UNEXPECTED STATE

British Politics and the Creation of Israel

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Mark Tessler, *editor*

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For Ursus

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Introduction

The Balfour Declaration is a document that, despite having been written in 1917, still stirs staunch pride or vehement disgust, depending on who you ask. It was a brief but momentous memo, ostensibly from (but not written by) British foreign secretary Arthur James Balfour. Although delivered to Baron Lionel Walter Rothschild and published in *The Times*, Balfour's note was, realistically, addressed to Jews around the world as it pledged Britain's support for a Jewish national home in Palestine. Since British forces invaded the Holy Land a month after the letter was issued and only vacated Palestine in 1948 as Israel formally declared its existence, Balfour's declaration has achieved a somewhat contradictory symbolic status—as a sign of Britain's laudable achievement in, and devastating culpability for, the subsequent triumph of Zionism.

Former British prime minister David Cameron described this historic document as "the moment when the State of Israel went from a dream to a plan," but it is generally considered throughout the Arab world to be Britain's "original sin."[1] Supporting one viewpoint over the other depends on personal political preferences, but neither perspective is rooted in fact. The idea that Balfour signed a letter commencing the intentional and purposeful march toward Israeli statehood—in a territory that, at the time, was part of an Islamic empire and contained relatively few Jews—has become alarmingly unquestionable. Challenging this dichotomous history of British sentiment/animosity is always a precarious endeavor, but that is precisely what this book intends to do. *Unexpected State* aims, for the first time, to explain the *how* and the *why* behind Britain's policies for Palestine. It argues that domestic politics in Westminster played a vital and inadvertent role in British patronage of and then leniency toward Zionism, allowing the British Empire to foster a Jewish national home and suppress Arab rebellion. Therefore, this book argues that the "muddling through" of everyday British politics was instrumental in conceiving and gestating a Jewish state.

By investigating how British governments endured moments of crisis with the representatives of Zionism, and how they dealt with indecision over the future of Palestine, it is possible to uncover a relatively clear pattern. The tumult of Westminster politics and Whitehall bureaucracy harnessed the idea of a Jewish presence in Palestine as a convenient political football—an issue to be analogized with and used pointedly to address other more pressing concerns, such as Bolshevism in the 1920s, Muslim riots in India in the early 1930s, and appeasement

shortly before the start of World War II. The result was a stumbling, ad hoc policy journey toward Israel's birth that never followed any centralized plan. Rather, for the British Empire of 1917, conditions culminating in Israeli independence were distinctly unlikely and unexpected.

Why such a situation occurred, however, is not exactly a straightforward inquiry, and the answer is relevant to a much wider discourse than merely the annals of obscure historical analysis. An ongoing search for peace in the Middle East cannot ignore how contemporary perceptions of the conflict are intimately bound to the parties' understanding of their shared history. There are, naturally, multiple versions of this history, but, although the importance of Britain's tenure in Palestine is hardly challenged, curiously few scholars have asked how British policy toward Palestine was made. This refers particularly to high policy decided by the cabinet in Westminster rather than the day-to-day activities of administering the territory, which was conducted chiefly through the bureaucracy of the Colonial Office.

What emerges within the relevant literature, instead, is a consistent recourse to stubborn, unsubstantiated myths about British intentions and motivations—misconceptions that, in turn, fuel other attitudes that are distinctly unhelpful, such as the idea of an all-powerful Zionist lobby or the championing of Palestinian victimhood. This is explained extensively in chapter 1, but the "myths" on trial here are broadly those that highlight British politicians' personal feelings toward Jews or Arabs, as though these prejudices *must* have had a substantial impact on Britain's imperial planning. The main problem with this thinking is that it is too easy to describe any number of contextual factors that may have influenced the direction of British policy. However, the evidence that bias drove or determined Britain's relationship with Zionism and Palestine is frequently lacking. As the decision makers themselves are long dead and understandably unavailable for cross-examination, how then is it possible to determine, with any accuracy, what thought processes occupied their minds during the interwar period?

Bearing in mind this question, it is important to stress that some valid boundaries must be placed on the themes and issues explored in this type of investigation. Therefore, this book uses an innovative politics-first approach to illustrate four critical junctures of Britain's policy making between the beginning of its occupation of Palestine in December 1917 and its withdrawal in May 1948. The following chapters argue that, contrary to the established literature on Mandate Palestine, British high policy reflected a stark lack of viable alternatives that left little room for consideration of personal biases, allegiances, or sentimental attachments to either Zionism or Arab nationalism during the tense moments when choices had to be made. This approach reveals how decisions about the future of Palestine were frequently more concerned with fighting narrow domestic

or broader international political battles than preventing or dealing with a burgeoning conflict in a tiny strip of land on the Mediterranean.

As many previous books have focused chiefly on day-to-day interactions in Palestine, they have relied heavily on the original documentation of the Palestine administration and the high commissioner as well as his dealings with the Colonial Office in London and the diaries and memoirs of prominent Zionist leaders such as Chaim Weizmann and David Ben-Gurion. This has meant that scholarly discussions about British policy decisions have been conducted almost exclusively through the prism of external parties' opinions about what was going on in London at the time. As this book concentrates specifically on British policy decisions, the focus has been placed on British archives as well as relevant collections held in the United States that are useful for examining the postwar Mandate period.

The Politics-First Approach

British policies generated many of the "demographic, economic, military, and organizational" conditions that were essential for Israel to achieve its statehood,[2] so a thorough investigation into the reasoning and motivations that informed British policy making helps clarify a major moment in world history. Toward this end, this book deals primarily with the dynamics of choice in British policy making. It asks, given the range of available options, *how* and *why* did British governments make their final decisions? What factors *did* and *did not* influence those choices? Answering these questions is not simply a matter of combing the archives. Indeed, a great deal of the scholarship related to British Palestine has struggled in this regard because it ignores principles of political psychology.[3] Without an appreciation for how the political brain operates, it is very difficult to discern causes from contexts.

Therefore, this book is based on a fundamental premise derived from political psychology—that the primary and immediate consideration of decision makers in government is their own political survival, making every other concern secondary.[4] Therefore, policy makers faced with a crisis and a range of potential options will automatically discard any courses of action that threaten their political careers, deciding what to do based only on the possibilities that are leftover.[5] Crucially, it does not matter how beneficial any of the discarded alternatives would have been for the economy, or the military, or the country as a whole—that benefit could not compensate for the political risk felt by politicians.[6] This amounts to a "politics-first" way of understanding how leaders make choices, and it helps provide a much better understanding of policies that seem to have been irrational or counterproductive.[7]

In applying this lens to Britain's Palestine policy at four key junctures during the Palestine Mandate, it is possible to demonstrate why the cabinet decided

to pursue action that worsened the burgeoning conflict between Palestine's two communities, sometimes in a manner that seemed entirely contrary to British interests, and how these policy decisions were often concluded without direct reference to the desires of either Zionists or Palestinian Arabs. This analysis provides an invaluable contribution, revealing how the development of policy in Palestine was based primarily on the need to satisfy British domestic political concerns. This was not because Palestine was unimportant but, rather, because Palestine policy frequently overlapped with multiple issues more crucial to the political survival of individual governments.

Therefore, this book highlights precisely how, while actual decisions varied during the British Mandate, Palestine policy making was driven by mechanisms that significantly narrowed the scope of options available to politicians as they tried to deal with successive crises. This means that although colorful, interesting, and engaging, the personal quirks, biases, and beliefs of decision makers had little demonstrable impact. There simply was no room, no space, for these feelings, because successive governments during this period faced a series of overly precarious political circumstances in general. This created a dynamic of "muddling through" that is detailed and evidenced in later chapters, demonstrating how the political climate prevented any kind of British grand strategy for the future birth of a Jewish state.

A Note on the Research

An execution of this politics-first approach is achieved by assessing a series of key events using archival documents, attempting to trace how decisions developed. This book is concerned with four specific junctures: (1) the decision to reaffirm the Jewish national home in the Churchill White Paper of 1922; (2) the reversal of the Passfield White Paper in 1931; (3) the decision to issue the MacDonald White Paper in 1939; and (4) the decision to withdraw from Palestine made in 1947. These particular moments have not been selected from a wider pool of options; they represent four distinct periods of policy making during British rule over Palestine. Each period is defined by a problem in Palestine—a violent riot or protest—that was serious enough to demand a policy decision from the British cabinet in Westminster rather than the Palestine administration in Jerusalem or simply the Colonial Office. The disturbances always preceded two commissions of inquiry followed by a statement of policy, which remained in place until the next violent outbreak necessitated another reassessment. These four predicaments represent the only instances when the central British government became directly involved in shaping Palestine's burgeoning conflict, and these decisions had the long-term consequences that make their study vital to understanding formative stages in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This book does not, however, provide a separate analysis of the decision-making behind the original Balfour Declaration in 1917 (see chap. 1). This is because the subject has already been covered in great depth and also because an extremely vague wartime promise of dubious sincerity, which was released initially as a private letter rather than as a white paper, does not necessarily constitute imperial policy. Rather, the affirmation of the Balfour Declaration is the real starting point for British policy making toward Palestine and the declaration itself is a natural component of analyzing the Churchill White Paper of 1922.

These insights are based on extensive primary research. As well as the substantial collections held at the National Archives in Kew (referred to in notes as TNA), others used are the Cadbury Archives in Birmingham, the Parliamentary Archives in Westminster, the London School of Economics Archives, the Cambridge Archive Centre, the University of Durham special collections, the Truman Presidential Library in Missouri, the United Nations Archives in New York, and the US National Archives in Maryland. This material includes a variety of source types, including government documents, reports, and memoranda as well as personal diaries, memoirs, correspondence, speeches, press conferences, and debates. As the research is focused specifically on decision makers in Westminster rather than Jerusalem, Israeli archives have been deliberately avoided. This is because books that offer commentary on the psychology of British actions in Mandate Palestine have never made this subject their chief concern, and so the distanced interpretations of prominent Zionists, whose material is held in those archives, have already informed existing but flawed understandings of British intentions and motivations (see chap. 1).

Structure of the Book

After introducing the aims and scope of this book, chapter 1 explains how histories of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are never neutral or benign, highlighting how important it is to correct inaccuracies in our preconceptions about the Mandate period.

Then, in chapter 2, this book's initial historical analysis concerns the Churchill White Paper of 1922 and why the British government decided to affirm the policy of a Jewish national home that was first articulated in the Balfour Declaration in 1917. This was despite violent Arab protests and Palestine's questionable military or strategic value. Two commissions of inquiry concluded that the government's policy, a draft Mandate based on the Balfour Declaration, was the source of Palestine's unrest. Why then, was the policy reaffirmed? This time period represented a Balfour Zeitgeist, in which the policy's confirmation in 1922 meant it remained unquestioned until a large-scale riot erupted in Palestine in 1929.

The second investigation deals with policy formulated following this later outbreak of violence. Chapter 3 details the government's attempts to acknowledge and manage the underlying problems between Palestine's Arab majority and Zionist minority. After another two commissions of inquiry, the government released a white paper named for the colonial secretary Lord Passfield, which attempted to limit Jewish immigration and land purchase in Palestine. This white paper constituted an understandable response to the conclusions offered by two independent investigations, but it was reversed only three months later. Why did this U-turn occur? The reversal meant that significant tensions in Palestine continued to be ignored, and from the early 1930s built to an Arab Revolt in Palestine, from 1936 to 1939.

Chapter 4 covers the next part of this study, which is centered on the British reaction to this larger rebellion. Again, two commissions of inquiry advised the government that basic Mandatory policy positions were fomenting Palestine's unrest. The first commission recommended partition, and the second advised against that plan. In 1939, the government issued the MacDonald White Paper, which promised Palestine its independence within ten years and set a cap on Jewish immigration for five years, after which any further immigration required Arab approval. This appeared to be a radical departure from the Balfour Zeitgeist, and from the pressures that caused a reversal of the Passfield White Paper, but why did it happen? The MacDonald White Paper stood as official British policy throughout World War II and into the postwar period, which witnessed an intense Jewish insurgency and burgeoning civil war in Palestine.

The fourth and final evaluation then, discussed in chapter 5, deals with British withdrawal from Palestine. After the war, there were two final commissions of inquiry: one conducted in concert with the United States and another by a UN Special Committee. The first recommended a binational state, whereas a majority opinion of the UN commission advocated partition. The British government, however, decided on neither of these courses and instead initiated a withdrawal plan in late 1947. After more than thirty years committed to the territory out of political and perceived strategic necessity, why did the British government make this final decision?

Together, these sections represent the building blocks of a more comprehensive understanding of British policy making toward Palestine during the Mandate and how it revolved around periods of violence. By teasing out precisely which issues and concerns drove British leaders during and after Palestine's riots and rebellions, it is possible to identify patterns of behavior. While some established literature has offered incomplete explanations of British behavior during this time, none have approached the subject in a systematic fashion or offered conclusions within a political psychology framework designed specifically for this task. This is exactly what this book is intended to address, as it seeks to

uncover the root causes of British policy toward Palestine, from 1917 to 1948, and to demonstrate how British politicians' self-serving mind-sets and incoherent actions created the necessary conditions for an otherwise unexpected state.

Notes

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1 A Usable Past

History Is Not Neutral

All histories of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are contentious, not just because they cover sensitive issues but because they have become weaponized in the service of contemporary political aims. These historical narratives are not "true" in the neutral sense but, instead, provide a version of the past that helps define a community and hold it together. Historians are intrinsically aware that these stories are biased, selective, and tailored to the community's needs, creating "a usable past."[1] Unfortunately, this perpetual reinforcement of different versions of the same history tends to promote conflict. The dueling stories perpetuate a sense of danger, victimhood, and blame while justifying a continuation of hostilities and rationalizing the use of illegal or unethical tactics.[2] An awareness of this unhelpful cycle burdens historians with a moral obligation to dissect those versions of the past that promote conflict and preclude compromise.[3]

Although neither Israeli nor Palestinian public opinion is monolithic, it is accurate to describe a dominant narrative valuable to each nation. Consequently, it is possible to grasp how a lack of scholarship investigating British intents and motives during the Mandate period has helped fuel myths of Israeli (or, in this instance, pre-state Zionist) power versus Palestinian Arab helplessness—ideas that reinforce the larger, conflict-promoting narratives.

Since the state's creation in 1948, Israel's traditional historical narrative has been constructed as a celebration of triumph against overwhelming odds. The events preceding Israel's independence were, naturally, interpreted in light of this heroic image. Stories of Britain's Mandate in Palestine were dominated by somewhat contradictory claims of Zionist influence in the halls of Westminster and accusations of British negligence and betrayal. The construction of a colossal enemy was also necessary to paint the Israel Defense Forces as a moral military. Although Zionist militias fought British and then Arab troops after World War II, their status as the forerunner to Israel's Defense Forces was based on the idea of reluctance, the result of internal and external aggression forcing war upon the proto-Israeli community.

Israel's traditional narrative, for example, blames Arab leaders for the Palestinian refugee crisis, for commanding villagers to flee and then refusing to accept partition or coexistence. This moment of "birth" left Israel surrounded by

purported enemies and subject to Palestinian terrorism, despite an alleged willingness to pursue peace if only their adversaries would do the same. This romantic image, of David facing Goliath, has also been adopted by Israel's supporters around the globe. In the United States, for example, features of the unrevised, unfiltered Zionist histories are repeated through news broadcasting, school textbooks, church teachings, and general discourse.[4] Although it seems absurd in many respects, the old myth that Palestine was "a land without a people for a people without a land" still persists under these conditions.[5]

Understandably, early histories of the Mandate followed a similar ethos. These books were chiefly about the struggles and successes of Zionist, eastern European elites. Interestingly, these histories seem to have gone hand in hand with the years of Labor Party dominance in Israel—celebrating the values of socialism and democracy. Examples include Koestler's *Promise and Fulfilment* and Kimche's *Both Sides of the Hill*.[6] Ultimately, these works portrayed Zionism as a national liberation ideology. Within this context, the complexities of British politics and individual politicians' roles, motives, and frustrations when dealing with the question of Palestine were largely immaterial. History had simply become "proof of the legitimacy, morality, and exclusivity of the Jewish people's right to the country, to the entire country."[7] Although the Israeli narrative has subsequently been punctured by a revisionist movement that gained momentum in the 1980s, Britain's role in the history has remained relatively constant.

Mostly looking inward, scholars such as Benny Morris, Ilan Pappe, Tom Segev, and Avi Shlaim built on the earlier work of Simha Flapan and other critical writers to interrupt the accepted doctrine. Ostensibly, they focused on atrocities, falsehoods, general aggression, Israel's culpability for the Palestinian refugee crisis, and Israeli belligerence that sabotaged tentative opportunities for peace. Ultimately, however, Israel's "new" history did not shed its Zionist roots and represented an additional rather than a replacement paradigm, and the scholarship attracted a great deal of domestic criticism. Shabtai Teveth and Efraim Karsh were particularly vitriolic, with Karsh accusing the revisionists of falsifying evidence. As the dominant Israeli narrative had operated "invisibly and involuntarily," research that challenged this widely accepted version of events felt subversive and aggressive.[8]

This is why it is crucial to note that the revisionist process did not occur in a disinterested vacuum. Collective memory had helped form an Israeli identity in the initial years of state formation, but the traditional narrative began to break down as the state became more secure. A groundbreaking triumph for the right-wing Likud Party in Israel's 1977 elections caused further disintegration. This was because an inflammatory rivalry between electoral campaigns in the next election, in 1981, included intense "history wars." A heated debate ensued

about the nature of Likud leader Menachem Begin's role in resisting British imperialism versus the alleged corruption among Labor Party members who had enjoyed decades of uninterrupted power.[9] By contesting Israeli history between them, the two major political blocks exposed the traditional narrative's arbitrary character and provided the catalyst for a new period of critical social thinking.[10] Dealing with the controversies of 1948 seemed pertinent under these political conditions, but a revised history of British policy during the Mandate has never felt urgent or necessary, in the same way, for Israeli politics. Interestingly, the same is true for Palestinian or Arab narratives, leading to curious agreement on points of history involving Britain that have somewhat escaped scholarly attention.

In contrast to the dominant Israeli history, Arab and Palestinian perspectives have never presented a singular narrative. Like the Israeli version, they veer between celebrating perceived victories and lamenting the weaknesses imposed by an outside power. Although they tend to agree on basic principles, a great deal of the narrative has always been internally disputed.[11] Wider Arab and Palestinian narratives are joined in blaming Great Britain and the United States for establishing a Jewish state in the predominantly Arab Middle East and united in condemning the expulsion of Palestinian Arabs to create a Jewish state. All versions of the Arab narrative reject Israel's assertion that Palestinian villagers took voluntary flight in 1948, but details of the history change from state to state, between classes (populist vs. elite), and depending on how critical they are of civilian as opposed to military leaders, among many other details.[12] Wider Arab historiography, for example, has celebrated Egyptian, Syrian, and Jordanian fighters in the war of 1948 but simultaneously portrays the Palestinians as weak and ineffectual.[13]

In the specifically Palestinian context, collective memory celebrates figures such as Izz ad-Din al-Qassam, a Syrian-born Islamic preacher and fighter who was killed in a firefight with British Mandate police in 1935. Al-Qassam's death is remembered as a key moment that sparked the general strike and uprising beginning in 1936; his memory was used during the First Intifada, which began in 1987, to rally Palestinians as "people of martyrs, grandsons of al-Qassam," and, of course, al-Qassam also lends his name to the military brigades of Hamas today.[14] However, the memory of al-Qassam and the celebration of many subsequent Palestinian martyrs exist in parallel with a more dominant narrative of collective helplessness. This is embodied in the memory of Deir Yassin. Although a massacre took place at this village, there was also a pitched battle in which Palestinian fighters resisted a stronger Israeli force for eight hours, a factor conveniently thrown aside in favor of the powerlessness motif.[15] As Saleh Abdel Jawad notes, "[. . .] Palestine was seen as a weak, unprepared society overwhelmed by a stronger and more organized force [. . .]" and even Palestinians tend to favor

explanations of the Nakba that blame external factors, like British deceit and Arab disunity.[16]

A good example of this enduring attachment to the idea of Palestinian helplessness is Al Jazeera's 2008 documentary *Al-Nakba* in which an entire hour-long episode is devoted to the Palestinian Arab uprising of 1936–1939, in which not a single victory—military or otherwise—is mentioned. As "[r]esistance is fundamental to the new Palestinian narrative," it seems incongruous that Palestinian resistance to the British in the 1930s is still portrayed solely in terms of victimization.[17] Even in a British-made fictional television show such as *The Promise*, Palestinian Arabs lack agency and are helpless in the face of both British troops and Zionist paramilitary fighters. Palestinian helplessness, then, is a paradigm that is also paradoxically repeated and reconstructed by outside observers wishing to support the community and further its interests, even when that narrative is unnecessarily self-defeatist.

There are, of course, exceptions to the widespread characterization of Palestinians as helpless and/or victimized. Rashid Khalidi's work provides a pertinent example of "new" Palestinian history. He details the shortcomings of Palestinian Arab leadership during the Mandatory period, blaming catastrophes in both the 1930s and the 1940s on its failure "to agree on appropriate strategies, to mobilize and organize the populace effectively, to create an accepted and recognized representative national quasi-state forum [. . .], and to break decisively with the structures of colonial control."[18]

Likewise, overall approaches to studying the Mandate have shifted to recognize how the Arab community in Palestine was sidelined in overly Zionist-oriented histories of the era. The "new" historians ostensibly challenged the traditional Israeli narrative, but their intellectual freedom to do so was largely hampered by a preexisting Zionist-centric attitude that left the Palestinians as observers rather than participants in their own history.[19] Works that redress this imbalance include Hadawi's *Palestine: Loss of a Heritage*, his *Bitter Harvest*, and Walid Khalidi's *From Haven to Conquest*.[20] As these newer histories were based largely on oral testimonies—since many archives remain closed in Israel—"it was the voices of the dispossessed who were now to be heard [. . .]."[21]

In terms of the Mandate, these "new narratives asserted a benign rather than conspiratorially hostile Britain."[22] However, this characterization appears to have been chiefly a reaction against the Israeli narrative of Britain's compliance and then betrayal. Recasting the empire from a lead role to a background player has not altered the victimization narrative. Therefore, although scholars such as Nicholas Roberts and Zeina Ghandour[23] have leveled criticism at Mandate history texts for ignoring or misrepresenting the less powerful side, this argument appears to be made from inside the narrative of Palestinian passivity and helplessness, not in an attempt to disrupt it. The result is a set of historical

interpretations that disagree on a great number of points related to the other's true intentions and actions but largely agree on the role Britain played in their shared experiences—creating a powerful Israel and a helpless Palestinian community. These ideas have endured without much questioning over whether that characterization of Britain is accurate.

Further complicating these histories, external parties often adopt the most rigid version of each community's rendition of events. This is often the case with otherwise unconnected observers who also feel a stake in the conflict—whether for religious or political reasons—and then "pick a side" and repeat the traditional, dominant narrative with greater fervor than many Israelis or Palestinians. This has left a great deal of Britain's role during the Mandate period curiously pristine in comparison to the debates about 1948 and after. This bias regarding the Mandate was noted in the 1990s, when Kenneth Stein "described a field in which 'advocacy of a political viewpoint may supersede nuances of terminology, the causation of events, or the mechanisms of change in the conflict's evolution.'"[24] Likewise, Zachary Lockman saw academics working "within a 'Zionist or Arab/Palestinian nationalist historical narrative'" that limited their analyses.[25] The Mandate is, in effect, a forgotten ancestor to contemporary narratives that are constantly reinforced to validate nationhood for both Israelis and Palestinians, albeit in different ways. Why and how British policy helped create this situation is a vital component of interrupting the narrative cycle.

Neglected Origins

Although the effects of British decision-making have been widely researched, reasons behind Britain's Palestine policy have been left largely unexplored. How did the British government make decisions regarding Palestine? What were the motives, intentions, and goals behind them? Answering these questions is necessary because, notwithstanding some notable exceptions, the vast majority of studies of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict settle for only a cursory overview of this period.[26] Works on the Mandate tend to use British policy decisions as plot devices, focusing only on each new white paper's effect on relations between Jews and Arabs in Palestine. British decision-making toward Palestine has provided the focus of very few scholarly investigations to date.

Although the work of historians such as William Roger Louis and Michael J. Cohen, for example, have explored in great detail the domestic and international political constraints on Palestine policy, their work has focused exclusively on the later Mandate and withdrawal.[27] This means that no study has been dedicated to British policy making during the entire Mandate and certainly none that tries to bring in political psychology. In addition, this book intends to address one prevalent trend within the literature.

As previous histories have centered on the role of the Colonial Office and the Palestine high commissioner (focused as they have been on day-to-day administration of the Mandate within Palestine), they have relied on certain assumptions, some stubborn myths, and frequent oversimplification to explain dynamics within the real corridors of British power. There has been an almost automatic recourse to highlighting British politicians' personal feelings toward Zionism or Arab nationalism. Epitomizing this is a comment offered by Shlomo Ben-Ami: "Frequently driven by pro-Zionist sentiments, and notwithstanding the apprehension of many in the mandatory administration at the ruthless drive of the Zionists, an apprehension sometimes fed by a strong anti-Semitic bias as much as it was driven by a genuine sympathy for the dispossessed Arab fellahin, or by a romantic, Lawrence of Arabia brand of admiration for the Arab 'wild man,' the policy makers in London and the high commissioners on the ground were essentially the protectors of the Zionist enterprise."[28]

Although these attitudes may have been prevalent, they did not necessarily direct policy in Westminster, and connecting the two uncritically is partly the result of source choice. Investigating principally the Zionist Archives in Jerusalem and the papers of officials serving in Palestine has created a history of British intents and purposes based on the supposition of parties far from the action, whose uninformed fears and frustrations naturally bled into their interpretations of cabinet policy making. This has resulted in the survival of largely unfounded "explanations"—such as simple ideas of Zionist and Arab pressure on the British government—in what are otherwise academically rigorous studies. Examining the British Mandate from only Jerusalem's perspective provides an incomplete version of events that does not help clarify the inner workings of Westminster during the Mandate years.

Other, more specific myths have also been allowed to endure for similar reasons. By providing a survey analysis of British Palestine policy through a review of the current literature, it is possible to discern a dominant Mandate narrative and highlight its neglected dimensions that are addressed in later chapters. This chapter charts some of the most common themes found in the established scholarship: Zionism and Arab nationalism in the British imagination; riots and rebellion in the interwar period; lobbying and influence; and the Mandate and the international community.

Zionism and Arab Nationalism in the British Imagination

A major recurring theme in British Mandate historiography is the importance placed on ideas of Zionism and Arab nationalism in the British imagination, an emphasis with its roots in studies of Britain's three infamous wartime promises. Between 1915 and 1917, the British government entered into three separate pledges

that involved the future of Palestine: the Hussein-McMahon correspondence, the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and the Balfour Declaration. As this book argues that later British decisions were not driven by ideology, it is necessary to admit that these foundation pledges did involve a degree of sentiment combined with practical concerns. However, the importance of ideology has been vastly overstated; these initial promises provide an important foundation for understanding the Mandate as a whole, but they are not sufficient devices for understanding British behavior in the thirty years that followed. As a great deal of studies have focused on this topic and they often contradict each other, the following overview is intended to demonstrate a combination of the factors that drove British policy making under the curious and distinct political atmosphere created by a world war.

First, the Hussein-McMahon correspondence produced Britain's initial Palestine pledge, to Hashemite ruler Sharif Hussein of Mecca and his sons Ali, Abdullah, Faisal, and Zeid. Despite Hussein's exalted position within the Ottoman Empire as guardian of the holy cities, he suffered a tense relationship with Constantinople.[29] Consequently, Hussein's son Abdullah (future king of Jordan) penned an official approach to the British oriental secretary in Cairo, Sir Ronald Storrs, in July 1915.[30] Abdullah's letter ostensibly opened formal negotiations between "the Arabs," represented by Sharif Hussein, and Great Britain, represented not by Storrs but by his superior, the district commissioner to Cairo Sir Henry McMahon. What followed was a series of dispatches between July 1915 and March 1916—the Hussein-McMahon correspondence. These communiqués outlined a deal in which the sharif agreed to lead a revolt against Ottoman forces in the Middle East, and, in return, Britain would aid the creation of an independent Arab state.[31] While Hussein did indeed lead the Great Arab Revolt in June 1916, it was the letters of negotiation rather than his military action that proved politically and historically significant. The correspondence became highly controversial due to a sustained debate over what, exactly, Britain had pledged to the Arabs, whether it included Palestine, and how this affected the legitimacy of later promises to the French and, ultimately, to the Zionists.

The principal issue was one of wording. Abdullah's opening letter proposed an Arab state encompassing most of the Middle East.[32] In response, McMahon specifically excluded "portions of Syria lying to the west of the districts of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo," claiming this was necessary because "the interests of our ally, France, are involved in them both."[33] These exclusions were based on vague instructions from Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey, but a problem later arose from McMahon's use of the word *district*, or *vilayet* in the Arabic version sent to Hussein. Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo were cities, and so the concept of their districts was open to interpretation.[34] As Palestine had existed without boundaries for nearly five hundred years under Ottoman

control, it was difficult to ascertain whether, according to McMahon's exclusions, Palestine was inside or outside the area promised to an Arab state.[35] This first promise has been made famous in the West largely by David Lean's 1962 film, *Lawrence of Arabia*. In the story, British generals and politicians are presented as a combination of enthusiastic Orientalists and evil imperialists, which is echoed in Ben-Ami's comment above. A great deal of research has been conducted into British intentions in this case, but opinion is divided.[36] The same is true regarding interpretations of the second promise, made to France.

The Sykes-Picot Agreement was the result of negotiations between the attaché to the imperial war cabinet, Sir Mark Sykes, and French diplomat François Georges-Picot conducted during the latter stages of McMahon's correspondence with Hussein. These Anglo-Franco talks produced an explicit division of the Middle East into British and French spheres of influence, resulting in a debate questioning whether the Sykes-Picot Agreement contradicted promises made to Hussein. The problems associated with McMahon's wording have been discussed already, so the question of imperial duplicity hinges on why Britain entered into a second pledge. The agreement with France allowed Britain the political freedom to pursue an offensive through Ottoman territory without fearing that its principal ally would become hostile, either during or after the war. French ambassador Paul Cambon, for example, had complained during the initial Hussein-McMahon correspondence that there was "too much talk in Cairo" and that this was discourteous to France, which "regarded Syria as a dependency."[37]

War Secretary Lord Horatio Herbert Kitchener also recognized the potential diplomatic storm arising from McMahon's correspondence with Hussein, posing the question to Sykes a month later: "May you not be straining your relations with France very gravely if you assume you have come to an agreement with them and take action in Syria?"[38] The resulting negotiations were an exercise in preventive diplomacy. Rather than a rejection of the previous promise, this new agreement facilitated the Hussein-McMahon agreement because "without the British offensive there could have been no Arab revolt; and without the Sykes-Picot Agreement there would have been no British offensive."[39] The motive was to prevent a misunderstanding in which French politicians believed they were being double-crossed. Then, as Sir Mark Sykes calmly noted, "All we have to do is not to mix ourselves up with religious squabbles."[40]

Although the later establishment of a British Mandate in Palestine often leads commentators to assume that Sykes and Picot allotted the entire area to Britain, their agreement actually shared Ottoman Palestine between several authorities. A brown area on the map prepared during the negotiations indicated that most of Palestine west of the Jordan River would be under international administration, and this was dependent upon consultation with Britain and France's mutual ally Russia, as well as with the sharif. Within the blue area allotted to France, Britain

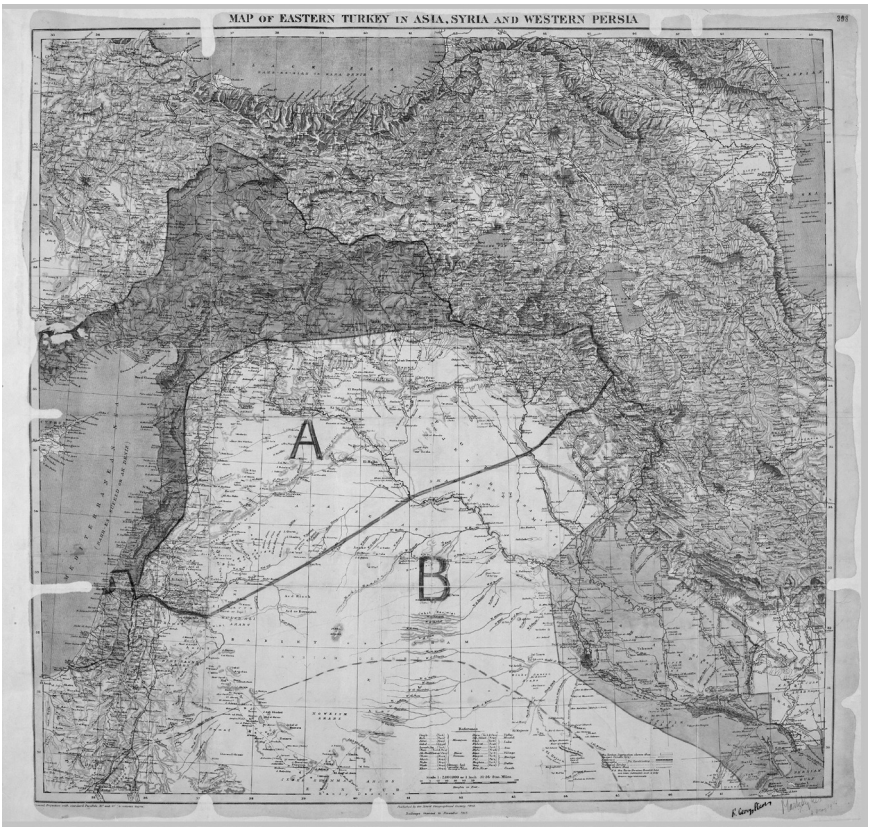

Fig. 1.1. Original map of the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916. Area A was intended to be France's sphere of influence, and Area B was allocated to Britain to form the basis of an Arab state. © The National Archives.

reserved the ports of Haifa and Acre with the right to build a railway linking them to Baghdad, in its own red area. The northern tip of Palestine above Lake Tiberius was to be part of France's annexed Syrian territory, whereas Palestine's regions west of the Jordan River and south of Gaza were part of the Arab state under British protection, leaving the now-Israeli city of Beersheba, for example, as unequivocally Arab owned.[41] (See fig. 1.1.) The spirit if not the letter of this Sykes-Picot Agreement did come to fruition during postwar talks, but again this was partly due to Britain's third promise, made to the Zionist movement.

On 2 November 1917, British foreign secretary Arthur James Balfour lent his signature to a short letter addressed to Zionism's high-profile patron, Baron Lionel Walter Rothschild. In fewer than 150 words, the message conveyed, for

the first time in Jewish history, the support of a great power to the cause of a Jewish homeland in Palestine: "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."[42] The Balfour Declaration was a key juncture in the history of Britain's involvement with Palestine; it laid the foundations—however unsteady they proved to be—for the British Mandate and a pro-Jewish Palestine policy that would continue until the brink of World War II. These initial British interests in Palestine evolved from two considerations: securing military lines of communication, and—after the Sykes-Picot Agreement—preventing a French Palestine.

British politicians sought the means during wartime to limit long-term German threats to the empire.[43] This was because "the acquisition by Germany—through her control of Turkey—of political and military control in Palestine and Mesopotamia would imperil the communication [. . .] through the Suez Canal, and would directly threaten the security of Egypt and India."[44] Although the Sykes-Picot Agreement had concluded with an international Holy Land, neither party was satisfied. If the War Office wanted to secure communication between Great Britain and the East, they would first need to block residual but insistent French claims to Palestine (which were bolstered by France's history of protecting Catholicism in the region).[45] In bullish style, Prime Minister David Lloyd George intended to use British forces advancing on Gaza to present the French with a fait accompli—British occupation of Palestine would constitute a strong claim to ownership.[46] They did not, therefore, need Zionism in the traditional military sense. This forceful strategy, however, risked a direct political confrontation with a much-needed ally. To avoid this eventuality, the ubiquitous Sir Mark Sykes pursued Zionism—a "just cause" with interests in Palestine—to provide the legitimacy for what were fundamentally strategic claims.[47] As a result, Sykes began to introduce Zionist interests in his negotiations with Picot.[48]

It was not until the first British invasion of Palestine was in motion, however, that Sykes contacted the two men who would figure most prominently in British-Zionist diplomacy. In January 1917, he met with the secretary general of the World Zionist Organization, Nahum Sokolow, and president of the British Zionist Organization, Chaim Weizmann, and the two leaders made it clear to Sykes that they favored British rule in Palestine. The following month Sykes introduced Sokolow to Picot, and the amicable meeting resulted in the opening of a Zionist mission in Paris. Thus, by the spring of 1917, the Zionist agenda was reassuringly recognized by the Triple Entente. This, combined with an underlying

anti-Semitic belief in the power and pro-German tendencies of world Jewry, led to the final British agreement to the Balfour Declaration.[49]

When the war cabinet approved the letter—drafted in negotiations between the Foreign Office, Sykes, and several Zionists—on 31 October 1917, the action passed because they believed "the vast majority of Jews in Russia and America, as, indeed, as over the world, now appeared to be favorable to Zionism. If we could make a declaration favourable to such an ideal, we should be able to carry on extremely useful propaganda both in Russia and America."[50] This conviction provided the final motivation—targeting American and Bolshevik Jews for propaganda—in approving the Balfour Declaration. It was merely the final step on a longer journey through military communication requirements and the need to keep France out of Palestine.

If, however, the Hussein-McMahon correspondence is seen as a promise motivated by Orientalist fascination with the bedouins, or if the Balfour Declaration is viewed as a morally intentioned return of the Jews to their homeland that was brought about by the lobbying skill of Weizmann and Sokolow, then the result is an impression of British decision-making based on sentiment and ideology. This implies that politicians were free to make decisions regarding the future of Palestine unhindered by political constraints. Ben-Ami's quote exemplifies this misunderstanding, but it pervades the literature on Mandate Palestine in more subtle and nuanced ways that result in misleading views of British policy. This is discussed in greater detail below and forms the basis for the historical intervention contributed by this book.

Riots and Rebellion in the Interwar Period

During the interwar period, there were three main outbreaks of violence that each resulted in a statement or change of British policy toward Palestine. Mandate histories tend to use this convenient chronology as a plot device to move the reader through a discussion of Jews' and Arabs' relations during the time period. As British motives during these instances are not the primary focus of other studies, cabinet policy making in Westminster is largely assumed to follow the same wartime influences that led to the Balfour Declaration, and, crucially, no deeper investigation is attempted.

The first violent outbreak was characterized by the Nebi Musa riots of April 1920 and the Jaffa riots of May 1921. The Nebi Musa procession is traditionally a celebration of Moses and also a rally against the Crusades, and this Muslim holiday attracted an influx of revelers to Jerusalem's Old City every year. In 1920, the traditional procession clashed with members of a Zionist group called Beitar, which had decided to stage its own demonstration, and the situation escalated

into a riot.[51] Nine deaths, hundreds of injuries, and the sheer scale of destruction demanded a commission of inquiry. It was led by Major General P. C. Palin.

This was the first British attempt to redress Jewish-Arab tensions in Palestine, but its findings were highly critical of Zionists, positing that they, "by their impatience, indiscretion and attempts to force the hands of the Administration, are largely responsible for the present crisis."[52] The Palin Commission, however, was never published, and, just as Palestine's military occupation transformed into a civilian administration, another riot began on 1 May 1921. These disturbances continued for two more days in Jaffa and spread to the surrounding region leading to attacks on Jewish agricultural settlements.[53] Again, the violence necessitated an official inquiry—the Haycraft Commission—which repeated many of Palin's concerns and recommended a clarification in policy to prevent further violence. The result in Westminster was the Churchill White Paper, published in June 1922. On 24 July 1922, the League of Nations then officially awarded Britain's Mandate to govern Palestine.[54] The British government, therefore, possessed ample evidence that the policy of supporting a Jewish national home in Palestine was creating violent tension but chose nevertheless to pursue it.

Although the allotment of blame for these early outbreaks of violence varies between scholarly interpretations—Tom Segev for example, chooses to highlight incidents of horrific violence perpetrated against Jerusalem's Jewish families,[55] whereas Haim Gerber focuses on the clash between Muslims and Zionist political demonstrators[56]—there has been no investigation of why Britain responded with the Churchill White Paper in 1922. The traditional Mandate narrative always includes some discussion of this white paper, but scholars' differing opinions about its contents (discussed more below) have informed their analyses of British deliberations without making this the focus of their research. In actuality, the exact sequence of events that led up to the Churchill White Paper form an important foundation in understanding how the British government developed policy during the rest of the Mandate.

For High Commissioner Sir Herbert Samuel, the problems created by the Mandate were too great and he left Palestine bitter and disillusioned in 1925. His successor, Sir Herbert Plumer, oversaw a period of relative calm in Palestine—possibly because a recession in Poland meant Jewish immigration declined during his tenure.[57] In fact, this calm remains one of the enigmas of British rule since tensions failed to either dissipate or erupt. Believing Palestine's tranquility was permanent, Plumer dismantled several armed units.[58] Leaving with a successful record in 1928, Plumer informed his replacement, Sir John Chancellor, that "the main security problems deserving attention were in Transjordan, not in Palestine."[59] A wave of unprecedented violence swept the country only a few months later.

The disturbances of 1929 were sparked by a long series of events connected with the Western or "Wailing" Wall in Jerusalem—beginning on the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur in 1928 and culminating in a Zionist demonstration on 15 August 1929 and a Muslim protest the following day.[60] Rumors that Jews were killing Muslims spread to other cities and some whole Jewish families were killed in their homes. The reaction from Westminster constituted another two commissions of inquiry. Although these investigations did not blame the Jewish community for all Arab woes in Palestine, they did admit that immigration into a flooded labor market was impractical (one problem being that the end of Ottoman conscription had left many more able-bodied young men in the area than in previous generations). Since the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate instructed that Jewish immigration should not prejudice the position of any other group in Palestine, and both commissions demonstrated the potential harm created by adding to the labor market at that time, the Mandatory power had a "duty to reduce, or, if necessary, to suspend" immigration until unemployment had eased.[61] This was not an issue of fairness but of peacekeeping and riot prevention. Whitehall prepared a new statement of policy—the Passfield White Paper.

This new white paper built on the foundations of Churchill's earlier policy, but it made establishing the Jewish national home through force of numbers significantly less likely. The Passfield White Paper, however, lasted less than four months. In February 1931, Prime Minister James Ramsay MacDonald wrote to Chaim Weizmann and essentially reversed the immigration restrictions included in the Passfield White Paper.[62] This so-called Black Letter has led to an impression that the documents prepared by Sir Walter Shaw, Sir John Hope-Simpson, and finally the Colonial Office under Lord Passfield are immaterial to the study of British Palestine. This is because, to date, there are very few analyses of why the white paper was reversed (discussed more below).

