CHAPTER-III
GREAT BRITAIN, ZIONISM AND THE PALESTINE QUESTION

The Middle East and British War Policy:

"It was the outbreak of the World War I that suddenly invested Palestine with a new importance in Allied military calculations. From then on, England based its Near Eastern policy on a central and immutable criterion, the security of Suez Canal". ¹ This vital passageway for British commerce, an artery of transport for the military manpower reserves of the overseas empires was threatened twice during January 1915 and August 1916 on account of Turkish military expedition. Though the attacks were repelled, Britain became aware of the vulnerability of the Suez to such kinds of assault from neighbouring Palestine. To counter this threat military headquarters in Cairo devoted their attention to new political strategy. This was to mobilize the Ottoman Empire's restive Arab subjects to their side by luring them to the promise of independence and sovereignty. ²

From the British point of view, status of those lands comprising the Ottoman Empire had been of importance since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Anglo-Turkish friendship had been possible at that point because of the mutual interest in frustrating the efforts at direct

². Ibid.
political penetration made by Napoleonic France. It was strengthened as the century progressed under the pressure of Russian expansionism³.

With the consolidation of control in India, successive British governments came to hold the strategic value of the Ottoman Empire's Arab regions in ever greater regard. Generals and statesmen alike acknowledged the necessity for retaining unimpeded access to the two routes linking England with her Indian Empire and the Orient: The land route across Syria and Mesopotamia to the Persian Gulf; and the waterway (Suez Canal) connecting the Mediterranean Sea with the Indian Ocean.⁴

The legacy of the British foreign policy was to support the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire although annexation of Cyprus in 1878 and the occupation of Egypt in 1882 were stark aberrations. The conversion of Turkish policy from professed neutrality to belligerency in late


1914 forced a complete rethinking as far as British military and political strategies were concerned.

After considerable delay, and only in response to intense diplomatic pressure from France and Russia, the British Government sought to formulate its ultimate war aims and territorial ambitions in the Middle East. An interdepartmental committee was specifically constituted under the Chairmanship of Sir Maurice de Bunsen to consider British desiderata in Turkey. The committee reviewed in detail the existing interests of Great Britain in the region and then submitted a secret report to the War Council on 30th June 1915.⁵

According to the report nine specific desiderata in the Arab region were distinguished. Three of these pertained to the Arab peoples. They called for the fulfillment of pledges under consideration or already given to the several Sheikhs of the Arabian Peninsula and, "Generally maintenance of the assurances given to the Sharif of Mecca and the Arabs"; insurance that Arabia and the Muslim holy places would remain "under independent Muslim rule"; and, lastly, a settlement of the question of Palestine and the holy places of Christendom.⁶

⁵. Ibid., p.4.
⁶. Ibid., p.5.
However, the moderate proposals of the de Bunsen committee were rejected though its basic postulates were shared by Foreign Office, India Office, and War Office in their future dealings with the Arabs, the French, and the Zionists.7

British War promises to the Arabs:

The emergence of the Arabs as a distinctive entity, and their recognition as such by the British Government, was one of the major results of Anglo-Turkish hostility. The state of war permitted Britain to exploit grievances between Arabs and Turks and to deal directly with the Arab spokesmen.8 As early as November 1914, a message had been sent to Sharif Hussain of Mecca, ruler of Hejaz, at the instruction of Lord Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War. It advised that:

If the Amir and Arabs in general assist Great Britain in this conflict that has been forced upon us by Turkey, Great Britain will promise not to intervene in any manner whatsoever, whether in things religious or otherwise.... Till now we have defended and befriended Islam in the person of the Turk: henceforward it shall be in that of the noble Arab.... It

7. Ibid., p.6.

8. See Zeine N. Zeine, Arab Turkish Relations and the Emergence of Arab Nationalism (Beirut, 1958), Bernard Lewis, The Emergence of Modern Turkey (London, 1961).
would be well if your Highness could convey to your followers and devotees, who are found throughout the world in every country, the good tidings of the freedom of Arabs and the rising of the sun over Arabia.9

It should be noted that the British encouraged the Sharif in his personal ambitions, even intimating to him that "it may be that an Arab of true race will assume the Caliphate of Mecca or Medina'. They also tended to overestimate the scope of his prestige and authority and the extent of Arab homogeneity.10

This message, and an earlier visit by the Sharif's son Abdullah, to the British Residency in Cairo soon led to a direct correspondence between the British High Commissioner for Egypt and the ruler of Hijaz concerning prospects for an alliance.

Hussein - McMahon Correspondence:

A correspondence -- later known as Hussein -- McMahon Correspondence consisting of ten letters, was exchanged during the period from July 1915 to March 1916 which culminated in a British promise of Arab independence.11

9. Cabinet meetings, 271, p.144 (Committees General Series, 1915), Hereinafter CAB.
10. Aaron, n.4, p.8.
In his opening letter of 14 July 1915 Sharif Hussein sought to gain the endorsement of Great Britain for his definition of Arab aspirations. He began by stating that "the whole of the Arab nation without exception have decided in these last years to live, and to accomplish their freedom, and grasp the reigns of their administration both in theory and practice".\(^{12}\) He then asked approval of several "fundamental propositions", the most important being that England should acknowledge "the independence of the Arab countries, bounded on the north by Mersina and Adana up to 37° of latitude...; on the east by the borders of Persia up to the Gulf of Basra; on the south by the Indian Ocean; on the west by the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea up to Mersina.\(^{13}\) It is presumed that Sharif Hussein was influenced in his claim by a protocol drawn up early in 1915 by secret societies of Arab nationalists at Damascus.\(^{14}\) In return the Sharif promised to acknowledge the preferential position of England in all


\(^{13}\) Ibid.

economic enterprises in the Arab countries. Replying on 30 August, Sir Henry McMahon expressed satisfaction that "Arab interest are English interests and English Arab", and that "our desire [is] for an independent Arabia". Regarding, the question of limits and boundaries, he advised that "it would appear to be premature to consume our time in discussing such details in the heat of war".  

This first exchange of letters set the tone for future correspondence by revealing divergent emphasis. In communicating with the Sharif, McMahon had but one immediate objective: to have the Arabs commit themselves against their political suzerain and co-religionists. He thus sought to avoid lengthy, detailed negotiations over exact boundaries and spoke initially only of an independent Arabia. The Sharif, on his part, was specific both with regard to the nature of military and financial support expected of Britain and to the territorial dimensions of future Arab rule. However, Sharif Hussein was vague in the matters of less immediate concern; he did not specify what form this future independence might take: whether one vast kingdom or several units, each with a separate form of government yet coming

15. Cmd. 5957, p. 3.
together to form a confederation.\textsuperscript{16} Thus, for example, on September 9, Hussein wrote, "I am myself, with all my might carrying out in my country...all things which tend to benefit the rest of the Kingdom", to which McMahon replied on 24 October: Great Britain would advise and assist to establish "what may appear to be the most suitable forms of government in these various territories".\textsuperscript{17}

Sharif Hussein kept on insisting for a discussion of frontiers, and McMahon, having realized that the Sharif regarded this question as one of vital and urgent importance and would delay entering the war, sought instructions from London. He was then authorized to make the following statement in his letter of 24 October:

The two districts of Mersina and Alexandretta and portions of Syria lying to the west of the districts of Damascus Homs, Hama and Aleppo cannot be said to be purely Arab and should be excluded from the limits demanded.

\textsuperscript{16} Aaron, n.4., p.9.

\textsuperscript{17} Cmd. 5957, p.6.
With the above modification, and without prejudice to our existing treaties with Arab chiefs, we accept those limits. As for those regions lying within those frontiers wherein Great Britain is free to act without detriment to the interest of her ally, France, I am empowered in the name of the Government of Great Britain to give the following assurances and make the following reply to your letter:

(i) Subject to the above modifications, Great Britain is prepared to recognize and support the independence of the Arabs in all the regions within the limits demanded by the Sharif of Mecca...18

Encouraged by this acceptance of his principal demand for independence, Hussein wrote back on 5 November, retracting his insistence upon the inclusion of vilayets of Mersina and Adana in the Arab Kingdom. At the same time, however, he did stress that the vilayets of Aleppo and Beirut and their sea coasts were purely Arab and that the vilayets in Mesopotamia were historically bound to the Arabs. But he was willing to leave the latter under British administration for a short time in return for a suitable sum paid as compensation to the Arab Kingdom for the period of

18. Ibid.
occupation". Sheif Hussein emphasized on this point that he had made the utmost in concessions for the sake of agreement. 19

The British Government, having consented reluctantly to the Sharif’s territorial claims, subsequently introduced modifications. By the time McMahon sent his letter of 14 December to Mecca, three reservations were apparent: (i) further consideration would have to be given to Aleppo and Beirut, "as the interest of our ally, France, are involved in them both".

