



11350 Random Hills Road, Suite 800, Fairfax, Virginia 22030 Phone (703) 934-6101 Fax (703) 352-3678

[fff@fff.org](mailto:fff@fff.org) [www.fff.org](http://www.fff.org)

## **Make Mine a Freedom Muffin**

**by Sheldon Richman**

I don't eat freedom muffins anymore (I'm on a low-carbohydrate diet), and my stepdaughter has a freedom bulldog. What are freedom muffins and freedom bulldogs? You know them as English muffins and English bulldogs. But as long as we're removing the word "French" from things, we might as well remove the word "English" too.

For heaven's sake why? Isn't British Prime Minister Tony Blair the Bush administration's staunchest ally in its war against Saddam Hussein and Iraq?

While it is true that the French government opposes the war in Iraq and wants no part of the "coalition of the willing," it is also true that but for the British we might not be in this mess at all.

We can begin the story with World War I. Besides Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the British were fighting the Ottoman Empire (Turkey), which controlled much of the Middle East. To harass the Turks the British worked hard to persuade the subjugated Arabs to revolt against Ottoman rule and disrupt the empire's ability to fight the Allied powers. The charismatic T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) was instrumental in getting the Arabs to cooperate. This was done through a bargain: Arab independence in return for the revolt. The Arabs carried out their part. The British did not. Not only did they renege, the British never had any intention of honoring the bargain. They, along with their French allies, had always planned to carve up the Middle East and keep much of it for themselves. (One of the first things the Bolshevik Lenin did after he seized power in Russia and pulled out of the war was to expose the secret treaty for colonizing the Arab lands.) Need I mention that the Arabs were not pleased?

The British and French proceeded to create nations out of thin air and to install puppet monarchies. Iraq was one of the phony states created by the British colonial secretary, Winston Churchill, after World War I. As Churchill's grandson and namesake wrote recently, "I have a confession to make: It was my grandfather, Winston Churchill, who invented Iraq and laid the foundation for much of the modern Middle East."

The cobbling together of Iraq could only have come from the mind of an arrogant Western colonialist. Iraq was not populated by “a people,” but rather by many different peoples, tribes, and families. The largest groupings are the majority Shi’ite Muslims, the Sunnis (who would be made politically dominant), and the Kurds, who are Muslims but not Arabs and who also inhabit parts of Iran, Turkey, Syria, and Armenia. (The contiguous Kurdish area is called Kurdistan, for which the Kurds have long wished independence.) When the ungrateful Arabs resisted British benevolence in 1920, Churchill had the Royal Air Force bomb them. He also proposed the use of poison gas to subdue the refractory natives, but he was overruled by his superiors. Thwarted, Churchill said, “I do not understand this squeamishness about the use of gas. I am strongly in favour of using poison gas against uncivilised tribes.”

An Iraqi parliament was elected, but until 1926 the British could veto legislation. Iraq became formally independent in 1932. In 1958 the British-backed monarchy was overthrown in a military coup. Five years later, the secular, socialist, and pan-Arab Ba’ath Party — yes, Saddam Hussein’s party — seized power, backed by the American CIA. That same year, another military coup took place, but in 1968 the Ba’ath Party regained power. In 1979 Hussein became president and, for a while, a U.S. client in the belief that he was a moderate and a counterweight to Iran, where the U.S. government had long supported a brutal monarch.

We can’t say for certain what things would have been like had Britain kept its promise to the Arabs. But it stands to reason that they would have had far fewer grievances against the West. Indeed, if Winston Churchill “invented Iraq and laid the foundation for much of the modern Middle East,” we have him and the British government to thank for many of our problems there.

So make mine a freedom muffin, thank you.

Sheldon Richman is senior fellow at The Future of Freedom Foundation ([www.fff.org](http://www.fff.org)) in Fairfax, Va., editor of *Ideas on Liberty* magazine, and author of “‘Ancient History’: U.S. Conduct in the Middle East since World War II and the Folly of Intervention” (Cato Institute).