The third, and most violent, episode of Arab-Jewish clashes in the interwar period began in mid-April 1936. As little action had been taken after MacDonald's letter, the situation in Palestine continued to fester. Smaller disturbances became more commonplace, but they achieved no political recognition and were repelled through the use of force alone; one example was the October-November demonstrations of 1933 when Westminster was assured that Palestine's government could handle any future breaches of the peace.[63] This confidence was called into question during the Arab Revolt of 1936–1939, which erupted in two distinct phases: the first was championed by urban elites involved with the Higher Arab Committee and focused mainly on political protest and a general strike. The British civil administration dealt with this mainly through concessions and diplomacy, negotiating via—among others—Abdullah of Transjordan and Iraq's foreign minister Nuri Pasha, utilizing their connections to calm protestors and prepare for yet another inquiry. This report ignited a second stage in the revolt.[64]

Led by Lord Robert Peel, the Royal Commission was asked to examine wide issues of British obligations to Arabs and Jews. Although the commission was sent ostensibly to "study," their report betrayed an underlying conviction that the real problem was opposition to the Mandate; it was unworkable, and every solution except partition would provide only illusory and temporary relief.[65] They decided that the troubles of 1936 reflected "the same underlying causes as those which brought about the 'disturbances' of 1920, 1921, and 1933 [. . .]. All the other factors were complementary or subsidiary, aggravating the two causes or helping to determine the time at which the disturbances broke out."[66] These "other factors" were trends, such as developing Arab independence in Iraq, Transjordan, Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon; high Jewish immigration and Jewish pressure on Palestine due to the Nazi regime in Germany; Jewish ability to appeal directly to His Majesty's Government by means denied to the Arabs; distrust in British promises following the Hussein-McMahon correspondence; and provocative Jewish nationalism and modernism.[67]

Consequently, the final report recommended an end to the Mandate and a two-state solution.[68] This report marked a real departure from all investigations and statements of policy that preceded it, and reactions from the interested parties ranged from cautious Zionist endorsement to vitriolic Arab condemnation (apart from Abdullah) and split British opinion.[69] The plan's widespread rejection was based either on the moral refusal of Britain's right to give Arab land to Jews or on the grounds that it betrayed the Balfour Declaration, appeased Arab violence, or damaged Anglo-Arab relations.[70]

In Palestine, the publication of Peel's recommendations in July 1937 provoked the second phase of the Arab revolt—a violent but initially successful peasant rebellion that British forces met with a ruthless crackdown. The British cabinet headed by Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain then appointed a further commission in December 1937 to gather the technical details needed to implement partition. Traditional scholarship attests that these investigators were strongly encouraged to deliver a negative opinion.[71] Indeed, the Woodhead Commission reported that they were "unable to recommend boundaries which will afford a reasonable prospect of the eventual establishment of self-supporting Arab and Jewish states."[72] To a question of two states, therefore, the answer was a resounding *No*.

Although scholarship focused on this rebellion has since highlighted how some tactics utilized in Britain's counterinsurgency campaign would be unacceptable or illegal by contemporary standards, scholars tend to assume that British methods implicitly satisfied norms of conduct in the mid-1930s. Scholars such as Yehoshua Porath, Michael J. Cohen, and Simon Anglim, for example, echo the insistent British denials of these atrocities. Porath asserts that "reaction to the strike and the revolt remained almost to the end rather reserved."[73] Whereas

Cohen accepts that "all kinds of charges were levelled" at British troops, he labels these as merely "rumor and propaganda."[74] Likewise, Anglim dismisses allegations as "the insurgents using various methods to try to influence public opinion in the wider world."[75] These assessments accept official government accounts while downplaying the testimony of Palestinian Arabs as well as British police, soldiers, and diplomats. They contrast sharply with the works by historians such as Jacob Norris, Matthew Hughes, and Tom Segev that describe a casual brutality involved in British methods that were employed against the Arab Revolt.[76] These more critical scholars, however, may dilute the impact of revealing British forces' abuses in Palestine by not distinguishing between crimes with differing levels of severity, a subject discussed in greater depth in chapter 4.

There has also been little contemporary inclination to address elements of the 1930s revolt that do not fit contemporary needs. Both Israeli and Palestinian narratives emphasize continuity with the past before 1948 as a source of legitimacy, and this means that the rebellion in Mandate Palestine has been reconstructed as a moment of protonational unity.[77] Unfortunately, this requirement for a usable past means the revolt has assumed a quasi-scared character; it is a powerful symbol, and, perhaps as a result, has been largely excused from academic scrutiny.[78] Zionist history tends to downplay the revolt in 1936–1939, referring to it as a series of riots or as *HaMeora'ot*, the "events," "happenings," or "disturbances."[79] Palestinian guerrillas' surprising successes against the forces of a mighty empire have, as a result, been squeezed out of the popular memory.[80] The movement is remembered as a flawed endeavor that simply imploded, which is an unfair characterization and one that obscures British forces' brutal and in some cases illegal tactics used to crush the revolt. This has left issues such as class divisions, intracommunal violence, and execution of traitors underexplored. This lack of examination also inadvertently reinforces the idea of Palestinian helplessness with a conveniently linear time line from the 1930s to the 1940s and beyond.[81]

After its resounding rejection by all parties concerned, the idea of partition was formally dropped in November 1938, and, instead, the government invited Jewish and Arab representatives to a conference in London.[82] Colonial Secretary Malcolm MacDonald authorized the drafting of a new policy in conjunction with the Foreign Office under Lord Halifax. Although its terms were rejected in meetings with both Zionist and Arab delegates, the resulting MacDonald White Paper, of 1939, outlined a commitment to independence in Palestine within ten years and essentially halted the Jewish national home.[83] In the interim, immigration during the following five years would allow Jewish numbers in Palestine to reach approximately one-third of the population—economic capacity permitting. Numerically, this translated into an additional seventy-five thousand legal Jewish immigrants in total.[84] The policy represented a complete reversal of the spirit of Britain's earlier commitment to the Balfour Declaration. Rather than a

stand-alone incident, however, it was part of the larger pattern of policy making throughout the period of British rule.

In Palestine, the new policy embittered Jews who compared the MacDonald White Paper to the Nuremberg Laws. Jewish paramilitary organizations, the Irgun (a right-wing group founded in 1937 by Revisionist Zionists) and its radicalized splinter group, the Stern Gang, attacked British installations, blew up phone booths and post offices, attacked Arab civilians in markets and coffeehouses, and committed a total of 130 murders in the few short months between Britain's new policy and the outbreak of World War II.[85] The Jewish Agency's paramilitary wing, the Haganah, agreed to support Britain's war effort. They fought the white paper by facilitating illegal immigration, but the Irgun continued violent attacks throughout the war.[86] British troops continued to fight what they termed *Jewish terrorism*, but when evidence of the Holocaust was discovered, widespread horror and outrage turned Palestine policy from a purely British concern into an international crisis. These outbreaks of violence form the spine of a dominant Mandate narrative, but various interpretations of how they led to British policy making are often characterized by overly simple explanations of lobbying and influence.

Lobbying and Influence

The idea that pro- or anti-Zionist feelings drove Palestine policy is one that reappears frequently in the Mandate literature alongside other tenuous explanations for British policy choices that do not withstand even a small degree of scrutiny. The most common instances of this relate to the formulation of the Churchill White Paper in 1922 and the reversal of the Passfield White Paper in 1931.

The most memorable aspect of the Churchill White Paper policy was that, in theory and for the first time, this document tied Jewish immigration to Palestine's economic capacity "to ensure that the immigrants should not be a burden upon the people of Palestine as a whole, and that they should not deprive any section of the present population of their employment."[87] How scholars have explained this development depends on whether they have perceived it as a change or a continuation of policy. Avi Shlaim, for example, views the Churchill White Paper as the beginning of Britain's withdrawal from Zionism.[88] Likewise, Benny Morris cites the reason for the Churchill White Paper as a change of personality in Downing Street from pro-Zionist Liberal Lloyd George to the ambivalent Conservative Andrew Bonar Law, leading to more balanced language in Britain's dealings with Zionism.[89] The problem with this analysis is that Lloyd George resigned on 22 October 1922, months after the white paper was written and published.[90] Conversely, Gudrun Kramer and James Renton posit that Britain allied itself with Zionism to justify its occupation to the other Great Powers

(especially France) at the Supreme Council of the Paris Peace Conference in San Remo.[91] Acting supposedly under the Wilsonian principles of nonannexation and national self-determination, Britain had chosen to justify its rule over Palestine by presenting itself as the protector of Zionism.[92] This is echoed in John McTague's work, which notes that by appointing the first high commissioner to Palestine as Sir Herbert Samuel, a Jew and a Zionist, the British prime minister appeared determined to promote the Balfour Declaration regardless of internal advice to the contrary.[93] In this respect, the white paper was an instrument of governance, imposing a minor limitation that was necessary to maintain the commitment to Zionism.

This seemingly unshakable commitment did, of course, face its first test in the Passfield White Paper of 1930 despite its swift reversal in 1931. Scholars tend to assume that the activities of Zionist lobbyists, such as Chaim Weizmann, placed the British government under immense pressure to recant the Passfield policy and that this was the sole reason for its reversal. Shlomo Ben-Ami, for example, notes that "before it could even come into effect, Passfield's white paper was for all practical purposes abrogated by Chaim Weizmann's skillful lobbying."[94] Similarly, Benny Morris writes, "By early 1931 well-applied Zionist pressure in the press and lobbying by Weizmann in London bore fruit."[95] The same reasoning is found in Yehoshua Porath's work, citing "Zionist pressure" in the reversal of policy, in Ilan Pappe's *A History of Modern Palestine*, Neil Caplan's *Contested Histories*, and many others.[96] Such explanations of British behavior are, however, overwhelmingly anecdotal; little attention has been paid to the evidence, which is rarely supplied. Pederson, for example, notes that "[h]istorians usually and rightly credit Weizmann's remonstrance and effective lobbying for that *volte-face*" and cites Norman Rose's *The Gentile Zionists* to illustrate this point.[97] It is particularly interesting that Rose is credited with this idea as it appears nowhere in his book. Instead, Rose offers an account that highlights parliamentary political infighting and at no point credits Weizmann with a victory.[98]

Rather than Rose's work, which is based heavily on research at the Weizmann Archives, this myth is actually most likely the result of Chaim Weizmann's own account in his autobiography, *Trial and Error*.[99] In what Christopher Sykes agrees is a highly biased account of the negotiations with British politicians, Weizmann paints the British attitude as incompetent and colored by anti-Semitism.[100] Accounts of the white paper's reversal are rarely granted more than a sentence or two in histories of the Mandate or Anglo-Zionist relations, and there seems to have been a widespread acceptance of these largely unfounded assumptions. The idea that Chaim Weizmann successfully lobbied the British government stems from his own personal interpretation of events but is one that has been repeated often without citation or further academic investigation.[101]

A small number of scholars have attempted to provide a more nuanced explanation for this reversal decision, but most analyses remain unsatisfactory. One

argument points to a Whitechapel by-election as the reason for Labour's apparent collapse under pressure.[102] Crucially, however, the by-election took place on 3 December 1930, two months before MacDonald wrote to Weizmann. James Hall, the Labour candidate in Whitechapel, won this election after securing support from the British chapter of the international Zionist organization, Poalei Zion. This was despite the Liberal Party candidate actually being Jewish and the fact that every other candidate publicly denounced the white paper.[103] Although Hall did not actively defend the new policy, his election pamphlets and documentation did repeat the official government interpretation of Passfield's white paper, that it was both a continuation of the Mandate and the Churchill White Paper of 1922.[104] It is incongruous, therefore, to explain the government's reversal decision by implying that it was a preventive measure directed toward this by-election; neither the timing, months before MacDonald's letter to Weizmann, nor the campaign, in which the Labour candidate won by tacitly supporting the white paper and still securing Zionist support, demonstrate a plausible causal relationship. This by-election, however, was certainly important in retrospect, and, in relation to the government's correspondence with Chaim Weizmann, this is discussed in greater detail in chapter 3.

Another opinion about this incident points to a letter to *The Times* written by preeminent lawyers Lord Hailsham and Sir John Simon. Taking what amounted to a pro-Zionist stance, the letter demanded an opinion from The Hague on whether limiting Jewish immigration violated the official Mandate for Palestine.[105] The scholarly argument, therefore, cites Prime Minister MacDonald's desire to avoid such scrutiny as the reason for reversing Passfield's white paper.[106] The problem with this reasoning, however, is that Hailsham and Simon specifically focused on criticizing two specific paragraphs of the white paper, neither of which were mentioned in MacDonald's letter to Weizmann. If Hailsham and Simon's criticisms were crucial, then why were their arguments absent from the final reversal? No evidence has been presented to demonstrate that MacDonald viewed interference from The Hague as a credible threat, and, indeed, these accusations leveled at the white paper met only sarcasm and scorn at the Colonial Office (see chap. 3). On its own, the Hailsham and Simon letter provides only a half-formed explanation. The letter was important, but for a different reason: Hailsham and Simon were preeminent lawyers, but, more importantly, they were both also former and future cabinet ministers from the Conservative and Liberal Parties, respectively. Their letter to *The Times* is evidence of a larger campaign to destabilize an already weak Labour government. Unfortunately, this domestic political angle has largely been ignored.

Although both Norman Rose and Gudrun Kramer mention the importance of political infighting within Westminster, their studies are not dedicated to the full reasoning behind Passfield's reversal.[107] Rose, for example, notes that "MacDonald must have been extremely sensitive" to rumors of Zionist activism against

his government around the world but chose not to investigate this idea further.[108] Coupled with this collection of unexplored assumptions about the reversal of the Passfield White Paper is a general apathy to the event. Major works such as Gelvin's *One Hundred Years of War* fail to even mention the Passfield White Paper, and other scholars, such as Michael J. Cohen, deliberately avoid it and proceed in the Mandate narrative directly from 1928 to 1936.[109] Asking why the Passfield White Paper was reversed is crucial for understanding how and why British policy evolved during the entire Mandate. The lack of scholarly attention received by this incident is also indicative of how British politicking has been overlooked in the relevant works of history. Comparatively, the final theme has been covered in more detail by Mandate scholars, but again it lacks integration into the broader perspective of how British policy was crafted throughout the period.

The Mandate and the International Community

As the British Mandate for Palestine was a trusteeship of the League of Nations, policy toward it always had to consider the international community. External involvement in Palestine politics, however, was particularly prominent in only two distinct time periods of Britain's thirty-year administration: when (following the Arab Revolt) negotiations led to the MacDonald White Paper of 1939, and when (after World War II) US president Harry Truman involved American politics in Palestine policy.

Although British policy making during the Arab Revolt has received far more attention than earlier incidences, the targeted focus of such studies limits their usefulness. Michael J. Cohen's excellent analysis of the later Mandate, for example, highlights the domestic political constraints placed on the British government in the late 1930s but betrays such a study's truncated scope by implying that earlier decisions were not equally the result of Realpolitik. Cohen writes, "The white paper was the result of diminishing options in the Arab Middle East on the eve of war,"[110] but it also "reflected a dramatic change from prior British policy in the area, in particular from the British attitude towards the Zionists, which previously had been at worst bureaucratically neutral and at best openly sympathetic."[111] In contrast, chapter 3 argues that the deliberations leading up to the MacDonald White Paper were conducted in exactly the same fashion as policy in the 1920s and early 1930s—representing the beginning of Britain's ultimate withdrawal from "the Holy Land."

World War II then created two significant developments with regard to British policy in Palestine. All previous Palestine policy had been relatively secretive—from patronage for Zionism in the 1920s to Arab self-determination in 1939. A new postwar internationalism, however, coupled with the public outcry for Europe's Holocaust survivors meant that the United States and members

of the fledgling United Nations (UN) pressured Britain for a real moral, rather than purely strategic, policy in Palestine.[112] The British Mandate hosted two final investigative commissions that demonstrated this new context. First, the Anglo-American Committee of 1946 attempted and failed to repair a rift between British and American administrations on the subject of Palestine. Second, when Britain referred the problem to the UN in 1947, the UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) conducted its own investigation.

The US president, Harry Truman, had publicly called for the admission of one hundred thousand Jewish refugees into Palestine, but the prospect presented a peacekeeping nightmare for British authorities. The Anglo-American report then reiterated this demand and concluded that the best solution was a single binational state in which "Palestine shall be neither a Jewish state nor an Arab state."[113] The report, therefore, simply suggested reconciling what throughout the 1920s and 1930s had remained irreconcilable. Unable to solve the conflict, unaided by any practical American suggestions, and under financial and political pressure created by the plummeting postwar economy, the British cabinet approved referring the issue to the UN.[114] The final UNSCOP report constituted both a majority and a minority opinion; whereas the minority suggested a federal state with a permanent but autonomous Jewish minority, the majority preferred partition.[115] If the solution was partition, however, this presented a further question of its enforcement. In keeping with all previous negotiations, the Arabs of Palestine rejected both partition and the minority federal plan, but the UN General Assembly voted for partition on 29 November 1947. Rather than accept the responsibility, the British government decided to withdraw.

This final Palestine policy decision has been characterized in the literature in several ways. Traditional Zionist history asserts that referral to the UN was either a ploy designed to push Palestine's Jews back into British arms once the UN failed to offer a solution or a punishment to allow the invasion of Arab armies who would eradicate the Jewish homeland. Conversely, Arab historiography has viewed British withdrawal as a plot to aid the creation of a single (Jewish) state in Palestine.[116] Alternatively, either the decision has been presented as tactical, meaning Prime Minister Attlee and Foreign Secretary Bevin identified the UN vote as a perfect opportunity to rid the empire of costly Palestine, or British forces were withdrawn out of economic necessity and war wariness.[117] However, investigations of the Westminster bubble during this critical time period are frequently sidelined in favor of discussing Zionist terrorist activities after the war—implying that the bombing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem in June 1946 or the hanging of two kidnapped sergeants in 1947 provided the final impetus to leave.[118] The commissions are mentioned only to highlight what appeared to be Britain's ineptitude in dealing with the postwar crisis in Palestine.

This apparent "dithering" has led scholars such as Benny Morris and James L. Gelvin to describe referral to the UN as dumping the Palestine issue onto another party.[119] This is not only an unfair characterization of Ernest Bevin's attempts to reach an Arab-Jewish agreement through negotiations but also an oversimplified analysis of British decision-making during this turbulent era. This perception is also part of the literature's constant conflation of Britain's referral to the UN in February 1947 with the decision to withdraw made in September 1947. Confusing the time line obscures any helpful understanding of the British psychology behind policy making at the end of the Mandate and misrepresents the primary motivations driving key members of government. Rather than being merely plot devices or the backdrop to a Zionist insurgency, the final commissions of the Mandate demonstrate Britain's need to achieve a delicate and precarious balance of diplomatic interests. This is discussed in detail in chapter 5.

Thinking Outside the Story

Britain's Palestine policy evolved from staunch support for the Jewish national home after the Balfour Declaration of 1917 to plans for an independent Arab Palestine in 1939 that had to be reassessed following World War II. This gradual reversal of policy coincided with a series of riots and rebellions in Palestine between Arabs and Jews in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s and Britain's inability to devise a workable solution to this ongoing tension. The Mandate years witnessed periods of violence, and these are generally used as plot devices in the established literature, highlighting how the British reaction to these crises worsened the burgeoning conflict. These periods of violence and four major themes constitute the dominant Mandate narrative, but it remains incomplete.

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2 The Balfour Zeitgeist, 1917–1928

The Balfour Declaration of 1917 became the first in a chain of events committing the British government to a Jewish national home in Palestine. Extended in the draft Mandate for Palestine and confirmed in the Churchill White Paper of 1922, this national home policy continued almost unquestioned until the Palestine riots of 1929 prompted a reassessment. This period, therefore, represented a "Balfour Zeitgeist," but it was a phase of British foreign policy that was not without frustration and confusion regarding its implementation. Rather than drawing a linear time line from 1917 onward, it is vital to recognize that the 1922 decision to confirm the principles of the declaration was highly uncertain. When examining the situation British politicians found themselves in, it also appears that their chosen course of action was somewhat irrational. Between the declaration and its affirmation, two British commissions of inquiry uncovered fundamental and irresolvable flaws in the national home policy, meaning that any rational analysis of its costs versus its benefits would not have recommended continuing.

In order to provide a cogent explanation of this decision, it is necessary to tease out the particular motivations and constraints of Britain's key decision makers at the time. This chapter, therefore, uses the politics-first framework to demonstrate how and why the British government decided to affirm the policy in 1922. It argues that in the first instance, the government rejected alternatives that were too risky politically. This can be seen particularly in the areas of governmental prestige, tussles surrounding bureaucratic politics, the cabinet's considerations of postwar economic decline, and the dangers posed by interparty rivalry. Once any overly politically risky plans had been dropped, the government merely double-checked that remaining policy options satisfied Britain's strategic objectives. Finally, this chapter highlights how the national home policy remained untouched by both Conservative and Labour governments in the 1920s due to a perception of "sunk costs," that is, too many commitments had already been made for anyone to attempt a U-turn. Rather than a Palestine policy based on national interests or one developed specifically for people and problems in the territory under consideration, this chapter reveals a Palestine policy based primarily on the need to satisfy unrelated political concerns.

What Were the Options?

State leaders are expected to judge any potential new policies based on a rational calculation of costs versus benefits.[1] Therefore, in order to explain the British decision to affirm the national home policy in 1922, it is first necessary to acknowledge that several factors make this decision seem irrational. A simple assessment of information available to politicians at the time would have supported ending the national home policy. This is evident from the reports submitted in 1920 and 1921 by two commissions of inquiry. Following the Nebi Musa riots of April 1920, the Palin Commission pinpointed fundamental flaws in the policy of supporting a Jewish national home, and, following the Jaffa riots of May 1921, the Haycraft Commission independently reiterated many of the same concerns.

The first major riots under British rule occurred roughly two-and-a-half years after the Balfour Declaration was first issued, but the Palin Commission found it was "undoubtedly the starting point of the whole trouble."[2] The Arabs of Palestine were struggling to reconcile an Anglo-French Declaration of self-determination with the promise of a Jewish home in Palestine, "giving rise to a sense of betrayal and intense anxiety for their future."[3] The announcement of a Jewish Zionist, Sir Herbert Samuel, as Palestine's first high commissioner was thought to exacerbate the situation.[4] General Edmund Allenby in command in Palestine believed "that appointment of a Jew as first Governor will be highly dangerous."[5] He anticipated that "when news arrives of appointment of Mr. Samuel general movement against Zionism will result, and that we must be prepared for outrages against Jews, murders, raids on Jewish villages, and raids into our territory from East."[6] In contrast, many British and French politicians were concerned about the actions of Zionists rather than Arabs. To reassure the French prime minister, Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill "expatiated on the virtues and experience of Sir Herbert Samuel, and pointed out how evenly he was holding the balance between Arabs and Jews and how effectively he was restraining his own people, as perhaps only a Jewish administrator could."[7]

Although the Palin report pointed toward "provocative" Zionist behavior as an immediate cause of the riots, it highlighted the real doubts underlying Arab animosity; "at the bottom of all is a deep-seated fear of the Jew, both as a possible ruler and as an economic competitor."[8] These anxieties became a familiar theme in all riots during the British Mandate. Also, in blaming Zionists for the disturbances, the commission report could not avoid implicating British support for Zionism in the violence. It asserted that "the Administration was considerably hampered in its policy by the direct interference of the Home Authorities," a thinly veiled criticism of policy emanating from the Foreign Office.[9] Major General Palin and his fellow commissioners warned the British government "[t]hat

the situation at present obtaining in Palestine is exceedingly dangerous" and "a very firm hand" was necessary to "hold the scales as between all parties with rigid equality" to avert "a serious catastrophe."[10] However, as Samuel took charge of Palestine from the military administration before the Palin report was complete, he issued a general amnesty and declared the matter closed. On 15 July 1920, and before he had read it, Samuel telegraphed the Foreign Office to advise against publishing the Palin Commission "irrespective of contents."[11] The dangers, fears, and tensions highlighted in the report might have been inconsequential if another riot on a worse scale had not erupted the following year in Jaffa. These disturbances were also the subject of an investigation, headed by the chief justice of Palestine, Sir Thomas Haycraft.

Although the Haycraft Commission did not question the national home as a viable policy, its report reiterated the fundamental tensions between Arabs and Zionists in Palestine. The immediate cause of the Jaffa riots was a clash between Jewish labor demonstrators: Achdut HaAvoda, the powerful majority organization that possessed a permit to conduct a rally, and Miflagat Poalim Sozialistim, an inflammatory and banned group that did not.[12] The labor dispute finished relatively quickly, but police found Arabs smashing windows in Menshieh and "a general hunting of the Jews began."[13] It was recognized immediately that the underlying cause was Arab hostility toward the Jewish national home, and, on 14 May, Samuel announced a temporary prohibition on immigrants landing at the port of Jaffa and began preparations for another commission of inquiry.[14] Haycraft posited that "the Bolshevik demonstration was the spark that set alight the explosive discontent of the Arabs, and precipitated an outbreak which developed into an Arab-Jewish feud."[15] Although appalled by the violence, Haycraft and his fellow commissioners believed that Arab antipathy in Jaffa resulted in part from a perceived Jewish arrogance, since newly arrived young men and women tended to stroll the streets arm in arm in "easy attire," holding up traffic and singing songs. This did not fit with conservative Arab ideas of decorum. Haycraft detected, therefore, "no inherent anti-Semitism in the country, racial or religious."[16]

The report concluded that "the fundamental cause of the Jaffa riots and the subsequent acts of violence was a feeling among the Arabs of discontent with, and hostility to, the Jews, due to political and economic causes, and connected with Jewish immigration."[17] Politically, the main fear was "that the Jews when they had sufficiently increased in numbers would become so highly organised and so well armed as to be able to overcome the Arabs, and rule over and oppress them."[18] Economically, the influx of skilled Jewish laborers and artisans was seen as a threat to Arab livelihoods.[19] The Haycraft Commission provided the British government with another accurate illustration of Arab-Jewish tension in Palestine, but it could not offer a solution without extending beyond its remit and questioning the overarching policy: "Much, we feel might be done to allay the

existing hostility between the races if responsible persons on both sides could agree to discuss the questions arising between them in a reasonable spirit, on the basis that the Arabs should accept implicitly the declared policy of the government on the subject of the Jewish national home, and that the Zionist leaders should abandon and repudiate all pretensions that go beyond it."[20] Without suggesting a political change, the commission had no practical advice to offer.

In light of the tensions highlighted by these commission reports, the government in London was presented with three options: continue supporting the creation of a Jewish national home in Palestine—imposing it with the threat or use of force; limiting the national home policy in a manner acceptable to its critics; or repudiating the policy altogether. The general staff articulated these options in practical terms: "(a.) An alteration of policy as regards Jewish immigration; (b.) An increase in the British garrison; or (c.) The acceptance of serious danger to the Jewish population."[21] The cabinet agreed their courses were to "withdraw from their Declaration, refer the Mandate back to the League of Nations, set up an Arab National government and slow down or stop the immigration of Jews: or they could carry out the present policy with greater vigour and encourage the arming of the Jews."[22] Far from a simple continuation of the Balfour Declaration policy, the entire question of Britain retaining Palestine was under review. In June 1921, the new Middle East Department of the Colonial Office advised "it is idle to consider what steps should now be taken [. . .] until we have made up our minds whether we wish to retain the Mandates."[23] As colonial secretary, Winston Churchill found the situation highly troubling, writing how "[b]oth Arabs and Jews are armed and arming, ready to spring at each other's throats."[24]

By August, it was obvious to the cabinet that "peace was impossible on the lines of the Balfour Declaration."[25] The situation required some form of action, not least to protect the British officials administering Palestine. Governor of Jerusalem Sir Ronald Storrs wrote in his diary at the time, "[W]e remain, all of us, in unstable equilibrium until, after two years and a half, somebody can be found to take any decision."[26] However, deliberations leading to an affirmation of the national home policy in 1922 at no point included consideration of either Zionist or Arab interests in Palestine. Concerns about prestige, difficulties created by bureaucratic turf wars, the political ramifications of postwar economic decline, and interparty rivalry truncated the list of solutions to Britain's woes in Palestine, not because they were bad ideas but because they were too risky for the politicians involved.

Concerning International Prestige

The threat to dignity, or the need for prestige, is an inherently dangerous topic for individual politicians and whole governments.[27] In the context of British policy

making in the early 1920s, threats to prestige were about Britain's stature within the international community. Although British policy on the Jewish national home was officially made in Westminster, it acquired an international element first as a wartime promise approved by the Triple Entente, then in the draft Mandate assigned to Britain by the principal Allied powers in 1920 (Britain, France, Italy, and Japan with a US representative present), and, finally, in negotiations with the League of Nations and the United States for their definitive approval.[28] These complicating factors meant that, due to concerns for international prestige, the British government could not reverse their commitment to the national home policy.

Palestine's retention by the British Empire was not a foregone conclusion but became more likely after World War I ended. Ultimately, for Britain, the problem of Palestine's trusteeship was less an issue of imperial expansionism and more about avoiding unwelcome intrusions. British military, strategic, and energy interests in Egypt, Arabia, and Mesopotamia made the prospect of a rival power in Palestine immediately following a world war decidedly unattractive. British prime minister Lloyd George and French prime minister Georges Clemenceau agreed in secret that Britain would annex Palestine and oil-rich Mosul in Mesopotamia in exchange for an exclusively French Syria and share of the Mosul oil.[29] Through this bargaining and a pledge of good faith toward the published Balfour Declaration, which facilitated League of Nations approval, the principle of a British Palestine became diplomatically entrenched very early—before British officials had time to appreciate the potential difficulties this entailed.

A further complication was the Treaty of Sèvres with Turkey, signed in August 1920. Article 95 of the Turkish peace treaty reinforced the draft Mandate in committing Britain to supporting a Jewish national home in Palestine.[30] Since the document carried signatures from Britain and the Dominions (including India), France, Italy, Japan, Armenia, Belgium, Greece, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Czechoslovakia, and Turkey, the scale of international agreement essentially prevented repudiation of the national home without creating a legal quagmire.[31] The Balfour Declaration had rapidly become the entire public basis of a British Palestine, and the length of negotiations with the French and other powers made it less and less likely that the national home could be reversed without substantial international humiliation, if the necessary agreements from league members could be achieved at all.[32] Churchill noted that the French were feeling the same about Syria and Lebanon as British politicians were about Palestine and Mesopotamia: "utterly sick of pouring out money and men."[33] Both powers, however, had bargained for the new territories through a larger international framework that was nearly impossible to reverse.

By June 1921, the power of this international body to inflict humiliation on the British Empire became readily apparent. There was a "serious risk" that when the Council of the League of Nations next met to vote on the final mandates,

they would be rejected on the basis of Italian and American objections.[34] Italy was raising the concerns of the Vatican regarding guardianship of Christian holy places in Palestine, and the US State Department, despite its position outside the league, formally objected to their exclusion from the consultation process.[35] In light of this diplomatic deadlock and the problems Britain was already facing in Palestine, the option to withdraw from the territory altogether was considered.[36] On a diplomatic level, the British government considered taking the opportunity to reject the terms of the national home policy while the entire Mandate was in question by "publicly confessing that they [the terms] are insecurely based and rebuilding them on a firmer foundation."[37] Unfortunately for the policy's opponents, however, the council of the league agreed to postpone a final vote from 1921 to July 1922 rather than create a situation in which all prior negotiations were void. This meant that after June 1921, any modifications to the Mandate would have required separate approval from the Great Powers within the prohibitively short period of one year.[38] American support for the draft Mandate was forthcoming on 3 May 1922—in a joint resolution by the US Congress—but this meant Britain was merely further entrenched in the national home policy.[39]

Between this public American declaration of support and the final league vote on 22 July 1922, the Churchill White Paper was published. It not only confirmed the national home policy but also specifically cited the diplomatic ties preventing its alteration: the "Declaration, reaffirmed by the Conference of the Principle Allied Powers at San Remo and again in the Treaty of Sèvres, is not susceptible of change."[40] By incorporating the language of the Balfour Declaration into the Mandate and Treaty of Sèvres, Britain had officially recognized a legal obligation to serve two masters. Governor of Jerusalem Sir Ronald Storrs, for example, referred to the highly unsteady first civilian administration in Palestine as "making a bicycle and riding it at the same time."[41] Ultimately, the legal and diplomatic quagmire associated with reversing the Balfour Declaration meant this option presented far too great a risk to Britain's international standing, for which the government would be held responsible. This situation was reinforced by the difficulties inherent in bureaucratic turf wars over Britain's newly acquired territories in the Middle East.

Turf Wars in Whitehall

This time period also witnessed a turf war erupt between the Foreign and Colonial Offices over the Middle East, the product of earlier and lingering tensions between the Foreign and War Offices as well as the Foreign Office and 10 Downing Street. This created an atmosphere within government that increased the political pain expected from any potential abandonment of the Jewish national home policy.

Immediately after World War I, responsibility for Palestine was divided between two cabinet offices. The War Office administered the Occupied Enemy Territories Administration (OETA) in Palestine following the invasion in December 1917. The organization acted under a chief administrator taking his orders from the commander-in-chief (General Allenby) through the general officer commanding.[42] While the War Office was responsible for executing policy, it acted on instructions from the Foreign Office, which received intelligence on the OETA directly from a chief political officer stationed in Palestine.[43] Colonel Meinertzhagen was the last to serve in this awkward position and wrote, "[S]uch work is tantamount to that of a spy on Allenby's staff."[44] When the military administration gave way to the civilian high commissioner Sir Herbert Samuel in July 1920, Samuel also began his tenure under direction from the Foreign Office.[45] This monopoly on Palestine policy, however, was challenged directly by the formation of a new Middle East Department in the Colonial Office. Lord Curzon was foreign secretary at the time, and his specific expertise was Eastern affairs. This, coupled with simmering rivalry between Lord Curzon and Prime Minister David Lloyd George in the search for a postwar peace settlement in Europe, made the Middle East even more important to the "essence" of the Foreign Office at this time and contributed to a propensity to fight for the Middle East as its "turf."[46]

Between the resignation of Arthur James Balfour as foreign secretary in 1919 and Lloyd George's downfall in October 1922, there was tension between the Foreign Office and the Office of the prime minister over European peace negotiations. Lord Curzon inherited a weakened Foreign Office, partly as a result of wartime conditions but also due to Balfour's apparent tendency to concede control over Foreign Policy relatively easily.[47] Rather than using the traditional Foreign Office channels, Lloyd George dominated postwar foreign affairs through presidential-style summit diplomacy, keeping close control of the agenda and minutes, and leading War Secretary Winston Churchill to complain that the record bore little resemblance to his memory of discussions.[48] The lack of information coming out of the Paris Peace talks, for example, was a matter of great contention at the Foreign Office. They complained that "we rarely receive, except occasionally through private channels on which it is not often easy to take prompt action, any official intimation of the decisions reached by the Councils of four or five."[49] This personal and semisecret style of diplomacy caused a certain amount of antagonism within the British government at large, leading Conservative statesman Andrew Bonar Law to promise specifically in his 1922 election address that all future international conferences would be handled by the Foreign Office and not by him personally.[50] This came too late, however, to have any effect on relations between the Foreign and Colonial Offices over Palestine policy.

Between December 1920 and the Churchill White Paper of 1922, there was a turf war between the Foreign and Colonial Offices over control of the Middle

East. As early as February 1918, Lord Curzon had suggested a new department for Middle East affairs, but he had always intended it to be an entirely independent new ministry or part of the Foreign Office.[51] Although the initial universal desire was for an entirely new ministry, it was prohibitively costly.[52] Players with a stake in foreign affairs subsequently lined up in support behind either a new department in the Foreign Office under Lord Curzon or one in the Colonial Office under the next colonial secretary, Winston Churchill. India Secretary Sir Edwin Montagu removed his ministry from consideration because "India expected her Secretary of State to mind her own affairs, [and] it was derogatory to her dignity to be treated as a part-time job."[53] What ensued was an argument regarding expertise. Curzon wrote to the cabinet that "Mr. Churchill prefers the Colonial Office, but I think must be very imperfectly acquainted with the views or interests of the States of the Middle East, if he thinks that such a transference [. . .] would lead to an immediate solution of the difficulties by which we are confronted."[54] Rather than highlight problems of correct administration, Curzon tried to paint Palestine as a diplomatic issue, irremovably connected to "the jealous and complex interests of foreign Powers arising out of their ecclesiastical pretensions, their commercial interests, and their acute rivalry," reiterating claims to the region as part of Foreign Office "turf."[55] If the new department for the Middle East was not installed in the Foreign Office, Curzon concluded, "it would merely mean that the work would have to be done twice over, and that there would be general confusion."[56]

However, on 31 December 1920, the new department was, by a majority vote, assigned to the Colonial Office.[57] This appears chiefly to have been the result of bullying from Churchill. A revolt had broken out in the Iraqi region of Mosul in May, and Churchill issued the cabinet an ultimatum requiring either withdrawal to Basra and ignoring the chaos in the rest of Iraq—"a grave political blunder"—or giving the Colonial Office a new department for the Middle East with the political authority needed to restore order in the two mandates of Palestine and Mesopotamia.[58]

This meant, however, that true to Lord Curzon's predictions, since the Foreign Office could not realistically stop being a player in the Middle East, the two departments vied for control during the diplomatic wrangling described above and the parliamentary infighting demonstrated below. As is liable to happen in turf wars, this created a situation inimical to decisive change.[59] Even after the final division of responsibilities was in place, Churchill continued to agitate for complete control within the Colonial Office: "The more I study the Middle Eastern problem," he wrote to Lloyd George, "the more convinced I am that it is impossible to deal with it unless the conduct of British affairs in the whole of the Arabian peninsula is vested in the Middle Eastern Department [. . .]. I must have control of everything in the ringed fence."[60] Churchill was convinced that the

split had produced nothing but "paralysis and confusion of action."[61] This was because "Feisal or Abdullah, whether in Mesopotamia or Mecca; King Hussein at Mecca; Bin Saud at Nejd; Bin Rashid al Hail' the Sheikh of Kuwait; and King Samuel at Jerusalem are all inextricably interwoven, and no conceivable policy can have any chance which does not pull all the strings affecting them."[62]

The issue was not differing opinions between departments on the moral or practical value of the Jewish national home—the Palin and Haycraft Commissions both demonstrated the grave problems inherent in the Balfour Declaration. Instead, the bureaucratic turf struggles of the Foreign and Colonial Offices meant there were too many cooks peering over the roiling Palestine broth. The prospect of further frustration and disagreement simply predisposed those ministries to ignore large or sweeping potential solutions.

Cuts and Commitments

The economy may seem more like an objective part of assessing the national interest than a strictly political issue, but, in times of hardship, perceptions of the economy become deeply political. The postwar coalition under Lloyd George was faced with the major task of reconstruction. As a prolonged economic crisis hit Britain by 1920–1921, the government was under pressure to spend less abroad and more at home. One of the most expensive elements of Britain's empire was the number of troops needed to maintain it. This meant that postwar economic decline strongly impacted deliberations about the Jewish national home in Palestine. Imposing the threat or use of force on it—that is, stationing troops in sufficient numbers to protect a very small Jewish minority from the Arab majority—presented far too much risk to the politicians who would be held responsible for that spending.

In December 1918, the coalition manifesto emphasized economic development, cutting the war debt and making "the inevitable reductions in our military and naval establishments with the least possible suffering to individuals and to the best advantage of industry and trade."[63] However, the severe contraction of markets during the war (including the loss of Britain's largest trading partner, Germany) meant Britain slid quickly into its first globalized economic crisis. An industrial recession struck in May 1920, and Britain was facing a high unemployment problem by the end of the year. More than two million were out of work in December 1921, and the average unemployment rate stayed over 10 percent for several years, higher than anything recorded before the war.[64] These economic problems also brought large-scale industrial action. A "triple alliance" of workers from the mining, railway, and transport industries provided continual unrest.[65] As well as the demonstrations, marches, and occasional violence of British workers, the government was also trying to deal with complaints from big business

and institutions such as the Bank of England, all clamoring for cuts.[66] However, a complicating factor was Britain's victory in 1918, placing it at the center of imperial authority and a communal responsibility for world governance as part of the Supreme Allied Council and then the League of Nations. This meant a continual commitment to deploy troops in border regions of Germany as well as vast and diverse new sections of the empire in Africa, which conflicted with the election priority of reduced military spending.

In terms of the Middle East, this conflict between maintaining an empire and satisfying the domestic need for economies was embodied by Winston Churchill's time at the War and Colonial Offices. Churchill pushed the new Middle East Department "towards a curtailment of our responsibilities and our expenditure."[67] Before the new department was assigned to the Colonial Office, Churchill complained bitterly about the waste created by the War Office, which followed instructions from the Foreign Office in the Middle East.[68] He charged that the result was villages "inhabited by a few hundred half naked native families, usually starving," being occupied by "garrisons on a scale which in India would maintain order in wealthy provinces of millions of people" and that this waste would continue "as long as the department calling the tune has no responsibility for paying the piper."[69] Churchill was only prepared to invest in fertile territories, such as East and West Africa, where development could contribute rapidly to British coffers.[70] For the Middle East, he recommended placing responsibility for maintaining order on the air force; this would be much cheaper than army garrisons or cavalry because it required only a few airstrips with no earthbound lines of communication or animals.[71]

This focus on spending cuts meant considerations of cost came before the safety of Britain's Zionist subjects in Palestine. Chief of the imperial general staff Henry Wilson called the cabinet's attention to the weakness of British garrisons in the Middle East in May 1920. This was due to the delay in a peace settlement with Turkey, the inability to enforce its terms, French problems with Turks and Arabs in Cilicia—"disasters which have obliged the French government to reinforce that theatre up to 48 battalions (reinforcements which are not sufficient to avoid still further disasters)"—and "the very unsettled interior condition of both Palestine and Egypt."[72] The general staff feared the boundaries of economy would leave them unable to fulfill imperial policy. They pointed to a "real danger" and how the government's pro-Zionist stance was "likely to increase our difficulties with the Arabs, and there are already indications that military action may be necessary, both to maintain the frontier and concurrently to preserve peace internally."[73]

These warnings were issued one month after the Nebi Musa riots in Palestine, but Churchill made no reference to either the army's advice or the violent outburst in Jerusalem in policy discussions regarding the Middle East or Palestine

specifically. The issue of cost became important even before the draft Mandate was complete. Lloyd George believed "that the raising of money for the development of Palestine is a most important matter and that the government should do all it reasonably can to facilitate this."[74] As a result, Foreign Secretary Curzon was advised to "have a talk with the representatives of the Zionist Organization and find out whether it is possible to meet some of their views without modifying the principles upon which the Mandate it based."[75] This was because the bulk of financing for development of the Jewish national home was expected to come from Zionist fund-raising, easing the future burden on the British Treasury.

On 26 January 1921, Churchill called for the further reduction of troops in Palestine, which the general staff advised were too low in number and invited rebellion.[76] The Jaffa riots broke out three months later. Nevertheless, despite assuming responsibility for Palestine first in the War Office and then in the Colonial Office, the only relevant issue to Churchill remained spending cuts. A means to this end was a series of Middle East conferences where various regional leaders and officials could be summoned to "effect economies in the Middle East."[77] This was a source of frustration to Zionist supporters who wanted active British involvement in building the national home. Colonel Meinertzhagen, for example—a professed Zionist advocate who worked in both the OETA and the Middle East Department—declared, "Winston does not care two pins, and does not want to be bothered about it. He is reconciled to a policy of drift. He is too wrapped up in home politics."[78]

Even the people seconded to Cairo for the conferences demonstrated Churchill's priorities. Rather than Arabists or policy experts, the guests from London were chief of the air staff Sir Hugh Trenchard, director of military operations Major General Radcliffe, J. B. Crosland from the Finance Department of the War Office, and Sir George Barstow of the Treasury.[79] The word *Zionism* was left off the conference agenda; that it was discussed at all is only implied by two minutes: "Policy in Palestine under the Mandate" and "Special Subjects."[80] Churchill did travel to Palestine and consulted with both Arabs and Jews, but he merely urged them to get along for the benefit of all.[81] Once back in Parliament, he even dismissed their complaints with derision: "The Arabs believe that in the next few years they are going to be swamped by scores of thousands of immigrants from Central Europe, who will push them off the land, eat up the scanty substance of the country and eventually gain absolute control of its institutions and destinies. As a matter of fact, these fears are illusory."[82]

This was not a political discussion that could result in reduced expenditure. Instead, the colonial secretary focused his Palestine discussions on Transjordan.[83] In order to save money, the sharifian Prince Abdullah would administer Transjordan with British advisers and a small contingent of troops, refrain from attacking French Syria, and prevent cross-border raids; in return, the British

would cut Zionism off at the Jordan River, thereby sparing them the soldiers and administrators needed to extend it.[84] This also allowed Churchill to plausibly claim that he was honoring the Hussein-McMahon correspondence.