(ii) since Britain could not repudiate agreements already in existences those which were then in effect with Arab Chiefs would still apply "to all territories included in the Arab Kingdom"

(iii) Britain insisted that her established position and interest in Mesopotamia would necessitate special administrative arrangements. Twenty thousand British pounds sterling, an "earnest of intentions", accompanied the letter in the hope of softening the Sharif's reaction. 20

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19. Aaron, n.4, p.10.

In his final letter of 1 January 1916, the Sharif said that he would not press an issue which might impair the alliance between Great Britain and France. "Yet we find it our duty that the eminent Minister should be sure that, at the first opportunity after this war is finished, we shall ask you (what we avert our eyes from today) for what we now leave to France in Beirut and its coasts.... It is impossible to allow any derogation that gives France, or any other Power, a span of land in those regions." 21

Sir Henry McMahon answered this in his fourth letter of 25 January 1916, by taking note of the Sharif's "desire to avoid anything which might possibly injure the alliance between Great Britain and France", and assured him that the friendship between the two countries would endure after the war. 22

The Sharif, on his part, never referred to the boundary question again during the negotiations but the claims, not accepted by the British Government, were not withdrawn. 23

The Sykes - Picot Agreement (1916): While the British Government through its official representative in Cairo was negotiating on the possibility of an agreement with the Arabs by promising them independence in a region to include Palestine, other representatives were negotiating secretly with France and Russia for dividing control of the Asiatic portions of the Ottoman Empire after victory. 24

As the major ally France’s claim to preference in parts of Syria could not be ignored. The British Foreign Minister, Sir Edward Grey, told the French Ambassador in London, Paul Cambon, on 21 October, 1915, of the exchanges of letters with Sharif Hussein and suggested that the two governments arrive at an understanding with their Russian ally on their future interests in the Ottoman Empire. 25

M. Picot was appointed French representative with Sir Mark Sykes, now Secretary of the British War Cabinet, to define the interests of their countries and to go to Russia to include that country’s views in their agreement. The negotiations for this Tripartite Agreement for the partition

24. Ibid., p.53.
25. Ibid., p.54.
of the Ottoman Empire started as soon as general agreement had been reached with Hussein but neither Sir Henry McMahon nor Sherif Hussein were told of them.

Russia was accorded the occupation of Constantinople in the secret discussions with Foreign Secretary Sazonov, both the shores of the Bosphorus and some parts of the Turkish Armenia. France claimed Lebanon and Syria eastward to Mosul. Palestine did in fact have inhabitants and shrines of the Greek and Russian Orthodox and Armenian Churches, and Russia at first claimed a right to the area as their protector. This was countered by Sykes-Picot and the claim was withdrawn to the extent that Russia, in consultation with other allies, would only participate in deciding a form of international administration for Palestine.

The Sykes-Picot Agreement provided for the Arab areas:

(a) an independent Arab state or a federation of Arab states in a part of what in now geographically known as Saudi Arabia and Yamen;


27. John & Hadawi, n.23, p.54.

28. Ibid., p.35.
(b) France in Lebanon and Syria and Britain in Iraq and Trans Jordan: 'to establish such direct or indirect administration or control as they may desire or as they may deem fit to establish after agreement with the Arab State or confederation of Arab States'.

(c) Parts of Palestine to be placed under 'an international administration of which the form will be decided upon after consultation with Russia, and after subsequent agreement with the other Allies and the representatives of the Sharif of Mecca.29

George Antonius an Arab authority on the subject has analysed the provisions of the document. He remarked:

What the Sykes - Picot Agreement did was, first, to cut up the Arab rectangle in such a manner as to place artificial obstacles in the way of unity.... Whatever gains the Allied Powers may have hoped to derive from the partition of that territory, it showed a lack of perspicacity on their part to have imagined that it could make for peaceful or a lasting settlement.

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Antonius added:

Another peculiarity was that it provided for a topsy-topsy political structure in which the first were to come last and the last first. The inhabitants of Syria and Iraq were politically more developed and mature than the inhabitants of the inland regions. Yet the agreement provided that the greater part of Syria and Iraq might be placed under a regime of direct foreign administration, while the inland regions were in any case to form independent Arab States. The absurdity of these provisions is particularly evident in the case of the regions destined to form the British sphere of influence.

He elaborated:

But more serious even than those errors of judgement was the breach of faith. The Agreement had been negotiated and concluded without the knowledge of the Sherif Hussein and it contained provisions which were in direct conflict with the terms of Sir Henry McMahon's compact with him. Worse still the fact of its conclusion was dishonestly concealed from him because it was realized that, were he to have been apprised, he would have unhesitatingly denounced his alliance with Great Britain.

Antonius has denounced the Agreement as a shocking document. He described, "it is only the product of greed at its worst, that is to say, of greed allied to suspicion and so leading to stupidity; it also stands out as a startling piece of double dealing." 30

The Agreement was in contradiction to the promises made to the Arabs. The Turks gave Hussein the details of the Agreement. Hussein could do nothing but formerly repudiate it and went on fighting. His faith in Great Britain remained unshaken.31

The tripartite agreement did not mention of concessions to Zionism in the future disposition of Palestine. However, before the departure of Sykes to Petrograd on 27 February 1916 for discussions with Sazanov, he was approached with a plan by Herbert Samuel, who was a member in the cabinet by virtue of being the President of the Local Government Board and was strongly sympathetic to Herzl's Zionism.32

The plan put forward by Samuel was in the form of a memorandum. Sykes was prudent enough to commit it to memory and destroy. Sykes wrote to Samuel suggesting that if Belgium should assume the administration of Palestine it might be more acceptable to France as an alternative to the international administration which she wanted and the Zionists did not.33 Of boundaries marked on a map attached

32. Ibid.
to the memorandum he wrote, "By excluding Hebron and the east of the Jordan there is less to discuss with the Moslems, as the Mosque of Omar then becomes the only matter of vital importance to discuss with them and further does away with any contact with the Beduins, who never cross the river except on business. I imagine that the principal object of Zionism is the realization of the ideal of an existing centre of nationality rather than boundaries or extent of territory. The moment I return I will let you know how things stand at Petrograd". ³⁴

Nevertheless, Sozanov in deliberations both with Sykes and the French ambassador, was careful not to commit himself as to the extent of the Russian interest in Palestine, but made it clear that Russia would have to insist that not only the holy places, but all towns and localities in which there were religious establishments belonging to the Orthodox Church, should be placed under international administration, with a guarantee of free access to the Mediterranean. Czarist Russia would not consent to a Zionist formula for Palestine; but its days were numbered. ³⁵

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³⁴ Ibid., pp.233-234.

³⁵ John & Hadawi, n.23, p.58.
The Sykes Picot agreement was a striking example of traditional diplomacy. It amounted to a calculated division in advance of territorial spoils of war. The analysis of its provisions and implications is significant. First it assumed that a spirit of close cooperation and consultation would continue to govern relations between the two powers in peacetime. The Agreement overlooked the conflicting interests of the two powers in area. Second, both parties appear to have held a limited definition of Arab sovereignty. They considered themselves "the protectors of the Arab State" and believed that any administrative systems which might be established could only be "as they desire and as they may think fit to arrange" with the Arab State. Yet they agreed to negotiate with the Arabs over the boundaries of the Arab State and were prepared to accept the King of Hejaz as an equal to be consulted together with the other allies in matters pertaining to that area reserved for international control. Third, the signatories were vague in their conception of the form which Arab rule would take. The acceptance of the agreement by His Majesty's Government was conditional provided that "the cooperation of the Arabs is secured, and that the Arabs fulfill the conditions and obtain the towns of Homs, Hama, Damascus, and Aleppo". It
was taken for granted that in any event the specific interests of all three parties could be adjusted reasonably and honorably once Turkey had been defeated.36

This was the spirit, and out of lingering anxiety on account of war the British Government proceeded to take upon itself a further obligation in November 1917, this time to the Jewish people, in the form of Balfour Declaration.

