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successful nation. Iraq contained different ethnic groups and different religions. There was no Iraqi nationality, although one did develop over the years. Almost from the moment Iraq was created, the British had trouble with it and the world has had problems ever since.

The final lesson which the Paris Peace Conference offers is that getting international agreements is one thing, enforcing them quite another. The Treaty of Versailles was a cumbersome document; it embodied a series of uneasy compromises among the powers and it was unnecessarily irritating to the Germans. In the long run, though, the most important thing was that there was not sufficient will to enforce it among the winning nations. There were enforcement mechanisms in the Treaty, but someone had to decide to use them. The French and, at first, the Belgians were willing, but they needed support from the British and perhaps the Americans and that support was not there in the 1920s and 1930s. From 1935 onwards Hitler violated the provisions of the Treaty—starting with the announcement that Germany had an air force and then moving troops into the demilitarized Rhineland—and got away with it. If, and it is one of those big ‘ifs’ in history, he had been stopped early on, the Second World War in Europe might not have taken place.

Were the present American administration and its supporters right to see a parallel situation with Saddam Hussein? Were the attempts by the United Nations, supported by countries such as France and Germany, to carry out weapons inspections merely a 21st century version of appeasement? The difficulty with taking lessons from history is always in finding the right one. Unfortunately we do not often know until many years later. Perhaps decades from now the O.D. Skelton Memorial Lecture will be on the lessons of 1919 and 2003.