The Jaffa riots themselves did not alter Churchill's position on this issue of cost. General Walter Norris Congreve submitted a memo to the Colonial Office in June 1921 entitled "Situation in Palestine"; it said Palestine was in "increasing danger" that would require "heavy expenditure" and meet "bitter resentment" from Zionists "for not protecting them better."[85] "I do not think," Congreve concluded, "things are going to get better in this part of the world, but rather worse."[86] Churchill circulated this memo to the cabinet but only to highlight how he disagreed with it. This was one month after the Jaffa riots, but neither the unrest nor advice from local officials appeared in policy discussions on cuts.[87]

Indeed, despite troop reductions, Churchill still saw Palestine as too expensive. When a danger arose in the summer of 1921 that the League of Nations would refuse Britain her mandates, Churchill suggested complete withdrawal on the basis that "His Majesty's Government have spent over one hundred million pounds in Palestine and Mesopotamia since the armistice."[88] Churchill even suggested to Lloyd George, believing he would agree, that Britain should offer "to hand over to the charge of the U.S. either or both of the Middle Eastern Mandates we now hold, if they should desire to assume them."[89] The colonial secretary advocated this course of action in cabinet where, to everyone's surprise, Balfour supported the idea, noting that it "ought to be very seriously examined."[90] Cutting costs in Palestine became one of the colonial secretary's favorite topics: "But whatever may be done about it," Churchill wrote, "the fact remains that Palestine simply cannot afford to pay for troops on the War Office scale."[91]

Instead, the colonial secretary recommended getting rid of British troops altogether and relying instead on police, Indian troops, "and lastly upon arming the Jewish colonies for their own protection."[92] Churchill's enterprise in economy was so comprehensive that even the infamous Geddes Committee on National Expenditure, which called for huge sweeping cuts across Whitehall's already nervous departments, confessed that while it found "very heavy expenditure" in Palestine, Egypt, and Constantinople, there was little more Palestine could afford to give up.[93] Geddes recognized the problem characterized by "the maintenance of internal order in a comparatively small country, and [how] the difficulties which have arisen are due to the attitude of the Arab population toward the Zionist policy adopted by the Government."[94] While many secretaries of state called the Geddes "axe" irresponsible, it perfectly complemented Churchill's own thinking within the Colonial Office.

As war and then colonial secretary, Winston Churchill's singular drive to reduce spending reflected the political situation faced by the entire coalition government. The expense associated with troops meant Palestine could not receive

the necessary reinforcements to protect the Zionist experiment from violence. In a time of widespread industrial action, high unemployment, and general economic downturn, the political cost was too high and this option was simply too risky. In this sense, considerations of the economy were closely connected to problems associated with interparty politics.

Conservative Complaints

One of the most important aspects of Britain's early Palestine policy was its relationship with interparty politics. Criticisms coming mainly from the Conservative Party were highly problematic. The "coupon" election of December 1918 left the Liberal David Lloyd George as prime minister at the head of a majority Conservative coalition. Dissension with his leadership grew steadily, and virulent parliamentary criticism of the government's Palestine policy meant the coalition was unable to continue the national home as it stood in the Balfour Declaration and draft Mandate (which included a commitment to put it into effect).[95] Some element of the policy, therefore, absolutely had to change.

The coupon election of December 1918 was a means of extending Lloyd George's prime ministerial tenure. After he ousted the fellow Liberal Herbert Henry Asquith, in 1916, Lloyd George relied heavily on Conservative support. The *coupon*, a derogatory term employed by Asquith, was a letter of endorsement signed by the prime minister and the Conservative leader Bonar Law, recognizing its recipient as the official coalition candidate in his constituency.[96] Owing to the immediate postwar popularity of the prime minister and the significant expansion of voting rights in 1918, the coupon was a powerful tool. The majority of recipients were Conservatives (364 as opposed to 159 Liberals), which reflected the reality of the Liberal Party as a spent force.[97] As the postwar political climate was marked by a significant swing to the right—the main issues were the fate of Germany and the kaiser, with many calling for his trial and execution along with the expulsion of Germans from Britain—the atmosphere among the electorate favored a Conservative victory. Liberal leader Asquith lost his seat to an "uncouponed" Conservative, and the Conservative Party even swept the vote in the traditional Liberal stronghold of Manchester.[98] This climate placed a great deal of right-wing pressure on Lloyd George at the head of his coalition cabinet.

After violence erupted in Palestine in 1920 and 1921, the government's handling of Zionism became one of several key issues for which to criticize Lloyd George. Although there had been a substantial amount of backbench support for the Balfour Declaration in 1917, this had merely reflected a need for wartime coalition solidarity that was hardly necessary by 1920.[99] The idea of costs versus benefits was a recurring political theme, and Conservative MPs Sir Frederick Hall, Sir Harry Brittain, and Sir Henry Page-Croft raised the issue in July 1920

and again in December that "an enormous amount of money has been expended in this direction for which we are not getting any return."[100] Opposition to the national home then began in earnest in March 1921 (with Sir Joynson-Hicks calling for publication of the Palin Commission) and continued in the House of Lords following the Jaffa riots.[101]

Complaints included the unlimited nature of Zionist immigration and how this led to Bolshevik infiltration, with the Conservative MP Joynson-Hicks highlighting how advice to "be very careful about introducing the right class of immigrants, and about not introducing too many at a time" had been "totally disregarded."[102] The issue of native rights was also brought up in both Houses in defense of Palestinian Arabs. Conservative peer Lord Lamington, for example, defended British control of Palestine while criticizing the Zionist element: "[W]hilst it might be quite possible to give to a child a spoonful of jam containing a lot of noxious medicines, the child would not be pleased with the jam in that condition. That is practically an analogy in regard to this Mandate as held by us."[103]

The main interparty dispute, however, remained costs. On 8 June, Joynson-Hicks had raised the point that "[b]efore we occupied this little country there was harmony, and the Turks only kept 400 regular troops in Palestine. We appear now to require at least 8,000, for whom this country has to pay."[104] This was a prevalent theme; Sir Esmond Harmsworth added, "The Jews are a very wealthy class, and should pay for their own national home if they want it [. . .]. As representing a portion of the British taxpayers, I do protest most strongly that any money of theirs should be thrown away in Palestine."[105] In response, Colonial Secretary Churchill advised, "While the situation still fills us with a certain amount of anxiety [. . .] I believe it is one that we shall be able to shape [. . .] within the limits of the expense I have mentioned."[106] Later that month, he advised the cabinet to withdraw from Palestine.[107] This was because the Liberal Churchill and the rest of the coalition were beginning to feel a great deal of pressure on the Palestine issue. The criticisms they faced were potent because they reflected political issues masquerading as practical concerns, and these fell largely under the Conservative banner of "Anti-Waste."

The coalition government tried to downplay interparty differences, so many policy debates raged in the press instead.[108] An overwhelming majority of the 1918-enfranchised population (79.1%) had never voted before and were clamoring for information about politics. This enhanced the role of newspapers, especially with regard to foreign affairs, for which the press was one of very few public sources of information.[109] Consequently, the press outlets that were highly critical of the Lloyd George government were also quite powerful. This was demonstrated by the Anti-Waste League, a campaign led by Conservative peer and press baron Lord Rothermere and championed in the House by his son, the above-mentioned MP Esmond Harmsworth. Using an ax as its symbol to represent spending cuts,

it was credited with winning two by-elections in Conservative seats.[110] One sign that Lloyd George felt under pressure from this movement was the formation of the Committee on National Expenditure under the chairmanship of Conservative politician and businessman Sir Eric Campbell Geddes, which, as expected, called for major spending reductions across most departments.[111] Rothermere's brother, Lord Northcliffe, was also using his papers *The Times*, the *Daily Mail*, and the *Daily Mirror* to criticize Palestine based on its cost as well as the idea that handing Muslim holy sites to Jews would inflame India. Northcliffe's death in 1922 meant these papers passed to Rothermere and they too became direct proponents of Anti-Waste.

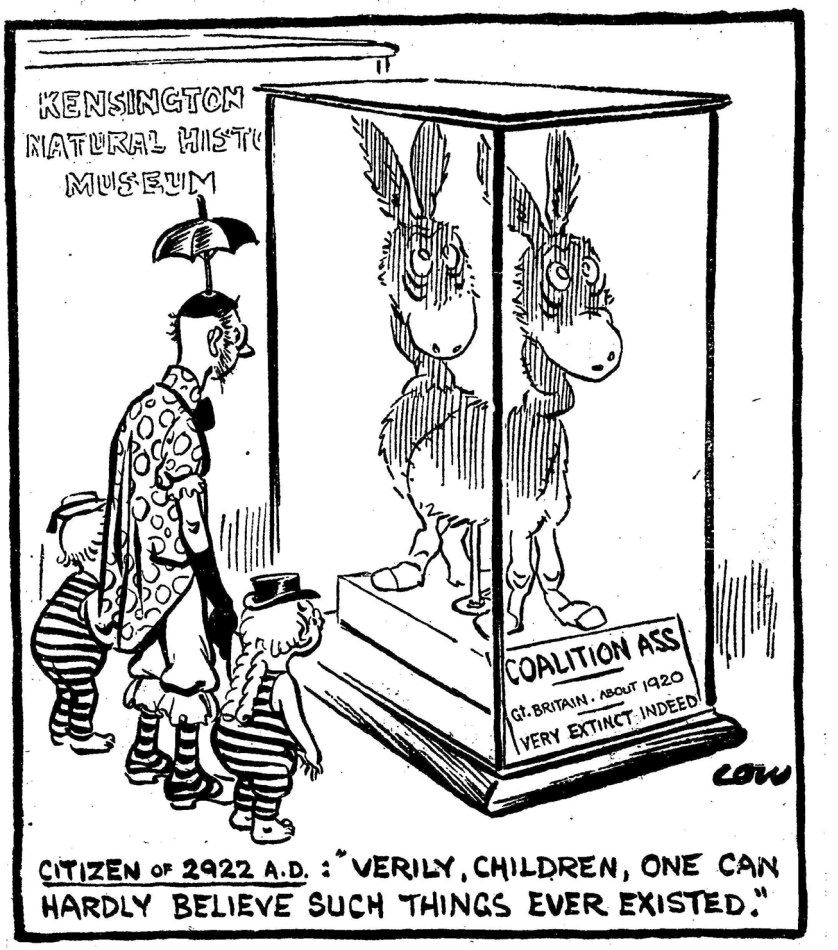
In the same period, previously supportive Lord Beaverbrook also abandoned Lloyd George and used his *Daily Express* and *Sunday Express* to propagate the myth of a Jewish conspiracy and to claim British politicians were being manipulated by Chaim Weizmann and other "mystery men"; also included in this press revolt were *The Spectator* and the *Morning Post*, which questioned the loyalty of Jewish Liberal politicians such as Palestine high commissioner Sir Herbert Samuel and India secretary Sir Edwin Montagu.[112] This was particularly unsound since Montagu had been one of few politicians adamantly opposed to the Balfour Declaration in 1917, arguing that it placed the status of Jews around the world in jeopardy.[113] However, it would be a mistake to view these anti-Semitic attacks outside their political context. Montagu was a target principally because he opposed the Anti-Waste League and Geddes's spending cuts.[114] The sheer virulence of such press attacks made many members of the coalition cabinet nervous. In an exchange with Samuel in February 1922, Churchill fought with Samuel over the responsibility to fund the Palestine gendarmerie. Due to the "growing movement of hostility, against Zionist policy in Palestine" Churchill as colonial secretary struggled to afford the new expense politically rather than financially.[115]

Opposition to the national home continued to grow, and there was a major debate in the Commons on 9 March 1922.[116] Churchill requested extra funds for salaries and expenses (including the gendarmerie) in the Middle East and was careful to stress that Palestine had been quiet and immigration was more closely monitored, since "[w]e cannot have a country inundated by Bolshevist riffraff."[117] He was met again with accusations of cost versus benefit in Palestine. Unionist MP Sir J. D. Rees asked "whether the Palestine Mandate is absolutely irrevocable, because the advantages to us I for one cannot see, and it seems to me a deplorable thing that we should be keeping down the Arabs in their own country at a large expense to our own country."[118] The Conservative MP Frederick Macquistan added, "[T]o the question of Palestine, I must say that that is a great mystery to the average Briton, especially if he is unemployed and sees good money going for

the benefit of people who he always thought knew far more about money than he did."[119] The same points were being raised time and again. This discussion, however, was only the precursor to a more controversial debate in the House of Lords in June.

Lord Islington introduced a motion against the Palestine Mandate on the basis that the national home policy broke promises made to the Arabs and "unless it is very materially modified, it will lead to very serious consequences. It is literally inviting subsequent catastrophe."[120] To the government's chagrin, Islington's motion carried by 60 votes to 29.[121] This had symbolic more than legal importance and was followed by a Commons debate less than two weeks later. Joynson-Hicks called for a motion to decrease the colonial secretary's salary as a procedural ploy to introduce a vote on Palestine, on the basis that the Mandate had never been referred to the House for approval.[122] It had the opposite outcome to the one Joynson-Hicks intended. Churchill secured a vote of confidence 292 to 35.[123] Crucially, one vital document had been published on 1 July 1922, between the two debates, and this was the Churchill White Paper.[124]

In publishing the white paper with records of communication between the colonial secretary and Arab as well as Zionist leaders, the government was addressing domestic political challenges rather than the tangible problems of governing Palestine under a dual obligation. The Churchill White Paper answered accusations that Britain was depriving Palestine's Arabs of their own home: "Unauthorized statements have been made to the effect that the purpose in view is to create a wholly Jewish Palestine. [. . .] His Majesty's Government regard any such expectation as impracticable and have no such aim in view."[125] To demonstrate this, the white paper formally linked immigration to the Palestine economy, following the example set by Samuel immediately after the Jaffa riots.[126] It also addressed the charge of broken promises: "The whole of Palestine west of the Jordan was [. . .] excluded from Sir Henry McMahon's pledge."[127] Answering allegations that the national home would inflame Indian opinion, the white paper highlighted how "the present administration has transferred to a Supreme Council elected by the Moslem community of Palestine the entire control of Moslem Religious endowments (Waqfs), and of the Moslem religious Courts."[128] Against lingering claims of Bolshevist infiltration—as described in the Haycraft Commission—the document stressed that "[i]t is necessary also to ensure that persons who are politically undesirable be excluded from Palestine."[129] Lord Islington had declared in June that the national home policy could not continue unaltered, and he was correct. Under the pressure of interparty politics played out in Parliament and in the press (see fig. 2.1), the coalition was forced to reevaluate a national home policy based solely on the Balfour Declaration.



"STAR" ELECTION POSTERS.—XIX.

Fig. 2.1. A parody election poster, published in *The Star* on 15 November 1922, making fun of Britain's asinine coalition politics. © David Low / Solo Syndication.

Satisfying the War Office

After the government rejected potential policies that came with insufferable political risk, only one alternative remained. The British government could neither entirely support nor repudiate the national home, leaving only the possibility of continuing but imposing limitations designed to address the policy's administrative weaknesses and political critics. The government literally had no other choice. All that was left was to double-check that this last available course of action was acceptable more broadly across British national interests.[130] In the case of postwar Palestine, decision makers were preoccupied with a single requirement, that the ongoing presence in Palestine would be strategically sound. Palestine was debatable as a military asset, but any policy had to satisfy British military and strategic interests in the region as a whole. Rather than maximizing benefits, this was about preventing costs.

During and after World War I, the British cabinet frequently considered the prospect of another similar conflict. Safeguarding routes to India, including lines of communication through Egypt and the Suez Canal, was paramount. These lines of communication became even more important after the war because Britain's empire had grown in Asia and Africa as well as the Middle East. These new holdings included former German territories (Tanganyika, South-West Africa, New Guinea, and Samoa); Turkish territories (Palestine, Transjordan, and Mesopotamia including Mosul); and the requirement to station British troops in Persia and in Constantinople to defend the Dardanelles Straits. There was also a need to increase troop numbers in Egypt to combat the rise of a powerful national movement in 1919 and in India to protect borders from the emerging Soviet Union as well as to battle insurgency.[131] However, the importance of Palestine in this geopolitical worldview was a matter of opinion.

In June 1918, Lloyd George asserted that "if we were to be thrown back as an Empire upon our old traditional policy of utilising the command of the sea in order to cut off our enemies from all the sources of supply and from all possible means of expansion, north, east, south, and west, Palestine would be invaluable."[132] It "secured the defence of Egypt" and losing Palestine "would not only involve the interruption of a main artery of our imperial communications, but would react upon our whole situation in the East, and even in India."[133] Immediately postwar, in December 1918, the army agreed with maintaining Palestine as a buffer state, but only "so long as it can be created without disturbing Mohammedian sentiment."[134]

As British policy of a Jewish national home did indeed inflame Arab and Muslim opinion, the army and key members of the cabinet began to express doubts regarding its military value. By November 1920, chief of the imperial general staff advised the cabinet that Palestine "has no strategical interest for the

British Army" but it "constitutes a serious potential drain on its resources."[135] Winston Churchill retained the post of war secretary at this time, and he agreed: "So far as the security of the Empire is concerned, we are the weaker, rather than the stronger, by the occupation of Palestine."[136] His successor at the War Office, Sir Worthington Laming Worthington-Evans, espoused the opposing view, that uprisings in Egypt and Mosul increased Palestine's importance, and the debate continued in Parliament into 1923.[137] Even those such as Churchill, who openly questioned Palestine's strategic value in private, publicly supported the "buffer state" line of reasoning. It provided a simple and convenient explanation for British entanglement in Palestine. Both sides of this debate, however, understood that Palestine could not be allowed to fall to a rival power. The tiny country was not necessarily crucial to British strategic defense of the empire, but a foreign obstruction there could be devastating.[138]

Therefore, as long as Palestine remained in friendly hands, the military planners were placated. The only politically viable option was to continue with the national home policy by imposing limitations on it. This alternative left Palestine in British possession, which was acceptable to its imperial strategists.

In Too Deep?

The years 1920–1922 were crucial in bringing about the confirmation of the national home policy in the Churchill White Paper, but the Balfour Zeitgeist continued throughout most of the 1920s despite a rapid turnover of British governments during this time. This continuing commitment was the result of sunk costs. The recognized phenomenon of sunk costs refers to an escalation of commitment that is not rational (because governments weighing the expected costs versus benefits associated with any course of action should not take into account resources that have already been spent).[139] On a personal level, this behavior is common. It would include activities such as continuing in a deeply unfulfilling career simply because of the time and money already spent on it. On a governmental level, just this kind of "irrational" process occurred under a new Conservative administration in 1923, under a Labour government in 1924, and again in 1926 under Conservative direction.

Four months after the Churchill White Paper was published, Prime Minister Lloyd George suffered a political mutiny that led to a general election in November 1922. For those Conservative backbenchers who had vigorously campaigned against the Middle East mandates, it was an opportunity to exert influence in favor of withdrawal. However, as the Anti-Waste League and parliamentary condemnations of the coalition government's Middle East policies had largely been directed politically at Lloyd George, the issue did not maintain its potency once he had left Downing Street. Press baron Lord Beaverbrook told the Conservative

Leader Bonar Law he would be using his newspapers to pressure Conservative candidates, urging the tax-paying public to ask who was in favor of leaving Palestine and Mesopotamia. The World Zionist Organization monitored this "bag and baggage" campaign carefully, but they found that a mere twenty-six candidates supported it (and, out of those, only seventeen were elected).[140]

Bonar Law privately wrote to Foreign Secretary Curzon referring to the Palestine Mandate and saying, "you know how keen I am to get rid of it," but at an election address in London, he declared he would "not be stampeded on the issue by Beaverbrook and Rothermere."[141] During the campaign, prominent Conservative politicians Leopold Amery and Austen and Neville Chamberlain expressed a desire to continue the national home pledge, as did former war secretary Worthington-Evans, former Chancellor Sir Robert Horne, and twenty-seven Conservative MPs.[142] Despite the fear and intimidation that anti-Zionist Conservatives in the Anti-Waste League had previously inspired, Lloyd George's departure left them largely neutralized.

However, the Conservative victory in 1922 led many Arab politicians to believe the policy would be overturned.[143] The immediate result was the return—after unsuccessful negotiations with the Colonial Office under Winston Churchill—of an Arab Delegation to London in January 1923.[144] Although the new colonial secretary, the duke of Devonshire, received them and insisted there would be no departure from the white paper policy, the cabinet fully expected a new lobbying campaign.[145] In February 1923, the Middle East Department submitted a memo to the cabinet explaining to the new government how "[w]e are, in fact, committed to the Zionist policy before the whole world in the clearest and most unequivocal fashion" and stressing how repudiation of the Balfour Declaration meant returning the Mandate to the League of Nations and evacuating Palestine immediately.[146] On 27 March, Lord Islington revived the opposing argument by introducing a motion in the House of Lords to change Palestine's constitution on the basis that Arabs had boycotted the vote.[147] The motion failed, but when Conservative prime minister Bonar Law resigned in May 1923 and was succeeded by Stanley Baldwin, the new prime minister dealt with the Palestine uncertainty by calling for another committee to report on policy.[148]

This committee, however, was a political exercise and not a comprehensive review of policy. Members were under pressure from supporters of the Palestine Arab Delegation—whose memorandum to the British government secured the signatures of more than one hundred Conservative MPs including 40 percent of backbenchers—but this anti-Zionism posed no political danger to any member of the committee, which consisted of secretaries of state and ministers previously associated with both sides of the Palestine argument.[149] These included Devonshire, Curzon, Amery, Worthington-Evans, and Joynson-Hicks.[150] Despite the wide swath of views this group had expressed as individuals at an earlier date,

they heard evidence only from High Commissioner Sir Herbert Samuel.[151] Predictably, no member seriously considered reversing the national home policy because it possessed "a cumulative weight from which it is well-nigh impossible for any government to extricate itself without a substantial sacrifice of consistency and self-respect, if not of honour. Those of us who have disliked the policy are not prepared to make that sacrifice."[152] They decided it was no longer pertinent to discuss the original promise made in 1917: "There are some of our number who think that that Declaration was both unnecessary and unwise, and who hold that our subsequent troubles have sprung in the main from its adoption. But that was nearly six years ago. We cannot ignore the fact that ever since it has been the accepted policy of His Majesty's Government."[153] The cabinet accepted these conclusions, marking an official Conservative commitment to the national home. This, crucially, depoliticized the issue for the 1920s.

When a Labour government was elected in 1924, the national home was reviewed again. Like the Liberal Churchill and Conservative Devonshire before him, Labour colonial secretary Thomas agreed there was no option but to continue: "My own view is that we have no alternative but to adhere to the policy of carrying out the terms of the Balfour Declaration as interpreted by our predecessors. I do not underrate the difficulties, but I am satisfied that the difficulties of any alternative course would be even greater" and the cabinet agreed.[154] Similarly, when Conservative Stanley Baldwin became prime minister again later that year, Palestine policy remained unchanged. Sunk costs meant the British government, regardless of party platform, could find no benefit in altering the commitment to a Jewish national home in Palestine.

Indeed, a period of tranquility in Palestine—actually caused by a Polish recession and a substantial reduction in Jewish immigration and settlement—meant British officials viewed the white paper policy as a success.[155] The effective depoliticization of the national home coupled with the absence of riots meant Palestine became less and less important as the decade progressed. In 1927, only 3,034 new Jewish immigrants were recorded in Palestine and 5,071 left.[156] All was quiet, and so Samuel's successor as high commissioner, Lord Plumer, saw little need for the inflated troop and police numbers stationed in Palestine since 1921, and with Colonial Secretary Amery's approval, began to disband them.[157] When riots and widespread violence erupted in Jerusalem in 1928–1929, the illusion and the Balfour Zeitgeist came to an end.

Unresolved Tensions

The Balfour Zeitgeist was a phase of British policy marked by a commitment to the Jewish national home in Palestine. There was no period of linear policy that continued from 1917 until Palestine's major riots in 1929. Rather, there was

a crucial episode of decision-making in 1920–1922 when the policy was questioned and then confirmed, albeit with limitations, in the Churchill White Paper. Considering the findings of two commissions of inquiry following the 1920 Nebi Musa riots and the 1921 Jaffa riots, the decision to confirm Britain's commitment to the national home in 1922 seemed unsupportable. Instead, a politics-first approach demonstrates how and why the British government came to its decision to affirm the national home.

In the first instance, Britain's government rejected options that were highly politically risky. Taking prestige and bureaucratic politics into account meant the opportunity to repudiate the national home was untenable. The state of the postwar economy meant the option to impose the national home with the threat or use of force was also inflammatory and had to be dropped. Finally, interparty rivalry left the government unable to continue the national home as it stood in the Balfour Declaration and draft Mandate. Consequently, only one alternative was left available. This option was then checked against the War Office's requirements for strategic planning in the region. Due to the perception of "sunk costs," this policy was then continued throughout most of the 1920s under governments representing all shades of the mainstream political spectrum. What this meant in the 1920s, however, was that the Jewish-Arab tensions in Palestine remained unresolved, as did their propensity to affect, and be impacted by, British domestic politics.

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3 The Passfield Reversal, 1929–1935

The Balfour Zeitgeist coincided with a period of calm in Palestine, during which British politicians were able to ignore lingering Jewish-Arab tensions, leading to rapid reductions in costly troops and police. However, a conflict over Jerusalem's "Wailing" Wall in 1928 roused the passions of both Jews and Arabs in Palestine, resulting in violence on a horrific scale the following year.[1]

In preparation for Yom Kippur in 1928, the Jewish beadle erected a screen at the Western Wall to separate male and female worshippers. This action was interpreted in the Muslim community as a sign of ownership, and since the Temple ruins were legally part of Muslim waqf property, British forces forcibly removed the screen to prevent rioting. This incident created an atmosphere of political tension that continued to simmer. On 15 August 1929, a group of young Jewish right-wing activists demonstrated at the Wall—followed by Muslims counterdemonstrating—and British efforts to mediate the approaching crisis failed, leading to a bloodbath only days later.[2] The following week Muslim activists streamed into Jerusalem armed with sticks and knives, and rumblings that Jews were killing Arabs inspired mass murder, looting, and destruction elsewhere in the country. Raymond Cafferata, for example, Hebron's British police superintendent, reported mob attacks on Jewish homes that led to murder and mutilation, but he possessed only a fraction of the force needed to restore the peace. Only the kindness of twenty-eight Arab households saved Jewish lives in Hebron, a fact that thoroughly shamed British administrators who prided themselves on maintaining order.[3] The British government responded with two commissions of inquiry that directly resulted in the Passfield White Paper of 1930. (See fig. 3.1.)

This document represented the first substantial attempt to limit the Jewish national home in Palestine, not indefinitely but to an extent designed to cool Arab hatreds and prevent rioting in the future. Nevertheless, this new policy was reversed. The volte-face was articulated in a letter sent from Prime Minister James Ramsay MacDonald to Chaim Weizmann in February 1931, giving rise to the belief that Zionist lobbying had successfully harnessed the British Empire's foreign policy.[4]

Demonstrating a more realistic and coherent explanation for the reversal decision requires examining the British government's political pressure points in more depth. The two commissions of inquiry highlighted dangerous levels of Jewish-Arab antagonism in Palestine as a direct result of Arab unemployment

Fig. 3.1. "Wails or Warwhoops?": a cartoon, published in the *Evening Standard* on 27 August 1929, insinuating that the widespread and deadly riots in Palestine were the result of Muslim fanaticism and Zionist arrogance. © David Low / Solo Syndication.

and landlessness, which was blamed locally on Jewish immigration and land purchase.[5] Therefore, the Passfield White Paper was an understandable and expected attempt to solve the problem by limiting Jewish immigration and land purchase in line with available advice. The decision to reverse it, however, appears almost inexplicable. The committee warnings and recommendations remained constant, so why reject a publicly acknowledged, targeted, and actionable policy?

Taking a politics-first approach creates more clarity, not only regarding the initial decision to issue the Passfield White Paper in 1930 but also regarding the subsequent decision to undermine it in 1931, until an Arab Revolt in the late 1930s prompted a reevaluation. During this period, politicians rejected politically risky options, particularly those that dangerously inflamed internal party politics and parliamentary politics. The government then decided among the remaining alternatives by focusing on preventing damage to the economy. Ultimately, however, the British government's handling of Palestine policy, between the MacDonald letter of 1931 and the beginning of the Arab Revolt in 1936, became crystallized. Following the political storm motivating Passfield's reversal, all identifiable options were politically impossible.

Rather than a Palestine policy based on a narrow interpretation of the role played by Zionist lobbying, this analysis reveals a Palestine policy based primarily on the need to maintain a modicum of unity within government and across parties, which was threatened by the strategic pro-Zionist activism of opposition leaders as well as more sincere Zionist sympathies of some Labour Party backbenchers.

A Narrow Range of Alternatives

Like affirming the Mandate in 1922, the decision to reverse the Passfield White Paper also defied the recommendations of those officials sent to investigate the underlying causes of unrest. Based on information available to politicians at the time, investing in Palestinian Arab agriculture or limiting Jewish immigration and land purchase in Palestine would have been predictable courses of action.[6] This was evident from the reports submitted in 1930 by two commissions of inquiry and, indeed, demonstrated by the issuing of the Passfield White Paper.

In the immediate aftermath of violence in Palestine, these two commissions of inquiry were charged with investigating the root of the problem and recommending a solution. The first was led by distinguished jurist Sir Walter Shaw and the second was composed of only one man, Sir John Hope-Simpson. Just as earlier commissions investigating violence had concluded in the early 1920s, all but one member of the team led by Sir Walter Shaw identified that "the difficulties inherent in the Balfour Declaration and in the Mandate for Palestine are factors of supreme importance in the consideration of the Palestine problem."[7]

Palestine had suffered a severe economic downturn during the mid-1920s, and, despite provisions of the Churchill White Paper of 1922 having stipulated that immigration should be based on economic capacity, this had largely been ignored.[8] The Shaw Commission found that both immigration and Jewish land purchase during the 1920s meant "a landless and discontented class is being created."[9] This was potentially a very dangerous development, and the commission decided that the only solution was a radical overhaul of agriculture and expansion of cultivation.[10] The report then recommended a scientific inquiry "into the prospects of introducing improved methods of cultivation in Palestine" so a new land policy could be based on science rather than politics.[11] The problem was considered acute enough that the Colonial Office temporarily halted Jewish immigration into Palestine under the Labour Schedule in May 1930, pending the scientific land report.[12] As Sir John Hope-Simpson was experienced in ethnic conflicts, having acted as the League of Nations' vice-chairman of the Refugee Settlement Commission in Greece, and (at the time) was considered neither demonstrably pro-Arab nor pro-Zionist, he was entrusted with the task.[13]

After two months of researching scientific reports written during the Mandate, as well as conducting interviews and traveling the country, Sir John

Hope-Simpson concluded that "there is at the present time and with the present methods of Arab cultivation no margin of land available for agricultural settlement by new immigrants, with the exception of such undeveloped land as the Jewish Agencies hold in reserve."[14] Many Jews and some British officials in Palestine regarded Arab unemployment and landlessness as a myth, but Hope-Simpson affirmed the growing problem—also manifest to a lesser degree in the Jewish community—after hearing testimony from employers who said they could meet their labor needs multiple times over. These misfortunes, Hope-Simpson noted, were then ascribed, "probably quite erroneously, to Jewish competition."[15] Like the Shaw Commission, Hope-Simpson saw the only solution as intensive development, and, to that end, "drastic action is necessary."[16] Hope-Simpson also included a huge host of small, practical suggestions from limiting the orange crop and encouraging the cultivation of other fruits, to reducing fees and taxes in line with the fall of the price of crops, and even ensuring schoolmasters received agricultural training.[17] Fundamentally, however, he found that "[t]here exists no easy method of carrying out the provisions of the Mandate. Development is the only way. Without development, there is not room for a single additional settler."[18] In light of these two commission reports, the cabinet committee on Palestine, led by Colonial Secretary Lord Passfield, was faced with the necessity of action.

The government in Westminster had several key options: do nothing, repudiate the national home, amend the Mandate, reinforce the national home, invest in Arab agriculture, or limit Jewish immigration and land purchase. Palestine's high commissioner, Sir John Chancellor, outlined these alternatives as (1) removing the privileged position of the Jews and allowing a measure of self-government or (2) installing enough military in Palestine to protect the Jews.[19] Conversely, Shaw Commission member MP Harry Snell defined the choice as either allaying "Arab anxiety by the easy device of restricting Jewish immigration, in which case you lay yourself open to a suspicion of evading the Mandate," or "you should rescue the Arab farmer from his situation of indebtedness."[20] Furthermore, Sir John Hope-Simpson himself stated the options as, "[u]nless Great Britain is prepared to surrender the Mandate (and I understand that the Dutch are willing to accept it), she will be compelled to undertake the expense of development. These are the two alternatives, and there is no avenue of escape."[21] Importantly, a politics-first approach comes to the same conclusion.

The option to do nothing was most likely discarded immediately because it would have resulted in a surge of political criticism accusing the government of evading fundamental responsibilities to keep the peace. Due to the issue of sunk costs, as discussed previously, the option to repudiate the national home was also discarded immediately. Unlike the machinations surrounding the development of the Churchill White Paper in 1922, no official seriously suggested returning the Mandate to the League of Nations. Amending the Mandate was also dismissed

as an option very early; this would have required consent from the league and a great deal of time spent lobbying other members for their support while the situation remained unresolved. Passfield himself noted that "[t]he objections to a revision of the actual terms of the Mandate seem to me insuperable."[22] Reinforcing the national home meant pouring in funding for security, and, while the Palestine administration did increase security measures following the riots in 1929, this was an impractical long-term solution even before the Great Depression. All of these options failed to meet political requirements as they would have initiated intolerable domestic political criticism. Investing in development or limiting Jewish immigration and land purchase were the only politically viable options remaining.

In terms of parliamentary politics, Passfield understood that the general policy of the white paper would not be welcomed warmly, but he did not predict the outrage it would produce from Zionists and members of every party. This was because criticism directed at the white paper, such as Hailsham and Simon's letter to *The Times* outlined in chapter 1, was couched in the language of international law but created political rather than legal problems. The colonial secretary had warned Weizmann beforehand, giving him an overview of the Hope-Simpson report and the policy under consideration, and Passfield believed that Weizmann "took it very well indeed" while stressing that "there should be no numerical limitation on the ultimate number of Jews."[23]

Prime Minister MacDonald had even reiterated Britain's commitment to the Jewish national home and the dual obligation on 3 April 1930, and the text of this speech was included in the white paper; it was "an international obligation from which there can be no question of receding."[24] Taking into account Weizmann's reluctant but nevertheless apparent acquiescence, MacDonald's reiteration of Britain's commitment to the national home, and Passfield's regular communications with the prime minister during cabinet committee deliberations, there was no warning of the political storm that followed.[25] Believing the two options of restricting Jewish immigration and investing in Arab agriculture satisfied political requirements, the government allowed these alternatives to be weighed against the most important aspect of national interest at the time: the economy.

As the American stock market crash of 1929 was developing into an international financial crisis that heralded stagnation and unemployment for British voters, it is important to recognize that development in Palestine necessitated either a guaranteed loan or grant-in-aid from the Colonial Office.[26] When the cabinet committee on Palestine submitted their first report to the cabinet on 15 September 1930, it was a detailed plan for the development that Hope-Simpson had advised was urgently necessary. However, the cost of Hope-Simpson's plan was unknown until a further financial committee delivered the blow: "Sir John Hope-Simpson's scheme involved the expenditure of some £6,000,000, spread

over ten years, the interest on which would have to be guaranteed by the Exchequer. This would probably necessitate a loan spread over twenty years, the service of which would require £400,000 a year. This sum, however, did not include the capital cost of the land."[27] These amounts were much higher than anything the cabinet committee had considered, and they were advised to reassess the situation in light of this new information.[28] The state of the economy was so dire that in late 1930 the Treasury reimposed its control over Palestine's finances and sent an investigator, Sir Simon O'Donnell, to rate the Palestine administration's efficiency and judge where economies could be made.[29] The committee prepared a new report following this financial information and concluded that "in present circumstances a proposal to spend many millions on land settlement of Jews and Arabs in Palestine would meet with serious opposition in Parliament and the country."[30]

Consequently, the committee returned to the cabinet on 24 September with new suggestions. They decided that Britain was under a moral if not legal obligation to recompense Arabs dispossessed by British policy in Palestine. They agreed that the Jews should be allowed, at their own expense, to continue developing the land they already owned and that this should suffice to permit Jewish settlement for the following five years.[31] Jewish immigration would be restricted to numbers suitable for those reserve lands or immigrants who could be absorbed comfortably into the industrial population.[32] Unfortunately, there is no full transcript of this meeting. The minutes merely record that after "considerable discussion" the cabinet agreed to approve the committee's draft policy including their new points, following the realization of the cost of Hope-Simpson's scheme.[33] The outcome was a compromise of some very limited development and compensation as well as limits on the rate of expansion of the Jewish national home. The draft policy was subject to many minor alterations and was published as the Passfield White Paper on 21 October 1930. Regarding the question of peace, Passfield's new policy articulated the belief that "so long as widespread suspicion exists, and it does exist, amongst the Arab population, that the economic depression, under which they undoubtedly suffer at present, is largely due to excessive Jewish immigration, and so long as some grounds exist upon which this suspicion may be plausibly represented to be well founded, there can be little hope of any improvement in the mutual relations of the two races."[34] This prompted condemnation from both Conservative and Liberal Party leaders, which both Passfield and MacDonald failed to predict.[35]

By February 1931, the white paper had been undermined so severely as to constitute reversal. This was done in a published letter from MacDonald to Weizmann offering an "authoritative interpretation" of the Passfield White Paper and British policy in Palestine.[36] Far from limiting land purchase or Jewish immigration, the MacDonald letter stressed that centralized control over land purchase

would be "regulatory and not prohibitive" and that "His Majesty's Government did not imply a prohibition of acquisition of additional land by Jews," which, of course, was the entire point of Passfield's policy.[37] Regarding immigration, the letter asserted that "His Majesty's Government did not prescribe and do not contemplate any stoppage or prohibition of Jewish immigration in any of its categories,"[38] which, again, ran counter to both the Shaw and Hope-Simpson commission reports as well as the deliberations of the cabinet committee on Palestine and the approval they received from the cabinet as a whole.

As the final text of the letter "had been agreed upon between representatives of the Jewish Agency and [another] Committee appointed by the Cabinet on the 6th November 1930," Zionist leaders appeared to have exerted a great deal of influence on the decision, contributing to the belief in the power of lobbying.[39] However, the calculations behind the reversal of the Passfield White Paper were more nuanced. Weizmann did orchestrate a campaign by writing letters to prominent newspapers as well as the League of Nations' Permanent Mandates Commission (PMC). He encouraged his supporters and friends—of which he had many among the British elite—to do the same, but these efforts always constituted more of a public show of protest than an exercise in secret diplomacy.[40] Negotiations with Zionists from November 1930 until January 1931 began with the Foreign Office trying to convince Weizmann and his colleagues that the white paper was a sound legal policy and ended with a volte-face. In these short months between the publication of the white paper and the MacDonald letter, the government came under severe criticism internationally, but, most important, domestically from opposition Liberal and Conservative parties. The polarizing nature of Passfield's new policy meant that the range of alternatives for dealing with its aftermath was narrowed to only two options: to continue with the white paper, or to reverse it. During this time, the factors that were most pressing to Labour's survival in government were internal party politics and the closely related problem of parliamentary politics.[41] Detailing the risk associated with these issues demonstrates just how little room Labour politicians had to maneuver.[42]

Crumbling from Within

A key source of political instability in 1930–1931 was internal party politics. The minority Labour government held only a fragile grip on power, and a problem that presented high levels of risk to that power was disunity within the Labour Party itself.[43] Labour foreign policy was marked by a commitment to the League of Nations, the credibility and stature of which was, therefore, highly important.[44] As Labour's traditional stance toward Zionism was staunchly supportive, James Ramsay MacDonald's government also faced the added complication of

rebellion by key Labour Party backbenchers. Both of these issues—attitude to the League and party sentiment for Zionism—became dangerously inflamed due to interparty rivalry, which is discussed in detail below. Labour's precarious unity combined with the government's numerical weakness meant that there was simply no feasible way to continue with the Passfield White Paper.

In terms of foreign policy, the Labour Party's focus on the League of Nations constituted support for a program of arms limitation, eradication of outstanding grievances, arbitration of international disputes, and collective security.[45] The point was to prevent further global conflicts and—although this goal proved impractical—Labour leaders viewed their time in office as a historic opportunity for peace.[46] This foreign policy, however, did not reflect the party's grassroots priorities; instead, it was the brainchild of Labour's intelligentsia, most notably Foreign Secretary Arthur Henderson (described by Lady Frances Davidson as "that prim old Methodist").[47] The policy was then sold to the rest of the party.[48] In addition, by the autumn of 1930, there was a general problem with "[d]iscontent and disillusionment" along the front bench. Lady Passfield remarked how the Labour leaders were "strangled by the multitudinous and complicated issues raised in government departments; and by the alarming gravity of two major problems—India's upheaval and the continuous and increasing unemployment."[49]

As such, the intellectual commitment to the league was a potentially weak point in the armor of Labour Party unity. Paradoxically, as the Palestine Mandate was granted and theoretically supervised by the Council of the League of Nations, it was also divisive for British Palestine policy to even appear in contravention of league authority. This Labour Party commitment to the league faced its first criticisms from the PMC—the body appointed to oversee all mandates—in the summer of 1930. To further complicate matters, when various politicians wrote their letters to *The Times* months later to protest against the Passfield White Paper, their criticisms were more poignant because they echoed accusations leveled by the PMC.

Following the Shaw Commission report, although Foreign Secretary Henderson assured the Council of the League of Nations that Britain had no intention of deviating from a policy based on the Balfour Declaration, the council requested that the PMC conduct a thorough examination of this new document.[50] Prime Minister MacDonald received a copy of the PMC's report on 28 July 1930 and said it "was not pleasant reading."[51] The report contained a very grave charge: "that the partial inaction of the Mandatory Power as regards its obligations to the Palestinian population both Arab and Jewish is the fundamental cause of the friction which eventually culminated in the serious disorder of August 1929."[52] Charging Britain with negligence, the PMC was discarding the Shaw Commission's evidence and conclusions as well as any new policy they inspired. In response, Colonial Office undersecretary Sir Drummond Shiels tried

to reassure the council; he advised that "there is no new policy; there is no secret to be disclosed; and that the British government stands today where it did when it accepted the Mandate, and with the same policy."[53]

Months later, however, in the face of criticism following the publication of Passfield's new white paper, Shiels's statement, in hindsight, could easily have been interpreted as a lie told directly to the Council of the League of Nations. Tension built in October immediately following the white paper's publication. Allegations arose that it "crystallised" the Jewish national home.[54] This term had come directly from the report of the PMC: "The Policy of the Mandatory would not be fairly open to criticism unless it aimed at crystallising the Jewish national home at its present stage of development."[55] The PMC's opinion that Britain had been responsible for Jewish-Arab tensions, its preference for Zionist arguments over an official British investigation, and Shiels's apparent dishonesty with regard to policy all contributed to an atmosphere in which Britain's relationship with the League of Nations was mutually wary. This meant that the minority Labour government did not relish the thought of further censure from the league, a development that would risk creating rifts within a party already potentially divided ideologically on the Palestine issue.

The Labour Party had been officially pro-Zionist since two-and-a-half months before the Balfour Declaration by approving the War Aims Memorandum, which called for a Jewish return to Palestine.[56] Its main proponent was Sydney Webb, who became Lord Passfield and the future colonial secretary and reflected the party's general support for self-determination among national ethnic groups, including in India.[57] By 1930, the strongest Labour supporters of Zionism were Joseph Kenworthy in the House of Commons and Josiah Wedgewood in the Lords.[58] Kenworthy, for example, wrote to Weizmann immediately after the white paper's publication, assuring him he had the support of many non-Jewish MPs and would correct this "blunder."[59]

Kenworthy had a general commitment to pragmatism in ethnic conflicts and did not consider British conciliations in the face of violence to be good policy unless they actually solved the problem at hand. He released a book in 1931 called *India: A Warning* highlighting all of the problems with finding a constitutional solution in India; his attitude was not partisan but intended to warn fellow politicians that succumbing to the violence of one particular ethnic group would not solve fundamental obstacles to peace and stability.[60] As discussed further below, this sort of reasoning was also directly relevant to perceptions of Palestine.

In the House of Lords, Wedgwood had been a friend to Zionism since the 1920s, joining with both James Ramsay MacDonald and future chancellor Philip Snowden in organizing the Palestine Mandate Society, a pro-Zionist lobby group.[61] MacDonald had even visited Palestine in 1922 and subsequently argued that the Arab claim to self-determination was invalid because "Palestine and the

Jews can never be separated" and "the Arab population do not and cannot use or develop the resources of Palestine."[62] MacDonald, Passfield, and Snowden, therefore, had all been involved in promoting the Zionist movement with their like-minded colleagues before attaining high office. Once confronted with the Shaw and Hope-Simpson reports, however, they all approved a new policy based on limiting Jewish immigration to Palestine.[63] This preexisting sentiment juxtaposed against the Passfield White Paper of 1930 had the potential to create a split within the Labour Party that, if left uncorrected, posed a real danger to the government's longevity.