Britain's Pledge to the Zionists; The Balfour Declaration: "From the British point of view, the secret war time agreements were dictated by the imperative necessity of gaining allies for the sake of winning the war. Russia, Italy, France and the Arabs were such allies. It was also believed in Great Britain that an understanding with the Zionists would produce a new ally in the form of world Jewry."37

The spring of 1917 brought two dramatic developments which proved to be decisive for the success of the Zionist cause. The first was the revolution in Russia and the second was the US entry into the war. The Western allies were  


intensely interested in keeping Russia in the War and in preventing a separate peace treaty with Germany. Prime Minister Lloyd George as well as Lord Balfour believed that, in view of the prominence of the Jews in the Russian revolutionary movement, it was essential to acquire their goodwill by responding favourably to Zionist aspirations. It was also important to obtain full co-operation and maximum effort from Britain's new ally, the United States. Here, too, it was believed, the Jews could render inestimable service. Moreover, an Allied pronouncement in favour of Zionism might win over the German Jewry to the Allied cause and, indirectly, help in producing internal disaffection in the Central Powers. While these were the practical reasons for Britain's decision to satisfy the Zionists, emotional motives on the part of some statesmen and a section of the Allied public opinion cannot be ruled out. "Christian charity toward a persecuted race, the Old Testament heritage so important in shaping the historical consciousness of some Protestant groups, and democratic liberalism added the glow of virtue to purely practical

38. Ibid.
calculation, or appealed to those for whom Realpolitik was not a sufficient inducement." 39

In their negotiations with Great Britain, the Zionists insisted on a British protectorate over Palestine as the best guarantee for the success of their programme. This amounted to the repudiation of that part of the Sykes Picot Agreement which provided for the internationalization of the Holy Land. This also amounted to another contradictory pledge. The British Government was not averse to accepting this Zionist proposal. 40

The British Foreign Secretary, Lord Balfour, in May 1917 paid visit to America. There he talked to Justice Brandies, a leading Zionist and a close adviser to President Wilson. The British Cabinet before committing itself desired to arrange for a formal endorsement by President Wilson of a pro-Zionist pronouncement. President Wilson not only supported Zionism but referred to himself as a Zionist in the course of discussions with other noted statesmen. 41

39. Ibid., pp.83-34.
However, Wilson was unwilling to make any endorsement at that time to pro Zionist policy, since the U.S.A. was not at war with Turkey. But following an official British enquiry addressed to Colonel House, Wilson on October 16, 1917 instructed him to approve the Pro-Zionist draft declaration proposed by the British government.

On November 2, 1917 following the acceptance by the British Cabinet of the major points of the draft submitted by the Zionists, Lord Balfour addressed the following letter to Rothschild:

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of the Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet.

His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done, which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine or the rights
and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.
I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

Yours sincerely,
Arthur James Balfour

By issuing the Balfour Declaration the British Government had committed itself even further to the emerging struggle for the Middle East, a struggle between Britain and France for regional pre-eminence.

Balfour and Zionism:

Balfour in 1917, in conversation with Harold Nicolson, explained his approach to the Jewish question in words like these: "The Jews are the most gifted race that mankind has seen since the Greeks of the fifth century. They have been exiled scattered and oppressed. If we can find them an asylum, a safe home in their native land then the full flowering of their genius will burst forth and propagate...."

42. The letter was first published in the Jewish Chronicle in London, 9 Nov. 1917.

43. Aaron, n.4, p.14, In contrast to its open circulation in Europe, the declaration was kept secret from the Arab Communities. A public reading of the declaration apparently did not take place in Palestine until April, 1920.
The submerged Jews of the ghettos of Eastern Europe will in Palestine find a new life and develop a new and powerful identity. Such, more or less, Nicolson recalls, were the exact words he used.44

Balfour felt that the Christian religion and civilization owed to Judaism an immeasurable debt, shamefully ill-repaid. Asked at a private gathering a few months after the declaration about the real motives behind it, he replied, "Both the Prime Minister and myself have been influenced by a desire to give the Jewe their rightful place in the world; a great nation without a home is not right",45 In a conversation recorded by Mr Dugdale46 in 1926, he said, "As you know, I have always been a a Zionist, long before the War. Therefore, when the problems of nationalism... began to occupy my mind I was at the Foreign Office during the War. It is not likely that I would be less keen to satisfy Jewish nationalism than any of the others".47


45. Leonard Stein, n.33, p.159.

46. 16 July 1926 Dugdale Papers as quoted in Leonard Stein, n.33, p.159.
In a memorandum written during the Peace Conference in 1919 he brushed aside the argument that this was not the normal case of a nation seeking the right to live its life on soil which it had already occupied. He said, further:

The four Great Powers are committed to Zionism. And Zionism, be it wrong or right, good or bad, is rooted in age long traditions, in present needs, in future hopes of far profounder import than the desires and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land.

He told Mrs Dugdale in 1926, 'I was very sympathetic to Arab nationalism, too, though I always felt that, as far as Palestine went, Arab claims were infinitely weaker than those of the Jews.

Zionism appealed to Balfour not only because he saw in it a national movement at least as worthy of respect as any other, but also because the unhappy history of the Jews seemed to him to give them a special claim to some measure of reparation. When he thought of the wrongs they had suffered at the hands of their persecutors, he was oppressed.

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48. Ibid.


by a certain sense of guilt, and the passionate advocacy of Zionism is accounted for, at least in part, by the promptings of a troubled conscience. The idea of atonement is brought out strongly in the concluding passages of his speech in the Palestine debate in the House of Lords on 21 June 1922.:

Consider whether the whole culture of Europe, the whole religious organisation of Europe, has not from time to time proved itself guilty of great crimes against this race. Surely it is in order that we may send a message to every land where the Jewish race has been scattered, a message which will tell them that Christendom is not oblivious of their faith, is not unmindful of the service they have rendered to the great religions of the world... and we desire to the best of our ability, to give them the opportunity of developing in peace and quietness, under British rule, those great gifts which hitherto they have been compelled... only to bring to fruition in countries which know not their language and belong not to their race....That is the aim which lay at the root of the policy I am trying to defend; and though it is defensible on every ground, that is the ground that chiefly moves me.

51. Stein, n.33, p.160.
The Balfour Declaration took shape in the interval between the Russian Revolution of March 1917 and the events immediately preceding the Bolshevik coup d'état in the following November. Considering how Czarist Russia had treated its Jews, it is little surprising that it should have struck Balfour as an 'extraordinary phenomenon' that many Jews were active, and some were conspicuous, in the revolutionary movements. But Balfour's remark that those were the reasons "which make you and me such ardent Zionists" is significant, Zionism as perceived by Balfour would provide an antidote to the destructive mania of Jews in rebellion against their lot by offering them a healthy outlet for their frustrated energies. Balfour believed that the solution proposed by the Zionists organisation was the correct one. At the time of the Balfour Declaration these ideas were already coming to the fore, but, strongly as they appealed to Balfour in the light of the Russian Revolution they served only to fortify him in beliefs which on other grounds he had come to hold with firm and, indeed, passionate conviction.52

53. Stein, n.33, p.162.
Declaration analysed:

For the purpose of analysis the text of the Balfour Declaration issued on 2 November 1917 may be divided into three parts.

The first is applicable to the Jews. It provided: 'His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people and will use their best endeavour to facilitate the achievement of this object'.

The second affecting the rights and position of the Muslim and Christian inhabitants, stipulated: "It being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non Jewish communities in Palestine".

The third pointing towards the position of the Jews outside Palestine, ruled: "The rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country shall not be prejudiced by the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people. This latter protective clause gave the Jews the homeland of another people while safeguarding their own rights in their countries of origin". 53

53. Hadawi, n.11, p.19.
If one reads through the second safeguarding clause, one is able to discern that the Muslim and Christian inhabitants have been mentioned in such a way as to give an entirely false picture of their position in the country and their indubitable right to it. Although constituting, in 1917, 92% of the population, they were referred to as "the existing non-Jewish communities of Palestine". This tended to give the erroneous impression that they were an insignificant minority occupying a position subordinate to the Jews. This clause, by purporting to protect the rights of the Arabs as "the existing non-Jewish communities", in reality aimed at robbing them in due course of their right to the country as owners and inhabitants.55,

But leaving aside this deception and looking at the implication of the safeguarding clause, there is only one possible judgement that can be passed on it, namely, it was sufficient to nullify the rest of the Declaration. The British Government should have known that what the Zionists wanted would have constituted a disastrous encroachment on Arab rights in Palestine. In effect the British Government promised to help the Zionists achieve them, provided that nothing was done to enable them to achieve it!

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55. Ibid.
Answering the criticism of the Declaration, Lord Balfour said, "Zionism may fail.... This is an adventure.... Are we never to have adventures? Are we never to try new experiments?" Lord Sydenham replied that the Zionist experiment would fail.

But the harm done by dumping down an alien population upon an Arab country - Arab all round in the hinterland may never be remedied.... What we have done is, by concessions, not to the Jewish people but to a Zionist extreme section, to start a running sore in the East, and no one can tell how far that sore will extend."

British Reassurance to Arabs:

The British had concluded two secret agreements which conflicted with Arab aspirations, the Sykes Picot Agreement dividing Arab territories between Britain and France, and the Balfour Declaration signing away to the Jews Arab rights in Palestine. The Arab were unaware of it till the text of these two instruments were announced by the Bolsheviks on coming to power in 1917. This was widely publicized by the

57. Ibid., p.1025.
58. Hadawi, n.11, p.22.
Turkish military commander as a sign of British betrayal of her pledges to the Arabs.

Nonetheless, the disclosure created great commotion in Arab circles and an explanation was requested by Sharif Hussein of Hejaz from the British Government. Assurances from the British Government came from time to time, however unconvincing, the Arabs continued to fight the Turks.

(1) The Hogarth Message of January 1918:

An explicit assurance was given that "The Jewish settlement in Palestine would only be allowed in so far as would be consistent with the political and economic freedom of the Arab population." 59

The phrase 'political and economic freedom of Arab population' is important since it is a marked departure from Balfour Declaration which guaranteed only the 'civil and religious rights of the Arab population. This was an assurance for Arab independence and sovereignty, which was ignored in Balfour Declaration.

