and military authorities in Iraq, scholars have referred to this discussion as ushering in a “praetorian state” where the military is neither simply a constitutional defender nor an active competitor to political power through its army. Highly militarized politics drastically slowed down the democratic process in Iraq, major disagreements were decided by force instead of political negotiation and compromise.

During regime change which heralded a succession of aspirations for reform by the Sidqi-Sulayman, its subsequent failure to deliver any of the campaign pledges exposed one of the biggest divides between seizing power and governing. The coup leaders found that taking control of state institutions did not mean they were able to re-shape the deeply-rooted social and economic patterns in or even overcome the sectarian and tribal divides. This clearly illustrated that force could not change and therefore must be held accountable for its true role in doing so. The aftermath of the 1936 coup and successive military interventions altered Iraq's political environment for decades, contributing to a cycle of instability and the eventual establishment of authoritarian regimes that relied primarily on military power to maintain control.

More than just a historical event, the 1936 Golden Square coup was an important turning point in the development of Iraqi politics. This event shows that the failure of civil institutions to manage political competition and build inclusive governance opened up space for the military to emerge as a political actor considered legitimate in resolving the crisis of power. As a result, the process of institutionalizing constitutional government became increasingly weak because political change was more often determined through military intervention than through democratic political mechanisms. Thus, the legacy of the coup not only affected the monarchical period but also shaped a pattern of civil-military relations that continued to influence the development of Iraqi politics in the following periods.

The findings of this research also contribute to comparative studies on authoritarian regimes by showing that state fragility, unresolved elite competition, and increasing military involvement in politics are mutually reinforcing factors in driving the emergence of an increasingly authoritarian government. Iraq's experience shows that when the military is accepted as the determinant in resolving political conflict, the legitimacy of civil institutions tends to weaken and authoritarian practices become increasingly institutionalized. Therefore, the case of the Golden Square coup is not only important for understanding Iraqi political history, but also provides lessons relevant to the study of civil-military relations, state fragility, and the development of authoritarian regimes in various postcolonial countries and developing countries facing similar institutional challenges.

6. References

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