When the white paper was published on 21 October 1930, the criticism it attracted seemed to have an impact on MacDonald's thinking relatively quickly. On 6 November, the cabinet decided to create a new committee for Palestine policy.[64] Primarily, the new committee was tasked with legal clarification of Palestine policy in cooperation with an authority such as the Lord Advocate. It would also "get in touch with the representatives of the Zionists in the most politic and tactful manner possible in the circumstances and should make recommendations as to the attitude to be taken up by the government in view of the reception of the recently issued white paper."[65] MacDonald then met with Chaim Weizmann the same day, when he purportedly told the Zionist leader, "There is no white paper."[66] This unequivocal comment was most likely an off-the-record exclamation, and there is little other indication that the decision to reverse the white paper had been made by 6 November. Indeed, MacDonald had written to Weizmann the day after the document's publication to advise him that "a closer study of what is laid down in the statement of policy will show you that it is far better than you seem to imagine, and that whatever you may object to in it is a very reasonable price to pay if we can secure closer cooperation in Palestine."[67] In addition, the prime minister wrote again a week later to stress that their differences over the policy were minor and based on misunderstandings and phraseology.[68] Weizmann had understood this to mean "that some amending interpretation of the White Paper is being considered" and he telegrammed his American counterpart, Felix Warburg, to this effect immediately after meeting MacDonald.[69]

Bringing the Zionists into discussions in this manner undoubtedly began with the aim of making absolutely sure that the new policy was legal and sound. This is why the cabinet wanted "clarification" conducted in conjunction with the Lord Advocate and why the initial approach was kept secret—the announcement of Zionist participation in the new Palestine subcommittee remained classified until the parliamentary debate on 17 November.[70] Gestation of the reversal idea had only just begun, and the government would have been unlikely to proceed with a difficult Commons debate and an impassioned defense of the white paper had the decision to reverse it already been made.

Rather, the main issue remained correcting any appearance that Labour intended to undermine league authority. Assigning Foreign Secretary Arthur Henderson as chair of the new committee facilitated this aim.[71] This also served a second purpose of soothing internal politics, as Henderson was far more popular within the party than MacDonald, especially when the extent of backbench antipathy for the white paper became clear during the debate.[72] This parliamentary debate is discussed in more detail below, but Kenworthy, for example, publicly railed against his own party leadership and advised the House that "Colonial secretaries have come under the lash of my tongue in the past and others will do the same unless the Colonial Office policy is changed."[73]

This added Palestine to the lengthy list of issues already angering Labour backbenchers under MacDonald's leadership. The prime minister found himself at the mercy of "rumours of dissensions, intrigues and crises in the government ranks" and Conservative politician Austen Chamberlain believed this was "a case in which the proverb is true that there is no smoke without fire."[74] Under this strain, Conservatives believed "Ramsay is terribly overworked, shows some signs of fretfulness which attacks him in such conditions, and might be upset by an accident."[75] Before the Palestine issue could become such an "accident," reaching out to representatives of the Zionist movement to liaise with a new cabinet committee on Palestine was less a direct reaction to their demands and more of a safety measure intended to guard against party divisions over the League of Nations. Later in November, December, and January, these negotiations became a way of plastering over the fissures left by the Labour leadership's shifting commitment to Zionism.

As the prime minister would have recognized this rebellious streak among his own backbenches after the white paper's publication, why did the cabinet not anticipate a breaking of ranks beforehand? Although it is very difficult to explain why a particular threat did not occur to the relevant politicians, it is likely that the new policy's internal effect was considered manageable. The threat became dangerously exacerbated, however, by the vocal and unrelenting opposition raised by Conservative and Liberal leaders. Internal party politics was not necessarily enough on its own to constitute too much political danger, but it primed the situation, most likely lowering the threshold of what was considered acceptable risk. Once combined with parliamentary politics, the frustrations of internal disagreements meant the Passfield White Paper was stillborn.

Firing across the Aisles

The two issues of internal party politics and parliamentary politics are closely related in this case because the latter represented a skillful, if not entirely on purpose, manipulation of the former. The minority Labour government depended

foremost on its own unity to maintain power, but it also relied heavily on Liberal Party support.[76] Following publication of the Passfield White Paper, this weakness was exploited effectively by the appearance of a Liberal-Conservative alliance. This rhetorical joining of forces heightened and prolonged the debate that was so divisive within Labour's own ranks. The approaching India Conference in mid-November 1930 exacerbated the white paper problem, and despite its critics across the aisle posing emotional and even fallacious arguments against Passfield's policy, a coherent and comprehensive governmental rebuttal proved unpersuasive. MacDonald was already in a precarious position, and India policy had proved dangerously disruptive the previous year. A parliamentary debate on the Passfield White Paper demonstrated these continuing divisions—which were confirmed by a diminished majority in the Whitechapel by-election—and these factors accumulated to ensure that discussions with Zionists (which initially aimed to provide legal clarification) resulted in a complete reversal of the offending policy. These features of parliamentary machinations combined with Labour's internal disunity, making any attempt to continue the Passfield White Paper all but impossible.

As well as unstable levels of support for foreign policy within his own party, MacDonald had to contend with the inherent difficulties of minority governance; he relied on varying degrees of cross-party support for foreign policy initiatives to prevent polarized parliamentary debates that risked splitting his own party.[77] In March 1930, for example, MacDonald wrote to Passfield to arrange some discussion on whether a new white paper on Palestine policy was urgently required, but stressing that "it could only be [. . .] with the general support of all parties in the House of Commons."[78] Likewise, the prime minister's son, Malcolm MacDonald, noted how it was always "important that the Liberals at any rate should support their proposals."[79]

Labour had inherited an empire in disarray. In addition, there was a looming global depression, stronger dominions, colonial nationalisms, and the rise of the United States as a world power. This all meant that imperial policy had become an exercise in calculated control through concession and compromise—a balance between firmness and conciliation. These issues also had the power to arouse great parliamentary passions within and across parties.[80] Conservative chairman Leopold Amery called this problem Labour's "paralysing ineptitude."[81] In this atmosphere, however, all party heads recognized the importance of some degree of cooperation in private negotiations.[82] As such, MacDonald had conferred with both Conservative leader Stanley Baldwin and Liberal de facto leader David Lloyd George in March 1930—specifically with regard to the Shaw Commission—to ask for "the guidance of your views on what should be done now."[83] Although no notes from this meeting exist, it was necessary because the consequences of trying to move ahead without cross-party support had proved

nearly disastrous for India policy the previous year, in circumstances highly similar to the debate that followed the Passfield White Paper.

When Labour came to power in 1929, the existing legislation on India's internal government was the Montagu-Chelmsford Act of 1921, which was due for review.[84] To this end, a Statutory Commission chaired by Liberal MP Sir John Simon had been formed to investigate and recommend the next stages of constitutional development.[85] Differences of opinion regarding the degree and pace of this self-rule cut across parties.[86] India had growing provincial nationalisms, and Lord Irwin, a Conservative peer cooperating with the government, suggested giving Indian politicians a veneer of responsibility and protoindependence to produce a sedative effect.[87] Before the Simon Commission could present its report, however, the government issued the Irwin Declaration based on this principle on 31 October 1929.[88]

Whereas both Conservative and Liberal leaders had agreed to this Labour government policy adopted from Irwin, the problem was with the declaration itself.[89] Liberal Lord Reading, the former viceroy to India, criticized the wording as dangerously ambiguous and sacrificing long-term stability for short-term pacification.[90] Reading's stature commanded a great deal of authority, and his objections allowed Lloyd George and other Liberals to refuse consent for the declaration, stiffening the instinctive opposition of Peel, Austen Chamberlain, Churchill, and other Conservatives whom Baldwin was unable to restrain once it became known that the declaration had not received Simon Commission approval.[91] This meant Baldwin also had to withdraw his support since diehard Conservative opposition (mostly Churchill, who was looking for an issue with which to revive his career) placed the Conservative leader's own position in profound peril.[92]

The result was a major hardening against minority-Labour's India policy among both Conservatives and Liberals.[93] The cabinet issued a communiqué specifically stating what Irwin's ambiguity had attempted to conceal: that the declaration involved no change of policy. This sparked outrage in India, leading to the need for repressive measures by May 1930 and leaving bitter and substantial disagreements between parties in Westminster.[94] In the year following the Irwin Declaration, however, there was a subtle and tenuous shift within Parliament back toward a more bipartisan line. Labour stood firmly behind the declaration and, despite a flurry of Liberal uncertainty, was ultimately supported by Lloyd George with Conservatives acting as a check on hurried constitutional development.[95] India remained a crucial issue, however, and the cabinet was meeting twice a day in the summer of 1930 to discuss it.[96] The situation also stayed tenuous for MacDonald. Lady Passfield recorded in her diary during this time that "the Labour government is on the rocks and may any day be wrecked."[97]

This tense situation continued throughout 1930 when the government had to deal with the Imperial Conference and the India Round Table only to be

blindsided politically by the subsidiary issue of Palestine. This convergence of similar crises left the prime minister "overwhelmed with work" and in a terribly exposed political position.[98] Cross-party cooperation was vital but shaky. Austen Chamberlain expressed an opinion, common among the prime minister's supporters and rivals, that "there is too much trouble ahead; Ramsay is not, I think, the man to deal with it."[99] The uneasy consensus on India policy built up the previous year was the product of luck rather than adroit political maneuvering on the part of the Labour government and, approaching the first of a series of India Round Table conferences in November 1930, was directly threatened by the fallout from Passfield's white paper.

While it would be overly simplistic to state that Palestine and India policy were decided in tandem, the period 1929–1930 marked one of the few occasions when India policy colored all of British politics.[100] In addition, the conflict in Palestine bore some of the hallmarks British politicians associated with India, such as ethnic conflict and "natives" agitating for political rights. Conservative Party chairman Leopold Amery remarked how the violence in Palestine would be "familiar to most Indian administrators."[101] This meant that attitudes to Palestine among the British political elite were, to some extent, informed by how they viewed the India problem, with which they were far more familiar. Who were the "natives" in Palestine, and which group required suppressing and which protecting? Neither Palestine's Jews nor its Arabs escaped the paternalistic racism emanating from the House of Commons that was associated with British imperialism more generally and the India question in particular in 1930.

In this context, any perception of weakness to imperial subjects around the world had to be considered very carefully. It would be a mistake, however, to consider that the two issues held equal weight in British politics: "little Palestine with its troubles—insignificant to the rest of the world," Lady Passfield wrote, "is likely to be forgotten in concern over the revolution which some say is going on in India. For the next six weeks, the P.M. and other Cabinet Ministers, having finished with the Dominions, will be absorbed in the Round Table Conferences to settle the fate of India—or rather the British in India."[102] Palestine was, paradoxically, both important (because it threatened to disrupt Labour's cross-party support for the India Round Table conference) and insignificant (as India was the chief and all-consuming concern). This meant that although the government's and certainly Passfield's early concern when formulating the new Palestine policy had been avoiding any appearance of capitulation to either outside lobbying or parliamentary pressure, the political storm created by its publication altered their priorities.[103]

At first, the dominant voice within the cabinet on this issue was that of the colonial secretary, who stressed the need to remain firm against any and all external parties. This meant ignoring both the borderline anti-Semitic complaints of

Palestine's high commissioner Sir John Chancellor and "the persistent bombardment by the Jews, in personal intercourse, in formal interviews, in newspaper propaganda, in insidious threats of ulterior action, notably electoral pressure at home and international public opinion abroad, and all the rest of it [. . .]."[104] Passfield seemed, for example, to take great pride in resisting Zionist lobbying to lift a ban on immigration under the Labour schedule imposed by Chancellor with cabinet approval: although "very strong pressure has been brought to bear upon His Majesty's Government to rescind the suspension without awaiting the Report of Sir John Hope-Simpson," he wrote, "[s]o far, all demands to rescind or modify the suspension have been resisted by His Majesty's Government."[105] This unwavering position was justified within the Colonial Office by the argument for a stable empire.

Crucially, this attitude of forbearance against the "Jewish hurricane," as Passfield referred to it, endured during the new policy's preparation in cabinet committees in the summer of 1930 and obviously did not prevent its publication on 21 October. Weizmann, for example, threatened to resign on 13 October but the white paper was still published two weeks later.[106] In contrast, the political danger following publication of the Passfield White Paper emanated chiefly from within the British political establishment and stemmed from many criticisms leveled at the white paper that represented more political strategy than principled objection.[107] Accusations directed by Liberal and Conservative leaders against the Labour government were not really about the text of the white paper or the policy it contained. Before outlining the attacks made by Conservative and Liberal party politicians, however, it is necessary to sketch a portrait of these opposition leaders' own precarious careers in 1930 to illustrate their motives.

Conservative leader Stanley Baldwin had barely survived the Irwin Declaration debacle by appeasing his vocal critics within the Conservative Party. When Baldwin spoke in Parliament on the India issue, for example, "there had been no word of approval from his own colleagues and as soon as Lloyd George got up Winston and Worthington-Evans on each side of him leant forward and punctuated every sentence with emphatic 'hear hears!'"[108] The Conservative leader was in danger of having to resign because "[i]f the matter had gone to division half his colleagues would have voted against him."[109] As a moderate who was facing diehard backbench opinion, especially with regard to India, the Conservative leader could ill afford to support any government policy that appeared to acquiesce in the face of demands even remotely similar to those of the India Congress. In the case of Palestine, Arabs were comparable to Indians—not because British politicians viewed Jews as nonindigenous but because they were Caucasian, European, and therefore perceived very differently in the interwar imperial mind-set. Approaching the India Round Table in 1930, Baldwin deliberately retreated from frontline politics and declined to serve on Britain's delegation to

the conference.[110] He wrote to Lord Irwin on 16 October to say that in preparing for the conference, he "kept off, partly to keep [Lloyd George] off and partly because the political situation is far too tricky to allow me to be immersed in a Conference when every crook in the country is out for my scalp."[111]

In this environment, the Conservative Party chairman (and former colonial secretary) Leopold Amery was highly concerned with keeping Baldwin in his leadership position.[112] Amery was a known Zionist sympathizer who had been involved with securing Palestine's advantageous borders in 1920 but did not support the cause at the Arabs' expense—he simply did not believe that the Arabs were losing anything. This is evident in an article Amery wrote for *The Pioneer* in December 1929. He was, first and foremost, a British imperialist: "The terms of the Balfour Declaration make it plain that the creation of the Jewish national home did not imply the setting up of a Jewish nationalist state or the support, in favour of the Jews, of that essentially intolerant type of racial or linguistic nationalism which has devastated Europe by its conflicting claims for political domination. Equally it left no room, in Palestine at least, for the assertion of that type of nationalism by the Arabs."[113] His motivations may be clearer when considering Amery's recollections after a dinner party the previous year; Amery admitted "[. . .] our object is to have Palestine permanently within the ambit of our commonwealth of peoples."[114] Fundamentally, Amery's loyalty was to his country's status, to his party's position, and so, at that moment, to Baldwin. Between them, they also felt subject to the opposition of Conservatives who still favored joining in a coalition with the Liberal Party and were marginalized by David Lloyd George's removal in 1922. These dissenters had included Austen Chamberlain, making the former foreign secretary an important man to court.

The policy that joined many along the Liberal and Conservative benches was free trade within the empire, which was the particular cause of the press barons, Lord Beaverbrook and Lord Rothermere. These men also formed the United Empire Party to split the Conservative vote and pressure against India reform.[115] The press barons opposed Lloyd George when he was prime minister on the basis of an antiwaste campaign, but, by 1929, they were undermining Stanley Baldwin's leadership of the Conservative Party over India and the free trade issue, the latter of which was championed by David Lloyd George and aroused suspicions of collaboration between the three men. Baldwin, for example, asked his shadow cabinet, "What is your reading of the Beaverbrook-Rothermere game? And under which thimble is the pea, or in other words Ll.G.?"[116]

In a moment of frustration in dealing with this situation, Amery suggested the Baldwin-loyalists within the party should sign a letter to their leader saying, "All your old colleagues conscious of each other's senility desire to tell you that not one of them has any objection to any of the others being bumped off [. . .]."[117] While assassinating the diehard Conservatives was not an option,

their various outrages were at least relatively predictable. Baldwin and Amery were determined to beat the press barons and the diehards at their own game: "I am fighting with beasts at Ephesus," Baldwin wrote, "and I hope to see their teeth drawn and their claws broken before the battle is over!"[118] On 23 October, one tactic for this war became apparent. The Conservative leadership penned a letter to *The Times* signed by Baldwin, Amery, and Chamberlain to protest against the Passfield White Paper.[119] Rather than being aimed solely at the Labour government's apparent anti-Zionism, however, the letter also targeted divisive factions within Conservative ranks. It was part Zionist sympathy and part political strategy.

The letter was first constructed in conjunction with Arthur Balfour's niece and Zionist campaigner Baffy Dugdale. Amery recounted how "Mrs Dugdale [. . .] came in very much concerned about the Palestine White Paper" and believed that the Conservative Party should "dissociate themselves as promptly as possible from the government in this matter."[120] Amery agreed and ushered Mrs. Dugdale in to see Stanley Baldwin, inviting her to begin "drafting something before she came back and lunched with us."[121] Mrs. Dugdale then took Baldwin's "general instructions as to the points to be brought out in a letter," which she drafted and then Amery revised and amended with Baldwin and Austen Chamberlain.[122] Weizmann credited his colleague Sir Lewis Namier with inspiring Mrs. Dugdale, but it was Leopold Amery who organized the Conservative opposition to the white paper.[123]

Amery even recruited Austen Chamberlain for this purpose. As well as being a known Zionist sympathizer, Chamberlain had opposed Baldwin over the Irwin Declaration and had no confidence in him as a leader, noting how, "to recall an old cartoon of 'Punch,' a manifesto in his hands becomes 'a wet blanket.'"[124] Chamberlain, however, did not relish the thought of a party run by the press barons and opposed attempts to force Baldwin's resignation on the grounds that it "would be hailed as a triumph for themselves by Rothermere and Beaverbrook" and "would lend itself to every form of misconception and be deeply wounding [. . .]."[125] Baldwin was not a passive observer in this political infighting, but he found it very draining and sympathized with James Ramsay MacDonald's similar situation, seeing the prime minister as "a good man and true, fighting for his life."[126] The same was not true for Baldwin's opinions of David Lloyd George: "no constitution can stand public life today when you get near seventy," Baldwin wrote, "unless you are made like L.l.G. with no bowels, no principles, no heart and no friends."[127] The Liberal leader was, incidentally, also under pressure from his own party. While Amery did not necessarily want a parliamentary debate on the Palestine white paper, "fearing that it would show divisions in our own ranks," it was members of David Lloyd George's Liberal Party who pushed for a date and organized it.[128]

It is important to note that Lloyd George had been a divisive figure for Liberal politics since 1916 when he ousted Prime Minister Asquith and then fronted a majority Conservative government against the wishes of many within his party. Until Lloyd George suffered a similar coup at the hands of his coalition partners in 1922, the former prime minister lent broad support to the Zionist enterprise. As noted previously, however, this was less the result of sentiment and ideology than the opportunities and constraints created by postwar diplomacy. Regardless, whenever the Palestine issue surfaced subsequently in debate, Lloyd George vociferously defended the Zionist movement—and thereby his own tenure as prime minister.

By 1930, his unofficial position as leader of the Liberal Party was also tenuous. Lloyd George had led a vote against the government in July 1930 and lost, simply because many Liberal MPs had defied the whip and sided with the government.[129] Sir John Simon, of the Simon Commission in India, was also close to challenging Lloyd George for the leadership of the Liberal Party, and the letter he sent with Conservative politician Lord Hailsham to *The Times*, protesting the Passfield White Paper, was a tacit challenge to the Liberal leader's authority.[130] Lloyd George was also bitterly frustrated with the Liberal Party's marginalized position and support for a Socialist party that was failing to live up to its radical reforming intentions.[131] As MacDonald refused to supply an arrangement that gave the dwindling Liberal Party any lifeline, Lloyd George attempted to exploit Conservative dissatisfaction with Baldwin to win back some of his former coalitionists and attract younger, more progressive Tories into his sphere.[132]

Baldwin recognized the tactic, noting that "the Goat has finally failed to get any real arrangements with Labour and rumour has it he is going to make another attempt on us."[133] Baldwin's assessment was that "[t]he Liberal Party is cracking badly and Labour is running about with its' tail between its' legs. Ramsay is tired and rattled. An election may come any day but I still feel they will see the New Year in [. . .]."[134] Lady Passfield recognized, however, that "all three parties are in a devil of a mess."[135] This was the political context in which the Passfield White Paper was published on 21 October 1930 and then debated in the House of Commons on 17 November. Both Baldwin (through Amery) and David Lloyd George had previous ties to Chaim Weizmann and Zionism, more generally, and this meant they were also well placed to use Zionist arguments to guard against internal criticism (in the case of Baldwin) or undermine a disappointing government usurping the Liberal Party's position in British politics.

As mentioned previously, the initial criticisms came in the form of two letters to *The Times* and these were followed by the crucial parliamentary debate. The first letter came from Baldwin, Amery, and Austen Chamberlain. It accused the Labour government of abandoning the Jewish national home policy, stating, "they have laid down a policy of so definitely negative a character that it

appears to us to conflict [. . .] with the whole spirit of the Balfour Declaration and of the statements made by successive governments in the last 12 years."[136] The effect of this policy, the letter charged, was "to create a feeling of distrust in that British good faith which is the most precious asset of our foreign Imperial policy."[137] The letter was relatively brief, and as such made no reference to the Shaw or Hope-Simpson Commissions nor to any of the specific arguments utilized by the white paper.

Following this, on 4 November, two lawyers and former cabinet ministers, Lord Hailsham and Sir John Simon, wrote their letter to *The Times*, which purported to compare provisions of the white paper to the terms of the Mandate.[138] Hailsham was a Conservative, the former Lord Chancellor, and Simon, of the aforementioned Simon Commission in India, had served as a Liberal Home Secretary.[139] As a Conservative, Hailsham was predictably opposed to Labour, and the Irwin Declaration had seriously undermined Simon both politically and personally. Described by Lady Passfield as "[t]hat smooth faced, slim and ingratiating personage," Simon was not characterized as a politician who accepted such insults to his stature with ease; he and his wife were "admirable citizens; but they have far too much contempt for other people and are far too obstinate and dogmatic, too assured of their own enlightenment."[140]

Hailsham and Simon's letter accused the government's new Palestine policy of flouting Britain's international obligations as a member and trustee of the League of Nations.[141] Furthermore, it called for "the Council of the League of Nations to obtain from the Hague Court an advisory opinion on the questions involved."[142] As the Labour government's League of Nations policy was a potentially divisive issue and the report from the PMC had been damning in places, this was hardly an attractive proposal in Downing Street. As with the Irwin Declaration, however, such criticism of the Passfield White Paper was not concerned with the actual policy, but, instead, "[a]lleged ambiguities and unfriendliness," how it looked and sounded.[143] Following these letters to *The Times*, a debate in Parliament on 17 November shook the government's already unstable foundations.

Comprising targeted attacks from Liberal and Conservative MPs designed to embarrass the government rather than clarify points of policy, the debate was centered on issues like anti-Semitism and breaches of faith. The government's response, however, had been prepared in advance by the Colonial Office and so was directed against the substance of these complaints rather than their political motivations. This led to a situation in which "the facts" of the white paper were immaterial to its survival.

Speaking first, Lloyd George led the attack, accusing the government of anti-Semitism and hypocrisy, and he attempted to drive a wedge between the prime minister (who was present) and the colonial secretary (who was not), by

questioning "whether the Prime Minister himself was fully consulted before this document was issued."[144] Chancellor's comments on this speech were as blunt as ever: "L.G.'s speech was typical—all sentiment and hot air."[145] Lloyd George also struck at the heart of Labour's commitment to the league, specifically highlighting how the PMC "was full of the most severe criticism of their administration" and "[t]heir answer was practically to tear up the Mandate."[146] During the debate, Amery echoed Lloyd George's sentiments, remarking that "no one wishes to acknowledge the parentage of this undesirable child. I do not suppose that the Prime Minister is prepared to elucidate this problem of disputed parentage."[147] MacDonald never answered these comments, but, of course, he had approved the policy—as had a cabinet committee, the full cabinet, and as far as Lord Passfield was concerned, Chaim Weizmann.[148]

It is important to note that this was routine parliamentary antagonism and was not necessarily unanimously designed to try and topple the government on this relatively minor issue. Amery wrote, for example, that "[i]t was important to push the Govt. hard but not to have a division which might either have finally confirmed the White Paper or alternatively defeated the Govt. and committed the Socialist Party to Passfield's anti-Zionist policy."[149] Nevertheless, the danger to Labour was cumulative.

In response to these attacks, it was Colonial Office undersecretary Shiels's assignment to speak in defense of the government, which in principle was not a difficult task. The prime minister had originally charged Henderson with the duty, but defending the government's policy so publicly would have placed him in an awkward position vis-à-vis the beginning of Anglo-Zionist talks.[150] Shiels highlighted that "[t]here seems to have been some obvious misunderstanding" of the Passfield White Paper, but he was merely being polite.[151] The vociferous nature of the opposition from Liberals and Conservatives in *The Times* had already been identified as both fallacious and underhanded. Palestine high commissioner Sir John Chancellor openly expressed this opinion, writing to O. G. R. Williams directly at the Colonial Office to say he was "greatly concerned about the letter which Baldwin, Chamberlain and Amery have written to the *Times*. If all parties would accept H.M.G.'s statement of policy, there would be some prospect of future peace in Palestine. If they are going to make it a party question, Palestine will become a running sore and a potential danger to the safety of the Empire, like Ireland."[152] In correspondence with Sir John Evelyn Shuckburgh in the Colonial Office's Middle East Department, Chancellor added, "I share your view as to the mischievous character of the Baldwin-Chamberlain-Amery letter. No doubt it was inspired by Amery."[153] After both letters had been published, the Colonial Office prepared a defense of the white paper, and their memoranda formed the basis of Shiels's defense.

At the Colonial Office, O. G. R. Williams was responsible for the full rebuttal to Hailsham and Simon's letter. Williams noted that the letter purported to compare the white paper with the official Mandate but mentioned only the Mandate's preamble, Article II, and Article VI, omitting any reference to protecting non-Jewish populations.[154] As well as misleadingly paraphrasing the white paper, Hailsham and Simon also ignored the findings of Hope-Simpson and created an impression of the new policy that was "quite untrue."[155] Williams did highlight, however, how Hailsham and Simon's reference to The Hague was purely political since "it would be so framed as to be exceedingly unfavourable and humiliating to His Majesty's Government [. . .] owing to the peculiar composition of the Hague Court."[156] This was the only part of the letter that was troubling, not because the issue really would necessitate referral to The Hague but because dealing with the threat exposed the government's financial motivations for cutting Jewish immigration rather than investing in development.[157]

Other than revealing this slightly mercenary policy-making procedure, the arguments opposed to the white paper prompted only incredulity at the Colonial Office. Passfield himself drafted a letter to *The Times*, stating "[i]t is reassuring to find from their letter published in your columns [. . .] that such high authorities as Lord Hailsham and Sir John Simon do not indicate anything in the Palestine White Paper inconsistent with the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate save in so far as they seek to draw from language used in paragraphs 15, 19 to 23 and 28 three inferences, not one of which is justified."[158] These inferences, Passfield added, "are made plausible only by an inaccurate representation of the contents of the paragraphs referred to, not one of which is quoted verbatim."[159] High Commissioner Chancellor echoed the absurdity of this situation, noting that "[t]he local Jewish criticisms of the statement of policy, for the most part, condemn it for things that it does not contain."[160]

In Parliament, Shiels reiterated polite versions of these sentiments and stressed his earlier opinion that the "White Paper makes no change whatever in the interpretation of the Mandate," but, rather, "[w]hat it does is to emphasize the necessity for a more exact application of the absorptive capacity principle."[161] Therefore, Shiels argued, "[i]t is obvious that the suggestion that this government is seeking to crystallise the Jewish national home in its present position is without a shadow of foundation."[162] Although the prime minister spoke very little during the debate, to this point he did add that "I have said again and again and I say now that the Mandate is to be carried out. But when we come to the condition of Palestine we must admit that the Mandate has to be carried out in such a way that civil disorder is not going to result from its operation."[163]

In this sentiment, the usually competitive Foreign and Colonial Offices were in agreement. Foreign Secretary Henderson had received the full text of Zionist

objections to the white paper the week before the debate via the prime minister's pro-Zionist son, Malcolm MacDonald. The Eastern Department of the Foreign Office had then prepared a full rebuttal that raised almost identical points to the defense written by the Colonial Office without conferring between the two.[164] Both ministries agreed that there was "no intention to crystallise the status quo."[165] The Foreign Office noted how "it is clear that, so long as an acute unemployment problem exists in Palestine (whether of Jews or Arabs), it is the duty of the Mandatory, under Article 6 of the Mandate, to restrict immigration into Palestine (whether Jews or Arabs)."[166] The bureaucracy, therefore, was united on the Palestine issue. The disagreements over Passfield's white paper were between politicians.

During the parliamentary debate, it was Leopold Amery who brought up the subject of India. Amery declared that Palestine's 1929 riots were "an old-fashioned religious outbreak of the type with which the Indian administration is only too familiar."[167] He was trying to draw a comparison between "giving in" to Arabs in Palestine and acquiescing to Indian self-rule, hinting at the Irwin Declaration. "This is not the first White Paper of this kind that has appeared," Amery declared, and pointed to unrest throughout the world "because of the White Papers which are poured out from the Colonial Office and which we are afterwards told do not mean what they appear to say."[168] Amery's speech was aimed at a continued appeasement of the diehard, anti-Baldwin group within the Conservative Party. This is why the arguments against the white paper had little relation to the document's actual contents. Even Malcolm MacDonald admitted that "[t]he substance of the white paper is all right [. . .] its embroidery is all wrong."[169]

While the rank and file of the House of Commons indulged in emotional arguments for and against the new policy, party leaders were busy calculating. The outcome of the debate was not necessarily instrumental for Amery and Baldwin, merely their noted opposition to a white paper that appeared to reward Arab violence in Palestine with decreased Jewish immigration. No majority was necessary, and so the plethora of opinion expressed during the debate posed no fundamental problems for Conservative leaders other than the slight embarrassment Amery originally hoped to avoid.

As expected, condemnation and support were not unanimous among any party. Colonel Charles Howard-Bury, for example, was Conservative MP for Chelmsford and spoke in support of the government, which he believed had "acted very courageously and impartially in producing that White Paper."[170] Another Conservative MP, Sir George Jones, admonished the character of the debate, stating "that it would be a calamity if the Palestinian question were involved in party politics in this country."[171] The Liberal MP Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris defied his own leader by highlighting how "it would be a moment of very grave importance in the history of this country if it were recognised that international events of this

kind are to be part of the ordinary battle of party conflict."[172] Labour MP Frederick Cocks also called attention to the political machinations underway, saying Lloyd George "had one eye on the Mount of Olives and the other on a part of the East End of London where a by-election is about to take place and where there is a population of very hard-working and able Zionists."[173]

Other Labour members lent support to the opposition. Daniel Hopkin, for example, raised the specter of anti-Semitism, asserting that "[a]ccording to this White Paper, if a Jew buys land he is wrong. If he is a farmer, he is wrong. It seems to me that to some people Trotsky is always a Jew but Einstein is always a German. Every time he is wrong."[174] To Hopkin, this made the white paper "the greatest mistake of any Minister since the time when we lost the American colonies."[175] Although both Liberal and Conservative parties were relatively untroubled by backbench dissent in this debate, Labour could ill afford such breaking of ranks. Amery understood this and gave his assessment of the debate as follows:

> My speech drew the PM who was thoroughly woolly; full of general gush about the Zionists but not really precise as to what the government meant to do [. . .] Walter Elliot wound up for us quite effectively, and then Alexander replied, a meagre ill formed speech which did not satisfy the House. Kenworthy rose full of indignation, was cut short but re-opened after the usual reading of bills, to ask questions which Alexander dodged by walking away leaving poor Shiels, sick and sorry, to make as good a defense as he could to a series of persistent questions as to whether the government stood by the White Paper or not. My summary of the debate was "From White Paper to white sheet."[176]

First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Alexander, argued that the debate vindicated Labour, asserting that "the so-called case against the government as stated to-night had been a very damp squib."[177] Alexander challenged "any impartial Member of the House who has sat right through this debate and heard all the speeches, to summarise the arguments [. . .] and to say if he does not agree with me that, in the main, the debate has not shown that there is a strong feeling in this House on the part of a majority against the position of the government."[178] This is where Labour's problem arose, however. The government needed more than a majority on this single issue as it required its own unity as well as cross-party support for foreign policy in general. This situation left the prime minister "cross about Palestine" and particularly annoyed with the colonial secretary. Lady Passfield wrote how "the Shaw Commission and Hope-Simpson, with his report, both nominees of Sidney's, have been too pro-Arab; a White Paper (which the P.M. saw and approved) was 'tactless'—indeed he allowed Lloyd George in his virulent attack on the White Paper, to assert that the P.M. has not seen it—which was mean of MacDonald."[179] The beleaguered Shiels, late in the evening debate, was badgered into asserting that "[i]t is quite obvious, surely [. . .] that the White

Paper, as explained and amplified today, certainly stands."[180] This, however, was unlikely. The Labour government was fragile on foreign policy, had already been undermined by criticism from the League of Nations, was threatened over the potential loss of cross-party support on India, and was faced with the realization that a few key pro-Zionist Labour MPs also opposed the white paper.

The younger MacDonald noted how the main problem was that "[i]f you dispute Hope-Simpson then certainly disagree with White Paper; that is a fundamental controversy."[181] Like many British-Zionist sympathizers, however, he did not tend to speak out against the two investigative commissions but instead took offense principally because the white paper seemed to focus unnecessarily on criticizing the Jews. He wrote that the "[d]ocument is typical of Colonial Office accustomed to take paternal interest in self-helpless native race [. . .]. White Paper shows lamentable and disastrous imbalance."[182] Malcolm MacDonald vehemently defended Zionism during this period, writing that "[i]f such censures are to be written, how many pages might be written about Arab assassins!"[183] The young Labour politician's own legacy on Palestine, however, would prove even more unpopular and controversial during his tenure as colonial secretary in the late 1930s (see chap. 4).

In addition, supplementing this internal split and external antagonism was the very tangible Whitechapel by-election results of 3 December 1930, which showed a significantly reduced Labour majority. These different factors combined to deliver the death knell to Passfield's white paper, but it was a slow-burn decision that did not materialize until protracted talks between Zionists and the Palestine cabinet subcommittee disruptively spilled into the next calendar year.

Immediately after the debate, James Ramsay MacDonald was still clinging to the official interpretation of the white paper. He wrote to Dr. Myer Solis Cohen in Philadelphia: "I am in an awful state of pressure. You will have seen the repeated contentions of the government that, as a matter of fact, the White Paper is no upset of the Mandate. The position in Palestine has got very dangerous, and the responsibility has to be shared by both the Jews and the Arabs on the spot. We must get things a little quieter; otherwise, nothing but disaster is ahead."[184] Following the by-election, the government needed to end the white paper debate and soothe internal divisions exacerbated by Liberal and Conservative opposition.[185] This meant that the Anglo-Zionist discussions had to be closed as quickly as possible. The prime minister had ceded this issue to Foreign Secretary Arthur Henderson on 6 November to organize a cabinet subcommittee, which did include Lord Passfield, and confer with Chaim Weizmann and other Zionist leaders to "clarify" the white paper.[186] Although this clarification did result in an effective reversal of the white paper, this was certainly not the original intention. As noted above, the talks began as a legal exercise and a means of convincing the policy's Zionist critics that it did not violate the Mandate.

Henderson's notes for the negotiations demonstrate his confidence in the government's stance. "If 'the position' of the Arabs is 'positively changed for the worse,'" Henderson wrote, "the government must take steps to put things right."[187] Zionist criticisms, he decided, "lose a good deal of their force because they assume intentions on the part of His Majesty's Government which are contrary to the facts."[188] The foreign secretary was also annoyed by Zionist memoranda's prolific citations of Hailsham and Simon's letter to *The Times* without a single reference to Lord Passfield's rebuttal of 5 November.[189]

In addition, Henderson criticized Zionist negotiator Leonard Stein's selective and misleading quotes, how he represented the policy as more anti-Zionist than it really was by eliminating the government's references to working with the Jewish Agency.[190] The oft repeated accusation that the white paper blamed Arab unemployment solely on Jewish immigration, for example, was one instance "of incomplete quotation and misinterpretation of the white paper. Great stress was laid on this particular misinterpretation in the ingenious perversion of it contained in a letter to Lord Passfield from Dr Weizmann, which Dr Weizmann published in 'The Times.'"[191] That part of the white paper, Henderson noted, spelled out Arab suspicions but in no way endorsed them.[192] The foreign secretary believed another tactic was to minimize the problem of dispossessed Arab cultivators because Weizmann and his colleagues "for political reasons" had to go "as far as possible towards satisfying their more extreme supporters who sympathise with the revisionist policy of a Jewish state in their time."[193] Lady Passfield offered a simple explanation of Zionist opposition to the white paper despite all the government's assurances: "It was not the Statement of Policy but the facts revealed by Hope-Simpson's report that he was up against," she wrote, "it was these facts that were so damning. Weisman is in the difficult position of a Company Promoter, confronted with an adverse expert's report, damaging to his prospective enterprise."[194]

As it was not the British government's priority to establish a Jewish state, Henderson believed it was Britain's duty to issue the white paper.[195] It is important to preface these opinions, however, with the knowledge that Henderson entered into these Anglo-Zionist talks with an eye on the League of Nations where his top priority throughout the autumn of 1930 was German disarmament. The foreign secretary was wary of and slightly bitter about Zionism's international activities. "On the publication of the Shaw Report," he wrote, "there is reason to suppose that every effort was made by the Jews to influence the Permanent Mandates Commission unfavourably against His Majesty's Government."[196] Another member of the Foreign Office later scribbled an additional note: "though it must be admitted that there is no documentary or other proof."[197]

The Palestine subcommittee first met Zionist representatives on 17 November and the initiation of these talks was announced that day. It was hoped that

the beginning of the subcommittee's discussions would provide some inoculation against criticisms anticipated at the debate, but Shiels was unconvinced: "I am rather doubtful about the electoral help we shall get," he wrote to Henderson, "as Amery, L.l.G. and Co. are heavily in with Weizmann [. . .]."[198] This first meeting had been postponed at Weizmann's request, but it was merely a procedural affair and the group adjourned after an hour to observe the debate in the Commons.[199] What followed was a series of face-to-face meetings and negotiations via correspondence until late January 1931. Throughout these talks, Chaim Weizmann alternated between confidence in his ability to secure a reversal of the white paper, and gloom and uncertainty regarding the direction of negotiations with Henderson's committee. Two days after the debate, for example, Weizmann informed Amery that "[a]lthough the government is retreating very slowly and with not too much grace, a retreat it is."[200] However, a few days later Weizmann wrote that, he wrote "I don't know exactly what will be the result of our present negotiations with the government—I am writing at a time when events are about to break [. . .]. I do not know how our negotiations will end. This is no easy matter."[201]

The first draft of what became the MacDonald letter was received by Weizmann on 29 November, and he remarked that the "impression here is unfavourable."[202] This first draft, labeled "the Henderson letter" at this stage, was very long and essentially constituted the full rebuttals already made by Passfield, Shiels, and the Colonial and Foreign Offices.[203] It did contain some of the key reversing phrases found in the final letter, but these were accompanied by extensive contextual caveats. While noting that the Passfield White Paper made land control "regulatory and not prohibitive," the first draft also included a section saying, "it does involve a power to veto transactions which are inconsistent with the tenor of the general scheme."[204] As well as assurances that there would be no stoppage of immigration in any category, the first draft included sprawling provisos asserting the government's right to restrict immigration in line with economic capacity.[205]

Weizmann considered that Passfield was poisoning the atmosphere against them, believing "the old man malignantly sabotages everything."[206] Lord Passfield's relationship with the Zionist negotiators was indeed extremely strained at times. Lady Passfield wrote that her husband partially admired Weizmann, stating the Zionist diplomat was "a disinterested idealist, a clever administrator, an accomplished intellectual—all rolled into one. But he is a champion manipulator—and uses arguments and devices, regardless of accuracy, straightforwardness or respect for confidence, or other honourable undertakings [. . .] 'A clever devil: I take my hat off to him.'"[207] Mostly there was frustration between them. Although "Sidney started with a great admiration for the Jew and a contempt for the Arab," Lady Passfield wrote, "he reports that all the officials, at

home and in Palestine, find the Jews, even many accomplished and cultivated Jews—intolerable as negotiators and colleagues."[208]

From the Zionist delegation's perspective, the problem was that Henderson and two other committee members, Alexander and Shaw, had no prior dealings with their cause, creating long, drawn-out meetings in which the intricacies had to be explained and the busy Henderson in particular became very irritable.[209] In contrast, Weizmann wrote, "Passfield does know the thing, but he is so artful and shifty that you never know when you have got him to agree to something."[210] Looking at the meeting transcripts and Henderson's notes, it does seem that he was well versed in the problems of Palestine but simply refused to yield on the government's right to issue the white paper and his belief that the Zionist criticisms were unfounded. Henderson told Weizmann he was being "supersensitive," and quoted Shiels's parliamentary defense of the white paper during meetings.[211] The foreign secretary challenged Weizmann on every point, demonstrating how these talks were originally intended to persuade and intimidate rather than placate Weizmann and his fellow Zionists. "[O]ur whole object," Henderson stated, is "to clear up matters that are ambiguous, that have been misstated or misunderstood [. . .]. I want you and your colleagues to be quite clear in your mind that the fullest possible opportunity is given to you to state every possible objection your people have to this White Paper. You can expect nothing more."[212] The foreign secretary specifically wanted to avoid any action that looked like a withdrawal of the original white paper.[213]

By mid-December, Weizmann complained that "[t]he negotiations with the government drag on rather inconclusively."[214] A redraft of the Henderson letter reached Weizmann, but it included only minor changes following advice from a legal committee, and the alterations constituted technical changes to language in two paragraphs of a document more than twenty pages long.[215] There was still no agreement by the end of December.[216] Weizmann, however, had met with MacDonald on Christmas Eve and found that "the prime minister seems really anxious that our negotiations should end in a successful agreement."[217] Malcolm MacDonald records this meeting slightly differently, noting that nothing much was said about the subcommittee conference other than it needed to be complete before Weizmann could bring up other subjects like Palestine administration staff and the development scheme.[218]

The Palestine subcommittee was achieving very little, and Henderson was due to leave London for Geneva on 9 January.[219] In preparation for his absence, the foreign secretary authorized another redraft of the letter. This was written by the Lord Advocate and Malcolm MacDonald, both identified by Weizmann as friends of their cause, in conjunction with Leonard Stein, Louis Namier, Major Hind (another Zionist), and even Weizmann himself.[220] It was finished on 7 January in time to be circulated to the cabinet committee and to Henderson before

he left for Geneva, resulting in a few further amendments and a fourth draft of the letter.[221] It was during these January meetings that the final letter took shape by cutting out all of the caveats and provisos concerning Britain's right to limit Jewish immigration and land purchase that Henderson had defended since the previous November. Further changes were agreed via written correspondence on 22 January 1931, but they were all superficial—all offending wording had already been removed from the British draft.[222] There was a final meeting between Zionists and the Palestine subcommittee on 30 January and suddenly they had complete agreement. The fifth draft of the letter was finalized during this session and was approved by the cabinet on 4 February 1931.[223] By this time, Weizmann admitted to Malcolm MacDonald: "I am afraid you are sick of the sight of my blue paper [. . .],"[224] which the Zionist leader almost always used for his flourishingly handwritten correspondence.

The reversal of the Passfield White Paper, therefore, did not occur until January 1931 and evolved slowly during that month. It is likely that as Henderson pressed on doggedly in discussions with Zionists, James Ramsay MacDonald worried more about the depressing statistics of the Whitechapel by-election and the negotiations' anticipated effect on upcoming parliamentary business. The India issue was due to resurface early in the new year.