(2) The Bassett Letter of 8 February 1918:

This letter was another reassurance that "His Majesty's Government and their allies remain steadfast to the policy

59. Antonious, n.14, p.268. See Also Aaron, n.4, p.16 and Lenz, n.37, p.82.
of helping any movement which aims at setting free those nations which are oppressed...." The letter went on to say, The Government of His Britannic Majesty repeats its previous promise in respect of the freedom and the emancipation of the Arab peoples. 60

(3) The British Declaration to the Seven of 16 June 1918:

Earlier British pledges to the Arabs were confirmed. The Declaration referred to the proclamations read in Baghdad and Jerusalem on March 19 and December 9, 1917, respectively and stated that these proclamations "define the policy of His Majesty's Government towards the inhabitants... which is that the future government... should be based upon the principle of the consent of the governed. This policy will always be that of His Majesty's Government." 61

(4) the Anglo-French Declaration of 9 November 1918:

Anglo French intentions were more explicit in the last document of consequence to emerge from the war period. A Declaration was issued jointly by the two countries in

November 1918 and was given wide publicity. After repeating the desire of France and Great Britain to foster the emancipation of the peoples in the Middle East and the establishment of freely-chosen national governments and administrations, it stated:

Far from wishing to impose on the populations of these regions any particular institutions, they are only concerned to ensure by their support and adequate assistance the regular working of governments and administrations freely chosen by the populations themselves. To secure impartial and equal justice for all, to facilitate the economic development of the country..., to favour the diffusion of education, to put an end to discussions.... Such is the policy which the two Allied Governments uphold in the liberated territories.\(^62\)

With these assurances and affirmations, the Arab War against the Turks went on with greater vigour and determination.\(^63\)

\(^{62}\) Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th Series, 145:36.

\(^{63}\) Hadawi, n.11, p.21.
BRITAIN AND THE MANDATE

With the signing of the Armistice of Mudros by the Entente Powers and Turkey on 30 October 1918, fighting ceased in the Middle East. On 30 January 1919, the Supreme Council of the Peace Conference decided that the conquered Arab provinces, including Palestine, were not to be restored to Turkish rule. Palestine remained under British military administration until 1920, when a civil administration was set up which continued until the British Government obtained on 24 July 1922 a formal mandate from the Council of the League of Nations to administer the country. A writer has commented on the nature of the Mandatory system as follows:

"To circumvent the fulfillment of their promises of Arab independence and to implement the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, the Allied Powers devised what became known as the Mandate system. This turned out to be disguised colonialism."  

64. Aaron, n.4, p.17.
65. Hadawi, n.11, p.55.
67. Hadawi, n.11, p.55.
The Palestine Mandate:

The concept of international mandates was inspired by the principles, propounded by President Wilson and leaders of the Russian Revolution, that war settlements at the end of the First World War should not involve any annexations but should be based upon the principle of self-determination of peoples. The first concrete proposal of the concept was made by General Smuts as part of a project for a League of Nations which he published in December 1918 on the eve of the Peace Conference.

The concept of the mandate was accepted and its basic objectives laid down in Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations which was adopted on 25 April 1919. Article 22 indicated the territories which would be subjected to Mandates. There were:

(a) territories detached from the Turkish Empire,
(b) certain territories in Central Africa,
(c) territories in South-West Africa and certain of the South Pacific Islands.


The character of the Mandate and the Mandatory Powers would differ in each of these three classes of territories. The least onerous were the Mandates to be granted in respect of territories detached from the Turkish Empire. As regards these territories, Article 22 provided:

"Certain communities formerly belonging to the Turkish Empire have reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognized subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone. The wish of these communities must be principal consideration in the selection of the Mandatory."

However, Article 22, did not designate the Mandatory Powers. This was done later by the Supreme Council of the Allied Powers.

Palestine, as one of the territories detached from the Turkish Empire, was one of the countries whose independence was thus provisionally recognized, "subject to the rendering of administration advice and assistance by a Mandatory." On 25 April 1920 at San Remo the Supreme Council of the Allied Powers decided to allocate the Mandate over Palestine to
Great Britain. But the terms of the Mandate were yet to be settled. 70

One of the most extraordinary aspects of the Palestine Mandate is that its terms were proposed by a foreign body which harboured political ambitions in respect of the country concerned. 71 In its memorandum dated 3 February 1919, submitted by the World Zionist Organisation to the Peace Conference at Paris, this body outlined its wishes and desiderata with respect to the future of Palestine. It is important to note that "many of the suggestions of the memorandum found their way, after revision, into a draft Mandate for Palestine formulated by the Zionist Organisation and circulated at the end of March 1919... and, after further revision, into the Mandatory instrument approved by the Council of the League of Nations". 72 The terms of the Mandate over Palestine were settled by the British Government "in consultation with Zionist representative's." 73

71. Cattan, n.67, p.16.
The Arabs of Palestine, who were the party immediately concerned were not even consulted. The Palestine mandate was approved by the Council of the League of Nations substantially in the terms proposed by the Zionist Organisation. 74

The Mandate had two principle objectives:

The first objective was to give effect to Article 22 of the Covenant. The first recital in its preamble stated:

"Whereas the Principal Allied Powers have agreed, for the purpose of giving effect to the provisions of Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, to entrust to a mandatory selected by the said Powers the administration of the territory of Palestine....."

In fulfillment of this objective Article 2 of the Mandate provided:

"The Mandatory shall be responsible for... the development of self governing institutions....."

The second objective was to put into effect the Balfour Declaration, and facilitate Jewish immigration. The second recital in the preamble stated:

74. Cattan, n.67, p.16.
"Whereas the Principal Allied Powers have also agreed that the mandatory should be responsible for putting into effect the declaration originally made on 2 November 1917, by the Government of His Britannic Majesty, and adopted by the said Powers, in favour of the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, it being clearly understood that nothing should be done which might prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country; and

Whereas recognition has thereby been given to the historical connexion of the Jewish people with Palestine and to the grounds for reconstituting their national home in that country...."

To fulfill this objective Article 2 provided:

"The mandatory shall be responsible for placing the country under such political, administrative and economic conditions as will secure the establishment of the Jewish national home, as laid down in the preamble...."

Armed with the Mandate, using the might of British empire and seconded by the forces of Zionism, the British Government implemented the Balfour Declaration in Palestine...
against the will and despite the opposition of its original inhabitants. 75

The foul play was aggravated by the way Mandate was implemented:

First, the British Government as Mandatory did not take into account the tenuous safeguards laid down in favour of the original inhabitants of Palestine both in the Balfour Declaration and in the Mandate itself. The Balfour Declaration had provided that "nothing should he done which might prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non Jewish communities in Palestine". The Mandate had provided that in facilitating Jewish immigration into Palestine, the Administration should ensure that "the rights and position of other section of the population are not prejudiced " (Article 6). The Mandate was implemented without taking into consideration those safeguards. 76

Second, Article 2 of the Mandate provided that the Mandatory was responsible for developing self-governing institutions. There was no trace of any such institutions at 75. Ibid., n.67, p.17.
76. Ibid., p.18. See also Hadawi, n.11, pp.59-60.
any time during the Mandate. Palestine was governed and administered from beginning to end as if it were a colonial possession. A half hearted attempt was made by the British Government in 1922 to grant some semblance of autonomy to the people of Palestine in the form of a Legislative Council. This attempt, however, failed because of Arab opposition to the proposed measure on the grounds that it did not recognize majority rule, and because of a Jewish opposition to the grant of self government to Palestine in any form so long as they were a minority. 77

British Civil Administration in Palestine:

A civil administration in Palestine was established on 1 July 1920. The consortium of British Officers which arrived in the country included British Zionist Jews who were placed in key position. Some of these were Herbert Samuel, one of the framers of the Balfour Declaration as High Commissioner; Norman Bentwich, Attorney General and chief legislator of Palestine laws, Albert Hyamson, Director of Immigration, and Max Nurock, Principal Assistant Secretary to the Government with access to all matters pertaining to policy in Palestine.

77. Ibid., p.18.
One of the early actions of this consortium was to enact the first immigration ordinance on 26 August 1920, fixing a quota of 16,500 immigrant Jews for the first year.78

Other legislation followed, all were aimed to facilitate the "Jewish national home" policy. It seemed as if the British Government had no obligations to the Arab section of the community. Significant among these, next to the Immigration Law, were laws affecting land disposition, registration and settlements; this was being done to hasten Jewish acquisition of Arab land. One of these laws - disguised as a law to protect cultivators against eviction by their land lords had the opposite effect. This was because almost all the large tracts of land were owned by absentee land-owners living in Lebanon and Syria. Whereas relations between landlord and tenant had until then been on the best of terms the new law gave the tenant the impression which was also encouraged by Jewish land brokers that he no longer needed to pay his rentals since the law gave him certain 'tenancy rights' and protected him against

78. Hadawi, n.11, p.58.
eviction. Even 'squalors' were soon able to establish 'tenancy rights' under certain ambiguously worded provisions of the law. The landlord, placed in the unenviable position of owning land but getting hardly anything out of it, and hardened with taxation beyond his means, found himself in a critical situation. Here is where the Jewish land broker stepped in and offered to buy the land and rid the landlord of his problems. This resulted in massive purchase of lands by the Jews and appalling displacement of the agricultural Arab families. Other measures favouring Jews were the granting to Jewish companies of concessions over state lands and the natural resources of the country, such as irrigation, electricity and the extraction of potash and other minerals from the Dead Sea.

The Arab majority was denied the right of controlling its destiny while it had to change its policy in deference to the will of the minority, or until the minority had itself become a majority.79

79. Hadawi, n.11, pp.59-60.
The Arab Opposition:

Arab opposition to the Mandate and the policy of the Balfour Declaration remained steadfast and unrelenting throughout the period of the Mandate.

When appeals, protests, arguments, demonstrations and strikes failed to move the British Government to fulfill its pledges to the Arabs and follow a policy of justice and equity, the Palestine Arabs resorted from time to time to violence. The first violent expression of Arab feeling occurred on Easter Sunday in April 1920; the second in May 1921; the third in August 1929; and between 1926, and 1939, an all out rebellion broke out which was preceded by an unprecedented six months strike.80

Four principal commissions of inquiry were appointed directly as a result of the riots.

These commissions were:

The Palin Commission of 1920.

The Haycraft Commission of 1921.

The Shaw Commission of 1930

The Royal (Peel) Commission of 1937.81

80. Ibid., p.60.

The findings of these commissions were invariably the same, namely,

(a) Arab disappointment at the non-fulfillment of the promises of independence which had been given them during the First World War;

(b) Arab belief that the Balfour Declaration implied a denial of the right of self-determination and their fear that the establishment of 'a national home for the Jews' in Palestine will lead to their ultimate dispossession of their homes and homeland.

The Zionists made no secret of their intentions, for as early as 1921, Dr. Eder, a member of the Zionist Commissions, "boldly told the Court of Inquiry' that "there can be only one National Home in Palestine, and that a Jewish one, and no equality in the partnership between Jews and Arabs, but a Jewish preponderance as soon as the number of the race are sufficiently increased."82

British 'Statements of Policy':

The commissions of enquiry which were appointed to establish the causes for the riots were each followed by the

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issue of a 'Statement of Policy', each commission tried to interpret the meaning of 'a national home'.

Churchill Memorandum:

The British Governments' first attempt at a definitive public statement of policy in Palestine, the Churchill Memorandum was issued on 3 June 1922. The British Government in this instance was virtually the same small power clique around Lloyd George which had been responsible for the Balfour Declaration. Now their statement of policy was tempered by the advice of some permanent British officials in the Foreign and Colonial Offices. This was due to the perspective improved by the absence of the war factor in their analysis. The terms of the draft Mandate were being considered under lower pressure. A deviation from earlier Zionist formula which included the establishment of a Jewish state or commonwealth in Palestine, was occurring.

The 'Memorandum' offered what was considered to be a forward step in the development of self governing

83. Cmd. 1700, British Statement of Policy.
84. John, Hadawi, n.23, pp.181-82.
institutions by a proposal to establish a legislative council containing a large number of members to be elected on a wide franchise. The British promise had been to facilitate the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine; 'the terms of the Declaration...do not contemplate that Palestine as a whole should be converted into a Jewish national home, nor was there anything in it to warrant the suggestion that Palestine was destined to become 'as Jewish as England is English'. Moreover, 'His Majesty's' Government regard any such expectation as impracticable and have no such aim in view'.

The principal points were:

(1) His Majesties' Government re-affirmed the Balfour Declaration.

(2) A Jewish national home would he founded in Palestine as of right and not of sufferance, but there would be no imposition of a Jewish nationality upon the inhabitants of Palestine as a whole.

(3) Nor did His Majesty's Government contemplate the disappearance or subordination of the Arab population, language or culture.

85. Ibid.
(4) The status of all citizens of Palestine should be Palestinian. No section of the population would have any other status in the eyes of the law.

(5) His Majesty’s Government intended to foster the establishment of a full measure of self government in Palestine, and as the next step, a legislative council with a majority of elected members would be set-up immediately.

(6) The special position of the Zionist Executive did not entitle it to share in any degree in the government of the country.

(7) Immigration would not exceed the economic capacity of the country at the time to absorb new arrivals.

(8) A committee of the elected members of the legislative council would confer with the administration.

(9) Any religious community or considerable section of the population claiming that the term of the Mandate are not being fulfilled.\(^{86}\)

Although the White Paper repudiated the idea of Jewish domination over the Arabs, it established a principle for

\(^{86}\) Ibid., pp.182-83.
the regulation of immigration which would in time make such domination possible if not inevitable. Moreover, it was more than a statement of formal principles and did not take into account one of the essential facts of the situation. The British Government had laid down a general policy of a dual obligation. The Zionists always better organized, through the privileged status of the Jewish Agency and through many other maneuverings could tilt the balance in their favour. The Arabs yet hoped that a change of British policy would occur and ensure justice to them.

On 24 July 1922 the Mandate for Palestine was approved by the Council of the League of Nations, to come into force officially on 22 December 1923. A last attempt by the Vatican to block its approval failed. The Papal Secretary of State, Cardinal Gasparri, submitted a memorandum dated 15 May 1922 severely criticizing the Mandate articles designed to give effect to the Balfour Declaration, declaring that they were incompatible with the Covenant of the League of Nations.

Nevertheless, the 'Churchill Memorandum' established the support of the coalition government for the Balfour

Declaration and the Palestine Mandate at the expense of the wartime pledge to the Arabs and paved the way for the acceptance of the Mandate by the League, and established the right of Zionists to demand British administrative, and if necessary, military aid in colonizing Palestine.

Passfield White Paper:

The riots of 1929 were followed by yet another pronouncement. This is in form of a White Paper which became known as the 'Pass-field Memorandum'. This memorandum is important and is reproduced here:

Many of the misunderstandings which have unhappily arisen on both sides appear to be the result of a failure to appreciate the nature of the duty imposed upon His Majesty's Government by the terms of the Mandate. The next point therefore which His Majesty's Government feel it necessary to emphasize, in the strongest manner possible, is that in the words of the Prime Minister's statement in the House of Commons on the 3rd April last, 'a double undertaking is involved, to the Jewish people on the one hand and to the non-Jewish population on the other'.
The statement continued:

These points are emphasized because claims have been made on behalf of the Jewish Agency to a position in regard to the general administration of the country which His Majesty’s Government cannot but regard as going for beyond the clear intention of the Mandate. Moreover, attempts have been made to argue, in support of Zionist claims that the principal feature of the Mandate’s the passages regarding the Jewish national home, and that the passages designed to safeguard the rights of the non Jewish community are merely secondary considerations, qualifying, to some extent, what is claimed to be the primary object for which the Mandate has been framed.

This is a conception which H.M.G. have always regarded as totally erroneous. However, difficult the task may, it would in their view, be impossible, consistently with the plain intention of the Mandate, to attempt to solve the problem by subordinating one of these obligations to the other. The British accredited representative, when appearing before the Permanent Mandates Commission on the 9th June last, endeavoured to make clear the attitude of H.M.G. towards the difficulties inherent in the Mandate. In commenting on his statements in their report to the Council the Permanent Mandates Commission made the following important pronouncement:
'From all these statements, two assertions emerge, which should be emphasized:

(1) That the obligations laid down by the Mandate in regard to the two sections of the population are of equal weight;

(2) That the two obligations imposed on the Mandatory are in no sense irreconcilable.