On 23 January, the prime minister officially closed the first stage of the India Conference, which was due to continue within a few months. Indeed, Lady Passfield noted that Palestine could be tidied away, but "[d]uring the next year, whichever party is in power, it is India that will claim attention."[225] She called the closing speech "a gorgeous success" but stressed that India's constitutional development would remain an ongoing concern.[226] The same was true of Labour's internal divisions. The prime minister, for example, expressed how he was "getting very tired [. . .] of the number of letters I get from colleagues ending, for one reason or another, with a threat that they must resign. I think it is about time that I started playing the same sort of card."[227] It appears that the weight of holding the Labour Party together on an issue made more divisive by the arguments of Conservative and Liberal politicians, who were partially motivated by preserving their own leadership positions, was simply too tiresome. The minority Labour government found it less politically risky to concede to the terms of a letter drafted and amended by the prime minister's own son and a legal authority in the Lord Advocate than to continue to defend the Passfield White Paper against what both the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office agreed were unfounded accusations. Baldwin wrote that "[t]he government is decaying daily and I can't see how in any way they can hold on much longer [. . .]," and he was correct.[228] There may have been no official alliance between Baldwin, Amery, and Lloyd George, but the effect on MacDonald was the same.[229] In a bid to maintain Labour unity and avoid derailing India policy, the government was unable to continue with the Passfield White Paper.

A Failure to Act

Although the British government was faced with only a single main option of reversing the white paper, there were also two subsidiary alternatives: Labour's elite could reverse the Passfield White Paper and replace it with extensive development, as originally intended, or reverse the Passfield White Paper without extensive development. One of these options was far more attractive in terms of broad national interest, which, in 1930–1931, was focused on the economy.

The Economy Crashes

Unlike in the situation during the Balfour Zeitgeist, the economy for the Labour government during the Passfield debacle was an objective national problem rather than a debatable political one. Distinct from the embattled Lloyd George coalition, the minority Labour government was not facing a campaign like "Anti-Waste" because the press barons (Lords Beaverbrook and Rothermere) were thorns largely in Baldwin's side. Since the Passfield White Paper did not fall close to a general election, the economy was not overly politicized in this specific episode. Rather, over the period and subject in question, specifically October 1930–February 1931, the financial crisis following the collapse of the US stock market in 1929 was a constant, looming, material fact rather than a chiefly political problem in which the issue was a matter of perception.[230]

As a result of these real financial constraints, the option to reverse the Passfield White Paper was not dependent on a commitment to the development program of Sir John Hope-Simpson, already rejected once due to its high costs when the white paper was first published. The original cabinet committee on Palestine had determined that Britain was under a moral if not legal obligation to compensate Arabs disadvantaged by British policy, but the expenditure required was open to substantial manipulation because it depended entirely on how the number of dispossessed Arabs was calculated.[231]

During the parliamentary debate, MPs such as Lloyd George, Samuel, and Amery called for extensive development of Palestine along the lines originally proposed by Hope-Simpson.[232] Ultimately, however, extensive development failed to escape economic constraints for a second time, and the option to reverse the white paper without a large development program was far more attractive. Incidentally, these MPs raised no objections when the white paper's provisions relating to Jewish immigration and land purchase were rescinded but not replaced with the agricultural development that Hope-Simpson had identified as urgently necessary. Therefore, just as the Passfield White Paper began as a program to prevent violence in Palestine but was restrained by the economic situation, so too was its reversal, prompted by a need to maintain political power and limited in viability due to financial pressures.

After 1931

Even though Passfield's policy was reversed in this somewhat humiliating spectacle, he wrote to Henderson, "I think you were thoroughly justified in embarking on the discussions in the political emergency."[233] After 1931, the constraints that led to this course of action only grew, meaning that the British government's handling of Palestine policy between the MacDonald letter of 1931 and the beginning of the Arab Revolt in 1936 remained stagnant. Following the political storm created by the Passfield White Paper, and the reemergence of the economy as a political problem later in 1931, politicians could identify no potential policy that was both safe politically and good for the national interest.[234] The India problem continued within British politics, notwithstanding a tense settlement reached between Irwin and Gandhi in March 1931.[235] The Labour government then fell in August as the financial crisis reached new heights and the Conservative Party orchestrated a takeover, succeeding in splitting Labour in the process.[236] As the crisis deepened and London's financial sector called for cuts in government spending, continued tensions in Palestine failed to materialize on the new government's agenda.[237] Although the cabinet discussed individual issues, such as forming a Palestine trade preference, establishing a legislative council, and dealing with the rise in immigration following Hitler's ascension in Germany, the question of overall policy remained unaddressed.[238]

In 1932, the colonial secretary again placed the issue of Jewish immigration before the cabinet, and, rather than proposing a change of policy, he suggested that the determination of economic capacity be left entirely in the hands of the high commissioner stationed in Jerusalem. Another committee was formed to consider the question.[239] This adroitly removed Westminster from the immediate realm of responsibility and safely ignored the findings of the Hope-Simpson Commission.[240] In addition, the Colonial Office pressured the Palestine administration to develop a greater budget surplus, which meant spending less on development.[241] Although "[n]ew agricultural stations, demonstration plots, research, etc., were provided for," such schemes were tiny in comparison to the needs Hope-Simpson had identified.[242] Whereas the one-man commission had found thousands of Arab families either directly or indirectly dispossessed or made unemployed by British policy in Palestine, in February 1933 the colonial secretary asked that compensation be restricted to ex-tenants.[243] Tensions in Palestine continued to mount.

Unlike the period between the Jaffa riots in 1921 and those in 1929, the interlude between the Passfield White Paper and the next great outbreak, what became the Arab Revolt, was not calm at all. On 15 April 1931, the high commissioner "reported that in several areas, of which he gave details, the Zionists had bought property and were undertaking eviction proceedings against Arab families," which Weizmann was unable or unwilling to prevent.[244] Riots

broke out in October 1933, the Palestine police opened fire, and Arab hostility resulted in frequent demonstrations through Jerusalem and Jaffa.[245] Sir Arthur Wauchope, the new high commissioner, even expressed concern over delays to his shipments of tear gas by 1934.[246] Wauchope expressed, however, that such demonstrations were not "serious as a threat to the State" until the "*fellaheen*" peasant farmers joined the riots.[247] "Should religious as well as political cries be raised," Wauchope warned, "a number of the *fellaheen*, many of whom are landless and many very poor, will join; [. . .] Our difficulties therefore are liable to be far more formidable in the future than they have been in the past."[248] The high commissioner then went on to list exactly the same political, religious, and economic grievances that the Shaw and Hope-Simpson reports highlighted following the 1929 riots.[249] By the late 1930s, violence in Palestine erupted on a hitherto unfathomable scale.

A Crystallized Policy

The "Passfield Reversal" was a period in Britain's policy making toward Palestine that marked the first stages of Britain's withdrawal from the Jewish national home policy. Following the riots of 1929, two commissions of inquiry highlighted the need to invest in Arab agriculture and limit Jewish immigration and land purchase, in line with economic capacity, in order to keep the peace. These investigations resulted in the Passfield White Paper that was subsequently reversed following Conservative and Liberal opposition and lengthy consultations with prominent Zionists. Unlike many previous works on the Mandate that have characterized this incident as little more than a triumph of Chaim Weizmann's diplomatic skills, this chapter highlights the role played by Conservatives' and Liberals' use of Zionist arguments for their own political ends.

Baldwin feared the Conservative diehards who equated Arabs of Palestine with Indians agitating for self-rule and vociferously opposed both. Lloyd George was acutely aware of the Liberal Party's rapidly declining status and sought to defend his own prime ministerial record, which witnessed both the Balfour Declaration and the official Mandate, and simply to grapple for position. MacDonald's government was placed in jeopardy by the divisive nature of this ongoing debate, and he sought to solidify the new policy's legal standing while placating key backbenchers by assigning Henderson to confer with the Zionists. Henderson was focused on Europe and disarmament, and concerns for the ongoing India conference and poor performance in the Whitechapel by-election combined to make the Passfield White Paper too risky. The threshold for risk seems to have been significantly lower than previous Palestine policy-making episodes, and this can be attributed to Labour's even more fragile hold on power than the atmosphere surrounding Lloyd George's coalition government of the early 1920s. Following February 1931, all policy options were accompanied by unacceptable

levels of political risk, effectively crystallizing the British government's own Palestine policy until tensions erupted again in 1936.

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218. MAC 9/6/30, 24 December 1930, Interview between the Prime Minister, Dr. Weizmann and Mr. Namier at 9:30 a.m., reproduced by permission of Durham University Library.
219. MAC 9/8/2–9/8/58, 27 April 1931, Historical Summary of Discussions Leading Up to the Prime Minister's Letter of February 13th, 1931, to Dr. Weizmann, reproduced by permission of Durham University Library.
220. MAC 9/8/2–9/8/58, 27 April 1931, Historical Summary of Discussions.
221. Ibid.
222. MAC 9/5/36, 22 January 1931, "Proposed Corrections in Mr. Henderson's Draft Letter," reproduced by permission of Durham University Library.
223. Weizmann to Vera Weizmann, 30 January 1930, *Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann, Volume XV,* 95.
224. MAC 9/6/33, 8 February 1930, Weizmann to Malcolm MacDonald, reproduced by permission of Durham University Library.
225. LSE/PASSFIELD/1/2/9, 14 December 1930, Diary of Beatrice Webb.
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227. PREM 30/69/676, 31 October 1930, Ramsay MacDonald to Lord Arnold, TNA.
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236. Ibid.
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238. CAB 23/70, 23 February 1932, Cabinet Minutes, TNA; CAB 23/71, 6 April 1932, Cabinet Minutes, TNA.
239. CAB 23/71, 6 April 1932, Cabinet Minutes, TNA, 12.
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242. El Eini, "Government Fiscal Policy," 581.
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244. CAB 23/66, 15 April 1931, Cabinet Minutes, TNA, 19.
245. CAB 24/247, 18 December 1933, High Commissioner to Secretary of State for the Colonies, TNA.

246. CAB 23/78, 16 January 1934, Cabinet Minutes, TNA, 31.
247. CAB 22/237 February 1933, "Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies," TNA.
248. CAB 24/247, 18 December 1933, High Commissioner to Secretary of State for the Colonies, TNA.
249. CAB 22/237 February 1933, "Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies," TNA.

4 The MacDonald Betrayal, 1936–1939

The Arab Revolt (1936–1939) preceded events that appeared to represent a major shift in British policy toward Palestine. Despite a commitment to the Jewish national home expressed in the Balfour Declaration, the official Mandate, the Churchill White Paper, and the "Black Letter" of 1931, the MacDonald White Paper of 1939 seemed to abrogate any further obligation to Zionism. Instead, this new policy committed Britain to an independent Palestine with a permanent Jewish minority. Considering the difficulties faced by previous British governments in attempting to withdraw from the Jewish national home, this new direction was highly controversial. Labeled "betrayal" and "appeasement," the MacDonald White Paper was in many ways a direct result of the violent uprising of the Arab Revolt.[1] Demonstrating why, however, is more complicated than a simple analogy with the Munich Agreement.

Unlike the Churchill White Paper and reversal of Passfield's white paper, this decision to end the Jewish national home would indeed have seemed rational in terms of Britain's national interest (i.e., through weighing costs vs. benefits for the state as a whole). Between the beginning of the Arab Revolt and the publication of the MacDonald White Paper, two commissions of inquiry resolutely presented the British government with the same fundamental and irresolvable flaws in the national home policy that had characterized all previous investigations, leading the government first to pursue partition of Palestine and then to decide in favor of a single-state solution. In the context of imminent war in Europe, this decision reflected the adoption of advice from two preeminent committees in order to end rebellion in the empire and refocus attention and resources closer to home. This, however, is an incomplete picture, not least because similar reasoning fails to explain previous British behavior toward Palestine. Looking at the relevant politicians' political problems lends an additional insight, a more nuanced understanding that demonstrates specifically which governmental concerns influenced the decision to abandon Zionism and why this sudden shift in policy actually represented far more continuity than change.

During this episode, the decision makers' key concerns centered around diplomatic needs, bureaucratic politics, and parliamentary politics. The government then chose among the only politically viable alternatives by trying to minimize the burden for Britain's strategic and economic imperatives. Rather than a sudden U-turn in Palestine policy as the result of appeasement, this chapter reveals a

rebalancing of diplomatic interests in the Middle East necessitated by the Italian and German threats and made possible by a large Conservative majority in the House of Commons.

Searching for Solutions

In the time period under consideration, the British government was presented with a severe problem in the form of the Arab Revolt in Palestine, and their range of options for dealing with this situation was determined by the essentially contradictory reports of two commissions of inquiry: the Peel Commission in 1937 and the Woodhead Commission in 1938.

Each of these investigations identified the Arab Revolt as a severe intensification of previous, neglected disturbances. Unrest in the early 1930s had been a direct result of increased legal and illegal Jewish immigration into Palestine due to the rise of Hitler in Germany. This immigration had exceeded fifty thousand in 1933 and peaked at sixty-two thousand in 1935, doubling the Jewish population in a very short time period that coincided with severe drought and agricultural hardship in Palestine.[2] These levels of Jewish immigration did not threaten to reverse the Arabs' large demographic majority, but the new influx of German Jews was perceived as a dangerous precedent, the latest anxiety in a cumulative response to Zionism that inspired Palestine's Arabs to fear for their future. When the uprising began in April 1936, it evolved as a response to this increased Jewish presence, a series of reprisal murders between Jews and Arabs, parliamentary rejection of a Palestine Legislative Council, and refusal to grant three demands presented by the Arab Higher Committee: cessation of Jewish immigration, prohibition of land sales to Jews, and the creation of a national government.[3] The rebellion began in the form of a general strike accompanied by outbreaks of violence and sabotage directed at Jews, British officials, and fellow Arabs, and the British government's response entailed both repressive measures and authorization of the Palestine Royal (Peel) Commission to make recommendations for a political solution.

The answer, according to Lord Peel's commission, was decisive; the recommendation was the partition of Palestine, which far exceeded the committee's terms of reference.[4] While the committee was charged with finding both the causes of and the solutions to Palestine's problem, it was not technically empowered to undermine the Balfour Declaration. This original statement of intent and the official Mandate had accepted a British obligation to Zionism, but commissioners found that violence in Palestine during the 1920s and 1930s was consistently caused by an Arab desire for independence coupled with fear and hatred for the Jewish national home.[5] This had been exacerbated by the strides toward independence achieved by Iraq, Transjordan, Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon as well

as the pressure of immigration from Germany, the perceived injustice of McMahon's correspondence with Sharif Hussein, and "the intensive character of Jewish nationalism."[6]

Finding that "[n]either Arab nor Jew has any sense of service to a single state,"[7] the commission report concluded that any measures taken to ease the situation "might reduce the inflammation and bring down the temperature, but they cannot cure the trouble."[8] This was because an "irrepressible conflict has arisen between two national communities within the narrow bounds of one small country."[9] Peel, therefore, viewed repression as the only other way to maintain peace in Palestine, which was an expensive and morally objectionable course, a "dark path" that would also exacerbate the problem.[10] "While neither race can justly rule all Palestine," the committee members decided, "we see no reason why, if it were practicable, each race should not rule part of it."[11]

At the time, this was considered not only the best plan but the only feasible solution. Peel's partition proposals, however, amounted to nothing more than a preliminary sketch, recommending a very small Jewish state in the north of Palestine, an Arab entity joined to Transjordan with an exchange of population between the two, and a British enclave from Jerusalem to the sea.[12] (See fig. 4.1.)

Designed to address what they viewed as "fundamentally a conflict of right with right," this partition principle was readily accepted by the Colonial Office and cabinet, tentatively approved by Zionist leaders, but totally rejected by Palestine's Higher Arab Committee.[13] Partition was based on an English idiom: "Half a loaf is better than no bread," but the idea of giving even a square inch of Arab land to Zionists was objectionable enough to ignite a second and more intense phase of the Palestine rebellion in the autumn of 1937.[14] District Commissioner Lewis Andrews was murdered and Arab rebels took control of large swaths of territory, government forces evacuated Beersheba and Jericho, and the rebels besieged Jaffa. For a few days in October 1938, the rebels even had de facto control of the Old City of Jerusalem.[15] These successes prompted a harsher British response.

By the interwar period, Britain had established its self-image as a humane empire, having avoided brutalities akin to the Belgian Congo, German Southwest Africa, or French Algeria, and many British officials prided themselves on their empire's focus on the rule of law.[16] This does not, however, mean tactics were humane by modern standards, simply that in the 1930s they were legal. Army manuals forbade stealing from or mistreating civilians but provided for shooting rioters, collective punishment, and "retribution."[17] The violence, property damage, and humiliation inflicted by British forces during this period of suppression were of a harrowing nature and threatened to destroy all relations between the Arabs and the civilian government in Palestine. By 1938, High Commissioner Sir Arthur Wauchope was barely managing to temper the actions of British armed

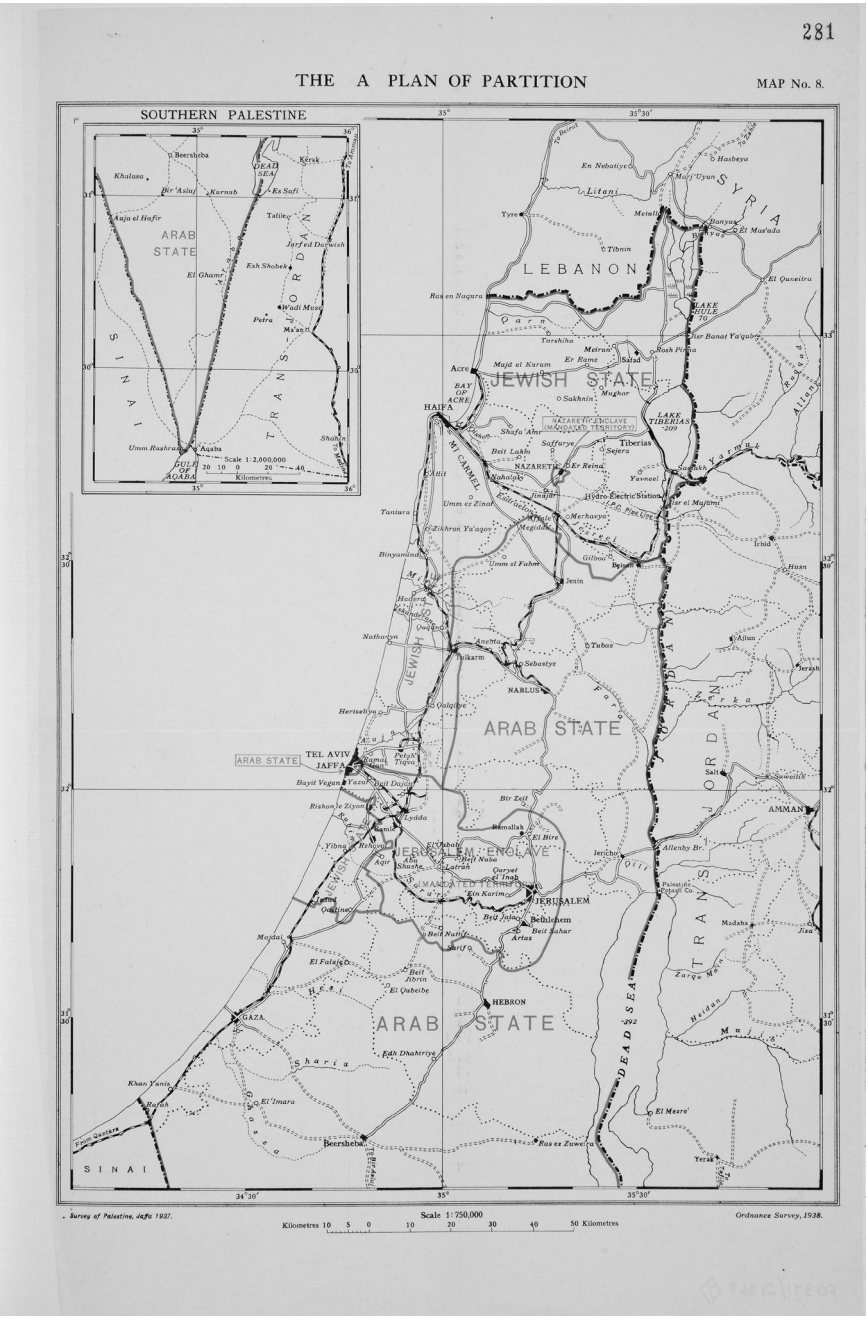

Fig. 4.1. Original map produced by the Peel Commission in 1937. The Jewish areas were intended to be independent, but the Arab areas would have become part of Transjordan. © The National Archives.

forces. When he looked for a political solution to the revolt and challenged army efforts to institute martial law, the Colonial Office replaced him with the more compliant Sir Harold MacMichael.[18] An even greater repressive effort was thought to be required, but the need for and purpose of a second investigating commission also gradually evolved in the cabinet during the autumn of 1937.

Chaired by Sir John Woodhead, the technical or partition commission was ostensibly charged with determining the best route toward implementing partition. Its verdict, however, undercut the principle. The Woodhead Commission returned three plans, A, B, and C, with varying borders, levels of subsequent British responsibility, and economic integration. This report concluded that any partition scheme that involved population transfer was doomed to failure due to the necessity of implementing such a scheme by force or leaving large minorities in each new state.[19] The commission was also unable to devise any boundary formulation that left Jewish areas defensible and Arab territory economically sound.[20] As Britain would need to conclude treaty agreements with both states, it was also likely to find itself in the impossible situation of having to defend the Jewish state from outside attack after incurring the expense of implementing partition.[21] One member of the commission, T. Reid, felt the need to add, "it may be said that one cannot make an omelette without breaking a few eggs, but it would not be easy to find an omelette in any possible scheme of partition."[22] (See fig. 4.2.)

Rather than ending on a negative note, however, the Woodhead Commission instead proposed partition with two very large British enclaves in the north and south that withheld fiscal autonomy from both Jews and Arabs, creating an economic federalism between the two with a British administration serving as the federal government.[23] This would have required a very high financial liability for the foreseeable future and would not have alleviated the rebellion already inflamed over the idea of Jewish statehood within Palestine.[24] Although the commission report specifically stated that Arab antagonism toward partition did not oblige them to return a verdict that no scheme was practicable, the report permitted no other conclusion.[25] It admitted than even economic federalism would not be satisfactory to either Arabs or Jews, and certainly not to the Treasury.[26] As a result, the cabinet officially rejected partition in November 1938.[27]

Following these two commissions, therefore, the British government was seemingly left with very few options. Peel had determined that partition was the only way forward, "at least a chance of ultimate peace," and Woodhead had demonstrated the impossibility of its implementation.[28] Although it took a relatively long time to realize in the context of what was otherwise a matter of urgency, the government was eventually faced with a stark choice between continuing to support the Jewish national home, thereby suppressing Arab protest indefinitely, and somehow surrendering the obligation to Zionism contained in the Mandate.

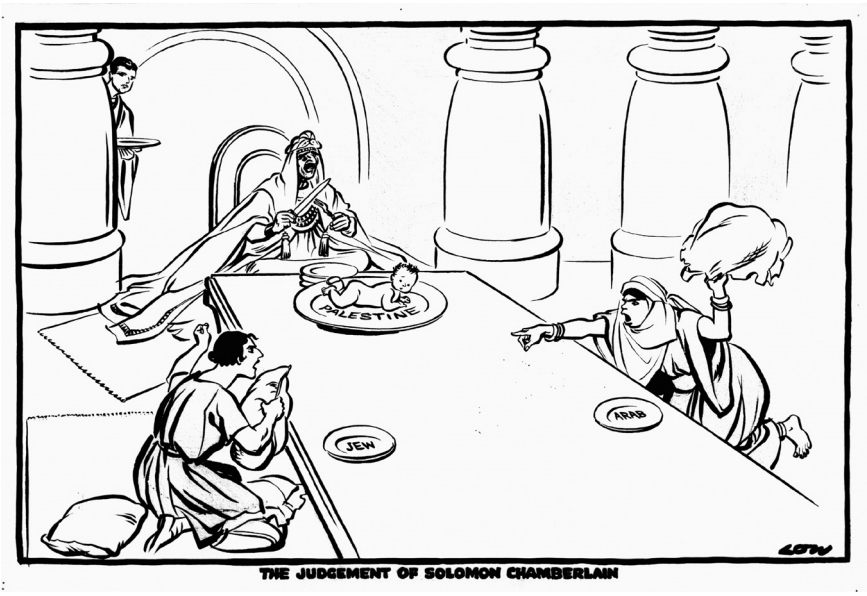

Fig. 4.2. "The Judgement of Solomon Chamberlain": a cartoon, published in the *Evening Standard* on 9 July 1937, hinting that the biblical king's wisdom was lost on British Palestine's battling communities. © David Low / Solo Syndication.

After concurrent bilateral negotiations in early 1939 at St. James's Palace, the MacDonald White Paper utilized Woodhead's arguments but not the commission's recommendations, declaring that "the establishment of self-supporting independent Arab and Jewish states within Palestine has been found to be impracticable."[29] Instead, the white paper committed Britain to Palestinian independence after a transitional period of ten years, allowing the Jewish population to increase to roughly 30 percent of Palestine's total inhabitants over five years—a plan permitting about seventy-five thousand immigrants, made up of ten thousand per year as well as twenty-five thousand refugees.[30] After that, further immigration would require Arab consent, meaning the Jewish national home (if not a Jewish state) was officially established.[31] As war approached in Europe, this white paper represented the most rational course, but the reasoning behind rejecting partition, as well as the priorities involved in choosing between Britain's two client-nations in Palestine, was more complex than a simple assessment of costs versus benefits. An understanding of the political constraints demonstrates how even this sudden change of policy in 1939 was entirely in keeping with British policy makers' logic toward the burgeoning Arab-Zionist conflict.

On the eve of World War II in 1939, the issues that were most important to British decision makers at this time centered on their diplomatic efforts abroad, bureaucratic infighting at home, and the dynamics of parliamentary politics. By analyzing how the government interpreted risk in the context of imminent war, it becomes clear that only one option was politically sound enough to be measured against the broader needs of national interest.[32]

Diplomatic Juggling

The most important issue on the British political agenda concerning Palestine in 1936–1939 was diplomacy. The second half of the 1930s witnessed a pervading threat of imminent war spread throughout the government. Diplomacy, therefore, became directly linked to regime survival. In this context, Britain's empire and spheres of influence were both its strongest asset (in the event of friendly, acquiescent mass mobilization and support) and a major source of vulnerability (should popular uprisings break out or formerly subject leaders alter their allegiances). Added to this concern was the necessity of securing, or rather avoiding offending, public opinion of other Great Powers such as the United States. Palestine, unhappily for the British government, combined these delicate facets of international diplomacy, pitting Arab leaders in the Middle East and Muslim opinion in India against Zionism, ostensibly the United States, and a traditionally pro-Zionist Council of the League of Nations.

In the late 1930s, the desire for Arab goodwill toward Britain was an overriding concern. No Arab leaders, least of all the Palestinians, applied direct pressure on the British government. Instead, Arab leaders jockeyed for regional prominence and position vis-à-vis Britain on the Palestine issue. There were no threats to break diplomatic ties, only a widespread underlying fear in Westminster of Italian and German infiltration of the Middle East or the catastrophic wartime loss of physical and communication routes through the Suez Canal to India. The perceived necessity of placating opinion in the Middle East far outweighed the importance of Zionist opinion, not least because the US State Department deliberately refrained from interfering and the League of Nations only became involved shortly before World War II was declared. In addressing the risks associated with each of these parties, the government found that it was unable to continue with the options of partition or indefinite repression under the Mandate due to uncertain relations with Arab leaders of the Middle East. In contrast, the political risks posed by Jewish and Zionist opinion (as well as the attitudes of the United States and the League of Nations) were perfectly tolerable at this juncture, allowing the option of acting against the national home to be considered further in terms of its impact on key aspects of the national interest.

Throughout this period, regional Arab leaders, rather than Palestinian politicians, were central to British decision-making, a phenomenon that arose

initially due to the general strike in Palestine and was then seized upon by Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, the Committee on Imperial Defence (CID), and eventually the Colonial Office. Involving regional leaders in the British Empire's Middle East policy was a new phenomenon in the 1930s. Although initially beneficial, this broader spectrum of actors became increasingly worrisome. The Peel Commission had been delayed by approximately three months while twenty thousand reinforcements restored order in Palestine and the strike came to a close, but only with the face-saving help of Ibn Saud of Arabia, King Ghazi of Iraq, and Emir Abdullah of Transjordan.[33] For the Arab states, their participation was a matter of prestige, but it was initiated against the backdrop of more grassroots agitation for the Arabs of Palestine. Even in the House of Commons, William Gallacher, the Communist MP for West Fife, pointedly defended their strike: "It is asked, why are not the Arabs satisfied with the improvements in wages and in this and that? There never was an invader at any time who did not justify his invasion on that very ground—'We have given you a mess of pottage, so what is all this nonsense about a birthright?' Have the Arabs a case? Yes, they have a case. They have had a rotten deal."[34] Rebellion was nothing surprising for imperial administrators, but the Peel Commission highlighted how the most striking feature of Palestine's revolt was the degree to which it "roused the feeling of the Arab world at large against Zionism and its defenders."[35] Although the support offered by Egypt, Transjordan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen was "by no means a powerful, all-embracing popular sentiment" and was largely confined to opposition groups, the issue gradually intensified as the British inability to solve the immediate crisis dragged on for years.[36] At the cabinet level, it was Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden who repeatedly warned of the consequences of Middle Eastern opinion solidifying against Britain over Palestine.

As Palestine's Arabs viewed partition with the same moral and material objection that was directed against the more vague policy of building a Jewish national home, Eden initially argued against the Peel Commission's proposals, even though the cabinet had rapidly accepted partition on the recommendation of the colonial secretary, William Ormsby-Gore (whom, incidentally, Lady Passfield described as "small and Welsh in appearance").[37] Eden had been cautioning the cabinet regarding Palestine's wider implications since before Peel arrived in the country, and the new partition policy did little to assuage his concerns. Highlighting the military implications, Eden noted how "troubles in Palestine have been watched with the keenest anxiety in the neighbouring Arab and Moslem-countries."[38] More importantly, he explained that "Saudi Arabia, the Yemen and Iraq have now become of great importance to His Majesty's government from the point of view of imperial communications. The air route to India and Australasia must cross over either Iraqi or Saudi territories; between Cairo

and the Protected States of the Persian Gulf, and it is not open to doubt that if Iraq and Saudi Arabia were to become hostile to British policy, they would be able seriously to interrupt Imperial communications with the East."[39] After Peel's partition proposals, part of this problem was population transfer and the negative political impact of its enforcement—the realization that "partition can now only be imposed by force."[40]

Considering the very small size of Peel's suggested Jewish state and the number of Jews needing to flee Germany, Eden pointed out to the cabinet that the Jewish state's urge to expand would be "well-nigh irresistible."[41] Then what would be Britain's responsibility? "If any stimulus were required to their rapidly growing nationalism," Eden argued, "it is hard to imagine any more effective method than the creation of a small dynamic State of hated foreign immigrants on the seaboard of the Arab countries with a perpetual urge to extend its influence inland."[42] Arabs would view the establishment of this entity as treachery, and, crucially, it would not solve the military problem. Britain would have to protect minorities in the new states, and so Eden questioned whether "we see any limit to the extent to which these troops are likely to be involved?"[43] Such intervention could have had disastrous diplomatic repercussions in Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen.

In Egypt, the Suez Canal was vital, and Britain had already accepted many concessions on this point in negotiating an independence treaty with the Egyptians.[44] In addition, oil supplies from Iraq would be "seriously threatened."[45] There were also similar dangers in Saudi Arabia and Yemen that were intensified by the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1935 and Italian overtures toward the two kings. Yemeni protests against Britain's Palestine policy, for example, preceded an Italo-Yemeni Treaty.[46] Based on this interpretation of Middle East politics, Eden concluded that the only way to ensure peace with the Arabs was to provide "some assurance that the Jews will neither become a majority in Palestine, nor be given any Palestinian territory in full sovereignty."[47]

Similar arguments were forthcoming from the Committee on Imperial Defence (CID) and high-ranking British officials who dealt with the new Arab states. The CID, for example, consistently warned of Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Persia becoming "uncertain friends" after Palestine's political leaders rejected partition, "which would be a most serious embarrassment to us in the event of war with Germany."[48] The India secretary, Lord Zetland, also voiced concerns that "Moslem opinion in India was now becoming rather aggressive on the question of partition."[49] Although by 1938 the India threat had dissipated except for "occasional expressions of indignation in the press and speeches by minor Muslim politicians," this did not prevent it being used as an argument for Arab concessions in 1939.[50] Another official who provided somewhat frantic advice was Miles Lampson, British ambassador to Egypt.

Lampson advised Malcolm MacDonald—who had assumed the post of colonial secretary following Ormsby-Gore's frustrated resignation in 1938—that pro-Palestine agitation in Egypt was the political tool of opposition leader Nahas Pasha but that Egyptians knew they were dependent on Britain for their security and well-being.[51] Lampson told Macdonald that any policy pursued in Palestine was unlikely to render Arab loyalties a positive asset, but if they were turned against Britain they would provide a formidable tool in enemy hands.[52] This measured advice acquired an urgent tone very quickly, however, as Miles wrote to MacDonald to plead that "unless the Arabs get satisfaction over immigration we must face the fact that, if war comes, we shall have to take on the Arabs as well as the Italians and Germans."[53] Time, he considered, was of the essence, as "[t]he longer you delay that no doubt painful decision, the less value you will get from making it. If you leave it until the verge of European War you will get no value at all."[54] These arguments built over the course of the Arab Revolt to back the British government into what it perceived to be a diplomatic corner. (See fig. 4.3.)

The content, therefore, of the MacDonald White Paper emerged in phases. The government had adopted partition in 1937, but arguments against it from Eden, the CID, Lord Zetland, and others meant that its longevity as a policy was almost instantly in question. The Woodhead Commission was a response to this debate, and its conclusions were rumored to be negative toward partition months before the final report was published. Meanwhile, Ormsby-Gore's successor as colonial secretary, Malcolm MacDonald, quickly accepted the view that partition was impracticable due to wider Arab opinion. This was despite his own pro-Zionist background—MacDonald had already served at the Colonial Office and left in 1936 when he wrote to Chaim Weizmann: "I need not tell you how sorry I was to leave the Colonial Office, and so to give up the official connection with Palestine. But you know I shall always watch developments there with sympathy, and if I can be of any help at any time you only have to let me know."[55]

Following Woodhead's rejection of partition, however, MacDonald and the rest of the government released a command paper agreeing with its conclusions and calling for a conference to negotiate a political settlement between the two parties. MacDonald was well aware that no settlement was likely and that Britain would still have to impose a solution.[56] It was imperative, however, that the ultimate policy formulation be acceptable to regional Arab leaders and not necessarily to the Arabs of Palestine: "It is more important," MacDonald informed the cabinet, "that we should regain the full sympathy of these neighbouring governments than that we should secure the friendship of the Palestinian Arabs; they are the countries whose lukewarm support or actual hostility in case of war would have most unfortunate results."[57] This was despite the recognition that Arab states were unlikely to support Germany and Italy, having sided with Britain during the Munich crisis "with scarcely any mention of the embarrassing

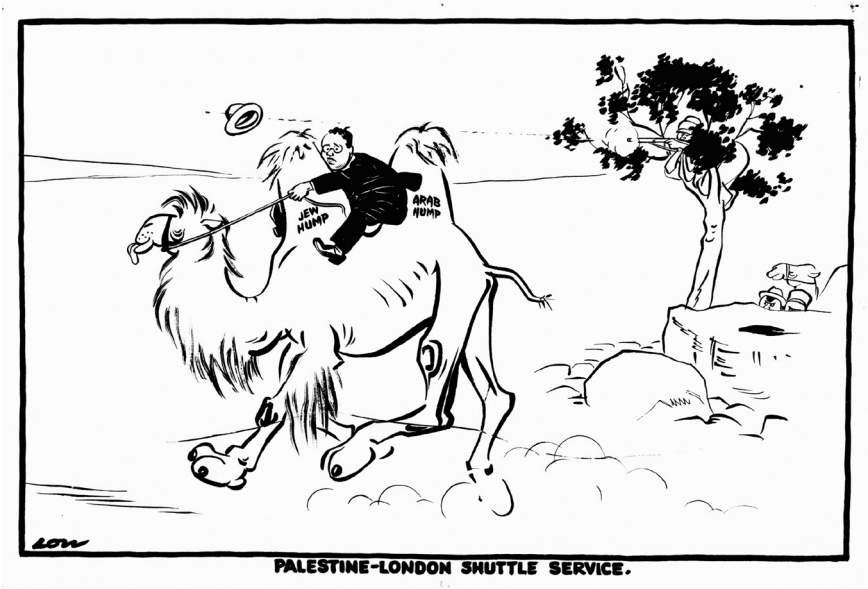

Fig. 4.3. "Palestine–London Shuttle Service": a cartoon, published in the *Evening Standard* on 22 July 1938, during the height of the Arab Revolt, poking fun at Britain's diplomatic conundrum. © David Low / Solo Syndication.

situation in Palestine."[58] Regardless, the colonial secretary continued to assert that "we cannot ignore the repeated warnings of our representatives in that part of the world, and the strength of feeling of the Arab public generally against our Palestine policy is making it more and more impossible for their rulers to maintain a pro-British attitude."[59]

This was how the government abandoned partition, but it was only through the course of discussions at St. James's Palace in January, February, and March 1939 that the intractable nature of Arab demands became clear. As a result, the cabinet went from agreeing to only harsh restrictions on Jewish immigration and land purchase to supporting an independent Palestine within ten years.[60] The Palestine delegation rejected these proposals on the basis that the interim period was too long. In contrast, although "the representatives of the neighbouring Arab States had taken this attitude in public, behind the scenes some of them had told us that they regarded our proposals as wise and reasonable."[61] In particular, Saudi delegate Fuad Bey Hamza said in private that "while their hearts were with the Palestinian Arabs, they had brought not only their hearts, but also their heads, to London."[62] Independence was important but as a principle rather

than an immediate outcome. It had even "been suggested by the Arab representatives that a solution could be reached on the lines of the regime which had been in force for some years in Iraq, while arrangements for a constitutional Assembly were being worked out. A provisional government of Iraqi Ministers had been established, with British advisers; during this period, which lasted some four years, the Iraqi Ministers had been a facade, and the British advisers had been the real rulers of the country. Nuri Pasha was urging us to follow this precedent."[63]

As a result, MacDonald finally put to the cabinet what he had already discussed with both delegations: that they should announce an end to the Mandate and the establishment of an "independent" Palestinian state "with British advisers to run the show."[64] The figure of seventy-five thousand additional Jewish immigrants over five years was finalized—MacDonald had originally argued for more than three hundred thousand—and Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain admitted there was no better bargain they could strike for the Jews, though he felt they had been roughly treated.[65] "The plain fact," MacDonald told the cabinet, "was that the Jews had made no attempt to co-operate with the Arabs in the last twenty years, but they would now have to do so."[66] This was largely the attitude taken with Zionist leaders after Ormsby-Gore's departure.

Rather than adopting the rhetoric often heard in Parliament that portrayed Zionism as a special and enlightened movement, MacDonald's language implied equality with Palestine's Arabs and an air of disdain, trivializing the conflict as merely a battle of interests in which "each of them wants to be the master."[67] When Zionists threatened to boycott the St. James's Conference after British refusal to allow ten thousand refugees into Palestine, Chamberlain and MacDonald understood that "the Jews" simply were not in a position to withdraw.[68] The opinion of actual Zionists, therefore, was almost inconsequential. The fact that they did not have an impact on the British political calculations in this period of decision-making should come as no surprise, however, as they had never possessed that type of direct influence. Previously supportive elements in the House of Commons (discussed more below), the League of Nations, and the United States either shrank away from the issue or wielded too little influence to be of assistance.

The "betrayal" of the MacDonald White Paper was self-imposed, in believing Zionism had harnessed the foreign policy of the British Empire only to realize this was not the case. Although both Chamberlain and MacDonald still professed affection for Zionism, this had no impact on their deliberations. Upon the release of MacDonald's white paper, the colonial secretary drafted a letter that Chamberlain sent to Chaim Weizmann saying, "I greatly regret that this should be so, and that it should be necessary to apply some measure of disappointment to long and ardently cherished hopes. I have always recognised and admired your single-minded devotion."[69] In the end it was understood that,

regardless of Palestine policy, in a war with Germany the Zionists had nowhere to turn but Britain.[70] No intervention on their behalf was forthcoming.

Opinions on Zionism coming from the United States and the League of Nations were not particularly important in this period of policy making. Although Ormsby-Gore had frequently warned of rampant American displeasure over the abandonment of partition, this, as the Foreign Office predicted, never materialized.[71] The US State Department made it clear to British ambassador Lindsey that they were receiving thousands of telegrams on the issue, but "that this was merely a personal message for our information," because "the United States Government did not wish to appear to be interfering in any way with the conduct of matters which were within the province of His Majesty's Government."[72] MacDonald did discuss the release of the white paper with US ambassador to Britain, Joseph P. Kennedy, "who had been in a somewhat gloomy mood" and had thought that "Jews, in his view, were unpopular in America, but he thought they might be able to work up a certain amount of anti-British agitation; the results of which would not, however, last for very long."[73] In terms of US opinion, the government received notification only of very low level pleas such as letters from a Presbyterian and a Methodist minister, resolutions by the Massachusetts cities of Worcester and Chelsea, and a request to continue the Mandate from a New Jersey senator, as well as many individual concerned citizens and even one telegram from the American Arab National League urging the opposite, for Britain not to be swayed by "Jewish clamor."[74]

These combined factors led Mr. Baggallay at the Foreign Office to "regard Middle Eastern opinion, which might be permanently and seriously hostile, as outweighing American opinion, which would probably be only temporarily incensed."[75] He concluded that "[o]ur interests here are far too important to be made the plaything of the Jews of America, however important they may be politically."[76] Eventually, the US State Department did issue a series of telegrams noting American rights to be consulted regarding changes in the Mandate, but the Foreign Office dismissed them as preelection posturing.[77] Likewise, the League of Nations never posed a political risk.

Cabinet ministers anticipated that the Permanent Mandates Commission would be split four to three on whether MacDonald's white paper was legal within the terms of the Mandate and that it would be referred to September's full meeting of the Council.[78] This was indeed the verdict, but, before the full Council of the League of Nations could render its judgment, war was declared.[79] Ultimately, the options to partition Palestine or continue the Mandate using indefinite repression were dropped due to the importance of Arab and Muslim opinion. In contrast, the option to act in contravention of previous obligations to the Jewish national home passed the political test due to a lack of effective

opposition in Geneva, in Washington, or, as discussed below, in the House of Commons.

War Crimes and Public Relations

Complicating the need for international diplomacy were rumors circulating about the nature of Britain's counterinsurgency operations in Palestine. It would appear that the War Office, in particular, viewed the cessation of Arab rebellion as a key imperative in the face of potential war in Europe and was prepared to defy international and British norms of conduct in order to achieve that objective. This goal was pursued with such enthusiastic cruelty that it could have severely complicated the Foreign Office's diplomatic preparations for war.

Eventually reinforced by approximately twenty-five thousand men, British armed forces and later the police in Palestine fell under the commands of General Dill, Major General Wavell, and Lieutenant General R. Haining with divisions commanded by Major Generals R. O'Connor and B. Montgomery; these men credited themselves with suppressing the Arab Revolt by late 1939.[80] However, by highlighting how these men operated with respect to the three principles of conduct in warfare—discrimination, necessity, and proportionality—it becomes clear that some tactics were unsavory even to imperial Britain. Subsequent accusations of wanton violence attracted unwelcome attention, which undoubtedly made the seas of international opinion even more difficult to navigate.

The public commitment to discrimination was evident in British assertions that Palestinian Arab villagers should not be targeted unnecessarily through collective punishment (in the form of punitive searches and home demolitions). The War Office argued that all of their activities met the principle of necessity, and they justified the use of military courts and large numbers of death sentences on this basis as well. Proportionality specifically related to unnecessary suffering in the form of summary beatings, killings, or torture, and this was the subject on which British responses to criticism aroused suspicion rather than reassurance. Whereas British tactics in the first two categories were admitted and defended publicly—implying that they satisfied standards of the time—allegations that British forces systematically employed disproportionate violence were kept secret, were denied, and remained uninvestigated, implying that these activities would have failed the test of public opinion.

Combatants or Civilians?

Discrimination between soldiers and civilians was a principle applied in theory but not in practice during the Arab Revolt in Palestine. The 1907 Hague Convention had expressly stipulated differentiation between combatants and civilians, and Palestine's military leadership asserted that it was fully adhered to at

all times.[81] In 1939, for example, to answer condemnations that ordinary Palestinian Arab villagers were being targeted unfairly by British troops, the War Office issued the following statement: "[U]nderlying all efforts to suppress this rebellion, one fact had always to be uppermost. Namely, the forces in Palestine were not dealing with an enemy of the Empire but with the rebellious activities of a section of a race who are themselves members of the British Community of Nations. Therefore, at all times, it has been necessary to ensure that every repressive action by the Military should be guided by the principles of minimum force, firmness, fairness and impartiality."[82]

This was careful rhetoric, but principled discrimination was made almost impossible by the military's almost universally inclusive definition of combatants. As there was great popular support for the revolt as well as widespread intimidation of civilians by those engaging in the uprising, there was hardly a single villager in all of Palestine that the British military considered a true civilian. General Haining largely refused the existence of noncombatants among Palestine's Arab population. Since Haining saw "no organised rebel army in the accepted sense, against which troops can act to the exclusion of the remaining peaceful citizens," High Commissioner MacMichael was able to assure the colonial secretary that "every practicable effort is made to spare innocent villagers."[83] However, he underlined "innocent" to emphasize that those being punished were, of course, considered guilty.[84] This cyclical attitude resulted in the moral and legal justification for collective punishment, most notably punitive searches and home demolitions.

Searches of rural villages were conducted with the aim of finding weapons caches. The assumption was that "[p]ractically every Arab village in the country is well stocked with lethal weapons."[85] This, however, was rarely the case, and British troops' oft frustrated hunt for large deposits of firearms led them to accuse villagers of deliberately concealing them elsewhere, another assumption that seemed to justify turning the searches into punitive exercises. Searching villages was "not a gentle business" because the police had often been targeted by rebels, and, in frustration, "they did retaliate."[86] Police and troops emptied and mixed a year's supply of grains, sugar, olive oil, and kerosene, ransacked houses, and destroyed furniture until nothing was left.[87] One Palestine police officer noted how "in the villages anything European is looked upon with suspicion, the only exception being Singer sewing machines and which are the first things the soldiers destroy when searching a house."[88] Deputy governor of the Jaffa District, Aubrey Lees believed that these searches also included "extensive robbery and looting," including of life savings.[89] This process became a sort of concessionary prize for brigades who failed to catch a particular group of rebels. "We nearly caught up with a band of the bad boys," Constable Burr wrote home to his parents, "but they slipped across the border, we would have gone after them

but had our D.S.P. with us but he let us beat up a village where they had stayed the night."[90]

During these punitive searches, villagers were often concentrated in cages as an inducement to surrender hidden weapons. The best-known example of this occurred in the village of Halhul in May 1939.[91] A Scottish regiment called the Black Watch erected two wire cages, one in the shade containing food and water and the other positioned in the sun with less than a pint of water per day.[92] Those who betrayed the position of a rifle hoard could pass from the "bad" cage to the "good" cage, but there was no option for villagers who did not know where any rifles were hidden.[93] Between ten and fourteen villagers died, and the detainees were only freed after eight days when they gave up forty old Turkish rifles.[94] The district commissioner of Jerusalem, Edward Keith-Roach "was instructed that no civil inquest should be held," but the high commissioner decided the incident warranted compensation, which was paid "at the highest rate allowed by the law, [. . .] over three thousand pounds to the bereft families."[95] This was considered an unfortunate episode, but the method was not prohibited from further use. Likewise, home demolition was a tactic used throughout the revolt despite its dubious merit.

In June 1936, the port of Jaffa proved too difficult to police as chasing suspects through this part of town and the surrounding alleyways was tantamount to suicide. On the pretext of a public health order, the British administration decided to demolish large sections of the old city of Jaffa.[96] Later, when the Palestine administration enacted the Defence Orders in Council of 1937 to give the military and police greater powers, no alternative justification for demolition was required other than the belief that its inhabitants were aiding rebels.[97]

Such large operations were atypical, however, as demolition was largely saved for rural villages, some of which, such as Mi'ar in October 1938, were leveled completely, and again the tactic was punitive rather than purely strategic. "The procedure now when a soldier is killed," wrote Constable Burr, "is to blow up the nearest village and for this purpose deep sea mines are being supplied by the *Malaya*."[98] The use of sea mines and oversize explosive charges by royal engineers was intended to cause collateral damage. Lieutenant General Carr described one instance of this in the town of Qala, where several residents were suspected of participating in rail sabotage: "I saw to it that the [Royal Engineers] put in extra explosive to not only demolish the culprits' houses but also those adjoining it. In all I had eight houses obliterated."[99] Between 1936 and 1940, the authorities destroyed approximately two thousand houses, and British troops even forced some Arabs to demolish their own homes one brick at a time.[100]

These procedures hardly helped win the hearts and minds of Palestine's rural Arab population. On multiple occasions the Arab Women's Society appealed to Palestine's high commissioner on this basis: "The demolition of any house in a

village is liable to estrange the whole village," they wrote, "[t]he destruction of the house-effects of a poor villager who, in all probability, might be innocent, would make an enemy of him."[101] It was obvious to the Women's Society that "[i]n many cases these villagers have been the target of revenge by both the Government and the armed men."[102] However, despite possessing doubtful strategic merit and the potential for bad public relations, these punitive searches and home demolitions were never denied. Instead, they were justified publicly by the principle of military necessity.

Justifying Tactics

British authorities in Palestine, as well as their counterparts in Westminster, publicly rationalized dangerous search methods and home demolitions through the principle of military necessity. This maxim was also used to warrant particularly harsh sentences imposed by Palestine's military courts. In terms of international norm violation, however, such public validation meant that although these tactics would be viewed as unnecessarily harsh today, they did seem to meet criteria for "humaneness" in war during the 1930s.

Searches were considered unfortunate but unavoidable. Labour MP Sir Herbert Morrison, for example, raised the dilemma of holding villages responsible for individual's crimes, noting how "this kind of thing is not particularly palatable to us," but concluding somewhat erroneously that the practice served as a deterrent to "murder and anarchy" that "must be put down."[103] Despite the compensation that had to be paid to dead villagers' families after some searches, High Commissioner MacMichael continued to justify methods used at Halhul, and another similar incident at the village of Beit Rima, on the basis that the areas were "notoriously 'bad' and both were known to contain large numbers of illegal arms."[104] MacMichael blamed the deaths at Halhul on "a combination of unfortunate circumstances which included abnormally hot weather" and the age of the men who died.[105] Taking a comparable attitude, General Haining insisted that police and troops were not ordered to destroy furniture and food stores: "Stringent orders are issued and every precaution taken to prevent looting or wanton destruction of property or food."[106] Damage was blamed on villagers leaving cupboards locked so they had to be broken in order to conduct the search.[107] Constable Kitson, however, remembered that "we did certainly mess villages up" and "[w]e didn't lose any sleep over these things."[108]

Similarly, High Commissioner MacMichael defended demolitions as necessary measures against those aiding and abetting rebels, and, by the summer of 1936, the legal powers to demolish had been expanded significantly.[109] In June, the colonial secretary announced to Parliament that "[h]ouses and buildings from which firearms have been discharged or bombs thrown, or any houses in villages

in other areas where the inhabitants have committed or abetted acts of murder, violence or intimidation, the actual offender being unknown, may be appropriated by the Government and demolished without compensation."[110] This tactic was justified as "fully recognised and understood by the Palestinian Arabs" and their tribal, collectivized mentality, and was "necessary" because a crime had been committed but police had no definitive proof indicating by whom.[111] The British belief in the efficacy of these measures failed to grasp their radicalizing effect on ordinary Palestinian villagers. Collective punishment was deemed "the only method of impressing the peaceful but terrorised majority that failure to assist law and order may, in the long run, be more unpleasant than submitting to intimidation."[112] The same counterproductive thinking was applied to sentencing in military courts.

In the first stage of the revolt, discharging a weapon or throwing a bomb at British forces, regardless of the damage it caused, became an offense punishable by death, and damage to property or sabotage warranted life imprisonment.[113] These were not common sentences throughout the empire. A former India secretary raised concerns that "when if we shut up a single Bengalee terrorist there were questions about our interfering with the liberty of the subject, searching his house, and so on. What is the situation today?"[114] The Arab Revolt in Palestine was so dire, however, that "the very drastic regulations such as the death penalty for using arms" was viewed as a "regrettable necessity."[115] The military courts avoided civilian interferences, and laws of evidence were relaxed so that an officer could swear to testimony he heard from a witness if the witness was presumed dead, could not be found, or for reasons of his safety could not be produced in public.[116] Between 1937 and 1939, the number of Arab detainees in Palestine increased tenfold to some nine thousand prisoners, and more than one hundred of these were hanged.[117]

Although justified domestically by military necessity, the courts were ineffectual as a deterrent. District Commissioner Keith-Roach, who had to attend every execution in his capacity as sheriff, remarked how "[t]he irony of the whole process was that not a single execution made the slightest difference to public security, to Arab opinion, to Arab fears, to Arab respect for law, or to Arab action."[118] Keith-Roach was a minority opinion at the time, however, and these procedures were generally considered too merciful. Constable Burr noted how "[t]he military courts started off well but, as we expected are being too lenient and want too much evidence to convict them, so any Johnny Arab who is caught by us now in suspicious circumstances is shot out of hand."[119] Indeed, even the impartial commission led by Lord Peel—sent to Palestine in hope of solving the political problem—criticized the government for being too compassionate.[120] Likewise, the League of Nations' PMC rebuked British authorities for not instituting martial law when disturbances first commenced.[121] There appears to have

been a widespread and international consensus, therefore, that counterinsurgency tactics in Palestine that were validated by the principle of military necessity did meet international standards of behavior in war. The same, however, was not true of British methods that were publicly denied.

Unnecessary Suffering

In 1930s Palestine, British forces and police undermined the proportionality principle in several key ways: summary beatings, shootings, unofficial destruction of houses, and torture for the purposes of interrogation. These activities were not permissible according to the international norms of the time, and this is evident in the Foreign, Colonial, and War Offices' responses to allegations of atrocities, which were fervently denied but never officially investigated.

First, testimonies of British troops and police highlight the widespread mistreatment of Palestinian Arabs, including those suspected of rebel activity and others presumed guilty by association. Detainees, for example, were used as human shields to guard against road and rail mining.[122] Private Bellows, of the Royal Hampshire Regiment admitted that this was "[r]ather a dirty trick, but we enjoyed it."[123] When a captive fell from the hood of a vehicle during this process, "if he was lucky he'd get away with a broken leg, but if he was unlucky the truck coming up behind would hit him. But nobody bothered to go and pick the bits up."[124] A soldier named Arthur Lane also recalled an incident when his regiment caught seven Arabs after a small firefight and assaulted the men until "this lad's eye was hanging down on his cheek. The whole eye had been knocked out and it was hanging down and there was blood dripping on his face."[125] Prisoners were struck with "rifle butts, bayonets, fists, boots, whatever."[126] Other mistreatment also included stripping captives naked and blasting them with a fire hose, an act justified by the assessment that these "dirty buggers" needed a bath.[127] Officers witnessed this treatment, which was "definitely done with their approval."[128] Humiliation and beatings also escalated to murders that were rarely investigated.

The killings largely occurred as reprisals. Major Bertrude Augustus Pond noted how "soldiers would see Arab *atrocities*, and there were some of their mates killed and on occasions, they, the troops, became bloody angry."[129] Pond knew of "one or two occasions" when this resulted in the shooting of prisoners, but he also believed these were isolated incidents, after which "the unit itself, however much they had been provoked, felt ashamed of what had happened in some regiments."[130] The Royal Ulster Rifles, for example, reportedly destroyed the village of Kafr Yasif, demolishing between 60 and 150 houses and killing between 9 and 25 of its inhabitants in retaliation for two British deaths.[131] Similar atrocities seem to have occurred at al-Bassa, where the Royal Ulsters allegedly huddled approximately fifty villagers under a bus, detonated explosives under the vehicle,

and burned the village.[132] At Miksa, a number of murdered Arab villagers were initially blamed on militant Zionists but this was later exposed as the work of British police, a response to the death of a constable in the village.[133] Constable Burr also recounted how a military regiment seconded to the police captured twelve Arabs near the Mosque of Oman and promptly bayoneted them all to a wall: "that's the type of men we need out here," he wrote, "they are taught in the army that the spirit of the bayonet is to kill."[134]

There was only one successful prosecution against British forces or police for murders of this nature, but this single case demonstrated a clear line between what was and what was not publicly acceptable treatment of suspected rebels held in custody. In January 1939, four British constables were charged with murdering Mohammed el Haddad, a man arrested for possessing a revolver who then later reportedly tried to escape.[135] The incident had occurred in full view of Jaffa's German colony, and the publicity made it impossible to ignore. Haddad had been unarmed and handcuffed when the shooting occurred, at a distance of only a few yards, and on a back street in Jaffa that was a significant detour from the constables' route between police stations.[136] In addition, the fatal shot was fired after Haddad was already down.[137] All four men were convicted, but only Constable Wood, who had fired that fatal round, lost his appeal.[138] Despite convincing evidence that Haddad had been taken to a Jaffa alleyway with the intent to kill him, the only element of this very public crime that British officials treated as normatively problematic was the shot fired when Haddad was incapacitated. It is possible to infer, therefore, that killing an escaping prisoner was acceptable and met the threshold of necessity, even if the circumstances could, at best, have been avoided and, at worst, were very suspicious, whereas murdering an injured detainee did not meet these standards of "humaneness." In contrast, the use of torture for interrogation consistently failed to meet any standards of British and international codes of conduct in war.

Torture occurred in special interrogation centers established by colonial policing expert, Charles Tegart.[139] At these clandestine centers, "'selected' police officers were to be trained in the gentle art of 'third degree,' for use on Arabs until they 'spilled the beans.'"[140] This was not as secret a practice as the perpetrators intended. The Arab Ladies of Jerusalem complained about their practices of "whipping and beating with canes," and Edward Keith-Roach demanded that the center in his area of Jerusalem be closed.[141] Victims' testimonies were also translated by Miss Frances Newton and disseminated by the Arab Centre in London as pamphlets.[142] Prominent Palestinian notable Jamal al Husseini even wrote a letter to the League of Nations requesting an impartial commission to investigate accusations of summary shootings, rape, beatings, scorching with hot iron rods, forcing prisoners to stand under cold showers for hours, "applying immense pressure on the stomach and back until the victim faints from pain (after evacuating

all contents of the stomach)," torture involving genitals, and removing fingernails.[143] The deputy governor of Jaffa, Aubrey Lees, also described similar tortures when writing to a friend in England, claiming he heard them from the victims.[144]

Numerous low-level reports were also produced by concerned officials serving in the region. One of the most damning came from Mr. Ogden at the British Consulate in Damascus, who apologetically drew the Foreign Office's attention to his realization that "third degree" was taking place in Palestine.[145] He dismissed Newton's translations as "exaggerated and mendacious" but wanted to stress that he had "heard from several independent sources that such methods are by no means unknown to police in Palestine."[146] He believed that Charles Tegart handpicked a "body of men, all British, who are sworn to secrecy. The victims are taken by night to a house outside Jerusalem [. . .]. Here the G-men, as I am told they are called, are permitted to inflict every form of torture they can think of."[147] This included hanging a man upside down and urinating on his mouth and nose.[148] "This sort of thing, if it is true," Ogden wrote, "ought to stop, and quickly. The publicity given to it is rapidly taking away the last shreds of our reputation as colonial administrators and will do us no end of harm if used by certain European countries which are not at present too friendly."[149] This was because no argument could be made that such activities fit the principle of military necessity.

Indeed, these were not simply British standards being violated; concerns were raised regarding Germany and Italy's use of such information and how this would influence world opinion.[150] Hitler had already called attention to "the poor Arabs" and told "Churchill, Eden, and other critics of appeasement that they should apply their 'prodigious knowledge' and 'infallible wisdom' to Palestine, where things had 'a damnably strong smell of violence and precious little of democracy.'"[151] A public statement had been issued when the four constables were charged with murdering Haddad, principally because "we should be more liable to criticism in German press and elsewhere to the effect that our previous denials of 'atrocity stories' had been based either on ignorance or on suppression of the truth, that it was now evident that these stories were true."[152]

International taunts meant that the War Office viewed allegations against British troops not as legitimate complaints but as "propaganda," dismissing Miss Newton as an "eccentric old lady" and peddler of "atrocity stories" while the Foreign Office tried to assure the Council of the League of Nations that "[t]here is no ground for the allegations regarding the conduct of the police and military forces."[153] The Colonial Office also tried to reassure the public that "[e]very allegation of irregular conduct is made the subject of immediate enquiry."[154] However, one line was crossed out of the Colonial Office statement, which read, "His majesty's Government are satisfied, after most careful enquiry, that they

are entirely unfounded."[155] There was never any investigation into allegations of general brutality, and officials in Westminster merely forwarded any concerns contritely to the high commissioner in Palestine.

The colonial secretary, for example, urged MacMichael that "[t]here is the paramount consideration, with which I know you agree, that we must set our faces absolutely against any development of 'black and tan' methods in Palestine. The only way to stop such a development is to stamp it out at the very beginning"; he stressed that "[i]t is of the utmost importance that individuals amongst them should not be guilty of any action which would bring the Force and the Administration into disrepute."[156] The Foreign Office also forwarded complaints to MacMichael. The head of the Middle East Department wrote to him confessing he felt "rather apologetic" about "referring this matter to you for comment, but I should like to be put in a position to deny that there is any foundation whatever for this extraordinary allegation."[157]

For his part, MacMichael admitted that "he had little doubt that, in the stress of the present extremely tense conditions of Palestine, roughness had sometimes been used in dealing with persons thought to be responsible for the killing of British troops or officials," but he believed "that any suggestion of the use of terrorist methods or torture should be whole-heartedly repressed."[158] The only course of action taken was the high commissioner's promise that "he would mention the matter again to the General Officer Commanding, who is now in general charge of both troops and police, and ask him to do his best to ensure that no methods of this sort were employed."[159] The army, however, had almost a free hand in Palestine with no effective civilian oversight, making these polite requests somewhat futile.

During the first stage of the revolt in 1936, the civil administration had been able to curb military excesses, but High Commissioner Wauchope was removed, largely for interfering, and his successor, Sir Harold MacMichael, ceded power over the police and armed forces to the general officer commanding (GOC) during the second more violent stage of rebellion.[160] The GOC controlled Palestine through various area commanders, who were merely advised by their civilian counterparts, the district commissioners. MacMichael had been stripped of all authority by 1938.[161] In terms of singling out any blameworthy parties, the GOC's approval would, at the very least, have been necessary to maintain and dismantle interrogation centers, to which the high commissioner had presumably called General Haining's attention at least twice. This is why Matthew Hughes has called the brutality displayed in Palestine a systemic problem rather than a small collection of exceptional abuses.[162]

As the various GOCs held the power to order or prevent "irregular" methods and did not seem amenable to the latter, it is reasonable to presume that the War Office agreed with their tactics. Conversely, the Colonial and Foreign Offices

wished to prevent politically explosive revelations from coming to light, and they implored the high commissioner to prevent excessive force, overlooking that he had no power to do so. In addition, soldiers and police could expect to escape prosecution as long as their crimes remained unobserved by large numbers of Western or foreign witnesses. The prosecution of four constables for the murder of Haddad seems to have been the only case of its kind brought to court during the revolt.[163] Otherwise, the response to accusations largely abdicated responsibility. The Foreign and Colonial Offices were content to believe War Office denials and failed to pursue the claims separately. In sharing his concerns about torture in Palestine, Mr. Ogden at the consulate in Damascus laid the blame appropriately. "[I]t is not the police who are to blame in Palestine, nor the army. They are thoroughly demoralized by the continued state of sub-war," he wrote. "In my opinion the blame lies with H.M.G. [His Majesty's Government] for having allowed such a situation to develop. It is pathetic that any British administration should be reduced to using such methods to retain control over a country."[164]

The fact that summary shootings, beatings, and torture defied international standards of behavior is evident in the British attempts to conceal such activities from the world at large. By continually denying claims made by Palestinian Arabs and British officials that cruel and unusual methods were being used in Palestine, but simultaneously allowing the practices to continue, British authorities must have believed they were helping in some way to suppress the rebellion. The irregular methods were presumably justified internally by the principle of necessity, but their lack of public airing implies that these tactics defied international codes of conduct, demonstrated by the broadcasting efforts of Germany and Italy as well as British attempts to reassure the Council of the League of Nations. Whereas British counterinsurgency tactics involving punitive searches and home demolitions were not problematic for public relations, indiscriminate killings and torture were. One member of the Palestine police aptly summarized the methods used to quash the Arab Revolt: "In order to fight terrorists," he said, "we became terrorists, more or less."[165] This was a situation made worse by, and which worsened, the crisis of pending war in Europe that colored policy making toward Palestine.

Reprising Turf Wars

In addition, yet another turf war between the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office over Palestine policy frustrated the government's will to act. Throughout 1937 and part of 1938, the two secretaries of state for these ministries—Colonial Secretary William Ormsby-Gore and Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden—entered into a cabinet-level power struggle ostensibly over the Peel Commission's partition proposals. This turf war came to an end only when both men resigned from

the cabinet in 1938—Eden in February and Ormsby-Gore in May—and were replaced by Malcolm MacDonald and Lord Halifax (formerly Lord Irwin of the Irwin Declaration), respectively. Eden had found the Foreign Office a challenging posting, not least because of his relatively junior status among fellow cabinet secretaries. Writing later, Eden admitted,

> I was aware that my appointment was not welcome to all my elders in the Cabinet, where there was no lack of former Foreign Secretaries and other aspirants to the office. I knew that Baldwin's support would be fitful and lethargic. I had also seen the practice . . . of a multiplicity of Ministers taking a hand at redrafting a dispatch. On one of these occasions about a year later, I began to protest vigorously, when Baldwin passes me a note: "Don't be too indignant. I once saw Curzon burst into tears when the Cabinet was amending his dispatches." After the meeting, he told me I must remember that out of my twenty colleagues, there was probably not more than one who thought he should be Minister of Labour and nineteen who thought they should be Foreign Secretary.[166]

Eden faced a built-in tradition of turf wars that began again with William Ormsby-Gore over the Palestine question, though Ormsby-Gore supported him on other issues. The subsequent colonial secretary, Malcolm MacDonald, then adopted the Foreign Office view of partition, but the delay created by bureaucratic politics allowed the situation in Palestine to worsen considerably. This turf war raged between only the two cabinet secretaries themselves, hardly involving their staffs, and was fought as though they were arguing a heated debate over strategy versus compassion. This prompted the prime minister to intervene in a way that caused the severe delay. This process of bureaucratic infighting added more than a year to British deliberations, a procrastination that pushed the decision about Palestine until after the Munich Crisis and much closer to imminent war in Europe.

It is important to note that the turf war played out between Ormsby-Gore and Eden, heading up their respective ministries, as they each attempted to maximize their institution's agendas and goals.[167] The Colonial and Foreign Offices were traditional bureaucratic rivals, where chief players were often undersecretaries and heads of department, meaning that much of the game playing took place below cabinet level. However, the conflict between lower ranked officials and office staffs was not crucial in this instance. In 1937, the Colonial Office Middle Eastern Department was headed by O. T. R. Williams, one of four assistant undersecretaries of state, supervised by Sir Cosmo Parkinson and often Sir John Shuckburgh, who presented information to Ormsby-Gore.[168] The day-to-day running of Palestine fell within the Colonial Office remit, but Palestine's international diplomatic ties were handled by the Eastern Department of the Foreign Office.[169] George Rendel headed this department, which reported to Sir Lancelot Oliphant and upward to Anthony Eden.[170] Previous studies have detailed the

antagonism between these ministry staffs,[171] but these dynamics were not overly relevant for policy making at this time. The key figures (in terms of how interdepartmental conflict had an impact on decisions) sat in the cabinet. This is where the delay was created. The foreign secretary had a much wider scope than the colonial secretary, and it was this scope—in considering the impact of Palestine policy across Britain's Middle East strategic interests—that gave him a legitimate role in the development of policy during the Arab Revolt. Repeatedly, however, the colonial secretary attempted to reinterpret the crisis as a small, isolated incident that should be dealt with equitably rather than strategically, an argument essentially against Foreign Office interference.

This may appear to be a cynical reading of the Colonial Office's attempt to do what was best for Palestine, but Ormsby-Gore's early evaluation of the rebellion demonstrates agreement with what became the Foreign Office argument, and it was only after Eden's involvement that Ormsby-Gore became hostile regarding any cabinet discussions on abandoning partition. When Peel's proposals were discussed and the colonial secretary advocated the partition plan, Ormsby-Gore wrote privately that "without a reasonable measure of assent on the part of the two peoples concerned, no scheme of partition involving the establishment of two independent States can be put into effect."[172] Ormsby-Gore had pinned his colors on partition in order to prevent the appearance of indecision or uncertainty following the publication of Peel's recommendations.[173] This meant that he could not accept Eden's arguments without tacitly surrendering responsibility on this issue to the Foreign Office.

Several months later, when international tension increased over Italy's joining with Germany in the Axis and leaving the league, as well as Japan's threat to the British position in Asia, the Foreign Office took a renewed interest in the Palestine problem and its ramifications across the region. This began a series of memoranda[174] in which the two secretaries of state jockeyed for position on the issue within the cabinet. Ormsby-Gore accused Eden of ignoring "fundamental realities of the Palestine problem," and the foreign secretary labeled Ormsby-Gore's assessment of regional Arab amity as "unfounded and misleading."[175] A direct result of Ormsby-Gore's defensive posture was the need for a second commission. Although the Colonial Office did not appoint Sir John Woodhead and his fellow commissioners until March 1938, their mission came under intense discussion between Ormsby-Gore and Eden in the cabinet. Was the commission merely a "technical" commission as Ormsby-Gore argued, tasked with implementing partition? Or, as Eden advocated, was it a "partition" commission, possessing the right to judge partition impracticable?[176] Ormsby-Gore managed to get the word *technical* inserted into the commission's terms of reference by securing the prime minister's private approval, a measure that Eden referred to as having "gone too far."[177]

In May 1937—before the Peel Commission had returned its report—Neville Chamberlain replaced Stanley Baldwin as prime minister; he acted with far more intervening authority than the beleaguered Baldwin had demonstrated. On 8 December 1937, Chamberlain mediated between the two men, asserting that while "evidence available to the world was as yet not sufficient to carry the conviction that partition was impracticable," and "if the Government were to make such an announcement it would be criticised for having surrendered to threats and force," the commission should not be debarred from concluding that "in their view no workable scheme could be produced."[178] This, Chamberlain asserted, "need not antagonise the Arab States! Neither need it exclude the possibility of a change of policy if the Commission showed partition to be unworkable."[179] The cabinet generally agreed that an announcement committing Britain to enforcing partition would create unrest in India while at the same time any "impression of vagueness" had proved just as fatal in the past.[180] This meant that the technical/partition commission, which became the Woodhead Commission, provided a convenient tool to help the government appear decisive when it was anything but. The final decision between the two arguments was delayed until some unknown date in the future. Woodhead was appointed three months later, traveled to Palestine in April, and presented the committee's findings in November 1938, nearly a year after Chamberlain had intervened within the cabinet.

As Eden resigned in February 1938 and Ormsby-Gore followed in May, the bureaucratic dynamic surrounding a search for peace in Palestine changed significantly. Although the traditionally pro-Zionist Malcolm MacDonald assumed Ormsby-Gore's post, he did not defend partition on the basis of an "equitable" solution. Instead, as MacDonald shared none of Ormsby-Gore's responsibility for the adoption of partition, he was able to approach the issue free from his predecessor's defense of Colonial Office turf. Although it is unlikely that MacDonald assumed his new post with a bureaucratic politics agenda in mind, his agreement with the Foreign Office and CID opinion that Arab support was threatened by Palestine policy actually won the bureaucratic battle for the Colonial Office. Without a policy to rail against, the Foreign Office possessed no legitimate reason to claim Palestine policy was within its remit. The documents that deal with Palestine policy formation following Eden and Ormsby-Gore's resignations are dominated by Malcolm MacDonald in discussions with Prime Minister Chamberlain; the new foreign secretary, Lord Halifax, is hardly mentioned. This relationship may have been the result of pressure on MacDonald to act quickly, which was very difficult before the Woodhead Commission returned its findings. MacDonald anticipated that the inquiry would return a verdict of no confidence in partition, but this was by no means certain.

The Woodhead Commission, far from receiving instructions simply to reject partition, found the task set to them exceedingly difficult. Woodhead noted "that

if he had known how difficult this job was when it had been offered to him, he would have refused to undertake it!"[181] MacDonald pestered the committee continually for an early submission because he needed time to assess their policy recommendations and formulate ideas to take to the cabinet. The colonial secretary had heard rumors that the commission would repudiate partition and believed it would be better for the Arab insurrection for this news to emerge sooner rather than later.[182] MacDonald pleaded with Woodhead, "saying that he would appreciate that the European situation increased the desirability of our getting Palestine policy settled as early as possible."[183] Woodhead, however, refused to provide him with early data or even discuss the matter in private over dinner to avoid overt interference or the appearance of impropriety.[184] "If I came and dined with him and his colleagues for the purpose which I had in mind," the colonial secretary offered, "I would not try to influence their decision. If they liked, I would not open my mouth, except to put food into it, throughout the evening."[185] When the conclusions did eventually emerge in November 1938, they provided the perfect opportunity to retreat officially from the policy that appeared to endanger British strategic interests in the Middle East—a consideration that was only pertinent due to the looming threat of a second world war.

Ultimately, although staff at the respective ministries were indeed pitted against each other in terms of their opinions, it remained the relationship between William Ormsby-Gore and Anthony Eden that fueled a turf war between the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office in 1937–1938. This is evidenced by the profound change witnessed once these two men left the government and a final consensus emerged. There was a real fear of losing Arab support in the event of war, which was an opinion shared and reiterated by many more officials than Rendel, Oliphant, and Eden. Most important, the year's delay caused by bureaucratic infighting made it harder for the British government to support the Jewish national home. This was because Arab attitudes only hardened against repressive British counterinsurgency measures the longer they continued, and Arab leaders only became more indignant over the perceived lack of interest in Westminster. Added to this disruptive delay was a lack of probing parliamentary criticism, which meant repudiating the Jewish national home no longer posed much of a political risk.

Unusually United

It is important to discuss Parliament because the body had been highly influential in directing Britain's deliberations on Palestine in both 1922 and 1930. However, in 1939 a lack of effective parliamentary opposition rendered the Jewish national home politically inert, a situation that would have seemed impossible during the policy-making dynamics discussed in earlier chapters. This was due

to two reasons: Prime Minister Chamberlain and Colonial Secretary MacDonald shared the opinion that British deterrence was not harmed by concessions in Palestine by 1939; in addition, a large Conservative majority in the House of Commons meant the government could risk losing support from a sizable number of Conservative MPs (i.e., those who equated Palestine's independence with appeasement). Amery, for example, wrote to Eden that "[t]he whole business is a replica on a small scale of the European situation."[186] Incidentally, although Ormsby-Gore had opposed Eden's attitude to Palestine, he had supported him in the cabinet on the crisis with Germany.[187]

First, the architects behind the MacDonald White Paper—MacDonald himself (who was a former Labour MP and the son of James Ramsay MacDonald) and Prime Minister Chamberlain—did not think that resolving the revolt in Palestine through diplomatic gestures endangered Britain's standing in the world. This meant that the policy they developed did not represent as much of a fundamental change as it appeared. Britain's empire had a history of rebellion, and the idea of repressive measures to restore "order" followed by concessions was not new. MacDonald had specifically questioned Sir Miles Lampson about the impact of abandoning partition. "Would not this be greeted as a sign of our decadence?" he asked, as "[t]he Germans and Italians would certainly urge this in all their propaganda."[188] At the Colonial Office, the veteran imperial administrator Shuckburgh had expressed similar concerns, that "there was a danger that terrorists would declare that they had won their first battle and must now carry on with the work of driving the Jews into the sea."[189] Lampson merely replied, however, that "[i]n a way the British were always giving way to this sort of pressure. They had done so in the cases of Ireland and India and even of Egypt [. . .] On the whole their credit was far greater after the event than before."[190] Pretending Britain had always remained firm in the face of local challenge was futile. Rather than associating the rejection of partition with Munich and appeasement, the colonial secretary and the prime minister came to view it as part of imperial governance. Ultimately, Britain could concede ground, but the empire attempted, if possible, to avoid the appearance of it.

This attitude was most apparent during interdepartmental discussions on Palestine in October 1938. MacDonald noted that "if concessions were to be made, it was essential to avoid the appearance of a surrender to terrorism; we must show the world that our decision has its roots in justice, not force; and thorough-going measures for the restoration of security must therefore precede and accompany the proposed declaration of policy."[191] This is why communications about Palestine with regional Arab leaders were conducted clandestinely. Chamberlain, for example, wrote to Egyptian prime minister Mahmoud Pasha in October 1938 to assure him they were seeking a solution beyond repression, but it was marked "secret."[192] The colonial secretary also argued that the key leader in the revolt,

mufti of Jerusalem Haj Amin al Husseini, would have to be represented at bilateral talks because "no considerations of prestige should prevent us from coming to terms with the one man who can, on his side, guarantee peace. The vicious circle of rebellion—investigation—half settlement has got to be broken, and this is apparently the only way of breaking it."[193] When Palestine's new high commissioner, Sir Harold MacMichael, protested that "His Majesty's Government cannot treat with instigators of murder," Sir G. Bushe from the Colonial Office replied, "On the contrary, peace in Ireland was made by a treaty between Cabinet Ministers and 'murderers.'"[194] MacDonald agreed, and argued that rejecting partition in this manner would create some opposition in Parliament. However, this antipathy would be largely irrelevant because "His Majesty's Government is only committed to consulting Parliament before embarking on a new constructive policy."[195] The transparent secrecy involved in courting wider Arab opinion continued even when the government had to defend its policy to Parliament. When the House of Commons debated an end to partition in October 1938 and then voted on the white paper in May 1939, at no point did government representatives use the "Arab opinion" argument to justify Palestinian independence.

By the late 1930s, the national government (a Labour-Conservative alliance created by a Conservative takeover of Ramsay MacDonald's government in August 1931) was very secure. Still dominated by Conservatives since a general election in 1935, the government felt very little threat from parliamentary politics. There were only 8 Labour MPs and 33 Liberals versus 387 Conservatives.[196] There was, however, a proportion of Conservative MPs who opposed the Neville Chamberlain cabinet over the policy of appeasement. Those who resisted the Munich Agreement of 1938 saw parallels in the MacDonald White Paper's concessions to Palestinian Arabs. Consequently, they opposed the white paper, too, by an extension of principle. This vocal but unthreatening group materialized when MPs officially debated the white paper on 22–23 May 1939. The debates were centered on moral rather than strategic questions and were totally dominated by criticisms of the policy, with no backbench opinion being voiced in support of the government (a situation highly out of character with previous debates). The final vote vindicated the government's position—meaning that 268 MPs who voted in favor of the white paper had declined to defend it publicly. Opposition in these debates was mainly mounted by the very small number of Labour MPs and two vocal Conservative opponents of appeasement: Leopold Amery and Winston Churchill.

Criticizing the white paper on the basis of appeasement, Amery declared that "[i]t is preposterous to ask the House to shut its eyes, open its mouth and swallow this half-baked project."[197] The white paper only invited "more intransigence, more violence, more pressure from neighbouring States," and was "a direct invitation to the Arabs to continue to make trouble."[198] His multiple speeches were

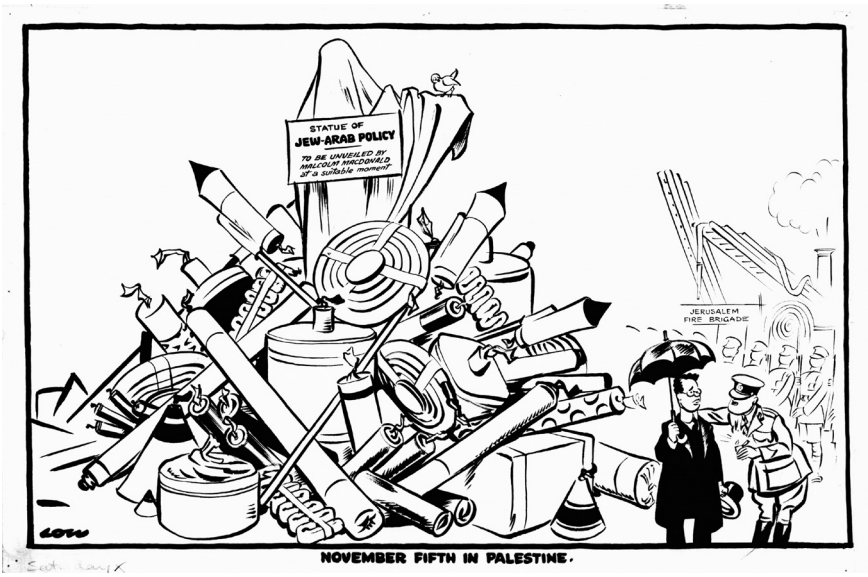

Fig. 4.4. "November Fifth in Palestine": a cartoon, published on Guy Fawkes Night in the *Evening Standard* in 1938, making light of Palestine's explosive potential. © David Low / Solo Syndication.

long and heated, and Churchill stood up to agree, asking, "What will our potential enemies think? What will those who have been stirring up these Arab agitators think? Will they not be encouraged by our confession of recoil? Will they not be tempted to say: 'They're on the run again. This is another Munich.'"[199] These arguments were echoed across parties and in the House of Lords, by Lord Snell and the former high commissioner to Palestine, Herbert Samuel. To these men, neither partition nor the white paper presented an adequate solution.

Instead they advocated merely "perseverance." Churchill, for example, had criticized the government's lack of a decision in November 1937, accusing the cabinet of doing nothing except "palter and maunder and jibber on the Bench."[200] He had also openly opposed partition in an article for the *Jewish Chronicle* citing the pending war in Europe and an inevitability of armed conflict in Palestine as his reason.[201] Then, in the debate over the MacDonald White Paper in 1939, Churchill declared that he was bound to vote against the government's proposals: "I could not stand by and see solemn engagements into which Britain has entered before the world set aside for reasons of administrative convenience or—and it will be a vain hope—for the sake of a quiet life [. . .] I should feel personally embarrassed in the most acute manner if I lent myself, by silence or inaction, to what I must regard as an act of repudiation."[202] (See fig. 4.4.)

In the final vote, Churchill abstained—perhaps demonstrating that he, like all of the 268 MPs who voted "yes" reluctantly admitted that there was little other choice.[203] Amery, with 178 other MPs, voted against the white paper, but the government still won by a margin of 89. As predicted, the government could afford to lose votes and split the party on this single issue—it simply had a large enough majority. Therefore, although parliamentary politics and the sometimes hollow rhetoric of strident members of the House had proved influential in earlier events, by 1939 the unusually large Conservative majority in the House of Commons protected key decision makers from political fallout, allowing them to consider policy options that had previously been far too risky for British politicians.

Meeting National Needs

It was clear that British forces could not continue indefinitely with repression in Palestine, nor could British diplomats implement partition. This left only one option, which was to repudiate or end the British obligation toward building a Jewish national home. This sole course of action also had to satisfy a key aspect of British national interest in 1939. In the case of Palestine policy—as Britain approached World War II—one issue emerged as crucial for all members of government. This was the need to ensure military and strategic planning and readiness. The option of ending the Jewish national home was found to be unproblematic in this regard.

Preparing for War

As war approached, military or strategic needs were, naturally, highly salient. The war played a large role in determining which issues were politicized, but more tangible military considerations (plans of the chiefs of staff, for example) were critical enough that they had to be considered separately as well. Crucially, any option considered politically sound by the cabinet had to satisfy the needs of the army, navy, and air force. Palestine had to remain available and in a manner that did not draw troops away from vital areas of defense in the Middle East. The white paper met both of these conditions.

First, as Leopold Amery highlighted in the Commons, Palestine was crucial to the British military because it was "the Clapham Junction of all the air routes between this country, Africa and Asia."[204] It also occupied an important naval position following Italy's conquest of Abyssinia, what Amery called "new conditions in the Mediterranean," with the port at Haifa allowing a flow of oil supplies from Baghdad.[205] Palestine occupied a key position in the defense of Egypt and India for a dual reason. As well as the British military requiring use of Palestine, the armed forces could not afford any other power to take its place there and threaten these vital British holdings. This had been a consideration throughout

the 1920s and 1930s, with fears that renouncing the Jewish national home would mean returning the Mandate to the league for reassignment. By creating a situation in which Britain would continue to act as trustee, for the interim period before independence and official treaty negotiations (which were supposed to secure an indefinite British military presence), the white paper removed this threat. It envisioned a ten-year transition period for Palestinian independence, to be followed by a full treaty, which was the same process that allowed Britain to grant Egypt "independence" while keeping control of the canal.[206] Although "the General Staff strongly criticised the absence from the White Paper of a more specific statement as to the strategical safeguards," the document kept Britain in Palestine unencumbered by an indefinite insurrection (that was, incidentally, being extended by regional Arab leaders such as Ibn Saud, who had been funding Palestine's rebellion).[207]

Troops deployed in Palestine were needed to defend the Suez Canal in the event of war. If Italy blocked the Red Sea entrance to the Canal, reinforcements from India would need to be transported to Egypt overland from the Persian Gulf, through Palestine.[208] This plan would have been severely complicated by the general strike. As the Peel partition plan was written during the first, less violent stage of the Arab Revolt, it was directed at this strategic need. Partition, when proposed, was not primarily an attempt to settle the Arab-Jewish problem philanthropically, but merely to solve the immediate political and monetary costs that weighed Britain down.[209]

Troops could not continue to be siphoned away from key strategic zones in the Middle East. Indeed, the cost of troops and hardware was of vital concern to the chiefs of staff, and the broad swath of territory Britain "protected" during the interwar period had already led to a reappraisal of military thinking on this topic. In October 1937, the chiefs of staff stressed the policy of "self-sufficiency" in the Middle East to avoid moving squadrons needed to protect vital areas such as the Suez Canal.[210] Defending the empire in a state of tension with limited resources had become a sensitive subject. The Arab Revolt in Palestine required reinforcements paid for by the Palestine administration in the region of £3.5 million (approximately £185 million today) but they had to be diverted from other tasks.[211]

Also, while partition might have seemed attractive initially as a means of securing the Mediterranean against Italian incursion following Italy's successful invasion of Abyssinia, this thinking was easily reversible as a second war between European powers crept ever closer.[212] If Britain needed to mobilize, then simultaneously creating two new states in the Middle East would have upset the status quo, incurred immediate expense, and commanded far too much attention considering the primacy of European affairs.[213] Regardless, partition was universally unacceptable and failed to restore the quiet in Palestine that military strategists

needed. Although a great deal of force was applied to try and fix the situation, Britain lacked the manpower, funding, and public backing necessary to endure in Palestine without a proper political solution.[214]

By 1939, the violent element of the Arab Revolt had been largely eliminated and the white paper gave Britain more security vis-à-vis the other Arab leaders. Vitally, a placated and even an independent Palestine still meant a strong British military presence without an uncontrollable drain on resources, ensuring that the MacDonald White Paper satisfied the needs of military readiness and strategic planning.

The MacDonald Compromise

The MacDonald White Paper of 1939 is often considered to mark a major shift in British policy toward Palestine. The white paper stated Britain's objective was "the establishment within ten years of an independent Palestine State."[215] This was portrayed as a direct response to the violence in Palestine, highlighting the Arab fear of Jewish domination and how this "has produced consequences which are extremely grave for Jews and Arabs alike and for the peace and prosperity of Palestine."[216] Instead of seeking to expand the Jewish national home indefinitely by immigration, the cabinet chose to allow further immigration only if the Arabs were prepared to acquiesce. Theoretically, this proviso relieved British troops of the tangible burden of policing Palestine solely to protect the growing national home. It also guarded against the diplomatic furor with regional Arab leaders who were opposed to Zionism and purported to avoid assuming the moral burden of ceasing Jewish immigration—the Arabs would make that decision.