"The Mandate Commission has no objection to rise to these two assertions which, in its view, accurately express what it conceives to be the essence on the Mandate for Palestine and ensure its future." 89

The Labour Government became immediately involved in a storm of anger from Zionist Jews throughout the world. But Arabs said that Britain had at last recognized their rights. 90 The American Jewish Committee stated that the United Kingdom's 'Statement of policy' was a repudiation of pledges to the Jews. 91 Weizman said that he would make an appeal to the League of Nations against it. 92


91. Ibid., 21 October 1930.

92. Ibid., 22 October, 1930.
"Times' also published an alleged 'revelation' from a friend of MacDonald that there had been a Cabinet fight before the 'Statement' was published, and that Passfield had forced the policy on the Cabinet. 93 "This was possibly a canard put out to weaken Passfield and the Government's policy or to provide a convenient let-out for MacDonald if criticism became too hot." 94

On account of the pressure at home and looming threat of financial reprisals from the United States, Romsay MacDonald backed down'. According to his colleague Herbert Morrison, he had already shown 'evidence of that remote and defensive attitude to those around him which in the end left him with virtually no friends in the real sense of the word', and sometimes gave the impression of 'an objectionable evasiveness' and a 'shilly-shallying which was to prove so disastrous to his reputation'. 95

Passfield defended his policy, denying that Palestine was barred to Jews. He said that the suspension of

93. Ibid., 26 October, 1930.
immigration was only contingent on unemployment in Palestine. Internationally he was supported by Judges Loefgren, Chairman of the League of Nations' Waiting Wall Commission, who defended British Policy as a compromise between the promises made to the Arabs and the Jews.96

On 14 November 30 it was announced that 'doubts have been expressed as to the compatibility of some passages of the White Paper of October with certain articles of the Palestine Mandate, and other passages having proved liable to misunderstanding', MacDonald had invited members of the Jewish Agency to confer on these matter'.97

MacDonald "Black Letter":

The Prime Minister wrote a letter to Weizman "clarifying" the White Paper for him but in reality capitulating to the pressures which the Jewish Zionists and their more politically powerful gentile supporters in the British Parliament had brought to bear.98 The letter to Dr. Weizmann is referred by Arabs as 'Black Letter'. The

98. Richard N. Verdery, n.82, p.293.
The difference in tone between the White Paper of 1930 and the "Black Letter" of 1931, is perhaps the most important contrast between the two documents. 'Whereas the Passfield White Paper and the Commission's reports that preceded it had conceived matters in terms of inhabitants of Palestine both Arab and Jewish, the MacDonald letter reaffirmed that the Mandate for Palestine reflected an obligation to the Jews of the world as a whole, not merely to those resident in, or currently eager to emigrate to, Palestine'. The 'Black Letter' diluted the government strictures upon Zionist demand, Jewish Labour for Jewish enterprises and permitted further acquisition of land in Palestine by Jews or Jewish agencies:

The Labour Government, like its predecessors adhered to the unsuccessful policy of attempted compromise between the aims of Arab nationalism and Zionism.... The Passfield Paper and the MacDonald letter were particularly unfortunate applications of the general British Policy, for they convinced first the Arabs and then the Jews that sufficient agitation and pressure could alter the intentions of the Mandatory. The whole

99. Ibid.
philosophy of compromise was at fault. The effort of the London government to the both pro-Arab and pro-Zionist within the limited confines of the HolyLand was brought with danger alike to the Arabs, the Jews and the British. 100

Jewish sources now describe the Ramsay MacDonald letter as in fact cancelling the Passfield White Paper of 1930. Weizmann summarizes the significance of the letter in the following words:

"...it was under MacDonald's letter to me that the change came about in the Government's attitude, and in the attitude of the Palestine Administration, which enabled us to make the magnificent gains of the ensuing years. It was under MacDonald's letter the Jewish immigration into Palestine was permitted to reach figures like forty thousand after 1934 and sixty two thousand for 1935..." 101

The Arabs regarded it as plain proof of the power which world Jewry could exercise in London and their confidence in British administration was shaken.

MacDonald White Paper: Plagued with unrest in Palestine and continued Arab rebellion (1936-1939) the British Government,

100. Hanna, British Policy, p.108. As quoted in Richard N. Verdery, n.82, pp.293-94.

on 17 May 1939, issued yet another but final 'Statement of Policy' which became known as 'The MacDonald White Paper. There was a direct attempt by Chaim Weizmann to urge Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain not to publish it.\textsuperscript{102} The Statement referred to the terms of the Mandate and it stated, "the Royal Commission and previous Commission of Enquiry have drawn attention to the ambiguity of certain expressions in the Mandate, such as the expression 'a national home for the Jewish people', and they have found in this ambiguity and the resulting uncertainty as to the objectives of policy a fundamental cause of unrest and hostility between Arabs and Jews".\textsuperscript{103} The Government was convinced that, in the interests of peace and well being of the whole people of Palestine, a clear definition of policy and objectives was essential. Consequently, the British Government declared that neither their undertakings to the Jews nor the national interests of Britain warranted that they should continue to develop the Jewish beyond already reached. The Government therefore decided;

1. That the Jewish National Home as envisaged in the Balfour Declaration and in previous statements of British policy had been established;

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., p.410.

\textsuperscript{103} As cited in John & Hadawi, n.23, p.315.
2. That to develop it further against Arab wishes would be a violation of Britain's undertakings to the Arabs and that such a policy could only be carried out by the use of un-justifiable force;

3. That, therefore, after admission of a final quota of 75,000 more Jewish immigrants over a period of five years, Jewish immigration should stop.

4. That during this period of five years a restriction should be placed on the acquisition of further land in Palestine by the Jews; and

5. That at the end of the period of five years, self-governing institutions should be set up in the country. 104

Reaction of the Arabs and Zionists to the White Paper:

Arab reaction to the White Paper of 1939 was mixed. A certain section of the population was willing to accept it but doubted the sincerity of the British Government; the other decided to reject it as not meeting fully the aspirations of the Palestine Arabs which was the abrogation of the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate and the granting of independence to the country.

'The Arab Higher Committee led by the Mufti from Beirut, rejected the terms of the White Paper but on 29 May 1939 the National Defence Party announced its readiness to cooperate with Britain in giving effect to them.'

The Zionists unanimously condemned the proposals of the 'MacDonald White Paper'. Their reaction was immediate. In Palestine, 'Dr. Herzog, the Chief Rabbi, stood in the pulpit of the great Yeshurim Synagogue of Jerusalem and before the weeping congregation tore up a copy of the White Paper to pieces. On 17 May 1939, the Palestine Broadcasting Service transmission wires were cut and the Palestine Broadcasting studios bombed, so that the official announcement of the British Government's new policy could not be immediately broadcast to the country. The next day the head quarters offices of the Administration's Department of Migration were set on fire, and the Government offices at Haifa and Tel Aviv were sacked by crowds bent on destroying every document of illegal immigration.'

This was the beginning of the Jewish rebellion in Palestine which was to partition Palestine and drive the

106. Ibid., p.320.
British out of the country. It was synchronized with Zionist political action in many countries. Even in Rumania, where a pro Nazi government was said to be in power, the protests of the Rumanian Zionist organisation against Britain and its proposed Palestine policy made headlines.107

The House of Commons debated the White Paper on 22 May 1939. The policy was approved by 268 votes against 179. A motion supported by Lloyd George and Winston Churchill, that as the proposals of His Majesty's Government relating to Palestine, as set out in Command Paper No.6019, are inconsistent with the letter and spirit of the Mandate and not calculated to secure the peaceful and prosperous development of political, this House is of the opinion that Parliament should not be committed pending the examination of these proposals by the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations', was defeated.108 On 23 May the House of Lords, after debate, approved the policy without a division.109

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Much water had flown down the river between 1930, when the Passfield White Paper policy had been rejected in the House of Commons, and 1939, the acceptance of a policy to which Zionists were violently opposed. Weizmann wrote in his autobiography: "I tried to find an answer to a question which was to occupy me for the remainder of my life: Why was it, a completely invariable rule that politicians who were enthusiastic of the Jewish home land during elections forget it completely if they were returned to power." It can be argued that what mattered was the information available to the men in government, compared with the propaganda which they relied on when out of office. This was not only true of Palestine. The fact seems to be that there was now a greater knowledge in England of the Near and Middle East among those influential in making policy. Diplomatic representation of Arabs to London from time to time had changed the common misconception of Arab leaders as romantic, semi barbarous sheikhs. About sixty members of parliament under the Chairmanship of Lord Whiterton, who had been on Allenby's staff in 1918, and Colonel Cliffton Brown, later Speaker of the House, had formed an informal group who believed in the merits of Arab case. The first book in England to carry the  

110. Weizmann, n.102, pp.437-438.
Arab point of view, together with accounts of British wartime promises to the Arabs, had been published in 1938, and this, *The Arab Awakening* by George Antonius, had probably done much to influence British opinion toward Arab nationalism.

The MacDonald White Paper, which was to be British policy in Palestine for the duration of the war, was an attempt to keep Arab national feeling temporarily placated, if did not actually satisfy them. The Zionists were embittered at its terms. But they had no choice except to support the British government against Hitler. This was a must, if the Jewish national home, after the war, had to grow into a Jewish state.

With the issuance of the 1939 MacDonald White Paper, the history of inter-war Palestine came to an end. The British administration and the government in London prepared for the war and were too preoccupied to send investigatory commissions. The Palestinian Jews and the larger Zionist community bowed to the inevitable restriction on immigration for the duration of the war although clandestine immigration continued. The Palestinian Arabs, their peasants' revolt spent, and their titular leader a
fugitive, relapsed into a political quiescence. The struggle between the two communities on Palestinian soil subsided beneath the surface for the time being.  

On the outbreak of World War II, both Arabs and Zionists decided not to embarrass the British Government and to cease all acts of violence. As attested by the Palestine Government, "The Arabs of Palestine demonstrated their support of Democracy at the outbreak of war, and there were spontaneous appeals in the Arab press to Arabs to rally to the side of Great Britain and set aside local issues; acts of terrorism were roundly condemned". The Arab notables caused on the High Commission to assure him of their loyalty.

There was an unanimous agreement among the Jews of Palestine to put aside their opposition to British policy in Palestine and demonstrate their loyalty to the cause of the democracies. Jewish terrorist acts ceased. The Jewish agency issued an appeal calling on all Jews in Palestine to close

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111. Richard N. Verdery, n.82, pp.302-3.


their ranks and offer their full assistance to Britain. This was not without a purpose. 114

As the war progressed British dilemma became more acute. Hitler’s final solution to the Jewish problem became known. For the British government it became unthinkable and impolitic not to allow Jewish immigration into Palestine at the end of the time prescribed by the 1939 White Paper, that is March 1944. The Zionists also forced the pace. They adopted a new program in May 1942 that called for the establishment after the war of a Jewish state in Palestine that would stretch from the river Jordan to the Mediterranean (the Biltmore programme). The presence in the United States of a politically influential Jewish community, which in 1943 adopted the Baltimore programme, made it difficult for London to pursue any policy that might be construed as anti-Zionist. 115

The Arab world achieved greater political cohesion during the course of the war, culminating in the foundation of the Arab League, in Cairo, in March 1945. The League

114. Hadawi, n.11, p.65.

referred to the terms of the 1939 White Paper as the "natural rights" of the Palestinian Arabs. This was notwithstanding the fact that the Palestinian's own leaders had rejected that document in 1939, and Amin-el-Husayni had collaborated with the Nazis since 1941.116

Although in 1944 a British Cabinet Committee had, under Churchill's direction again proposed the eventual partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab States the scheduled discussion in the full cabinet had been put off following the assassination in Cairo of the British Minister of State, Lord Moyne. Churchill never returned to the Zionist cause, and the Palestine problem was inherited by the Labour government.117

Churchill and Zionism:

Winston Churchill may be counted among those select few who became legend in their own life time. In the pantheon of Zionist heroes, few gentiles enjoyed such a privileged position as Churchill.

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116. Ibid.
117. Ibid., pp.8-9.
It would be a mistake to think that Churchill was ever a consistent, convinced supporter of Zionism. It goes without saying that he was never ideologically committed, in the same way as Herzl's adherents were, to the renaissance of the Jewish nation in Palestine, as the unique solution to the 'the Jewish Problem'. The periods when Churchill concerned himself directly with Jewish problems were relatively brief. These were interspersed with far longer spans when he had no official contact whatever. In 1934, he paid a private visit to Palestine, during the course of Middle East tour. He stayed overnight in Jerusalem, but did not apparently meet with any Zionist representative.118

Churchill concerned himself on the Jewish problem only when it was interwoven with his own personal political fortunes or with British imperial interests. As Secretary of State for War, and then for the colonies after the war, Churchill was preoccupied with securing economy and retrenchment in West Asia. "Repeatedly by, but in vain, he urged retreat and withdrawal from the Middle Eastern Mandate, Palestine and Mesopotamia".119


119. Ibid.
Balfour Declaration was disowned by Churchill. However it was important to him in two important aspects. First, Churchill was convinced that the Declaration had been instrumental in mobilizing powerful Jewish support for the Allied cause especially in the United States, whose entry into the war, Churchill believed, was secured partly by Zionist pressure. This belief for him was enduring and it played a pivotal role in Churchill's support for Zionism during World War II, prior to the American entry, after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in December, 1941. Second, Churchill did for a time believe that Zionism might provide the antidote to what he believed was Jew-inspired Bolshevism. Jewish resources and energy might be channeled usefully into building up a British-oriented protectorate in Palestine. But Churchill took little or no account of the rise of Arab nationalism after World War II.

The rise of Nozism during the mid and late 1930s threatened, and eventually shattered, the political order established by the victors of World War I. The threat to old order became a dominant theme during the late 1930s. Hitler gave the 'Jewish problem' a tragic twist and around in Churchill a unique personal commitment never interested at other junctures of his political career. Nonetheless the
Jewish suffering's took a very clear second priority during World War II. the first being the imperial interest.120

In May 1939, the Chamberlain Government issued a new White Paper. Churchill condemned the new policy in the House of Commons as a breach of faith, the 'destruction of the Balfour Declaration'. In this attack there was more than a suspicion of political opportunism in this particular attack. The Palestine White Paper provided Churchill with yet another occasion to express his anti-appeasement message. Churchill had seized on the Zionist cause as early as in 1937 when, contrary to the Zionists' own wishes he had attacked the Peel partition plan as a betrayal of Britain's commitments under the Mandate.

As war-time Prime Minister, Churchill reminded his colleagues repeatedly that he did not consider himself bound by the 1939 policy but adhered to 'his own' White Paper of 1922. This policy had stipulated that the Jews were in Palestine 'as of right, and not an sufferance'. and that they immigrate freely subject only to the economic absorbing capacity of Palestine. Yet a solution to 'the

120. Ibid., p.xvii.
Jewish Problem', in all its different aspects, was in fact deferred by Churchill until after the War.\textsuperscript{121}

As Prime Minister, Churchill had taken a pro-Zionist stand on every issue connected with Palestine during the War - from the Land Transfers Bill promulgated in February 1940, to the various schemes for a Jewish fighting force, to the renewed discussion of partition itself from 1943. Yet apart from his success in pushing through the decision to raise a Jewish brigade in September 1944, Churchill did not press to a positive conclusion any pro-Zionist measure. Neither did he seriously contemplate the dismissal of any cabinet appointee because of differences over Zionism.\textsuperscript{122}

During the war, Churchill's solemn commitments to the Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann had retained for Britain the support of the moderate Zionists. This was crucial since the support of moderate Zionists led by Weizmann had blunted the anti-British campaigns waged by some sections of American Jewry. Yet Churchill ended his tenure "with the White Paper unabrogated, no commitment on record and Weizmann left high and dry, standing before the Jewish people baffled, enraged, 

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., p.xviii.

undermined and empty-handed". 123 It is not easy to reconcile all this with the accepted view of Churchill as a pro-Zionist.

Churchill's war memoirs hint at controversies between him and his colleagues regarding the Holocaust, both before and after the massacre became generally known. They saw he was trying to live up to his sympathies for the Jewish people. But no contemporary statement of his can he found either to justify his stand or to explain his attitude towards suffering European Jewry. 124

After 1944, Jewish terrorism seems to have alienated Churchill from Zionism permanently. The assassination of Lord Moyne a close friend of his and the British Minister of State, resident in the Middle East not only brought a strong warning from him in the House of Commons to the Zionist movement as a whole, but caused him also to shelve the new partition scheme which had already been placed on the Cabinet's agenda. 125


On August 1, 1946, nine days after the King David Hotel tragedy Churchill endorsed the Labour Party doctrine which divorced Palestine from the Jewish refugee problem: "No one can imagine that these is room in Palestine for the great masses of Jews who wish to leave Europe, or that they could be absorbed in any period which it is now useful to contemplate". Referring to the King David Hotel explosion, he added: "It is perfectly clear that Jewish warfare directed against the British in political will if protracted, automatically release us from all obligations to persevere, as well as destroy the inclination to make further efforts in British hearts".126

**Labour, Bevin and Palestine Problem:**

On July 26, 1945 the Labour Party was for the first time in its history was voted into office with a commanding majority over its opponents. In a landslide victory, the party gained 393 seats as against 213 won by the Conservatives and their supporters. The Liberal Party's representation was reduced from 21 to 12 seats. The swing from Conservative to the left on such a scale was witnessed only twice before in British parliamentary history, in 1832 and in 1906.127


"In all of the complexity of Middle Eastern issues facing the British Labour Government in the post war era, there is one individual and one theme of paramount significance: Ernest Bevin and his policy of non-intervention". 128

An understanding of the thought and motivation of the Foreign Secretary, Bevin, proved the key to the problem of Britain and its quest for the answer of Palestine question. 129 Bevin later referred to British Palestine policy as "his" policy, Bevin as Foreign Secretary was in overall control, and followed developments with a grasp of detail and force and personality unrivalled by his British contemporaries. He has often been denounced as anti semitic. A close scrutiny of Bevin's temperament shows that it was rather the reverse. Bevin's "anti-semitic" reputation developed from his policy not his personal sentiment. He consistently attempted to avert position. He wished to create a binational state in which Arabs and Jews would create a binational state. Thus the Zionists from the


begining became his adversaries. When he was frustrated, often became angry, and the sometimes rose in wrath against the Americans as well as the Zionists. However, Bevin’s outbursts must not be allowed to obscure the creative thrust and coherence of his purpose. Paradoxically, there is truth in the view that his "pro Arab" disposition helped to bring about the creation of the state of Israel. Zionists throughout the world were able to unite in vilifying him.130

To Bevin "partition" symbolized a bankruptcy of policy, the end of the road, and an admission of failure, though sometime, unavoidable as in the case of India. In Palestine he pursued the goal of the binational state with such tenacity that one wonders what might have happened if he had become Secretary of State for India in 1945 rather than the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.131

Bevin believed that the answer to the problem of Jewish refugees and displaced persons should be sought in Europe rather than in Palestine, which he regarded as a predomately Arab country. He found himself caught between


131. Ibid., p.2.
Jewish nationalism supercharged by the emotions of Holocaust, and the anti-Zionism of the Arabs, without whose goodwill the British Empire in the Middle East would be doomed. The British could not support a Jewish state without alienating the Arabs. Nor could the British impose a settlement acceptable to the Arab countries without antagonizing the United States.