When examining the calculations behind this document in the context of Britain's previous policy formulations (the Churchill White Paper of 1922 and the MacDonald "Black" Letter in 1931), the decision in 1939 represents continuity as well as change. This is because the politicians' preferences, if not the final decision, followed a very similar pattern to earlier incidents. In every period, the British cabinet was presented with authoritative interpretations of tensions in Palestine that rested on Arab opposition to the policy of building a Jewish national home. Political constraints had, however, until the late 1930s, prevented the government following advice to vigorously implement, reduce, or end the policy.

Whereas the Chamberlain government did not interpret Palestine data any differently than its predecessors, it possessed the impetus of impending war and the strength of a large majority in the House necessary to carry out a "rational" policy. Interparty politics had played a large role in denying previous governments this luxury. Former India secretary Lord Winterton noted, for example, how "if during all the troubles that we had in India, the Hindu and Moslem disturbances, that if in speaking as Under-Secretary I had to deal with a state of

affairs in which there was in this House either a Pro-Moslem or a Pro-Hindu bloc, it would have been impossible for me to discharge my duties, because the government of India could not have maintained order."[217]

Also, the new policy was only as finite as the conditions that made it necessary, and it was still MacDonald's hope that there would be an eventual return to the idea of partition in the future.[218] Political conditions might improve over time, or they might deteriorate. As such, the white paper also included a provision that after ten years, independence could be postponed.[219] This was not a disingenuous article of the document, merely a safeguard against an unknowable future condition of international relations. By repudiating the Jewish national home and instead supporting a Palestinian Arab bid for autonomy masquerading as independence, Britain gave up nothing of value to its present or future political or strategic interests in the Middle East, making it difficult to label the policy as appeasement.

Far from an analogy with the Munich Agreement of 1938—which was a foreign policy anomaly pursued to avoid war with another European power—MacDonald's white paper was merely the routine exercise of diplomacy within Britain's own empire. Negotiations at the London Conference represented a familiar practice of short-term conciliation.[220] While labeled "appeasement" by some of those MPs who opposed Munich, the comparison was an emotional reaction to an otherwise normal act of concession and compromise. MacDonald himself was resigned to what he considered to be a less than ideal policy: "I don't think I did make such a good job of Palestine; but the problem was insolvable on any short-term lines, and there was little else we could do in the circumstances and at the time that would have given us the essential minimum of trouble in the Near East now. In the end Jew and Arab alike will have gained from our policy."[221] He also pleaded publicly that "[w]e cannot treat a million Arabs in their own country as though they did not exist."[222] The decision was made in the context of a crisis, but it also reflected a rational weighing of costs versus benefits. Also, it is important to remember that Palestine remained but a sideshow to the European situation, and books and memoirs on those involved in British foreign policy during the critical time period of 1938–1939 rarely even list Palestine in the index.[223]

World War II then stalled further cabinet-level considerations of Palestine policy, despite a violent campaign orchestrated by the Jewish paramilitary organizations, the Irgun and the Stern Gang. When allied troops began to liberate concentration camps, however, the horror of the Holocaust meant Britain was again severely constrained by diplomacy. Rather than only regional Arab states, by 1945, the cabinet had to contend with a new superpower in strident support of the Jewish cause.

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5 From War to Withdrawal, 1940–1948

When Clement Attlee's Labour government was voted into power in July 1945, it was faced with a stark postwar reality. As well as problems such as financial ruin, occupation of Germany, the beginnings of a Cold War with the Soviet Union, and a reinvigorated independence movement in India, Palestine was one of many pressing issues dominating the political landscape in these initial postwar years. Palestine, however, had explosive potential. The MacDonald White Paper of 1939 had left a rift between British authorities and the Jewish Agency in Palestine. Paramilitary groups such as the Haganah, Irgun, and its offshoot, the Stern Gang, repeatedly attacked British forces, which were deporting thousands of illegal Jewish immigrants—Holocaust survivors—to camps in Cyprus. Tension and violence escalated, and explanations of British withdrawal from Palestine in May 1948 tend to cite war fatigue and the empire's measurably decreased economic capacity as key elements of this decision.[1] However, the actual discussions about leaving Palestine altogether were mostly related to political concerns—frustrated diplomacy and fear of the unknown ways in which this might damage Britain's already exhausted economy.

Like much of the empire's adventures in Palestine, the British decision to withdraw abruptly in 1948 does not appear to make a great deal of rational sense. After the war ended and Labour ascended to power, two commissions of inquiry in 1945–1946 and 1947 recommended an end to Britain's Palestine Mandate, but only in the form it had taken since the 1920s. Labour was in favor of this outcome, but the nature of Palestine's constitutional development placed Britain in a seemingly hopeless political quandary. The Anglo-American Committee of 1946 recommended a binational state for Arabs and Jews under British trusteeship, whereas a majority of the UN Special Committee on Palestine in 1947 advocated partition and independence. Between these two investigations, Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin had attempted to secure agreement between Palestine's Jews and Arabs on either of these solutions as well as a plan for provincial autonomy. No proposals met with mutual agreement, however, leaving Britain between a Zionist position supported by the president of the United States and a set of Arab demands endorsed by leaders across the Middle East. This meant that between 1945 and late 1947, the British government found itself totally incapable of making a final policy decision.

A simple assessment of costs versus benefits cannot account for this inertia, as politicians should have been able to simply select the best of available options.[2] This is why understanding the government's political psychology is so important, because the principle that politicians put their own political survival before other considerations of the national interest helps us understand British paralysis over Palestine after the war. British decision makers rejected all of the policy alternatives that were too risky for them politically, and diplomacy appears to have been the most crucial setting in which these fears played out. Until September 1947, all available options came with devastating political consequences, leaving Palestine policy in a state of paralysis concealed by ongoing but unprofitable negotiations.

In 1947, however, an additional option was introduced that did meet the British government's political needs: as everyone awaited a vote over partition in the United Nations, there was suddenly an opportunity for Britain to wash its hands of Palestine without sacrificing its international relationships. This would only be viable if such a solution satisfied the broader needs of national economic and strategic interests. Rather than an empire fleeing from one of its previously vital strategic outposts, this analysis reveals a challenging and time-sensitive balancing of diplomatic interests between east and west and long-term strategic planning in the context of short-term economic pressure. The lack of politically viable options led to a lengthy delay in deciding Palestine policy, an end to which was only made possible by relinquishing any further Mandatory responsibility.

The Final Choice

At the annual Labour Party Conference in 1944, the party platform drafted by future chancellor Hugh Dalton was strongly pro-Zionist.[3] It advocated a Jewish state in Palestine with expanded borders and encouraged local Arabs to emigrate in exchange for compensation.[4] This position, dubbed "Zionism Plus," favored unlimited Jewish immigration into Palestine, specifically without consideration of economic capacity, and so rejected the MacDonald White Paper.[5] Upon election to government in July 1945, Ernest Bevin believed his own negotiating skills (developed through years as a union leader) could resolve the Palestine problem. Convinced that he could forge an agreement, Bevin boasted, "if I don't get a settlement, I'll eat my hat."[6] Attlee's government, however, soon realized the difficulties of their position regarding Palestine, finding themselves in similar constraints to those binding Neville Chamberlain's cabinet in 1939. An uprising in Palestine had the potential to create wider diplomatic problems, and the government's range of options was reflected in the polarized plans produced by two commissions of inquiry: the Anglo-American Committee and the UN Special Committee on Palestine. Although, by 1945, the alternatives presented by these

investigations were already well known, it is important to realize that the commissions took place specifically in order to search for new options.

The first postwar investigation, the Anglo-American Committee, resurrected the option of a binational state with provincial autonomy. The Peel Commission had rejected this alternative in 1937 because it required Jewish and Arab cooperation, but the idea was reprised in 1945–1946. As an investigation, the Anglo-American Committee was a direct result of increased American awareness of the Jewish displaced persons (DPs) problem in Europe. In mid-1945, the horrors of the Holocaust were still unraveling, and President Truman seemed particularly affected by public servant Earl G. Harrison's report of the poor living conditions among DPs encamped in the American zone of occupied Germany.

Like the Jewish Agency—whose immigration quota under the 1939 white paper was nearing completion—Harrison called for the immediate admission of one hundred thousand Jewish DPs into Palestine.[7] Truman then echoed this demand on 31 August 1945, but Attlee's government had barely moved into their offices and found compliance with this request fraught with difficulties.[8] There was the potential for a second Arab uprising against British forces in Palestine that would compound the Jewish insurgency growing there since the MacDonald White Paper, and such large-scale immediate immigration would also have made Attlee's government appear callously indifferent to British-Arab obligations outlined in 1939. Faced with pressure from across the Atlantic, Bevin orchestrated a joint venture with the United States to persuade its representatives of the merits of the British way of thinking.[9] Appointed 13 November 1945, the committee did not report its findings until 20 April 1946.

Five months of investigation and negotiation yielded a unanimous report among the Anglo-American Committee members. This report relied very heavily on the extensive investigation conducted by the Peel Commission in 1937 but came to different conclusions. It made ten recommendations, of which the most important were immediate immigration of one hundred thousand Jewish DPs from Germany to Palestine and a new Palestinian constitution to establish a binational state in which the majority would not be able to dominate the minority.[10] The committee members also advised for a continuation of the Mandate pending a trusteeship agreement with the United Nations.[11] Although the committee recognized the problems associated with enacting such a proactive policy while "Palestine is an armed camp," they believed that withdrawal would only bring "prolonged bloodshed the end of which it is impossible to predict."[12]

To enforce a blending of Arab and Jewish nationalisms, the committee recommended "that, if this Report is adopted, it should be made clear beyond all doubt to both Jews and Arabs that any attempt from either side, by threats of violence, by terrorism, or by the organization or use of illegal armies to prevent its execution, will be resolutely suppressed."[13] The report did not specify who,

exactly, would achieve this suppression. This is worth noting since Britain was already embroiled in such a conflict, and the committee found the realities of this quite disturbing, noting how they "became more and more aware of the tense atmosphere each day."[14] Faced with an unhappy situation, therefore, the committee had recommended a well-intentioned policy but one that seemed ignorant of the entire history of British-mandated Palestine as well as the aspirations of both Arab and Jewish communities. How to implement these recommendations, therefore, remained a difficult proposition. President Truman, for his part, reiterated his demand for the one hundred thousand immigration permits without reference to the constitutional development necessary to make this possible. Without an agreed framework for implementation, the joint committee was virtually useless.

As a result, Truman agreed to send two groups of advisers to Britain to negotiate a scheme for moving forward. The first was charged with discussing only the practicalities of admitting one hundred thousand Jews to Palestine. The second round of negotiations was led by Lord President of the Council Sir Herbert Morrison and US State Department official Henry F. Grady. This resulted in the Morrison-Grady plan of a binational state, with Arab and Jewish provinces and a separate Jerusalem and Negev under British rule.[15] This left a central government with final control of departments such as defense, customs and excise, the police, and the courts but with an elective legislature in the Jewish and Arab provinces whose bills required approval from the high commissioner.[16] In theory, Jewish DPs could immigrate into the Jewish province, and this meant the plan fulfilled recommendations made by the Anglo-American Committee. As the joint investigative commission had already rejected provincial autonomy, however, the link was somewhat tenuous.

Provincial autonomy also comprised only the beginning of a solution, as negotiations with Arabs and Jews would still be necessary for implementation. Unsurprisingly, President Truman rejected the plan due to the intolerable delay it would create for DPs seeking immigration visas. Regardless, provincial autonomy was presented to the British Parliament as a basis for negotiations.[17] As Conservative MP Oliver Stanley noted during the policy debate on 31 July 1946, however, this scheme was a year in the making and still lacked American support.[18] It was pointless discussing the Anglo-American Committee report, Stanley declared, as "that Report is dead, although, it is only fair to say, it has been buried with the very highest honours."[19] Provincial autonomy remained the official basis for negotiations, but representatives of the Jewish Agency refused to attend. Their most basic demand was some form of partition. In 1947, this was also recommended by the UN Special Committee on Palestine.

Partition had been rejected in 1938 after Sir John Woodhead's commission found it impracticable. The idea did, however, reemerge in the thinking

of Winston Churchill's national wartime government. Churchill's cabinet had flirted with the idea of partition along the lines originally suggested by Peel—with Arab Palestine annexed to Transjordan—but they never made a decision and the issue was shelved following Lord Moyne's assassination by the Stern Gang in November 1944.[20] Churchill especially believed that implementing almost any policy initiative was impossible in the face of terrorist activities and would likely destabilize the Middle East.[21] After the war, partition reentered the realm of possibility again, albeit unofficially, because it formed the basic demands of Jewish Agency representatives involved in private negotiations with Ernest Bevin through 1946 and 1947. Then, after the Palestine issue was referred to the United Nations, the option to partition was forcibly reasserted.

Over four months, the UN Special Committee on Palestine investigated the Palestine problem and signed its report on 31 August 1947.[22] Made up of representatives from eleven countries (Australia, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, Holland, India, Iran, Peru, Sweden, Uruguay, and Yugoslavia), its composition specifically avoided any members of the Security Council and reflected the geopolitical balance of power in the UN.[23] The Higher Arab Executive boycotted UNSCOP proceedings, but representatives from Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Transjordan agreed to participate.[24] The boycott, however, effectively meant that while the UNSCOP committee was swamped with memoranda, letters of appeal, reports, witness testimony, and evidence submitted by advocates of the Jewish, Zionist, and DP cause, there was little seen of the opposing argument unless it was included in British documentation. After nearly forty UNSCOP meetings, the Arab states and Pakistan did all testify on behalf of the Palestinian Arab cause, but the amount of paperwork—in comparison to documents advocating the Zionist cause—was miniscule. In August, UNSCOP asked to see British documents on various partition plans, but the committee had to be educated on the Palestine issue virtually from scratch.[25] Sir Henry Gurney and the British liaison MacGillivray gave testimony that was almost totally confined to basic facts and figures regarding population, taxation, immigration laws, average incomes and how the Palestine administration operated.[26] In this context, the committee report was returned remarkably quickly, albeit with two different conclusions.

The majority plan suggested partition into Jewish and Arab states with the city of Jerusalem under international supervision and all areas joined by an economic union.[27] This was deemed necessary because, just as Sir John Woodhead had reported in 1938, the Arab state would not, on its own, be economically viable.[28] The scheme then required Britain to continue the Mandate for an interim period that would allow the immigration of 150,000 Jews into Palestine.[29] Based to a large degree on Lord Peel's commission of 1937, the majority opinion agreed with Peel's earlier observations: "that the claims to Palestine of the Arabs and Jews, both possessing validity, are irreconcilable, and that among all of the

solutions advanced, partition will provide the most realistic and practicable settlement."[30] The majority opinion intended to divide Palestine into two sovereign states with an internationalized City of Jerusalem under the following specifications: "The proposed Arab State will include Western Galilee, the hill country of Samaria and Judea with the exclusion of the City of Jerusalem, and the coastal plain from Isdud to the Egyptian frontier. The proposed Jewish State will include Eastern Galilee, the Esdraelon plain, most of the coastal plain, and the whole of the Beersheba sub-district, which includes the Negev."[31]

In contrast, the minority position advocated by India, Iran, and Yugoslavia called for an independent federal state after a transitional period entrusted to an appointee of the General Assembly's choosing.[32] The majority, however, believed this type of binational or cantonized state was unworkable because the constant oversight necessary to keep both populations in parity would be nearly impossible.[33] These proposals were then refined through ad hoc committee and plenary meetings and put to a vote in the General Assembly on 29 November 1947.

There were, therefore, three options available to British decision makers in the late 1940s. In the House of Commons, president of the board of trade, Sir Richard Stafford Cripps announced in August 1946 that "there are three possible alternatives for Palestine in the future—partition [. . .]; the present scheme, or something of that character; and, thirdly, the return to the status quo."[34] This meant that other than partition, which had already been removed from consideration in 1938 with the Woodhead Commission, the alternatives were to create a binational state along the lines suggested by the Anglo-American Committee (more precisely, with provincial autonomy as agreed in the Morrison-Grady proposals) or to continue with the Mandate unaltered, adhering to the last defined policy as articulated in the MacDonald White Paper of 1939. The presence of this "do nothing" option meant that conventional Palestinian independence still remained plausible. Partition was then officially reintroduced by the UNSCOP report.

There was, of course, a final alternative that has not been discussed above. The option to withdraw without committing British resources to any form of a solution was obviously within the range of possibilities because it became the final decision. When this opportunity entered the debate, however, it was dependent on the rejection of all other alternatives. It was only when faced with an overwhelming prospect—that the General Assembly could vote in favor of an impossible partition—that the opportunity to withdraw completely became politically feasible. This is explored in greater detail below.

Diplomacy and Delay

In the context of postwar deliberations on Palestine policy, there was only one key issue that dominated all discussions: diplomacy. Britain's devastatingly

weakened postwar position gave diplomacy a new level of importance. The souring of certain political relationships was potentially destructive to the fragile economy, but the consequences were only vaguely predictable, and this degree of uncertainty only increased the general sense of risk. This sole key issue then surfaced in three different ways: in negotiations with the United States, with the Jewish Agency, and with the Arab states. An analysis of how the British government identified risk after World War II vis-à-vis these parties demonstrates how the politicians' political needs could not be satisfied by any other type of benefit for the national interest (i.e., such as to the economy or military). This left no feasible options until after the UNSCOP report was returned in 1947. When the single viable course of action (of withdrawing from Palestine) suddenly seemed possible, it also satisfied the major demands of national economic and strategic interest.[35]

Division with the United States

When President Truman called for one hundred thousand Jewish DPs to enter Palestine, he was declaring a new level of American interest in the Palestine problem. This was the result of widespread horror following the Holocaust and Earl Harrison's report detailing survivors' poor treatment within the American occupation zone in Germany.[36] Although initially driven by humanitarian concerns, the president's involvement in the Palestine question also acquired importance in his own domestic political sphere in a way that was in direct conflict with the home politics of Attlee's government. Due to the importance of US-UK relations following World War II, and President Truman's humanitarian and politically motivated support for Zionism, the options for the British government to pursue either a single majority Arab state of Palestine or create a system of provincial autonomy had to be dropped. Establishing the terms of reference for the joint committee illustrated a mistaken perception in Westminster that British politicians held sway over the American government; these initial negotiations also exposed an underlying American antagonism to the British position in Palestine more generally. Predictably, the two governments were then unable to agree on the report of the Anglo-American Committee or the subsequent Morrison-Grady proposals.

First, it is important to recognize that early in the postwar trans-Atlantic relationship, Attlee and Bevin tried to exert influence over the US president and failed repeatedly. Truman's initial request for the immigration permits, for example, arrived in the form of a letter to Attlee.[37] This was not immediately made public, but US secretary of state James Byrnes informed Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin that it was going to be published, causing Attlee to write to the president warning "that such action could not fail to do grievous harm to relations between our two countries."[38] It was published nevertheless. Additionally, Truman and

the US State Department could not be persuaded over Bevin's proposed terms of reference for the Anglo-American Committee. Framing the committee's central purpose demonstrated Washington and London's fundamentally opposed positions on even investigating solutions to the Palestine problem.

Bevin and Attlee wanted a commission focused on the problem of DPs in Europe and the possibility of their immigration to countries other than Palestine; this would have prevented the appearance of British double-dealing against the Arabs in favor of Zionism and would have provided greater scope for dealing with the actual DP problem. There was, however, a real danger that Truman would end the whole idea of a joint commission if Bevin insisted on redirecting the spotlight away from Palestine, where a large number of the DPs professed a desire to go.[39] Lord Halifax—Britain's foreign secretary when the MacDonald White Paper was published and subsequently the British ambassador in Washington—spied Truman's personal hand in the negotiations over terms of reference. Halifax wrote to Bevin that "[t]his is very annoying but I got a hint late last night that rats were at work. This is the President himself."[40]

Part of Truman's desire to highlight the Palestine issue in 1945 had been the upcoming New York mayoral election in November, but this meant Truman needed to delay the announcement of the Anglo-American Committee: the Democrats needed to avoid criticism from New York's Jewish community about further delay in dealing with the DP issue.[41] In 1945, it was estimated that only half of the American electorate had even heard of the Palestine issue, but of those, three to one were in favor of the creation of a Jewish state there, and the number was disproportionately high in New York.[42] As a result of these electoral considerations, the best compromise Bevin could achieve on the terms was that the committee would investigate DPs' ability to migrate to Palestine "or other countries outside Europe."[43] Even after this agreement, it was difficult for the Foreign Office to predict what further requirements could yet emerge. Attlee was scheduled to visit Washington in November, and Halifax, perhaps naively, noted that "there will be value in the Prime Minister's presence here to keep the President straight."[44]

When the Anglo-American Committee returned its report, a cabinet committee made up of experts from the Colonial, Foreign, and India Offices, as well as the chiefs of staff and cabinet offices, agreed "that a policy based on the recommendations of the Anglo-American Committee is not one which His Majesty's Government should attempt to carry out alone."[45] This was because "such a policy would have disastrous effects on our position in the Middle East and might have unfortunate repercussions in India."[46] Added to this, the Anglo-American Committee's binational state approach would not please Zionists either and required a "crippling financial burden."[47] It had been a calculated tactic bringing the United States into a joint commission, but Bevin and ultimately the cabinet recognized it

was imperative that America also share in the solution to prevent Britain shouldering all of the blame or the cost.[48]

Bevin believed this was possible, not least because he was under the impression that Secretary of State Byrnes told him American interest in the Palestine problem was to prevent large-scale Jewish immigration to America.[49] As an attempt at a comprehensive plan, however, the Anglo-American Committee's report was recognized as "unhelpful, irresponsible, unrealistic" and suggested that the British government was being "pushed around."[50] Regardless, pride had to be put aside. The necessary next step was to agree to a joint scheme for implementation.[51] The foreign secretary, however, was expecting a spirit of cooperation from Washington that did not materialize. He had written to Byrnes on 28 April to stress, "I trust that we can be sure that the United States government will not make any statement about the policy without consultation with His Majesty's Government."[52] Two days later, on 30 April, Truman unilaterally reiterated his demand for the one hundred thousand immigration permits.[53]

A tense few months then followed in which groups of British and American experts attempted to develop a new scheme for Palestine. In this atmosphere, Bevin and Attlee were trying very delicately to prevent further incidents in Palestine that could upset their courting of presidential opinion. In order to avert indiscretions among British forces, the high commissioner was stripped of the power "to authorise the Military Authorities to take drastic action against Jewish illegal organisations without cabinet consent."[54] Attlee informed the high commissioner specifically that "[i]n present critical circumstances it is essential that nothing should be done to alienate U.S. sympathy."[55] President Truman's attitude toward the problem—one naturally centered on his own political requirements rather than the British predicament—should perhaps have alerted Attlee and Bevin that solutions acceptable to them were unlikely to excite the Americans. In need of both a Palestine policy and United States' support, however, the British government had to pursue the show of cooperation and conciliation and hope the president could be persuaded.

To this end, the Jewish Agency, the Higher Arab Executive, and the Arab states were invited to submit their views on the Anglo-American Committee report within one month following 20 May, and then British and American experts would convene to discuss.[56] Vitally, Attlee and Bevin tried to convince Truman that whatever solution the experts created, it had "to consider not only the physical problems involved but also the political reactions and possible military consequences."[57] This also applied to individual stages of the negotiations. Truman, for example, pushed for a preliminary team of American experts to travel to London in advance of the main group, specifically to discuss the practicalities of moving one hundred thousand DPs to Palestine.[58] Bevin resisted,

fearing Arabs would interpret such discussions as meaning Britain had already decided on the policy of mass immigration.[59] The foreign secretary relented as long as these preliminary talks remained confidential. Unfortunately, before US State Department official Averell Harriman and his colleagues could begin talks, Bevin made a highly impolitic speech from the Labour Party Conference in Bournemouth on 12 June 1946.

Bevin remarked how the American desire for one hundred thousand immigrants to Palestine "was proposed with the purest of motives. They did not want too many Jews in New York."[60] While this comment betrayed more of what Bevin assumed was American anti-Semitism than his own, this comment in conjunction with earlier statements—such as his warning at a press conference in 1946 that Jews wanted "to get too much at the head of the queue," meaning this attitude would incite further anti-Semitism—only made the foreign secretary himself appear Nazi-like in the tense post-Holocaust atmosphere.[61] Bevin was even rebuked in Parliament for these "hasty, ill-timed remarks," and Labour MP Sydney Silverman reminded him that "[t]he Jews have been at the head of the queue since 1933. They were at the head of the queue in Warsaw, in Auschwitz, in Buchenwald, in Belsen and in Dachau and in all the other spots of unutterable horror that spattered the European mainland."[62] Bevin's chief crime in these instances was a decided lack of tact, sympathy, or emotional understanding of the tragedy that had taken place, which only made agreement with the profoundly saddened President Truman even more difficult.

By declaring that the United States only wanted immigration to Palestine to prevent the arrival of thousands more Jews in New York, Bevin unwisely made the president appear foolish when his goodwill and understanding were crucial.[63] Bevin never retracted his statement—he had meant it—though he instructed the Bournemouth remarks to be circulated so they could be read in context.[64] The second group of American experts arrived to begin a second phase of conversations in July, just as the US Congress was discussing the United Kingdom loan.[65] As a sweetener, Secretary of State Byrnes asked Attlee to issue "a reassuring statement on Palestine," but the cabinet refused.[66] This was because the transparency of such a statement would be obvious to all and because they doubted it would have the desired effect.[67] The talks over the Anglo-American Committee were scheduled to continue, and the chancellor of the exchequer, Hugh Dalton, believed that "according to the latest reports from Washington, the prospects of Congress approving the United Kingdom loan were now more favourable" and so "it would be a mistake for His Majesty's Government to issue any further public statement on Palestine until the debate on the loan was completed."[68] At least the appearance of Anglo-American cooperation was perceived in Westminster to be doing some good in Washington. (See figs. 5.1 and 5.2.)

Fig. 5.1. First public sitting of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry in 1946. These hearings took place in Palestine, after the commissioners had visited remains of concentration camps in Europe and met with Arab leaders in Cairo. © The National Archives.

When the US-UK negotiations produced the Morrison-Grady plan of provincial autonomy, Bevin hoped this would secure the president's support as a fulfillment of the Anglo-American Committee's recommendation that Palestine exist as neither an Arab nor a Jewish state and would allow DPs to immigrate to the Jewish province. It was attractive to the British cabinet because provincial autonomy was a short-term policy that could see them through the immediate postwar diplomatic crisis in Palestine, which was just one of many to be dealt with.[69] Then the subject could be revisited outside of an emergency atmosphere. While partition was an inexpedient and diplomatically challenging solution in 1946, provincial autonomy was considered "a constructive and imaginative plan" that "should be commended to the favourable consideration of the Jews and the Arabs if United States support for it could be secured."[70]

Neither Bevin nor Attlee nor the rest of the cabinet were fundamentally opposed to partition. It was merely the timing of it that was wrong, when Britain was at its weakest, and this was something they hoped the American president would understand. Bevin, for example, had Sir Norman Brook advise the cabinet that it may "be practicable to adopt, as our long-term aim, a scheme under which the major part of the Arab province would be assimilated in the adjacent Arab States of Trans Jordan and the Lebanon, and the Jewish province established as an independent Jewish State, with perhaps a somewhat larger territory than that

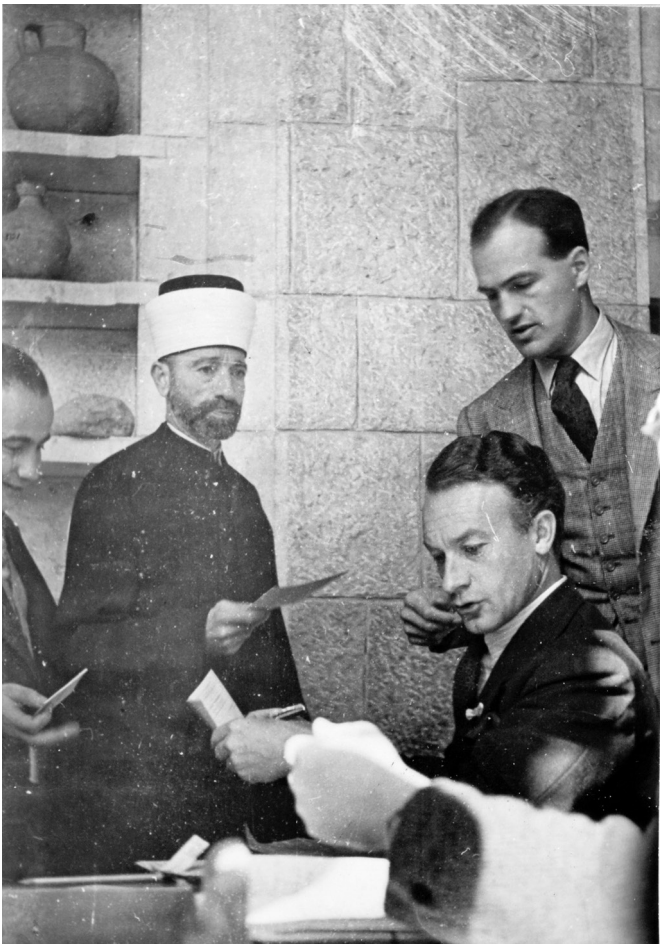

Fig. 5.2. Reporters at the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry in 1946 having their identities checked. This was necessary due to the high number of terrorist attacks in Palestine. © The National Archives.

suggested for the Jewish province proposed in [the Peel Commission]. He hoped that any intermediate solution [. . .] would contain nothing which was inconsistent with this long-term aim."[71] Provincial autonomy was officially submitted for US approval on 30 July 1946, though Truman had already heard the proposals beforehand from his own team.[72] A debate on the plan was scheduled in Parliament for 31 July and 1 August, and Bevin and Attlee were determined to press ahead despite receiving no word from the White House until the day before the debate.[73] It was a rejection.

Principally, this was because the Morrison-Grady proposals, though relatively practical, violated the spirit of what both Zionists and Truman's humanitarian concerns wanted to achieve. Although provincial autonomy would have allowed the immigration of one hundred thousand Jewish DPs to Palestine, it reflected no urgency on the matter. Such mass immigration would need to wait for the negotiations on constitutional development necessary to create a Jewish province, and, like the 1939 white paper, was still dependent on Arab acquiescence.[74] Agreeing to the plan meant postponement of the DP problem indefinitely and admitting there was going to be a cap on the Jewish community's future growth in Palestine.[75]

On the day of Britain's parliamentary debate, the British ambassador in Washington wrote that "it is acutely embarrassing for us that, on the eve of debate in Parliament, the President should have rejected the proposed statement approved both by Grady and Byrnes."[76] Truman also intended to recall his delegation from London immediately, and this "can hardly be otherwise interpreted than as denoting that, as at present advised, the administration intend drastically to recast the recommendations jointly agreed upon in London, if not to reject them in toto."[77] The newly appointed British ambassador Lord Inverchapel labeled this a "deplorable display of weakness" that was, he feared, "solely attributable to reasons of domestic politics which, it will be recalled, caused the Administration last year to use every artifice of persuasion to defer the announcement about the establishment of the Anglo-American Committee until after the New York elections."[78] This opinion was based on a conversation with the director of the US State Department's Near East Division, who "frankly admitted as much in talk with me this evening."[79]

Rather than telling Parliament about Truman's rejection of the Morrison-Grady proposals, however, Morrison was instructed to inform the Commons that the government "had hoped before the Debate to receive from President Truman his acceptance, but we understand that he has decided, in view of the complexity of the matter, to discuss it in detail with the United States expert delegation who are returning to Washington for the purpose. The President is thus giving further consideration to the matter, and we hope to hear again from him in due course."[80] This avoided the appearance of a total political failure for which there was no time before the debate to prepare, but it also left "the door ajar for the Americans to shut" so that "part at any rate of the onus for the sequel will then rest with them."[81]

The prime minister tried to persuade Truman that the plan devised by US and UK experts was the best prospect for a settlement, that it allowed the introduction of DPs to Palestine "without disturbing the peace of the whole Middle East and imposing on us a military commitment which we are quite unable to discharge."[82] Truman continued to deny support for the plan, which forced

Attlee to remind him that "you will appreciate that any solution must, as matters stand, be one which we can put into effect with our resources alone."[83] Provincial autonomy was the only plan the British had at that point as a reasonable basis for negotiations. Crucially, however, the government did not consider its position immovable on this plan or any of its features.[84] It was merely stuck between the Arabs' steadfast appeal for a single independent Palestinian state, on one hand, and the Jewish Agency's unwavering demand for partition with the creation of a Jewish state (discussed more below), on the other.

A formal conference was opened with the Arab states in London in September, but informal talks with representatives of the Jewish Agency had already begun in Paris in August. A new moment of tension between the transatlantic powers then emerged as Truman intended to make a statement on the evening of Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement. Just as Bevin believed he was starting to reach a breakthrough with Zionist negotiators, Attlee received the text of Truman's proposed statement on Palestine at midnight on 3 October 1946. The text reiterated Truman's earlier demand for one hundred thousand Jewish DP immigration visas to Palestine and gave his reason as the suspension of official conference talks until December, which forced DPs to face a harsh German winter without hope or succor.[85] As discussed below, however, the suspension of talks was entirely innocent and actually intended to allow Jewish participation in the official conference. Attlee requested that Truman allow him a little time to discuss the message with Bevin in Paris, and this was denied. Attlee wrote:

> I have received with great regret your letter refusing even a few hours grace to the Prime Minister of the country which has the actual responsibility for the government of Palestine in order that he might acquaint you with the actual situation and the probable results of your action. These may well include the frustration of the patient efforts to achieve a settlement and the loss of still more lives in Palestine. I am astonished that you did not wait to acquaint yourself with the reasons for the suspension of the conference with the Arabs. You do not seem to have been informed that so far from negotiations having been broken off, conversations with leading Zionists with a view to their entering the conference were proceeding with good prospects of success.[86]

Although Truman denied that political calculations were behind his statement, 1946 was an election year. Undersecretary of State Dean Acheson seemed to confirm British suspicions. He informed Britain's ambassador in Washington, Lord Inverchapel, that "Truman had reluctantly yielded to intense pressure from elements within the Democratic Party and from the Jewish groups in and about New York, which had been 'pestering and harassing' him for some time past and which had 'blown up' when the news had come that the conference in London had been adjourned until December 16th."[87] The key to this pressure, Acheson told Inverchapel, was that "the President had been much stirred on hearing that

all the candidates nominated for the coming elections in New York were preparing an open attack on him."[88] Complicating the Palestine issue for Democratic congressional candidates was the American Federation of Labor and a general fear among the American voter about Jewish immigration to the United States.[89]

By 1946, American opinions about immigration had hardened, with less than 10 percent of voters outside the clergy favoring immigration.[90] Among the 90 percent against, roughly half opposed immigration for economic reasons—they remembered the hardship of the 1930s, for example—and the rest possessed feelings against Jews or foreigners more broadly and the "threat" they posed to the American way of life.[91] An AIPO poll in January 1946 found even fewer in favor of immigration from Europe, less than 5 percent, and for the same reasons.[92] In a poll specific to Iowa in 1946, about one in seven respondents volunteered an opinion on Palestine—about half were critical of Britain and half believed the United States should expedite sending DPs "'back' to Palestine" rather than admit them to the United States.[93] Conversely, there was almost a complete consensus on the need for a Jewish haven. The majority favored immigration to Palestine but disagreed with any active US military participation in settling the problem.[94]

In addition, between 1946 and 1949, the Truman administration received just under a million campaign cards on the Palestine issue.[95] More than half of these cards came from New York, which contained 47 percent of America's Jews.[96] This meant the cards did not represent the American population as a whole but betrayed the existence of a sophisticated and highly mobilized pressure group campaign.[97] Similarly, Zionist organizations issued letter templates for various age and socioeconomic groups, including school children, to rewrite in their own words to the president and encourage policies such as selling arms to Palestine's Jews.[98] The White House only realized the letters were orchestrated because many had neglected to change the wording adequately enough to avoid detection.[99] These polling statistics and Zionist campaigning made judging the Palestine issue in terms of public opinion confusing at best, and this environment must have weighed on Truman and congressional candidates' minds.

Sensing this atmosphere when in New York for the Council of Foreign Ministers in November 1946, Bevin began to consider any means that might make partition a workable solution, which would strengthen the vital US-UK relationship. Agreeing to consider partition, Bevin believed, was simply an invitation for greater Zionist demands that had the potential to provoke US support for allotting Palestine in its entirety to the Jews.[100] This meant that "before His Majesty's Government could move openly from their present position they would have to await an undertaking by the Jews and by the American government that partition would satisfy them and not be merely the first of a series of demands."[101]

Support from both Republican and Democratic Parties would be necessary to avoid Palestine becoming "a subject for bargaining and vote-catching in

the Presidential election."[102] Then, finally, partition would require approval by the United Nations.[103] Secretary of State Byrnes advised Bevin that the president would approve of such a plan.[104] The foreign secretary even seems to have initiated the diplomatic foundations for such a scheme, attempting to scare his counterparts a little. "In all these talks," Bevin wrote back to the Foreign Office, "I have taken the line that there are three courses open to us; to settle the problem ourselves if we can, to offer the Mandate to the United States or to return it to the United Nations," adding gleefully, that "my frank statement of these alternatives has been received with a certain amount of consternation on all sides."[105] After he returned home from New York, however, these ideas seem to have been discarded, most likely due to fundamental Arab opposition.

In January 1947, Bevin told the cabinet that he was not fundamentally opposed to partition but that the difficulty was in imposing that solution against the will of either or both communities; instead, some middle ground should be sought through further negotiations.[106] At this meeting, the cabinet declined to specify a course of action in the event that negotiations broke down, but they acknowledged that referral to the UN "was bound to be embarrassing" because "[t]here would be much discussion of the various promises that had been made on behalf of His Majesty's Government, not all of which were easy to reconcile with one another, and critics would dwell on the long history of our failure to find a solution of the problem by ourselves."[107] When Bevin finally did ask the cabinet to approve referral to the United Nations, he "recalled the various stages of the negotiations over the past eighteen months, and explained how the problem had become progressively more intractable."[108] He blamed the influence of American Jewry both in Washington and within the Jewish Agency, and despite having "made every effort to secure the assistance of the United States government, [. . .] their interventions had only increased our difficulties."[109] The UN was not an avenue of investigation to be taken lightly, but it provided one potential way to secure, at last, a modicum of American acquiescence.

When talks did break down and the cabinet approved referral to the United Nations in February 1947, Bevin held informal talks in New York with the US ambassador to the UN and the secretary general before seeking approval also from Chinese, French, and Soviet delegates.[110] Between them they agreed that a special session of the General Assembly would be called to select the member states of a committee on Palestine, which would report back to the regular assembly.[111] British ambassador to the UN, Sir Alex Cadogan, issued a formal note to the secretary general on 2 April 1947, making it official.[112] In the end, even Truman admitted that "[w]e could have settled this Palestine thing if U.S. politics had been kept out of it."[113] During the process, however, the British government had been rendered incapable of following a course of policy that conflicted with Zionist interests due to the level of support offered to their cause in the United

States. This meant that both provincial autonomy and the option for a single independent Palestinian state, due to the American opposition detailed above, had to be eliminated from consideration.

Talking to the Zionists

As well as negotiations with the United States, diplomacy was also undertaken between Britain and representatives of the Jewish Agency. While this was not necessary on a purely strategic level, as the joint chiefs agreed Palestine's Jewish rebellion could be ended, like the Arab Revolt, with enough reinforcements, the political consequences of a war against "the Jews" following the Holocaust were too ludicrously damaging to consider.[114] As noted above, US opinion was firmly in support of Zionist goals, and it was American, rather than strictly Zionist, goodwill that was perceived as crucial to Britain's postwar recovery. Provincial autonomy was the plan Bevin advanced following the Anglo-American Committee, and securing Zionist agreement to it or any otherwise viable plan implied backing from the United States would be forthcoming as well. Crucially, Zionist acquiescence would have mended the diplomatic fissure that Palestine had opened between London and Washington.

It was not, however, forthcoming, and this failure meant the option to create a system of provincial autonomy disappeared from deliberations, placing Britain in an increasingly tightening diplomatic vice. Provincial autonomy received limited objections in Parliament, and Britain's politicians treated the issue surprisingly calmly considering Jewish paramilitary activities in Palestine. The plan for provinces was never in any way acceptable to the Jewish Agency, however, even as the basis for negotiations through 1946 and 1947.

It is important to understand that the provincial autonomy plan, which provided Bevin's basis for talks with Jews and Arabs, was presented to Parliament very soon after Zionist paramilitary groups bombed the King David Hotel on 22 July 1946. This building housed the British Palestine administration's headquarters. Perhaps counterintuitively, however, rather than driving policy, this attack seemed to create a certain amount of fatigue toward Palestine, so that its mention during parliamentary politics was not overly heated. Serving as chancellor of the exchequer at this time, Hugh Dalton was even flippant about the violence. "There must be a Jewish State" he said, "it is no good boggling at this—and, even if it is small, at least they will control their own immigration, so that they can let in lots of Jews, which is what they madly and murderously want."[115] When the House of Commons met to debate provincial autonomy on 31 July, the death toll was still unknown and a large number of people were still missing. Other than the expected condemnations of terrorist activities, combined with expressions of sympathy for Jews killed by the Nazis, mention of the event itself was surprisingly absent. (See fig. 5.3.)

Fig. 5.3. People run for cover as the King David Hotel in Jerusalem is bombed, 22 July 1946. © IWM.

An exception was Labour backbencher Mr. Wilkes, who declared that the "Irgun represents a right wing, Fascist, terrorist, brutal, murdering organisation controlled by a terrorist and Fascist Right Wing party."[116] After this a number of Conservatives questioned the exact denotation of the term *right wing* and Wilkes agreed to retract that particular phrase from his assessment, which he stated again for good measure. The only MP to note how the bombing might cause political ramifications at home was Mr. Evans. He expressed that it was "a most unpleasant business to be hunted, stalked and ambushed by evilly disposed persons armed with sticks of dynamite, tommy-guns and other lethal weapons, a very unpleasant business indeed. I have had some. And it does not console the victims of these attacks to know that their assailants are Zionist gentlemen with

political ambitions. Neither does it console their bereaved mothers and wives, our constituents."[117]

Instead of focusing on the bombing itself, or even the merits of provincial autonomy, a great deal of this discussion surrounded the necessity of guarding against carelessly anti-Semitic language—as used by both the foreign secretary and Palestine's general Evelyn Barker—and mostly criticizing the government for delay but not actual policy. Barker's anti-Semitic indiscretions were somewhat more vehement than Bevin's, as the general had circulated a "restricted" letter to his officers following the King David Hotel bombing. This communiqué ordered them to "put out of bounds to all ranks all Jewish places of entertainment, cafes, restaurants, shops and private dwellings. No British soldier is to have any intercourse with any Jew [. . .]"; he concluded by calling on the army to begin "punishing the Jews in a way the race dislikes as much as any—by striking at their pockets."[118]

Although the government distanced itself from these comments, the accumulated damage was done. Additionally, it had been a year since Bevin had initiated the creation of the Anglo-American Committee, and the debate was soured because MPs had learned of the provincial autonomy plan through leaks to the press rather than an official press release. Lieutenant-Colonel Morris, for example, remarked how "the Lord President of the Council comes along like a conjuror producing a rabbit out of a hat—a rabbit which has, apparently, already escaped and created a certain amount of mischief."[119] The lack of attention Attlee's government paid to Parliament, however, reflects its low level of political importance regarding Palestine policy in the late 1940s. Even when presented with policy initiatives that would satisfy neither Zionists nor Arabs and, therefore, based on previous experience, should have provoked outrage among pro-Zionist or pro-Arab MPs, there was hardly a murmur. "It is remarkable," Colonial Secretary George Hall noted on 1 August, "that we should have a two days' Debate on the question of Palestine with so little political feeling displayed, so many constructive speeches made and so much agreement as to the policy before the House."[120] Equipped with parliamentary acquiescence, Attlee's government pressed ahead with persuading the Jewish Agency and the Arab states to accept provincial autonomy.