He believed, as did many English of his generation, that the British Empire was a beneficent force in world affairs, though the word "Empire" would have to be replaced in the Middle East with something that suggested less exploitation and more equal partnership. The British and the Arabs could work together to develop the region to mutual advantage. Economically the Middle East together with Africa offered just as alluring a prospect as India had in the past. Militarily the countries of the Middle East could be brought into a system of defence that would help to offset the manpower and military potential of the Soviet Union. Such in brief was Bevin's vision. He combined political, economic, and military strands of thought into a coherent general policy that sought to preserve Britain as a great
power. The Middle East was the principal pillar of Britain's position in the world. 132

Bevin could not have systematically pursued his Middle Eastern policy without the effective partnership of the Prime Minister, Clement Attlee. Bevin would always take care to square his ideas with Attlee's before cabinet meetings. Together the two of them often made an unbreakable combination though Attlee was skeptical of Britain's capacity to remain a great power in the Middle East.

Apart from these two another figure is of importance. He is Arthur Creech Jones who was parliamentary Under Secretary for the colonies from July, 1940 until October 1946, and then Colonial Secretary until his defeat in the general election of February 1950. Both Attlee and Bevin repeated Creech Jones and listened to his advice. "Creech, as he was known to his friends, was sympathetic to the aims of the moderate Zionists. Nevertheless, he was overshadowed by both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary and his ability to work harmoniously with them explains why the Palestine issue within the Labour Government remained non-controversial. 133

132. Ibid.
133. Ibid.
The Colonial Office and the Foreign Office, the two offices of state mainly concerned with Palestine, often clashed over many issues, but when ministerial policy was agreed upon by Creech and Bevin as well as Attlee, then it was virtually invulnerable. The Bevin - Attlee - Creech combination helps to explain why the pro Zionist voices in the cabinet remained ineffective. The policy of the Labour Government in practice appeared to be in variance with the Labour Party’s publicly proclaimed sympathy with the Zionist cause.

Bevin confronted Churchill in Parliament, who was not only his most powerful and persistent adversary but also his principal critic on the tactics and timing of withdrawal from Palestine. Churchill was important in the background of the Labour Government’s policy toward’s Palestine because after World War I he himself, as Colonial Secretary had penned the official elaboration of the Balfour Declaration. The Declaration of 1922 established Transjordan as an Arab territory distinct from Palestine. Palestine itself was not to be a Jewish “national home” but there was to be a national home in Palestine. Jewish immigration would be allowed, in Churchill’s own phrase, up to the limit of “economic absorptive capacity”, which was to be judged by
the mandatory power. The declaration of 1922 served as basis of British policy for nearly two decades. When the White Paper of 1939 attempted to curtail and stabilize the Jewish population of Palestine at one-third of the Arab majority (with further immigration after five years dependent on Arab acquiescence), Churchill denounced it as a breach of faith with the Jews.¹³⁴

In August 1946, he castigated Labour Government’s handling of the Palestine problem: “It is our duty... to offer to lay down the Mandate live should... as soon as the war stopped, have made it clear to United that, unless they came in and bore their share, we should lay the whole care and burden at the foot of the United Nations Organisation”.¹³⁵

The Anglo American Cooperation and Committee of Inquiry:

Anglo American cooperation over Palestine proved to be perhaps the single most frustrating and elusive goal of the Labour government. A major disagreement developed in August 1945, when President Truman requested the admission of

¹³⁴. Ibid., p.5.

¹³⁵. Parliamentary debates, House of Commons, August 1, 1946, Col.1253.
100,000 Jewish refugees into Palestine. Bevin later remarked that "had it not been for a succession of unfortunate actions on the part of United States" following the demand of the 100,000, the question might have been settled. His point was that if the United States and Britain had acted together immediately and decisively at the end of the war, the Palestine drama might have had an entirely different denouement.136

When President Truman called for the admission of 100,000 Jewish refugees into Palestine in August, 1945, the population of the country itself, according to British estimates, was 550,000 Jews and 1,200,000 Arabs.137 The Foreign Office believed that a sudden influx of Jewish immigrants would destroy and last chance of reconciling the two communities. The Foreign Office stuck to the principle of 1939 White Paper and creation of a binational state. The Consensus in the Colonial Office was to go for partition recommended by Peel commission of 1937. The foreign office predomination because of Bevin.

The report of the Anglo American Committee of Inquiry and Truman's further demand for the 100,000 made things

137. Ibid., p.7.
worse. Walter Smart, the Oriental Secretary at the British Embassy in Cairo, reveals the Arab side of the dilemma:

I am struck by the superficiality and intellectual dishonesty of this report... the Committee demands the admission within less than a year of 100,000 immigrants (i.e. a large number than have even been brought in within such a short period at any time in the past) without making any mention of the question of Palestine's economic capacity to absorb them. Of must have been perfectly obvious to the members of the Committee, as it is to all of us, that their proposals must result in acute political and military conflict between the Arabs and the Jews in Palestine and the Arab countries round it.138

The policy of the Labour government on the Palestine Question was a painstaking attempt to keep in balance the vital Arab, American parts of the equation. It was the need for American as well as Arab support that explains the British retract to a position of evenhanded withdrawal.

Zionist terrorism offers a basic explanation of why the British were forced to retreat. On July 22, 1940, the Irgun Zvi Leumi blew up the British military headquarters at the

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King David Hotel in Jerusalem, with heavy loss of British, Arab, and Jewish life. The explosion polarized the Palestine conflict. The explosion at the King David Hotel occurred at the same time that officials in the British and American Governments were attempting to salvage the recommendations of an Anglo American Committee of Inquiry. They wanted to implement a scheme of provincial autonomy. It would have provided an ambergris compromise between the two extreme solutions of partition and a binational state. There would have been a large measure of Arab and Jewish autonomy, with certain powers reserved to the central administering authority. This scheme was not acceptable to both Arabs and Zionists.139

In this event President Truman became apprehensive about Palestine as a campaign issue in the 1946 congressional elections and feared that he would be accused of "ghettoizing" the Jews in Palestine. President Truman's on the eve of Yam Kippur was a turning point. On October 4, 1946, he expressed the hope for a compromise between the British and Zionist proposals. The Zionists, however, publicized the part of the statement in which the President

139. Ibid., pp.10-11.
appeared to support "the creation of a viable Jewish state". Attlee rebuked the President:

I have received with great regret your letter refusing even a few hour's grace to the Prime Minister of a country which has the actual responsibility for the government of Palestine... I am astonished that you did not wait to acquaint yourself with the reasons for the suspension of the conference with the Arabs.140

The conference mentioned in Atlee's letter to Truman was the London conference on the Middle East. The London conference met sporadically from September, 1946, to February, 1947. The Arabs stood by the letter and spirit of the assurances of 1939 and would yield to nothing less than Palestine as an Arab state. The Jews boycotted the proceedings because of the denial of the opposite promise of Jewish state.

In the last stages of the London Conference, Bevin continued to guide the discussions on the basis of the plan ---------------

for provincial autonomy. At the end, the Arabs refused to consider Jewish self-government in any form or further Jewish Immigration. The Jews regarded the boundaries of the “cantons” that the British were prepared to allocate to them as totally unacceptable and would not agree to any scheme not based on the premise of an eventual Jewish state.¹⁴¹

**Termination of Mandate:** In 1947, at the height of Zionist acts of terrorism the Mandatory Government made one last attempt to settle the Palestine problem by suggesting to both Arabs and Jews that British trusteeship over Palestine should continue for another five years with the declared object of preparing the country as a whole for independence.¹⁴²

The Arabs presented their own proposals for independence with guaranties for Jewish minority rights which were unacceptable to the British Government. The Jewish Agency on the other hand, rejected the Governments' proposals out-right and intensified its terrorist and sabotage activities.

¹⁴¹ W. Roger Louis, n.129, p.461.
¹⁴² Cmd. 7088 (Proposals for the future of Palestine).
On Feb., 1947, the British Foreign Secretary announced in the House of Commons that His Majesty's Government had found, "the Mandate has proved to be unworkable in practice, that the obligations undertaken to the two communities had been shown to be irreconcilable", and therefore announced its intention of giving it up.

Bevin, later on, came closely to frankly admitting defeat, at least in the sense of failure to achieve any of the basic British aims. The goal in Palestine, he said, "was to persuade Jews and Arabs to live together in one State as the Mandate charged us to do. However the facts point opposite to what he said.