Negotiations with representatives of the Jewish Agency were informal, unofficial, and unfruitful, and Ernest Bevin publicly blamed President Truman for the deadlock. One of the key problems was that the Jewish Agency refused to participate in a conference in which the basis for discussion was not partition. As such, when talks began in Paris on 17 August 1946 they were, to a large degree, spontaneous.[121] Principally, Bevin wanted to get the Jewish Agency into official negotiations, but they continued to refuse any framework that did not center on partition proposals. Both the foreign and colonial secretaries "regarded the

condition as an impossible one," and this deadlock continued through September 1946.[122] As late as 1 October, Bevin met with Agency representatives Weizmann, Fishman, Goldman, Locker, Brodetsky, Kaplan, and Linton, and they reiterated that attendance at the conference was only possible if its object was to establish a Jewish state in, or as part of, Palestine.[123] They also requested an act of good faith such as releasing Zionist detainees or stopping arms searches in Palestine.[124] Bevin refused, telling them that "British bayonets would not force partition on resisting Arabs."[125] Nevertheless, the foreign secretary did express the hope that provincial autonomy could be an agreed "*modus vivendi* that might lead to partition."[126] This idea of autonomy as merely a transition period before the creation of a Jewish state seemed more appealing to the Jewish Agency representatives.

To Bevin, the situation suddenly seemed promising.[127] Regarding detainees and searches, Bevin also scored a small victory by convincing the Jewish Agency representatives to enter separate talks on law and order, assuring them "there would be no difficulty in reaching some sort of an arrangement about detainees. The British government had not taken the initiative in blowing people up."[128] As Bevin found himself "groping towards a conclusion," he "felt that the best answer would be a trial transitory period on the basis of a unitary state ensuring proper rights for every citizen."[129] As had been the practice since August, the Agency representatives agreed to meet with Bevin again after considering the questions of law and order in Palestine separately.[130] Meanwhile, talks with the Arab states had been postponed until 16 December, after the UN General Assembly and Council of Foreign Ministers.[131] Far from approaching a settlement, Bevin's 1 October meeting with the Zionists was merely the first sign that the Jewish Agency might enter the official conference when it reopened.[132] It provided Bevin with a very small glimmer of hope that was dashed following the statement by President Truman on 4 October 1946.

On the eve of Yom Kippur, Truman publicly reiterated his earlier demand for the immediate immigration of one hundred thousand Jewish DPs to Palestine. Attlee had received only hours of notice before the announcement. Since Bevin was in Paris negotiating with the Jewish Agency, Attlee requested a delay in order to confer with his foreign secretary. This was denied, despite the fact that postponement was partly decided in hope that the Jewish Agency would agree to join, which might be prejudiced by Truman's statement.[133] This is precisely what Attlee wrote to the president, as well as trying to explain that modifying Britain's immigration policy during the adjournment would be tantamount to a breach of faith toward the Arabs.[134] Further complicating the relationship were Zionist interpretations of Truman's speech. He ended the statement with a call for compromise between British and Jewish negotiators, but this was widely viewed as an endorsement of partition.[135] For his part, Truman believed the statement contained nothing new.[136]

Fearing a resurgence of Zionist intransigence, Bevin seized the initiative and set in motion the good faith gesture they had requested. If an agreement regarding detainees could be found, Bevin advised the cabinet, "we shall be able to bring Jewish representatives into the Conference on future policy in Palestine, and there is no reason why this should be deferred until the Delegates of the Arab States return to London on the 16th December."[137] The result was a Colonial Office subcommittee formed to find means of cooperation between the Jewish Agency and the Palestine administration over issues such as detainees, arms searches, and emergency regulations with the aim of securing a truce.[138]

In October, Arthur Creech Jones replaced George Hall as colonial secretary. A known Zionist sympathizer, Creech Jones's appointment was also an act of good faith.[139] The next month, in line with Bevin's earlier discussions with Agency representatives, the new colonial secretary recommended the release of members of the Jewish Executive detained in Palestine since Operation Agatha in June 1946.[140] Agatha had been a forcible search and seizure maneuver ordered by General Barker. It involved more than one hundred thousand soldiers and police surrounding Jewish settlements, including Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, and imposing a curfew. Renamed locally as the "Black Sabbath," the operation resulted in more than three thousand arrests and considerably exacerbated the already tense situation between Jews and Britons in Palestine.[141] The King David Hotel was then bombed only a few weeks later, and this meant that negotiators on both Zionist and British sides spent the autumn and winter of 1946 engaging in tentative talks while being entirely unsure of who they could trust. (See figs. 5.4–5.6.)

Additionally, the conference scheduled for 16 December was postponed again until after Christmas. This was because an upcoming election at the Zionist Conference in Basel, which would not be complete by 16 December, would decide whether the Jewish Agency could enter official negotiations.[142] This meant that, in the meantime, the Jewish Agency pushed very strongly for Bevin to admit partition to the conference proceedings in order to sway the Basel vote.[143]

The problem was, however, that Bevin was attempting to secure an agreement based on provincial autonomy in the short term that may lead in the future to partition. This was because agreeing to consider partition in the first instance would only invite greater demands and place Britain in an intolerable position with the Arab states.[144] At the Twenty-Second Zionist Conference in Basel, Chaim Weizmann lost his presidency to Rabbi Silver, and attendance at the London conference in January was refused unless Britain made significant concessions in the direction of partition—an attitude that US secretary of state Byrnes told Silver was "frankly silly."[145] This marginalization of Weizmann had begun with the Peel Commission's proposals in 1937, when the Zionist Labour leader David Ben-Gurion had ascended to prominence. The power in international Zionism then continued to shift away from its British representatives and more toward

Fig. 5.4. Internees at the Rafa Camp in Palestine, 1947–1948. British counterinsurgency efforts in Palestine included imprisoning large numbers of Jews while the police and military screened for terrorists. © The National Archives.

American leaders, such as Rabbi Silver, when Weizmann's failure to secure the longevity of the Jewish national home became clear in 1939.[146] The postwar Zionist attitude in negotiations became less conciliatory and more militant. Informal talks, however, did continue, though Bevin noted that "[t]errorism is poisoning the relationship between Great Britain and the Zionist movement."[147]

Meeting several times in January and February 1947, representatives of the Jewish Agency, Foreign Secretary Bevin, Colonial Secretary Creech Jones (new), and additional secretary to the cabinet Norman Brook still could not reach any points of consensus.[148] The two secretaries agreed to one last effort, hoping to agree on provincial autonomy leading to independence after a transition period

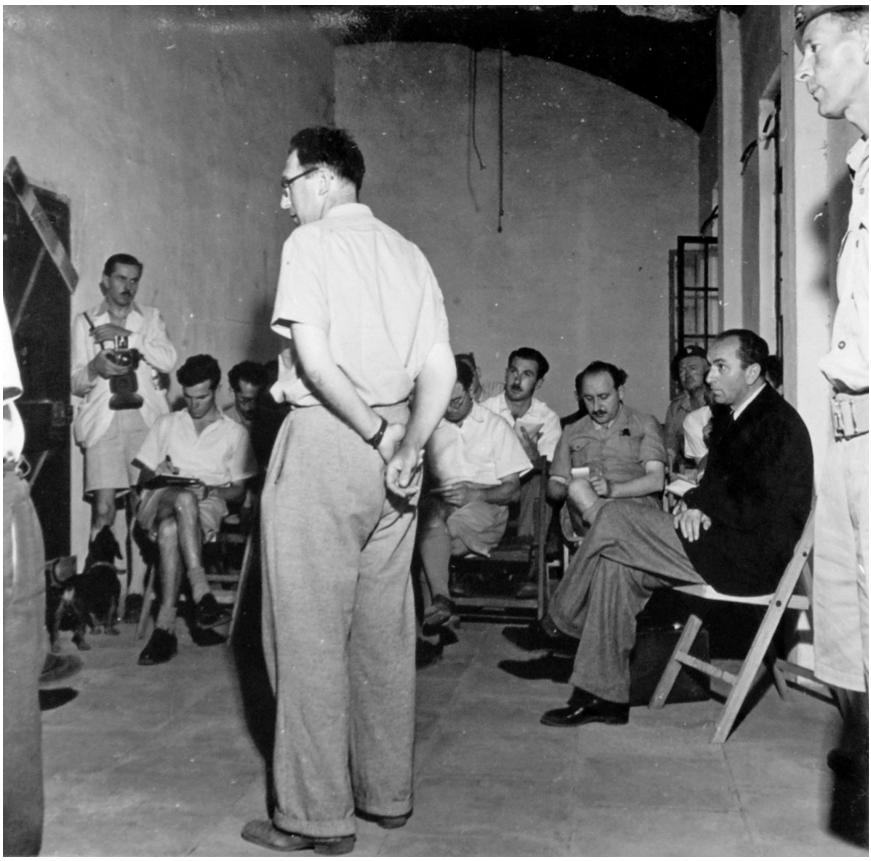

Fig. 5.5. Press interview with a Jewish man formerly interned by British forces in Palestine, 1947–1948. This was following an exposé about torture practices at these camps. © The National Archives.

of five years.[149] If this failed, then they recommended referral to the United Nations—the statesmen had run out of ideas.[150]

Another problem, however, was that the Jewish Agency could not accept provincial autonomy (even as an interim measure before partition) because it was viewed as merely a small alteration to the 1939 white paper and deprived the Jewish people of their rights in their homeland as promised by the Balfour Declaration, the Mandate, and the prior policy of the Labour Party.[151] Considering the Zionists' Biltmore Declaration, which called for the remaking of Palestine into a Jewish commonwealth (rather than the traditional demand for a Jewish national home within Palestine), Agency representative Moshe Shertok told Creech Jones "he would like the British Delegation to understand the magnitude of the sacrifice

Fig. 5.6. A police station in Jaffa following a terrorist attack, 1945–1947. © IWM.

which the Jews were prepared to make in offering to accept a reasonable partition."[152] When shown British maps of the proposed Jewish province, for example, the Zionists rejected them "as a mockery of their just claims."[153] Instead, they insisted that a Jewish state "must include, over and above the area shown on the map, Galilee, the Gaza Sub-district, the Beersheba Sub-district and the eastern portions of the Hebron and Jerusalem Sub-districts, up to and including the Jerusalem-Jericho road."[154] The colonial secretary noted how "[i]n other words, they claimed the whole of Palestine except the central Judean hills."[155] After the Anglo-American Committee, Ernest Bevin had engaged in Anglo-Jewish negotiations for more than five months and achieved absolutely nothing. As provincial autonomy, even as an interim measure, required cooperation from both sides, the Jewish Agency's constant and unwavering rejection of this plan meant it was also eliminated from consideration.

Negotiations with Arab States

Precarious diplomacy on the Palestine problem also took place between representatives of the British government and leaders of the Arab states. This was, in a nutshell, because communications and oil supplies "depended on retaining the

goodwill and co-operation of the Arab peoples."[156] Like the relationship with America, full consequences of any broken ties were difficult to predict, lending the subject an air of greater risk. Crucially, diplomacy with the wider Middle East seems to have been viewed on roughly equal terms as the US-UK relationship, and, by extension, as more important than British-Zionist relations. Bevin and Atlee agreed, for example, that "if the Jews refuse to participate in the Conference owing to their demands not being met, the Conference must go on without them."[157] Although representatives of the Arab states were, ostensibly, willing to negotiate, their basic requirements nullified the option to partition Palestine and made a system of provincial autonomy impracticable. A regional desire for independence was complicated by ongoing Anglo-Egyptian talks, and the Arab leaders' position remained just as immovable as that of their Jewish counterparts.

It is important to note that Arab leaders' opinions were highly important to British politicians. The years 1946–1947 were a time of British weakness and Middle East ascendancy, and the Arab leaders were aware of their value. This placed Britain in a similar situation to 1939, when the white paper was formulated to appeal to regional Arab statesmen who then negotiated in support of their own interests as well as those of Palestinian Arabs. The fate of Palestine, however, was an even trickier subject to discuss with Arab leaders after the war because it was tied to wider impatience for full independence in the Middle East. During the war, Churchill had called for Syria and Lebanon to have full independence. Once this was achieved in 1943, it was entirely unrealistic to expect other Arab states to forfeit the right.[158]

Complicating the situation were ongoing talks between Britain and individual Arab states on other issues. Negotiations over Palestine, for example, coincided with Anglo-Egyptian talks for revising the 1936 treaty of alliance.[159] British ambassador to Egypt, Sir Ronald Campbell, argued that the Anglo-American Committee proposals "will add another serious element of disturbance to the troubled situation in the Middle East at an inopportune moment when in view of the treaty revision problems in Egypt and Iraq, we need to secure as much goodwill as possible from Egyptian-Arab world."[160] Campbell suggested that accepting the committee's proposals should be deferred until after the treaty negotiations with Egypt were complete.[161] Likewise, the Joint Intelligence staff warned that the committee report would create unrest throughout the Arab and Muslim world, endangering a settlement of the India question.[162] This conflict of interests only worsened as negotiations dragged on. January 1947 witnessed Anglo-Egyptian negotiations stall, Britain withdrawing from responsibility in Greece and Turkey, and the beginning of a phased withdrawal from India.[163] This only heightened the strategic importance of the rest of the Middle East, and Arab states recognized their leverage.

When invited to begin talks on the Palestine issue by the British government, the foreign ministers of the Arab states met first in Alexandria to agree on the minimum requirements.[164] They would attend, but only if the subjects of partition, federalization, and Jewish immigration remained off the agenda.[165] Nothing was said about the participation of Palestine's Higher Arab Executive, but the Arab states were not willing to consider any proposals that endangered their counterpart's goal of independence.[166] The Arabs of Palestine did not engage in separate talks over their future because the former mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, was specifically excluded. In addition, the Higher Arab Executive—formed during the Arab Revolt in the 1930s—refused to continue negotiating on a subject that was supposed to have been settled by the 1939 white paper.[167] This atmosphere of protonationalism was something that Attlee found difficult to understand, commenting in his memoirs that "you might think that an Arab struggling to keep alive on a bare strip of sand would jump at the chance of going to Iraq or somewhere else where there was more opportunity for a better life. But oh no. One patch of desert doesn't look very different from another patch of desert but that was the one they wanted—their own traditional piece."[168]

The London Conference opened on 9 September 1946 and, like private talks with the Jewish Agency, showed little ground for compromise on the subject of provincial autonomy. The additional secretary to the cabinet, Norman Brook, wrote to Attlee that the chiefs of staff believed "any solution of the Palestine problem must satisfy two conditions. First, it must give us the power to control and co-ordinate the defense of the country and to maintain forces and military facilities in it as, when and where we require; and secondly, it must not alienate the Arab States."[169] They doubted very much whether provincial autonomy satisfied the second of these conditions.[170] As the chiefs expected, all of the Arab states opposed provincial autonomy because they viewed it as a transition to partition and feared Jewish autonomy would lead to overall population majority and expansionist policies.[171]

In response to this plan, the Arab states proposed an independent unitary Palestine with safeguards for the Jewish minority but a prohibition on further Jewish immigration.[172] It was essentially a fulfillment of the MacDonald White Paper, an option that had already been rejected due to the need for good diplomatic relations with America. When the conference resumed in 1947, Bevin had to admit to the cabinet that negotiations with the Arab states "have confirmed our fear that there is no prospect of finding such a settlement."[173] This was because the absolute minimum requirements for both parties were incompatible—Arabs could not, under any circumstances, endorse the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine and the Zionists could not agree to anything less.[174] This meant Bevin could not secure either full American or Arab backing for any plan and instead searched for another potential source of ideas in the United Nations.[175]

When UNSCOP returned its verdict in August in favor of partition, Bevin immediately understood that Britain could in no way be associated with implementing this plan due to its fragile relationship with the Arab states. He informed the cabinet, contradicting an earlier opinion, that partition would have a destabilizing impact on the Middle East as a whole. "It would probably not be long," Bevin wrote, "before the Jewish government, faced as it would be in the course of time with a problem of over-population and driven by the ultra-nationalist political parties which will not accept partition as a final settlement, would try to expand its frontiers."[176] Partition created a Jewish state with a large Arab minority surrounded by Arab territory, and so Bevin supposed that "the Arab population of this State would play a part in history not unlike that of the Sudeten German minority in pre-war Czechoslovakia. Thus the existence of a Jewish State might prove to be a constant factor of unrest in the Middle East, and this could hardly fail to have a damaging effect on Anglo-Arab relations."[177] Fundamentally, Bevin asserted, partition was not possible. As well as producing an economically unviable Arab state, and in the process putting British soldiers in danger, it would severely sour relations with the Arab states.[178]

Redefining the Realms of Possibility

As diplomacy with the United States prevented fulfillment of the MacDonald White Paper, and since both Jews and Arabs rejected provincial autonomy while the Arab states refused to consider partition, the British government was left in a situation in which all available options were poisonous. This is when the potential to withdraw from Palestine completely entered the realm of possibility. After the UNSCOP proposals were returned in September 1947, but long before the General Assembly voted in favor of partition on 29 November, withdrawal became politically viable simply because all avenues of negotiation had failed and withdrawal threatened to damage neither US nor Arab state relations.[179] (See fig. 5.7.)

As early as January 1947, before the conference with Arab states resumed, Bevin was advising Attlee that success was unlikely and that they were running out of alternatives. Bevin wrote to Attlee, "I think this decision should be taken in full realisation that the Conference has very little chance of success, and before taking it we should look ahead and consider what we should have to do in the event of a breakdown."[180] They had two options: to impose a solution by force, which, as already noted was impossible on a diplomatic level alone before considering the cost, or to give up responsibility for Palestine.[181] Considering this dilemma, the referral to the United Nations should be viewed as a stalling tactic, a desperate search for more options. In February 1947, Bevin told Parliament that "[w]e have carefully studied this matter, and put forward proposal after proposal. They are there, and I personally do not think that we can offer to the United Nations

Fig. 5.7. "Who's Taking Who for a Ride?": a cartoon, published in the *Daily Mail* on 6 January 1947, depicting Prime Minister Attlee as the terrified nanny of militant Zionism. © Leslie Gilbert Illingworth / Solo Syndication.

any more proposals. We shall leave them on the table. They, in turn, may have better ones, but this is the best we can do."[182] Colonial Secretary Creech Jones, however, specifically told the House, "We are not going to the United Nations to surrender the Mandate. We are going to the United Nations setting out the problem and asking for their advice as to how the Mandate can be administered."[183] As well as buying time, the foreign secretary believed this action could bully Palestine's communities into accepting some compromise.

Bevin advised the cabinet that he "thought that both Jews and Arabs were anxious to avoid discussion of the problem" in the UN, and "our firm intention to take the matter to the United Nations Assembly [. . .] might bring them to a more reasonable frame of mind."[184] Bevin believed that "[e]ven though we gave notice of our intention to submit the matter to the United Nations, we could subsequently withdraw it from the agenda of the Assembly if between now and September a solution could be found which was acceptable to both parties."[185] Therefore, rather than "dumping" the issue on the UN in February 1947, Bevin intended to use the new circumstances as a negotiating ploy to Britain's advantage: "[e]ven after such an announcement had been made, he would certainly continue his efforts to find a solution."[186] The foreign secretary and the prime minister even extended this logic after the UNSCOP report was returned. Bevin advised the cabinet that "unless His Majesty's Government announced their intention of abandoning the Mandate and of withdrawing from Palestine, there was no prospect of an agreed settlement."[187] Attlee concurred, hoping that the threat posed to both Jews and Arabs by an unpredictable UN vote on partition might scare the two groups sufficiently to extract concessions.[188] Ultimately, however, no additional overtures from either Jews or Arabs were forthcoming.

As well as seeking more options or more fruitful negotiations, this tactic was intended to prevent Britain from taking on the responsibility for implementing whatever scheme the General Assembly approved. To avoid unwelcome obligations, Bevin inserted a key section in Creech Jones's statement to the UN saying Britain would not implement a solution that was not acceptable to both parties.[189] The additional proviso was intended to ensure that no other UN member put forward ludicrous counterproposals expecting Britain to implement them, but it also allowed Britain to cede responsibility for Palestine under a guise of moral abstention.[190] This stipulation was based on a valid fear. Rumors were spreading at the General Assembly before the vote on 29 November "that the strategic importance of Palestine to our oil interests in the Middle East and to defence of Suez Canal is so great that Great Britain is bound to implement whatever United Nations decides, regardless of consequences to ourselves."[191] In cabinet, however, this was far from the general consensus, and withdrawal had been considered a viable option since at least mid-September: "[O]ur withdrawal from Palestine," Bevin informed the cabinet, "even if it had to be effected at the cost of a period of bloodshed and chaos in the country, would have two major advantages. British lives would not be lost, nor British resources expended, in suppressing one Palestinian community for the advantage of the other. And (at least as compared with enforcing the majority plan or a variant of it) we should not be pursuing a policy destructive of our own interests, in the Middle East."[192] There was clearly only one course of action that satisfied the British government's political needs

in 1947. In order to become a fully viable plan, withdrawal also had to satisfy the Treasury and the military.

Another Postwar Economy

In the postwar environment, it was inevitable that considerations of the economy would form some part of any policy decision-making. Discussed briefly here, the economic situation played an important role, but one that was somewhat intertwined with military/strategic needs discussed below. When, in 1947, the British government was presented with an option to withdraw from Palestine, it was facing a disastrous year for the economy, most notably in the form of a sterling crisis. In this context, withdrawing from Palestine was fine as long as it avoided incurring additional costs.

It is important to note that when 1947 began, and during ongoing negotiations with both Arabs and Jews over Palestine, Britain was trapped in a profound energy shortage. A terribly cold winter highlighted the already short supply of coal, and this vital resource slipped below the stock levels considered necessary for national survival.[193] As coal could not be transported to power stations, the lack of electricity throughout the country shut down industry and home consumption; livestock died and people froze in their homes.[194] This was the domestic economic setting in which Attlee, Bevin, and the cabinet agreed to refer the Palestine problem to the UN in February. To complicate their deliberations further, another—potentially devastating—financial crisis hit Westminster in August, just before the completion of the UNSCOP report, and was the direct result of Britain's loan conditions with the United States.

In December 1945, the Attlee government had secured a loan from the United States that began in July 1946. By 1947, however, the funds were diminishing far too quickly.[195] A global shortage of food and raw materials effectively made the United States a sole supplier, and a sharp rise in American prices in early 1947 decreased the original loan's value by approximately $1 billion.[196] As the dollar drain continued, the Treasury estimated the loan might last until 1948 rather than the original estimate of 1951; by July, the Treasury was losing $500 million every month and there were major depletions of gold and silver reserves.[197]

Additionally, part of the loan's terms had been a British commitment to the free convertibility of sterling into dollars, and this initiative was scheduled to commence on 15 July 1947.[198] The result was disastrous. Free convertibility and the global demand for dollars—as well as speculating in foreign markets—meant that Britain was suddenly hit by a massive outflow of capital.[199] In order to meet the demand for dollars, it was necessary to use funds from the American loan, which meant it was unlikely to last even throughout 1947. Britain was losing dollar reserves at a rate between $100 million and $200 million each week.[200]

On 17 August, the cabinet decided that, financially, the situation was too dire and agreed to halt convertibility. In response, the remaining US loan was frozen.[201] Only after tense but rapid negotiations did the US agree to a temporary emergency suspension on 20 August.[202] The situation was bleak, and Britons faced cuts in their food rationing by November 1947.[203] This provided the economic context of the cabinet's decision to withdraw.

Moreover, the military expenditure associated with rebellion in Palestine had exceeded £82 million (approximately £3 billion today) by May 1947, and although this was largely borne by the Palestinian rather than the British taxpayer, there was still a perception of Palestine incurring high costs in times of austerity.[204] Palestine's financial burden was mentioned rarely in cabinet discussions in comparison to the all-encompassing diplomatic problems associated with both American and Arab demands, but Ernest Bevin did specifically recommend withdrawal to avoid the further loss of British lives and waste of resources.[205] Britain's very limited financial reserves were a constant, well-known constraint. Withdrawal removed a costly responsibility following a year of economic uncertainty and privation, not least by removing the one hundred thousand troops needed to fight a Jewish insurgency. This meant that unnecessary additional economic hardship could be avoided.[206]

No Longer a Stronghold

A recurrent theme in Palestine policy discussions during the Mandate was the military or strategic national interest. This was also an important consideration in the postwar environment and was tied very closely to economic needs. Palestine was a strategic imperial outpost and at no point did the chiefs of staff ever explicitly renounce its geographic military importance. The undeclared state of war in Palestine, however, was financially draining and possessed the explosive potential to create equally expensive unrest elsewhere in the Middle East, especially if Britain attempted to enforce either of the UNSCOP proposals. Crucially, when Foreign Secretary Bevin recommended withdrawal to the cabinet on 18 September 1947, he did so with the specific understanding that Palestine lost its strategic value when constantly engaged in, or under the threat of, violent internal conflict and civil war.[207]

British strategic and military planning continued after 1945 as though Britain was still a great world power and a strong empire.[208] The option to withdraw had been mentioned in passing before the UNSCOP report, but it had always been the consensus that leaving Palestine "would have serious effects on our strategic position in the Middle East and on our prestige throughout the world"; the foreign secretary specifically asked the cabinet not to consider such alternatives in October 1946.[209] Throughout consideration of the Palestine problem, the

chiefs of staff stressed that "strategic considerations should not be overlooked."[210] Palestine's location gave Britain its strategic hold in the Mediterranean close to the Suez Canal, both of which were made more important in 1947 by the plan to withdraw from Greece and remove troops from Egypt following Anglo-Egyptian talks.

As prospects for negotiations with the Jewish Agency and the Arab states seemed bleak in January 1947, the chiefs of staff outlined the three cardinal requirements of future defense of the British Commonwealth: "(i) the defence of the United Kingdom and its development as a base for an offensive; (ii) the maintenance of our sea communications; and (iii) the retention of our existing position and influence in the Middle East."[211] These "vital props" of Britain's defensive position were all interdependent, and "if any one were lost the whole structure would be imperilled."[212]

Specifically, with regard to Palestine, the territory was considered to hold "special importance in this general scheme of defence. In war, Egypt would be our key position in the Middle East; and it was necessary that we should hold Palestine as a screen for the defence of Egypt."[213] Following the stalled Anglo-Egyptian talks, however, and Britain's commitment to withdraw from Egypt unless it was threatened, the chiefs saw in Palestine the "base for the mobile reserve of troops which must be kept ready to meet any emergency throughout the Middle East."[214] This was because Transjordan was not a good enough outpost on its own, and the Jerusalem enclave would not suffice in the event of partition.[215] Even when the foreign and colonial secretaries suggested merely referring the Palestine problem to the UN, the joint chiefs reacted defensively against this proposal. They believed that "[t]he Preservation of our strategic position in the Middle East as a whole would be gravely prejudiced if our right to station British forces in Palestine were not retained."[216] It was strategically imperative to keep some form of base in the Mediterranean because if all bases there and in the Middle East were lost, the "defence of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth would be undermined."[217]

However, this preoccupation with long-term strategic planning was combined with an awareness of Britain's very limited short-term resources. This reality meant that hostilities in Palestine, and their potential to create wider instability across the Middle East, were financially costly and strategically dangerous.[218] Colonial Secretary George Hall, for example, stressed that implementing the Anglo-American Committee's recommendations was likely "to involve us in military and financial commitments beyond our capacity to bear."[219] In a joint memorandum, the foreign and colonial secretaries emphasized that "[i]f we were to undertake it, or to be associated in any way with the enforcement of a settlement as unpopular with one of the parties as that now recommended by the United Nations, the whole responsibility would fall on us, as the only armed forces on the spot are ours."[220]

This potential commitment was more than a little daunting. In February 1947, Colonial Secretary Creech Jones, who had professed sympathy for Zionism and favored partition, admitted to the cabinet that it was an unworkable plan. The colonial secretary "confessed" that "the enforcement of Partition was, he was now convinced, bound to involve conditions of rebellion and disorder in Palestine which might last for a considerable time and would involve a substantial military commitment for us."[221] This recognition of limited resources combined with ongoing hostilities in Palestine then gradually altered opinions among Britain's military elites over the summer of 1947, causing them to question whether Palestine was really worth the expense and lives lost. These casualties amounted to 141 members of the Palestine police, 368 servicemen from the army, navy, and air force, and 21 British civilians—lost to both Arab and Jewish violence.[222] An important consideration of British well-being may have been the hanging of two sergeants in July 1947—kidnapped and murdered by the Irgun, their bodies were then booby trapped to injure others.[223] This was only the latest in a line of incidents involving kidnap or ambush, but it was considered particularly shocking.[224]

By 18 September, after the UNSCOP report was complete, a new attitude emerged. The same day Bevin dated his recommendation of withdrawal for the cabinet, the defense secretary outlined the impossibility of fulfilling almost any plan in Palestine. The UNSCOP Majority proposals for partition would involve "[t]he imposition by force of some Colonial type of government in the Arab State, the safeguarding of the Jewish State and the protection of British life," which entailed "appreciable reinforcement of the existing Middle East garrison with appropriate naval and air supports."[225] Long term, it would "render impossible of achievement the firm strategic hold in the Middle East which is an indispensable and vitally important part of Imperial defence policy."[226] Similarly, the Minority Plan for a single binational state "would be impossible to implement [. . .] against greatly increased opposition from the Jews and it would be necessary to impose by force a Colonial type of government."[227] Agreeing to implement either one of these plans, on a purely military level, would "entail a drastic revision of our Defence Policy."[228] Critically, although the defense secretary advised against any "demonstration of weakness in withdrawing in the face of difficulty" and also added that withdrawal "might be impossible to implement," he did not at any point object to withdrawal from Palestine on the basis of its military importance.[229] The strategic value perceived only months earlier had simply dissipated. Exemplifying this new consensus were opinions expressed by the chancellor of the exchequer, Sir Hugh Dalton.

Dalton, another professed Zionist sympathizer within the cabinet, wrote to Attlee in August 1947:

> I am quite sure [. . .] that the time has almost come when we must bring our troops out of Palestine altogether. The present state of affairs is not only costly

> to us in man-power and money, but is, as you and I agree, of no real value from the strategic point of view—you cannot in any case have a secure base on top of a wasps' nest—and riot is exposing our young men, for no good purpose, to most abominable experiences, and is breeding anti-Semites at an alarming speed. [. . .] It is high time that either we left the Arabs and Jews to have it out in Palestine, or that some other Power or Powers took over the responsibility and the cost.[230]

Dalton also raised the issue in the cabinet on 20 September: "If an agreed settlement could not be reached in Palestine," he said, "that country was of no strategic value to His Majesty's Government and the maintenance of British forces in it merely led to a heavy drain on our financial resources and to the creation of a dangerous spirit of anti-Semitism."[231] The decision to withdraw was approved that day, more than two months before the UN officially adopted partition.

A Rock and a Hard Place

After completion on 31 August and then months in committee and plenary meetings, the partition resolution was finally ready for a vote in the General Assembly. It achieved the necessary two-thirds majority on 29 November 1947, inaugurating the famous Resolution 181.[232] Five days later, on 4 December, the cabinet approved a withdrawal plan drafted jointly by the foreign and colonial secretaries and approved by the Defence Committee.[233] It was presented to Parliament on 11 December and received barely a hint of criticism except on the most minute of procedural details.[234] Although in Parliament, the arrival of this policy seems to have been entirely expected, neither the Jews nor the Arabs nor even the Americans believed it was real, and their UN representatives had to be informed privately in order to be convinced.[235] British forces and administrative staff would only stay in Palestine long enough to aid Jews and Arabs through a limited transition period and planned to withdraw fully by 1 August 1948.[236] This was revised later, and the last member of the British administration left Palestine on 15 May 1948.[237]

Ultimately, the need to protect diplomatic relationships with both the United States and the Arab states left the Attlee government between two policies—partition and independence—that were bitterly opposed on each side. When first assuming office in 1945, Bevin even highlighted Britain's new dual obligation with regard to Palestine: "I consider the Palestine question urgent," he wrote, "and when I return to London I propose to examine the whole question, bearing in mind the repercussions on the whole Middle East and U.S.A."[238] The American relationship with Zionism and President Truman's desire to intervene on behalf of DPs suffering a humanitarian crisis, as well as the need to consider his own domestic political situation, meant there could be no repeat of 1939.

Attlee and Bevin's problem in dealing with Truman, as well as American public opinion molded by Holocaust newspaper headlines, was that British politicians attempted to deal with the tragedy of DPs as entirely separate from the fate of Palestine. The tide of global opinion viewed them as one and the same—not least due to very effective Zionist campaigning. Attlee expressed this to Truman, explaining, "We are giving deep thought to means of helping the Jews in Europe and to the question of Palestine. The two problems are not necessarily the same [. . .]."[239] Bevin then attempted to "sell" the plan of provincial autonomy to both Zionists and Arabs on the basis that it would be an interim solution, though this was a scheme with two diametrically opposed outcomes depending on who constituted the foreign secretary's audience. Bevin's initial search for a long-term settlement became a desperate attempt to create almost any short-term agreement, enough to see the British government through the whirlwind of postwar crises elsewhere.

Attlee later wrote in his memoirs that "[i]t was one of those impossible situations for which there is no really good solution. One just had to cut the knot."[240] Hector McNeil, Foreign Office minister and subsequently vice president of the UN General Assembly, in 1947 summed up the legacy such knot cutting was going to leave for two peoples locked in conflict: "We have failed," he said, "and we must confess our failure. Beyond doubt when the historians come to look at our record of administration in Palestine, they will find many errors, and I hope that they will learn from those errors."[241]

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The Last Word

More than thirty years of British rule in Palestine witnessed a seemingly unshakable commitment to Zionism crumble under the weight of varying pressures that threatened the political survival of successive prime ministers and cabinets. The events covered in this book represent four distinct periods of policy making, which reflect the only instances when the central government for the British Empire became embroiled in a small nationalist conflict in Palestine. Charting these British attempts, ostensibly at reconciliation between Jews and Arabs, reveals how the distinct leaders' feelings, biases, and passions about Zionism or Arab nationalism, as well as their intents and goals for the tiny territory, were continually shaped and undermined by the necessity of maintaining their own political positions. In every case, the politicians in power were confronted with only a single viable option or an extremely narrow selection of alternatives. Rather than "choosing" which policy to pursue in Palestine, they consistently found themselves cornered into a suboptimal decision. This realization has changed the focus of study entirely, away from questioning what the British government hoped to achieve in Palestine and toward asking, first and foremost, what ramifications it was trying to avoid.

As the incidents featured in this book are organized chronologically and reflect distinct episodes, they constitute the individual puzzle pieces that fit together to form a more complete image of British policy making. During the Balfour Zeitgeist, when Britain committed itself to supporting the creation of a Jewish national home in Palestine—following the Balfour Declaration, the draft Mandate, and, finally, the Churchill White Paper—ample evidence showed that this policy was fomenting violent unrest. Such disturbances had the potential to undermine the strategic value of Palestine and were draining financially. Under these circumstances, ending the British involvement with the Jewish national home would have been an understandable decision, as demonstrated by both the Palin Commission and the Haycraft Commission. Instead, the British government found itself in a position where either renouncing or wholeheartedly supporting the policy of the Balfour Declaration was politically untenable. The calm in Palestine that followed the Churchill White Paper in 1922 seemed to vindicate Britain's middle course, but the riots of 1929 threw it into question yet again.

Circumstances that led to a reversal of the Passfield White Paper in 1931 are possibly the most misunderstood elements of the Palestine Mandate. Rather than a simple equation of Zionist pressure achieving a change in policy, an alignment of political interests among Zionists, Liberals, and the Conservative Party threatened the unity and survival of the Labour government. This episode has received startlingly little scholarly attention, perhaps because the myth of an all-powerful Jewish lobby in interwar Westminster has suited both Israeli and Palestinian historical narratives. However, such simplification is not useful for understanding policy making in Britain, making a more complete analysis of the Passfield White Paper a crucial component of this research.

When Palestine's tensions remained unsolved in the early 1930s and erupted into the Arab Revolt of 1936–1939, the preferences voiced by politicians became simpler to identify. Pending war presented such an obvious risk to the government's political survival that the strategic importance of Arab leaders outside of Palestine's diminutive boundaries was, in 1939, readily apparent. The policy of the MacDonald White Paper, which called for Palestinian independence, has been labeled a "betrayal," but loyalty to the Zionist cause never drove British cabinet discussions at any stage of the Mandate. Rather than the beginning of Realpolitik, this episode was merely a continuation of it.

Ultimately, the withdrawal from Palestine involved many of the same considerations about political risk that had been present in earlier British deliberations. Through highlighting the details of their diplomatic entanglements, it becomes clear that perfectly reasonable explanations for Britain's withdrawal (such as the cost of troops in a dwindling postwar economy) played a lesser role than expected. Inconclusive negotiations with the United States, Zionists, and the Arab states left the British government's proverbial hands tied. Even before the UN General Assembly voted for partition, there was no viable alternative except to withdraw.

Looking at these turning points—from the Churchill White Paper in 1922, to the reversal of the Passfield White Paper in 1931, the MacDonald White Paper in 1939, and, finally, Britain's decision to withdraw from Palestine in 1947—it becomes possible to identify how every decision made about Palestine was molded by a range of mundane political problems. There were changes in British policy during the course of the Mandate, but there was perfect continuity in the decision makers' preferences. Although this self-interested and risk-averse behavior may seem predictable for politicians in general, detailing how this conduct affected British policy in Palestine adds an important element to the existing scholarship. Rather than an assessment of British intents and goals based on individual politicians' capricious allegiances or aversions to Zionism, the politics-first approach reveals a predictable pattern.

Historical Lessons of the Politics-First Approach

Although the focus of this book has been on British policy making toward Palestine through the lens of a politics-first perspective, its four main sections yield several additional points to consider in terms of historical importance. As well as the central theme that personal biases had less to do with policy than individual career prospects, three further potential conclusions can be raised.

The first is that Britain's sponsorship of the Jewish national home, which significantly contributed to Israeli statehood in 1948, was to some degree an accident, not least because Zionism's infamous hold on British politicians was tenuous and dependent on context. The British sponsorship of a Jewish national home evolved out of a combination of ambition and necessity. The original overtures toward Zionism were conducted by Sir Mark Sykes. He believed in national self-determination for small ethnic groups and was searching for a political rather than strictly military means to legitimize British invasion and occupation of Palestine. After World War I, this championing of a grand cause helped Prime Minister David Lloyd George secure Britain's hold on Palestine, which was necessary to protect the routes to Egypt and India. The international approval required for this arrangement, however, meant that it was nearly impossible for Britain to extract itself from the pledge to support a Jewish national home, despite many warnings that this was potentially a dangerous commitment. This is where the "accidental" British support for Zionism became entrenched and was demonstrated in multiple governments' tacit commitment to the policy throughout the 1920s.

Although it was frustrated relatively quickly, the Passfield White Paper also represented an attempt to roll back the unintended policy that was causing unrest among Palestine's majority Arab population. Evidently, the effort was undermined by the inherent weakness of James Ramsay MacDonald's minority Labour government. Again, the continuation of Britain's commitment to a Zionist enterprise was merely a short-term fix, a policy that lacked real intent. The next policy-making episode witnessed yet another retreat from the idea of a Jewish national home. The white paper named for Colonial Secretary Malcolm MacDonald promised independence to Palestine and demonstrated the British government's collectively unsentimental attitude toward the future of Zionism. Interestingly, the most dedicated British effort to maintain the Jewish national home arguably came during the tenure of Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin, who relentlessly tried to keep the territory and court President Truman's approval but, ultimately, helped engineer Britain's withdrawal.

From this perspective, the British sponsorship of Zionism over a thirty-year period, which allowed the Yishuv to develop enough strength in terms of

population numbers, organizational ability, and military training to engage in the first Arab-Israeli War in 1948 and establish the State of Israel, might be considered an accident of history. Even the raging Jewish insurgency in Palestine and the threat of further Arab disturbances that necessitated a final departure could be attributed to the British failure in preceding years to "clarify" internally what endured as an undefined and often inadvertent British responsibility toward Zionism. Mission creep and the use of Palestine as a political football allowed the commitment to continue far longer and more deeply than multiple British governments intended.

On a similar note, the accidental nature of Britain's commitment to Zionism undermines more conspiratorial ideas of Jewish power or, in less controversial terms, the influence of Zionist lobbying. A closer look at British policy making reveals that while Dr. Weizmann was a well-liked, respected, and adroit negotiator among Britain's political elite, his influence owed as much to luck and the virtue of representing the right cause at the right time as to his personal skill in British politics. He and other Zionist leaders, however, did have to battle against periodic British governments' attempts at incomplete reconciliation between Zionism and developing Arab nationalism that would have led to the creation of self-governing institutions in Palestine.

At first, the logical course of action regarding these animosities would have been for Britain to simply abandon the policy of a Jewish national home. This was implied in the first commissions chaired by Major General Palin and Sir Thomas Haycraft and suggested by multiple officials, including Winston Churchill, during the initial stages of British rule. As it was in the empire's best interest to avoid rioting in Palestine, the Churchill White Paper of 1922 did represent a concerted effort to assuage what were considered to be unfounded fears about the nature of Zionism—restricting Jewish immigration in line with economic capacity and assuring the world that the aim was not to create a solely Jewish Palestine.

Then again, in 1930, the Passfield White Paper represented an honest if somewhat naive attempt at redressing a perceived imbalance in Palestine, between the Jewish community, which seemed to be benefiting largely from British rule, and the Arab population, which was suffering far more as a result of economic depression. The same was true in the negotiations leading to the MacDonald White Paper in 1939—the aim was a quiet Palestine. Although the policy of promising independence was hardly driven by altruistic motives, it still demonstrated an attempt at settlement that many British politicians who professed Zionist sympathies, including Colonial Secretary MacDonald, hoped would not be necessary. Following World War II, Ernest Bevin staked his reputation on finding a solution to the Jewish-Arab conflict in Palestine and worked tirelessly to secure some compromise from both sides. It was only because these negotiations repeatedly stalled that Britain's Mandate for Palestine came to an end.

In addition, a second derivative conclusion might be that successive British negotiators did committedly try to solve the conflict they had helped provoke in Palestine but found the issue constrained severely by their own domestic politics. While it is very easy to dismiss a succession of British politicians' policy decisions as inept, dithering, or worsening the conflict, there was also a concerted and consistent effort to end and prevent violence. The counterinsurgency methods of the 1930s are today considered unacceptable, brutal, and in many cases illegal, but the Arab Revolt was a turning point in the British government's attitudes toward Palestinian nationalism. Early British negotiators had really lacked a sympathetic understanding of Arab complaints. Herbert Samuel, for example, formerly the high commissioner of Palestine, seemed to scoff at the idea that Jewish immigration could become unreasonable: "If there were any question that the 600,000 Arabs should be ousted from their homes in order to make room for a Jewish national home; if there were any question that they should be kept in political subordination to any other people; if there were any question that their Holy Places should be taken from them and transferred to other hands or other influences, then a policy would have been adopted which would have been utterly wrong. It would have been resented and resisted—rightly—by the Arab people. But it has never been contemplated."[1]

The Arab rebellion, and later the Jewish insurgency, meant that subsequent mediators were forced to recognize both Zionist and Arab concerns, but they were simply unable to reconcile what they realized far too late was a conflict between nations within one strip of land. It is possible to conclude, therefore, that there were some good intentions but an inability or unwillingness to understand the situation with unmitigated clarity.

These efforts at negotiation are relevant to the discussion of one final potential conclusion about the Mandate: the British political predicament ultimately aided the Jewish insurgency's cause following World War II, specifically with reference to the Holocaust's impact on international diplomacy. A common opinion is that international sympathy for the Zionist cause, following the Holocaust, led to Israel's creation. Such a simplistic argument is easy to refute,[2] but chapter 5 of this book reveals how outrage and distress, particularly in the United States following World War II, severely constrained both British counterinsurgency efforts against Zionists in Palestine and options for dealing with the crisis diplomatically. The policy of granting Palestinian independence, for example, became untenable chiefly because the British economy needed American money. At the same time, maintaining the intended British presence in Palestine endangered relations with the Arab states and would have required a stronger and politically unviable counterinsurgency campaign. While it is simplistic, therefore, to draw a direct link between international sympathy and the creation of Israel, it did play a vital role in the British decision to withdraw that prompted Israel's early leaders to proclaim statehood.

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